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R E P O R T NO. 19

HISTORICAL SECTION

ARMY HEADQUARTERS

5 Nov 48

Operation "PLUNDER": The Canadian Participation
in the Assault Across the Rhine and the Expansion
of the Bridgehead by 2 Cdn Corps 23/24 Mar - 1 Apr 45

AMENDMENT NO. 1

Insert following para 56:-

56a. The British Army of the Rhine (B.A.O.R.) has turned out a series of highly interesting Battlefield Tour studies. These were written with the object of providing an accurate yet concise story of the most important battles and of the many problems concerned with them. The B.A.O.R. report on Operation "VARSIITY", while it does not make any changes in the Canadian narrative necessary, does have great historical value in that it provides a source of accurate information regarding

- (a) Airborne operations of XVIII United States Corps (Airborne) in support of the crossing of the River RHINE 24-25 March 1945, with particular reference to 6th British Airborne Division, and
- (b)
 - (i) Tactical and administrative build-up.
 - (ii) Problems of organization of traffic control.
 - (iii) Reports on the effect of various weapons.
 - (iv) New lessons derived from tactical experiments.
 - (v) Technical notes on the employment of certain specialist arms such as artillery.

These items are not dealt with in this account of Canadian operations, but may be set down later under separate heading. (British Army of the Rhine Battlefield Tour Operation VARSITY)

for *PL Mayer Capt*
(C.P. Stacey) Colonel,
Director Historical Section.

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Operation "PLUNDER": The Canadian Participation
in the Assault Across the Rhine and the Expansion
of the Bridgehead by 2 Cdn Corps 23/24 Mar - 1 Apr 45

AMENDMENT NO. 2

Insert following para 76:-

76a. The British Army of the Rhine (B.A.O.R.) has turned out a series of highly interesting Battlefield Tour studies. These were written with the object of providing an accurate yet concise story of the most important battles and of the many problems concerned with them. The B.A.O.R. report on Operation "PLUNDER", while it does not make any changes in the Canadian narrative necessary, does have great historical value in that it provides a source of accurate information regarding

- (a) The part played by 12 Brit Corps on 24-25 Mar 45, with particular reference to the operations of 15 (S) Inf Div and the Air Operations connected therewith.
- (b) (i) Tactical and administrative build-up.
(ii) Problems of organization of traffic control.
(iii) Reports on the effect of various weapons.
(iv) New lessons derived from tactical experiments.
(v) Technical notes on the employment of certain specialist arms such as artillery.

These items are not dealt with in this account of Canadian operations, but may be set down later under separate heading: (British Army of the Rhine Battlefield Tour Operation PLUNDER)

for *PLMayer* *Cap.*
(C.P. Stacey) Colonel,
Director Historical Section.

R E P O R T NO. 19
HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)

ARMY HEADQUARTERS

26 Jun 48

Operation "PLUNDER": The Canadian Participation
in the Assault Across the Rhine and the Expansion
of the Bridgehead by 2 Cdn Corps 23/24 Mar - 1 Apr 45

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REPORT NO. 19

HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)

ARMY HEADQUARTERS

Operation "PLUNDER": The Canadian Participation
In the Assault Across the Rhine and the Expansion
of the Bridgehead by 2 Cdn Corps 23/24 Mar - 1 Apr 45

Reference Maps: G.S.G.S. 4414 Holland and Germany
 1/25,000 Sheets 4002, 4003, 4004,
 4102, 4103, 4104, 4204, 4203.

1. The following narrative continues the series of official reports dealing with the operations of the First Canadian Army in North-West Europe and is a direct sequel to Report No. 186. It describes the part played by the Canadians in the assault across the Rhine (Operation "PLUNDER" by Second British Army on the night 23/24 Mar; 9 Cdn Inf Bde being under command) and deals with the expansion of the Rhine bridgehead by 2 Cdn Corps up to 2359 hours 1 Apr 45, the time at which H.Q. First Cdn Army became fully operational on the east bank of the Rhine.
2. The successful conclusion of Operations "VERITABLE"^x (of which "BLOCKBUSTER" was a part) and "GRENADE"^x on 10 Mar left the Supreme Commander in a position to enter upon the decisive stage of the war on the Western front. The winter offensives by First Canadian and Ninth U.S. Armies had now given the Allied forces control of the whole of the west bank of the Rhine from the Dutch - German border to the bridgehead established by General Bradley's 12 U.S. Army Group at Remagen some 12 miles south of Bonn on 7 Mar. It was thus possible to contemplate the launching of operations on a large scale into trans-Rhenish Germany. So far as 21 Army Group was concerned, the assault across the river had been conceived by Field-Marshal Montgomery as an operation which "required to be under the control of one Army Commander rather than two" in the northern part of the sector, (Hist Sec File AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/C/E: General Crerar's Despatch to the Minister of National Defence, 5 Apr 45, para 7); further to the south he proposed to mount a co-ordinated assault with Ninth U.S. Army near Rheinberg. With the attainment of his objectives on the west bank, therefore, the C.-in-C. was able to regroup his forces and give Lt-Gen Dempsey the necessary frontage and the responsibility of forcing a crossing in the area of Xanten and Rees. The intention was to establish a bridgehead, in conjunction with First U.S. Army to isolate the Ruhr from the rest of Germany, and break into the North German plain. (Ibid)

PLANS AND PREPARATIONS FOR THE ASSAULT ACROSS THE RHINE

3. As General Crerar outlined in his Despatch to the Minister of National Defence on 29 May 45

^x See Historical Reports 185 and 186.

...the C-in-C's plan was to cross the Rhine with two armies on a front to include Rheinberg and Rees, the Ninth US Army being on the right and the Second British Army on the left. Under Lt-General Dempsey's command, the 18th US Airborne Corps, comprising the 17th US and 6th British Airborne Divisions, was to execute the third and last great airborne operation of the campaign. The initial intention was to capture Wesel as a centre of communications. The bridgehead so gained would be expanded to ensure the town and its roads against any interference from the south and used as a base from which to seize Emmerich and the important crossing there. The whole area would then be developed in depth to enable further offensive operations to be mounted by all three armies east of the Rhine and north of the Ruhr.

(Hist Sec File AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/C/E; General Crerar's Despatch to the Minister of National Defence, 29 May 45, para 3; see also G.O.C.-in-C. file 1-0, C.-in-C. 21 Army Group Directive M 559, 9 Mar 45)

4. Ninth U.S. Army was to assault across the Rhine near Rheinberg protecting the right flank of second British Army and the bridging sites at Wesel. Lt-Gen Dempsey's forces were to cross in the areas of Xanten and Rees, while XVIII U.S. Airborne Corps would "drop in" north of Wesel (AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket II: page 47). Thus the two attacking armies would secure a bridgehead east of the Rhine within the area bounded by the towns of Duisburg, Bottrop, Dorsten, Borken, Aalten, Doetinchem and Pannerden (General Crerar's Despatch, para 5). While the 21 Army Group plan called for First Canadian Army to take no active part in the assault, during this phase, the Army was to carry out several feints along the river on the left of Second Army and "to hold the river line from Emmerich to the sea, the security of the bridgehead over the Waal at Nijmegen and of the islands on the north side of the Scheldt Estuary being primary requirements". By 23 Mar the individual areas of responsibility were as follows: on the right, 2 Cdn Corps from the Cleve-Emmerich road to Milligen with elements of 2 Cdn Inf Div holding the river line; in the centre from Milligen to the juncture of the Maas and Waal 1 Cdn Corps was established with 49 (W.R.) Inf Div firm in front; while on the left, along the Maas westwards to the sea, 1 Brit Corps had under command 1 Pol Armd Div, 4 Cdo Bde, 116 R.M. Bde and the Royal Netherlands Bde. (See also Report No. 186, paras 169, 179, 184, 186). At the same time First Canadian Army was required "to make all preparations for bridging the Rhine at Emmerich and for taking command of our lodgement area to the north and north-west of that place when so ordered" (*ibid*).

5. The second phase was intended to carry the Army Group's broader penetration into an area bordered by Hamm, Munster, Rheine, Almelo, Deventer, Apeldoorn, Otterloo and Renkum. The Canadian boundary with Second British Army would then include Emmerich, Doetinchem, Ruurlo, Borculo and Borne, and the direction of General Crerar's operations would be to the north. (G.O.C.-in-C. file 1-0, C.-in-C. 21 Army Group Directive M 559, 9 Mar 45)

6. General Dempsey's plan called for three well-timed assault crossings followed by the airborne "drop". The northern thrust would be made on D minus 1 by 30 Brit Corps against Rees while 3 Brit Inf Div held the west bank of the river along the Corps front; Lt-Gen Horrocks would then proceed to establish and build up his bridgehead with a view to passing

his armour through. Further to the south, Lt-Gen Ritchie's 12 Brit Corps was to execute a double punch; the first by 1 Cdo Bde against Wesel late on D minus 1 to capture the town and the bridges over the river Lippe and the Seiten Canal; the second on D Day by 15 (S.) Div on a two-brigade front from the area of Xanten. The western bank on this sector would be held by 52 (L.) Div, who had orders to hold a brigade group ready to reinforce the 15 (S.) Div. 53 (W.) Div, with under command 4 Brit Armd Bde, and 7 Armd Div constituted the build up forces for 12 Brit Corps. (AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/E, Docket II: Notes on Operations of 21 Army Gp, 6 Jun 44 - 5 May 45, section 7, pp. 47-49)

7. The Airborne operation, due to go in on D Day itself, was designed to seize the high ground about five miles north of Wesel and to help speed the capture of the vital bridging areas. 6 Brit and 17 U.S. Airborne Divs were to capture the Diersfordt Wood and Ijssel bridges in that area and establish contact with 12 Brit Corps; after that 6 Brit Airborne Div would be relieved by 15 (S.) Div, while its American counter-part would push on to the east, assuming temporary command of 1 Cdo Bde and having a priority call on 6 Gds Tk Bde. 17 U.S. Airborne Div would finally pass to Ninth U.S. Army when convenient. (Ibid)

8. As the left flank of 21 Army Group's forthcoming operations was to be a Canadian responsibility, General Crerar had agreed with Lt-Gen Dempsey that 2 Cdn Corps would be placed under the operational control of Second Army shortly before the actual assault was launched. The Canadian formation would then be passed over the Rhine at the appropriate time and would be used to extend the Rees bridgehead to the north-west toward Doetinchem and Aalten and to secure Emmerich as a centre of communications and as a bridge site. When the river had been bridged at that point 2 Cdn Corps would revert to General Crerar's command (General Crerar's Despatch, para 5). The prerequisite then to the First Cdn Army operations was the construction of a bridge at Emmerich, but this was not possible so long as the high ground to the north-west of Emmerich remained in the enemy's hands: This wooded feature, known as the Hoch Elten, rises to a height of some 240 feet and covers the roughly triangular area bounded by Elten, Kilder, Zeddam and 's Heerenberg. The Hoch Elten had long been an objective of high priority because of its dominating position and it was with the particular task of seizing it that the Canadians were to be passed through the left of Second Army over the 30 Corps bridges. The first main task of 2 Cdn Corps was to attack through the left of 30 Brit Corps, to advance on Zutphen (9494) and Deventer (9207), and in conjunction with an operation by 1 Cdn Corps against Arnhem, to regroup facing east for the thrust into Germany. (H.S. 215C1 (D351) G.S.O. 1 Ops file Op "PLUNDER", Vol 76, outline plan 2 Cdn Corps, dated 18 Mar 45). The operation by 2 Cdn Corps was to be known as "HAYMAKER" (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 18, Op "PLUNDER" folio "FLANKS" 51 (H.) Div Op Instr No. 35, dated 22 Mar 45, para 28).

9. The full implications of the northward thrust from the Emmerich bridgehead were that with 2 Cdn Corps General Crerar would carry the defences of the Ijssel - prepared by the enemy to withstand an assault eastwards - by taking them in the rear from the east. After capturing Zutphen and Deventer,

he would seize Apeldoorn and the intervening high ground towards Arnhem. He would take Arnhem itself by an assault crossing over the Neder Rijn with 1 Cdn Corps while the enemy was already engaged with 2 Cdn Corps farther north. His engineers would then be prepared to bridge the river at Arnhem and open up communications from Nijmegen through that town to the north-east as soon as the progress of 2 Cdn Corps made this possible. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 1, Directive, 10 Mar 45). "A secure flank facing west and running northwards from the Neder Rijn about Renkum would be formed. When these communications had been established, the axis of First Cdn Army's operations would then be turned towards the north-east". (General Crerar's Despatch, para 7).

10. In projecting the course of these operations General Crerar wrote,

...I decided that when the 2nd Canadian Corps had captured the Stokkammer Bosch and Hoch Elten features and was advancing to secure the front between Doetinchem and Panterden, the 1st Canadian Corps would drive the enemy from the south-eastern portion of the Nijmegen "island", and make contact with Lt-General Simonds' forces along the Panterdensche canal. As the latter advanced northwards and secured their left flank to the line of the IJssel between Doesburg and Westervoort, Lt-General Foulkes would clear the northern portion of the "island" and gain control of the left bank of the Neder Rijn for the purpose of establishing a bridgehead north of the river and west of Arnhem as a preliminary to the capture of the town itself. This crossing was to be planned to take place at the same time as, or slightly subsequent to, the crossing of the IJssel by the 2nd Canadian Corps, which would be made after Lt-General Simonds had gained the line between Delden, Holten and Deventer.

(Ibid, para 8: see also W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 2, Directive, 24 Mar 45)

11. A regrouping of considerable proportion now took place to bind the agreement between Generals Crerar and Dempsey and to coincide with Second British Army's plan of assault scheduled for the night of 23/24 Mar 45 (H.S. 21501 (D351), G.S.O. 1 Ops file, Op "PLUNDER", folios 74, 76, 81). Lt-Gen Horrocks' 30 Brit Corps took over 3 Brit Inf Div in situ from 8 Brit Corps, while 2 Cdn Corps came under the operational control of Second Army at 1200 hours 20 Mar. On the same day 3 Cdn Inf Div was placed directly under the command of 30 Brit Corps, which in turn passed 9 Cdn Inf Bde to 51 (H.) Div. (Ibid: Folios 74, 76, 81)

12. The attack by 30 Brit Corps was to be carried out in three phases. In the first, 51 (H.) Div, with under command 9 Cdn Inf Bde, would secure the initial bridgehead, at the same time being responsible for passing Brigadier J.M. Rockingham's battalions over the Rhine and, when opportunity

■ See Appx "A" to this report.

offered, for committing them to action on the left. Following immediately behind 51 (H.) Div would be one infantry brigade and the Divisional Headquarters of 43 Inf Div, who would on arrival, take over 9 Cdn Inf Bde for build up and relieve the left brigade of the Highland Division. Then would come the remainder of 43 Inf Div followed by the rest of 3 Cdn Inf Div. Once these moves were completed and its operational strength was considered great enough, 3 Cdn Inf Div was to resume full control of 9 Cdn Inf Bde and of the left flank. At this point, the second phase, the development of a three-divisional front, would commence; with 3 Cdn Inf Div on the left, 43 Inf Div in the centre and 51 (H.) Div on the right, with a view to building up the lodgement area so that the third phase, an armoured break out along the axis Bocholt, Aalten, Groenlo, could be launched. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 15, folio "PLUNDER", Op Instr No. 49, 20 Mar 45; Hist Sec file 229 C2, 2(D7) "PLUNDER" R.A. 30 Corps Op Instr No. 35, 20 Mar 45)

13. 3 Cdn Inf Div was to remain under command of 30 Corps until such a time as adequate communications existed; when that stage was reached the commander of 2 Cdn Corps would take over the direction of Operation "HAYMAKER" on the left flank. (H.S. File 215C1 (D351), G.S.O. 1 Ops file, Op "PLUNDER", folio 76, Outline Plan 2 Cdn Corps, 18 Mar 45; also Folios 66, 67, 68, 69, notes by Col G.S. on conference with commander and C. of S. 2 Cdn Corps on Op "PLUNDER", 14 Mar 45). On 14 Mar, at a conference held at H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps to discuss the probable course of operations, Lt-Gen Simonds had indicated that in order to allow bridges to be erected at Emmerich, he considered that a bridgehead must cover an area of at least 4000 to 5000 yards' radius with its centre at Emmerich. To secure such a bridgehead was the initial task of 3 Cdn Inf Div, but the Corps Commander explained that if this operation proved at all "sticky", he would be prepared to reinforce it with part or all of 2 Cdn Inf Div. (Ibid: and folio 72, Op "PLUNDER", 17 Mar 45)

SUPPORT FOR THE OPERATION

14. The immediate air support for Operation "PLUNDER" was itself gigantic, and may be broken down into five definite phases. The first of these, the interdiction programme to isolate the Ruhr, had actually begun early in February. At that time eighteen bridges on the most important routes from central Germany were selected for destruction. The responsibility for these targets had been divided between the Allied medium bombers in the theatre and the strategic air forces in England. In solemn succession each of the chosen bridges was attacked, with the result that by 23 Mar 45 only three or at the most four of the original eighteen structures remained in use. Though not directly connected with Operation "PLUNDER" at that time, these onslaughts (to quote an official report) "provided an appreciable bonus thereto" (AEF: 45/21 Army Group/S/F "Air Action in Support of the Battle of the Rhine: May 1945") The second phase, this one specifically designed for Operation "PLUNDER", covered a long term interdiction programme begun early in March, with Bomber Command "going all out" to paralyze the enemy's transportation network in the rear of the battle area, attacking the area which included Zwolle, the Elbergen Bridge, Rheine, Neubeckum, Soest, Siegen and Siegburg. The

offensive included heavy bomber attacks on all existing viaducts, bridges and rail centres both in the above area and leading into it.

15. The third phase of the air operations comprised the pre-D Day bombing, the object of which was to reduce the enemy's will to fight, to hinder his defensive preparations and to disrupt his communications. The targets in this phase, insofar as 21 Army Group's front was concerned included, (as pre-arranged targets,) the towns of Haldern, Isselburg, Anholt and Praest. These places were high in priority to receive treatment; Haldern and Praest were to be heavily attacked during the last hours of D minus 1 by a strong force of fighter bombers, while the other two centres were earmarked for certain destruction by first light on D Day. The fourth phase, also a pre-arranged programme was planned to establish and maintain air superiority over the assault areas, the dropping and landing zones, with particular reference to those air-fields capable of handling jet propelled aircraft the appearance of which had, since the beginning of the year, increased enough to substantiate the fact that the German Air Forces were attempting a serious revival. It was of absolute importance that the assault across the Rhine should go forward without interference. Therefore all air strips were to be attacked on D minus 3 and on D Day by over 1400 machines of Eighth U.S.A.A.F. with extra sweeps by 2 Tactical Air Force and VIII Fighter Command of U.S. Army Air Forces. Other necessary items in the fourth phase included the neutralization of the enemy's flak defences, the provisions of fighter cover for the air-borne attacks, the close support for the assault and the prevention of enemy movement into and within the battle area. The last phase provided for the day to day support after the initial attacks across the Rhine. For this purpose adequate air support communications were allotted to all the assaulting units so that local air support could be called for on short notice. Most hostile batteries were already on the pre-arranged target list, but any other such interference observed would be dealt with on the spot. (Ibid; also W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 14, sub-appx "A" to Air Support, Confirmatory Notes, Conference 1600 hrs, 17 Mar 45, also Report by The Supreme Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Europe of the Allied Expeditionary Force, 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1945, p. 99)

16. The artillery support was to be equally heavy. It was divided into four parts. The proper counter-battery programme beginning at H minus 4 involved the use of 746 guns, a portion of which would have already ranged and carried out some destructive shoots since 1300 hours (H-8). At H minus 3 most of these guns were to cease fire but 256 of them would continue to blast the enemy's positions until H minus 45 minutes. In addition, beginning at H minus 3, the counter-mortar programme was to continue until H Hour with 80 pieces hurling their projectiles to discourage the enemy from manning his own close

* One of the most important, the one at Bielefeld, had already been severely hit by R.A.F. Lancasters with the new 22,000 pound bombs on 14 Mar.

** Page numbers used in this report refer to the edition published by the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C.

support weapons. Simultaneously, while 32 field guns from Gds Arm and 3 Cdn Inf Divs blinded the enemy's observation posts with smoke until H minus 90 minutes, the 30 Corps preliminary bombardment guns, 408 in number, were to fire in unison until H minus 4 minutes. A further weight of deadly metal was to shower the east bank of the river in a "pepper-pot" shoot controlled by 3 Brit Div, with under command C.H. of O. (M.G.), 3 Cdn A.Tk Regt and 4 Cdn L.A.A. Regt to begin at H minus 2 hours and to be carried on to H plus 5 minutes and be on call thereafter. This first "pepper-pot" would drench pre-selected targets on the left flank of the attack, excluding Rees. A second shoot, controlled by 51 (H.) Div, covered the right flank of the attack across the river and included Rees. The crescendo in this thunderous overture was to come at H minus 30, when, after 10 minutes' complete silence, 516 guns would belch forth to herald the supporting bombardment for the actual assault by the Highland Division. This was to go on until H Hour, after which a harassing fire programme by 80 guns (mostly 3.7 A.A. operating in a ground role) would come into effect to isolate the immediate battlefield. (H.S. File 229C2 2(D7), Op "PLUNDER": Fire Plan Table Cloth, 3rd edition, sheets 1 and 2; R.A. 30 Corps Op Instr No. 35, 20 Mar 45; AEF/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V, Folio 12, Appx 2, Op "PLUNDER", Trace "PEPPER-POT" gun areas).

17. D Day for the operation was to be 24 Mar, with H Hour for 30 Corps at 2100 hours D minus 1, However, even up to 1600 hours on 23 Mar this colossal and carefully planned attack was subject to postponement if weather conditions were not favourable. Special code words were devised to define whether the operation was "on" or not. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 18, 51 (H.) Div Op Instr No. 35, 22 Mar 45)

TOPOGRAPHY OF THE BATTLEFIELD

18. In making a topographical study of the ground north and east of the Rhine which includes Emmerich, Bocholt and Wesel, the area may be divided into four types of country:

- (a) The Rhine flood bed.
- (b) The Rhine flood plain.
- (c) The stretch of low sandy plateau between the Ijssel and the Rhine.
- (d) The valley of the Oude Ijssel River.

The Rhine flood bed is bounded by the main dyke which follows the north bank of the Oude Rijn and the Alter Rhein. It is subject to complete submersion at time of high water. The countryside, which is found below the level of the river, is mostly pasture land with fields geometrically shaped and frequently hemmed by drainage ditches. Hedges and trees are few. In the immediate vicinity of the river there are numerous stretches of dead water, patches of low scrub and peat bogs; in addition, much of the ground liable to flood remains marshy even in dry weather. The surface soil is either red or blue clay based on sand or gravel; this same surface being traversable to all vehicles in dry weather. After rain however it becomes generally impassable to wheeled vehicles and quite difficult for

tracks. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 15, folio "30 Corps" Op "PLUNDER": 30 Corps Int Dossier No. I, 13 Mar 45, Part IV; G.S.G.S. 4414, Maps 1/25000, sheets 4002-5, 4102-5, 4203-5)

19. The Rhine flood plain is mainly the area which would be flooded if no dykes existed. It is frequently intersected by meanders and streams which represent the original course of the river; in many places around these are found small lakes or patches of stagnant water. Generally it is low slightly undulating country, mostly arable with some pasture. The population live in small villages and isolated farms which stand for the most part on the higher ground. These communities are connected by a network of secondary narrow roads of uncertain surface which could not be expected to stand up to much heavy traffic. The clay soil would immediately make cross-country going difficult during and after wet weather; the small marshes and peat bogs would be further obstacles. It is on the eastern edge of a single sand plateau which forms an island on this flat plain that the town of Emmerich lies. Emmerich itself is dominated, immediately to the northwest, by high wooded ground - known as the Hoch Elten feature. The capture of this feature would be essential to anyone wishing to hold the city securely, and enemy firmly entrenched on Hoch Elten would fight strongly to hold it and would be difficult to dislodge. (Ibid; and 30 Corps Int Dossier No. I, 13 Mar 45, as above)

20. The low sand plateau exists as a minor ridge dividing the Oude Ijssel valley from the Rhine and runs roughly from Wesel to Anholt; it is also to be found around Bocholt as well as north and west of 's Heerenberg. In general this type of country is higher than the flat plain and has fine sandy soil. On the ridges are many small woods surrounded by arable land, and the people live mostly on farms and in hamlets which have sprung up at the numerous road junctions. (Ibid)

21. The valley of the Oude Ijssel is flat and open with many pasture fields running right up to the river's bank; most of the land is arable. There are few hedges, the fields being bounded by ditches which are sometimes as much as 15 to 20 feet wide. These are in themselves firm obstacles, especially formidable north of the river where the ditches are deeper. The soil in this region is loam, which would allow a free passage for most vehicles in summer and some in winter, though any heavy group of vehicles might be liable to bog down. (Ibid)

22. Communications in the flood bed and plain generally depended upon the secondary road system, which was poor and unable to take heavy loads. However, the other roads in the sand plateau and the Oude Ijssel valley, though still not good, were more developed and of better quality. The autobahn marked on most maps was only in the earliest stage of construction. It appeared then, that the majority of movements beyond the Rhine would be confined to these roads. The main obstacles would obviously be the dykes, the rivers, the woods and the Wesel - Emmerich railway. Around these obstructions, the enemy, a proven master in delaying action, could be expected to put up a stiff resistance. (Ibid)^x

^x For a detailed topographical study of the area see Inter-Service Topographical Department, I.S.T.D./C/403/P1, Western Germany: Frontier Zone, Sheet P1, Topography, Roads, and Bridges (Copy available at Joint Intelligence Board).

THE ENEMY SITUATION

23. Having got the remnants of his forces back across the river in comparatively good order after Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", the enemy might be expected to make frantic preparations to meet the coming storm. But the question of how he would dispose his forces on the east bank was not an easy one to answer, mainly because from 11 Mar to 15 Mar there had been almost complete lack of contact. On 16 Mar, however, some air photographs gave indication that the enemy was continuing to build up his strength in the angle of the Rhine and the Ijssel rivers, particularly in A.A. positions.

The latest air cover shows new positions from Emmerich (E96) to Zutphen, at Dolten (A07) and at each side of the Hoch Elten (E96) feature. Further field artillery also is being emplaced in the gun areas centered at Hoch Elten. A corresponding reduction in A.A. is seen north and east of Zaltbommel (E26). There is no further clue to the formations to be employed on our immediate front except that 116 Pz Div still appears to be hovering in the background east of Emmerich.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 259,
16 Mar 45)

24. Since the task of exactly placing the German formations was only accomplished by the thorough investigation of the existing sources, the piecing together of the jig-saw was slow; but gradually the information trickled in, was analyzed, confirmed and passed on. It became clear that a heavy concentration of guns had been assembled under cover of the woods on the dominating feature of Hoch Elten, from which the low-lying river country could be overlooked for several miles upstream. Along the front west of Emmerich our observers had spotted some 160 cannon (W.D., Historical Officer, H.Q. First Cdn Army, 18 Mar 45, based on First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 262, 18 Mar 45). Battered though his troops might be, harried and urgently reinforced from his depleted depots and training establishments, the enemy was seeking anxiously to deploy the wasted strength of his formations to the best advantage along this last great water barrier in the west. (Ibid)

25. By 2400 hours 19 Mar Lt-Gon Dempsey's Intelligence Staff reported that:

On the lower Rhine front above Nijmegen the enemy shows considerable nervousness and a great sense of urgency in carrying out his preparations. This is indicated by several factors, including road movement in the general area North of the Lippe and a somewhat aggressive attitude in the air, designed both to ascertain Allied movement and to disrupt communications. It is fairly clear that First Parachute Army crossed the Rhine reasonably well to plan and in fairly good order. It is also certain that the bulk of the equipment of this Army was got across the Rhine and the enemy's primary concern, in so far as Second Army is concerned, is to prepare for a crossing over the Rhine below the Ruhr - an area which he considers to be a very feasible one from the point of view of assault river crossings...

(AEF: 45/Second Army/L/F, Docket I:
9 Feb - 29 Mar 45; Int Summary No. 289,
19 Mar 45)

26. At this same time it was confirmed that 2 Para Corps was the right-hand corps of First Para Army. 6 Para Div was known to be under command 2 Para Corps on its right, inclusive Emmerich, exclusive Rees; in the centre between Rees and Xanten, 8 Para Div held its line; while on the left, from Xanten to Wesel, was 7 Para Div. The centre corps was probably 86 Corps, with 84 Div on the right and 180 Div in the centre. The left flank here could not be considered beyond speculation. One point, however, was fairly clear. The sector from Wesel to Duisburg was large, possibly too large for a single corps, and on the face of this it appeared that 2 Para Div on the left flank of First Para Army might belong to another corps, the right-hand division of which might be 190 Inf Div. Waiting behind to the rear, 47 Pz Corps was located. This corps, which consisted of 116 Pz Div and 15 Pz Gren Div, had been carefully traced in its movement after it had covered a good part of the withdrawal across the Rhine, and could be found in a northerly direction through Borken up as far as the line Aalten - Zelhem (0580). The Intelligence staff accounted for 47 Pz Corps in these words:

It is fairly clear that the task of this Corps is mobile reserve to Army Group H and possibly to Twenty-Fifth Army as well, and it is so placed as to be able to meet an emergency either in the Vesel-Emmerich sector or further North across the Ijssel.

(Ibid)

27. Besides 47 Pz Corps, there were known to exist a number of Wehrkreis Battalions*, most of which appeared to be in the area of Borken. The task of these battalions was apparently to prepare the towns in their own area for all-round defence and to combat any air landing attempt. These somewhat inferior troops were backed by several mobile flak units, whose primary role was anti-air landing, but who would come into operation in a ground role if the local situation demanded it. On local defences the First Cdn Army Intelligence Staff commented:

It is quite clear that defences designed to stop us crossing the Rhine are not in an advanced stage of preparation. The main trends of activity are in the areas of the crossing places of Emmerich, Rees, Xanten and Wesel. The tendency here is for the existing defences to fan out in all directions and eventually, were they allowed to proceed, some semblance of a line along the river, or standing back from it, might emerge. It is this preparation, with the somewhat doubtful assistance of civilians and Volkssturm that is going on daily and in feverish haste.

(Ibid)

Thus we see the picture of the First Para Army sorting itself out, its undermanned divisions reinforced in an area that was not as yet ready to stop our penetration across the Rhine. Nevertheless, whatever the state of preparation, whatever the strength of his divisions and however weak the mobile armour back of them might be - these paratroops could be expected to fight as fanatically as ever. (Ibid)

* Wehrkreis Field replacement units in training under command Military District Staff. Used in emergency as local defence forces.

28. Subsequent interrogation of many of the German Commanders concerned has been possible, and it has established that the appreciations of our Intelligence Staffs were substantially correct. First Parachute Army was commanded by General Alfred Schlemm, a fighting man of "undoubted military ability". (AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket III: Special Interrogation Report General Alfred Schlemm). He told his interrogators how he had prepared to defend the Rhine, filling up his ranks - depleted by the Rhineland fighting - with 50,000 to 60,000 reinforcements, "the reserved category workers, convalescents and too-old and too-youngs". He claimed that he foresaw our use of airborne troops to assist in the crossing, anticipating that such landing would take place east of Wesel. This was in the area defended by 86 Inf Corps, commanded by General Erich Straube, whose ability was held in contempt by his brother generals. The actual area of the expected airborne landing was defended by 84 Inf Div, led by Major-General Heinz Fiebig, a man who gave his interrogators the impression that he was "a charming fellow to have at a party; the last man to lead a division in the field". (Ibid: Special Interrogation Reports, General Erich Straube, and Maj-Gen Heinz Fiebig)

29. The right of Schlemm's army was in more capable hands, for to the north of 86 Inf Corps stood the tough paratrochutists of 2 Para Corps, under the command of General der Flieger Eugen Meindl, whose "reputation had been enhanced by words of praise from both his seniors and subordinates". (Ibid: Special Interrogation Report, General Eugen Meindl). This red-faced little veteran of Norway, Crete, Russia and Normandy had about 10,000 to 12,000 fighting men in his corps and, according to his recollection when interrogated in the spring of 1946, about 80 field and medium guns, as well as 60 dual-purpose 88-mm anti-aircraft. Like his immediate superior, Meindl was concerned at the prospect of an allied landing from the air, but he appreciated that such a landing would take place near Rees. With 88 Inf Corps of 25th Army on his right and 86 Inf Corps on his left, Meindl awaited the attack. He deployed his corps with 6 Para Div holding the shore on the right, 7 Para Div on the left, and 8 Para Div in the centre. (Ibid)

30. Typical of the three generals who led the parachute divisions is Lt-Gen Hermann Flocher, Commander of 6 Para Div. In the forceful personality of this sound professional soldier is a clue to the fierce, skilful fighting of his paratrochutists. A highly qualified airman and soldier, he had served 14 months in the Spanish Civil War as a member of the German "Condor Legion". With 6,000 to 7,000 men he held the east bank from Emmerich to just north of Rees. As the roads leading out of Emmerich were not very good, Flocher thought the attack would come, not against his sector, but at Rees. (Ibid: Special Interrogation Report Lt-Gen Hermann Flocher).

31. Whatever depths of dejection the rest of the German forces had reached, these men of the parachute divisions still intended to fight to the end. At a later date prisoners from a paratroop division gave this impression of high morale to their American captors:

They are proud of belonging to an elite branch, however exterminated it may become in the meantime. They are, as a rule, younger and physically better qualified than other troops. Their relations to the Army are without a stigma, in contrast to the notorious SS gang. They like to consider themselves the successors

of the crack troops which invaded Holland in 1940, Crete in 1941, and made a last-ditch stand in Cassino. Actually, only a handful have survived these "memorable" days and, considering the quality and length of Para training now given, only very few would equal those accomplishments.

Practically all of them have been made to believe that Hitler has restored law and order, greatness and equality to the German people. The Hitler myth has taken so strong a hold on them that many refuse to consider even the possibility of a German defeat. Hitler's promise of a victory and of secret weapons to achieve it with is accepted by many like a guaranteed from a higher being. Others think that Nazi Germany was a good thing until the war but that Hitler should never have challenged the entire world as he did.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary
No. 271, 28 Mar 45)

32. Behind the non-flying parachutists and their infantry and Volkssturm satellites was the First Para Army reserve, 47 Pz Corps, commanded by the imposingly named General Heinrich Freiherr Von Luttwitz. When interrogated later, the corps commander claimed that his two formations were only 30 per cent of normal strength, and possessed only 35 tanks when they retired across the Rhine. They constituted the sole remnants of German armour still facing 21 Army Group. Reinforcements brought them up to 50 per cent strength in men, but no additional tanks were received. The corps was deployed in defence of the line of the Rhine, with 15 Pz Gren Div north of Bocholt, and 116 Pz Div centred around Ruurlo, while the General had established his headquarters at Silvolde. Luttwitz placed the corps in these positions to deal with a parachute landing which Army Group "H" feared would be launched along the Ijssel in conjunction with a surface assault across the Rhine. (AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket III; Special Interrogation Report, General Heinrich Freiherr Von Luttwitz)

33. The enemy's total reserves capable of intervention against "PLUNDER" could be divided into two categories,

- (a) Armour and infantry in the west.
- (b) Reserves from outside.

Apart from 47 Pz Corps, the following information was available about the Panzer type formations: The portion of Pz Lehr Div which was not already committed against the Remagen Bridgehead might well be sent down there very shortly to assist 9 and 11 Pz Divs and 106 Pz Bde, none of whom was having an easy time. 3 Pz Gren Div was in the slow process of refitting. 2 Pz Div was, according to a recently acquired prisoner, somewhere south of the Moselle, but since this formation had not had any rest for some weeks, it was not likely that it would interfere in our forthcoming operations. Thus the chances were that on D Day all armour except 116 Pz and 15 Pz Gren Divs would be engaged elsewhere. It might, however, be expected that as in "VERITABLE", some odd regiments would filter into the battle area slowly.

34. It was estimated at this time that none of the units which had been engaged during the last few days on the west bank would be strong enough to be moved away from their present

sectors. Potential reserves must therefore be sought at either end of the western front, on the eastern front, or even in Norway, Denmark or Italy. The three last sources were fair possibilities, the Russian front was not, for Marshal Stalin's men were putting on far too much pressure to permit the release of any divisions for employment elsewhere. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 15, "30 Corps" Planning Int Dossier No. 1, 13 Mar 45)

DISPOSITION AND PLANS OF 2 CDN CORPS

35. Immediately prior to the opening of the Army Group's offensive, 2 Cdn Corps held the river front on General Crerar's flank between the Cleve - Emmerich road and Millingen with elements of 2 Cdn Inf Div (H.S. file, AEF: 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/F: Weekly Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities, 18 to 24 Mar).[#] In the centre 49 (W.R.) Inf Div passed at noon, on 15 Mar, to the command of 1 Cdn Corps, which then assumed responsibility for the Nijmegen sector between 2 Cdn and 1 Brit Corps. "Thus", wrote General Crerar, "for the first time the two Canadian Corps were operationally committed under my command and an historical consummation had been realized" (General Crerar's Despatch, para 4). On the far left, the line of the Maas river westwards to the sea was held by 1 Brit Corps with 1 Pol Armd Div, 4 Cdo Bde, 116 Royal Marine Bde and the Royal Netherlands Bde under command, 1 Cdn Inf Div and 5 Cdn Armd Div.^{**} Lately arrived from the Italian theatre of operations, remained in Army reserve to be employed according to the G.O.C.-in-C.'s plan and as the situation indicated. (Ibid)

36. The outline plan for 2 Cdn Corps was itself divided into four phases. In the first, 3 Cdn Inf Div, having attacked through the left of 30 Corps, was to seize Vrsasselt (0159) with the leading brigade, Emmerich and the surrounding woods (9662 - 9762) with the second brigade, while the third went on to capture the Hoch Elten feature. If, however, Emmerich was too strongly held, the town would become the objective of the third brigade and Hoch Elten was to be taken on by an additional brigade from 2 Cdn Inf Div. With this end in view 2 Cdn Inf Div was to have one brigade concentrated at Rees as soon as possible and another alerted and ready to cross at Rees as bridge space became available. Maj-Gen A.B. Matthews' third brigade was to take up a position northeast of Cleve and be prepared to carry out a scramble crossing of the river at Emmerich if the town was found unoccupied; if there was any opposition at all in Emmerich no such crossing was to be attempted. On completion of Phase One, the troops of 2 Cdn Inf Div on the east bank would become responsible for the Corps right flank; and while this phase was still proceeding, the balance of 2 Cdn Inf Div and 4 Cdn Armd Div were to begin crossing the Rhine. (H.S. file 215C1 (D351); G.S.O. 1 Ops File, Op "PLUNDER", folios 75 and 76, Outline Plan 2 Cdn Corps, 18 Mar 45)

37. The assault on Emmerich would have the full support of the guns of 2 Cdn Corps. Their devastating fire was to be directed against the town, the Hoch Elten feature, and

See Hist Sec Report No. 186, paras 179, 184, 193.

** See Operation "GOLDFLAKE", Report No. 181.

any of the enemy's batteries which attempted to interfere with the security of the bridgehead. The operation against Emmerich was not to be dependent on air support; it would go in regardless of weather conditions, although if air support was possible, it would be used against the enemy's "choke points" to prevent the movement of reserves, and against his gun areas. (Ibid; and folios 66-9, 72, "Notes by Col G.S. on Conference with Commander and C. of S. 2 Cdn Corps, Op "PLUNDER", 14 Mar 45)

38. The second phase would see 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs thrusting northward side by side, the former directed on Doetinchem, the latter to the line of the railway north of Hoch Elten. In the third phase, 4 Cdn Armd Div would make its appearance on the right to push on to Ruurlo and Lochem while the infantry formations continued their advance to Zutphen (9494), Bronkherst and Wichmond. The last phase was to be a pivot movement, with 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs advancing across the Twente Canal to the line Holten (1009) - Deventer (9207) while Maj-Gen Vokes' armoured division moved on Delden (3007). If, after all these objectives had been achieved, the enemy was still resisting at Arnhem against 1 Cdn Corps, Lt-Gen Simonds would assault westwards across the Ijssel River against Apeldoorn (8003), probably using 1 Cdn Inf Div. In the same 2 Corps Order the allotment of armour for the operation was announced. From the start of the second phase, one regiment (10 Cdn Armd Regt) of 2 Cdn Armd Bde was to be under Maj-Gen Matthews' command; another (27 Cdn Armd Regt) would be under command 3 Cdn Inf Div. (Ibid)

39. In its own corresponding instructions for the battle, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div allotted the tasks ahead. After Phase One (the initial breakout towards Emmerich by 9 Cdn Inf Bde under command 51 (H.) Div), 7 Cdn Inf Bde was given the job of enlarging the bridgehead and 8 Cdn Inf Bde the capture of Emmerich itself (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 18, folio "2 Cdn Corps": H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div Confirmatory Notes of Conference, 1600 hrs, 17 Mar 45). It had been previously decided that the assaulting brigades should consist of four battalions, each brigade taking in the leading battalion of the follow-up formation. In this way H.L.I. of C. became part of 154 Bde from the planning stage onwards. (W.D., H.L.I. of C., 15 Mar 45; AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V: Folio 20, Op "PLUNDER", Report prepared by Hist Offr, 30 Apr 45). H.L.I. of C.'s special assignment under the Highland brigade was to capture the hamlet of zu Bienen* (0558) and patrol north-eastwards to the area of Am Millingerbruch (0659) as well as towards Praest (0359) to the north-west. 9 Cdn Inf Bde proper was then to launch its leading battalion (Nth N.S. Highrs) through to assault Praest, while S.D. & G. Highrs seized the ground about Millingen (0757). It was expected that H.L.I. of C. would get across the river by 0200 hours on D Day with its two sister battalions trailing over some seven or eight hours later. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 18, Op "PLUNDER", 9 Cdn Inf Bde Op Instr No. 1, 22 Mar 45) See Appx "A".

40. As D Day approached, the concentration and marshalling of troops and equipment presented new problems of camouflage and concealment. The whole picture was a keen

* Notice in subsequent paragraphs (i.e., 61) plans very often must be changed to meet tactical demands: i.e. (a) H.L.I. of C were committed against Speldrop: (b) It was 7 Cdn Inf Bde who took Emmerich.

reminder of the days prior to the Normandy Invasion. The high-level planners accepted the fact that the enemy knew of our intention to cross the Rhine, but the greatest care was taken to see that the time and the place of the assault were not revealed. The actual concentration of the fighting men and machines was far from easy, for the broad pincer movement recently carried out by Ninth U.S. and First Cdn Armies had resulted in a wide dispersal of units which had to be sorted out in all too short a time. (AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket I). As far as the administration was concerned, the build-up of ammunition and engineer stores presented an even greater difficulty, for the only way into the area between the rivers was over First Cdn Army's heavily laden and already sagging road system about the Reichswald. (Ibid)

41. The immense work of preparing for the battle was only accomplished by the complete cooperation of all services. It took place behind a dense smoke screen which covered the whole front and even extended into the flanking sectors of both Canadian and American Armies. This smoke programme, originally started by 2 Cdn Corps during Operation "VERITABLE", was to prove most successful. When Second Army took over the Rhine bank on 10 Mar to begin to build-up for "PLUNDER", the screen was intensified as fitting naturally into the large scale deception plan to make the enemy believe that our attack was aimed directly at Emmerich. The screen was operated by a smoke control organization and timed to agree with the needs of the corps involved; only Headquarters Second Army could alter these timings in case of need for further air photography. (AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/C/F, Docket III, Vol 1, Folio 16, Smoke Screen Op "PLUNDER"; Folio 19, Report on Smoke Screens Carried out by First Cdn Army, p. 33)

42. As a good part of Second British Army had been operating under Gen Crerar during Operation "VERITABLE"; it became essential that no hint of our regrouping be given the enemy. To this end, a wireless deception plan, Operation "TRANSCEND", was arranged; this together with the actual placing on the ground of dummy equipments drew the German's attention towards Emmerich, and away from the real effort which was to be made further south. The camouflage plan, itself a master-piece of organized concealment, was carried out by the Camouflage Staff Pool of 21 Army Group, assisted wholeheartedly by experts from 12 U.S. Army Group and First Cdn Army. Like the smoke screen, it was the biggest undertaking of its kind on the western front. It included the complete camouflage of all our assault equipments, gun positions, ammunition dumps, engineer stores and concentration areas, in fact every last thing that would give the enemy the slightest clue as to the point of origin of the real attack. From these vast labours the rewards were most promising; on D minus 1 a very thorough aerial check showed little to indicate either the time or the place of our impending attack. (AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D,

* Op "TRANSCEND". This was a high-level wireless scheme in which links were established between First Cdn Army's main and rear H.Q. and 30 Brit Corps' main and rear H.Q. These links were to operate daily until the assault was underway, to give the appearance that the groupings of 21 Army Group had not been substantially changed.

Docket I; also W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army, April 1945:
Appx "JJ", folio Op "TRANSCEND", 8 Mar 45)

43. By this late hour the enemy's positions on the east bank were being subjected to the fiercest air bombardment since the Normandy landings. In addition to the effort by our fighter and fighter bombers, Air-Marshal Sir Arthur Harris' Bomber Command had by D Day flown 5,243 sorties dropping 24,983 tons of high explosives. Eighth and Ninth United States A.A.Fs. contribution was correspondingly large, with 24,500 tons being dropped in 11,067 sorties. A highlight of this destructive programme was to come at 2230 hours on D minus 1. At that time, 200 Lancasters were to swamp the town of Wesel and pave the way for the attack of 1 Cdo Bde. (AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket II, Vol 1: Notes on the Operations of 21 Army Group, 6 Jun 44 - 5 May 45, p. 51)

44. More than a month of heavy fighting through the confined region between the Rivers Maas and Rhine, in the face of a desperate defence and under appalling conditions of weather and terrain, had left our own troops utterly weary. And yet, notwithstanding their fatigue, morale was splendid: "...a tremendous feeling of esprit de corps was evident. The spirit... was that of troops resting after a job well done". The soldiers were convinced, moreover, that final victory was not far off, and in the brief period of rest before the resumption of operations beyond the Rhine they showed their eagerness to begin the last great battle. (Hist Sec File 205 A21.023, 21 Army Group Censorship Report for period 16-31 Mar 45, Cdn Army Overseas)

45. When dawn broke on 23 Mar the troops and their machines were ready for the great adventure. The hours before the assault were ones of orderly preparations; to the more seasoned soldiers it was like the D Day of June 1944; all realized that the time to perform a very necessary operation had arrived. Their feeling of confidence was strengthened by the C.-in-C.'s personal message.

1. On the 7th February I told you we were going into the ring for the final and last round; there would be no time limit; we would continue fighting until our opponent was knocked out. The last round is going very well on both sides of the ring--and over-land.

2. In the West, the enemy has lost the Rhineland, and with it the flower of at least four armies--the Parachute Army, Fifth Panzer Army, Fifteenth Army, and Seventh Army; the First Army, further to the South, is now being added to the list. In the Rhineland battles, the enemy has lost about 150,000 prisoners, and there are many more to come: his total casualties amount to about 250,000 since 8th February.

3. In the East, the enemy has lost all Pomerania East of the R Oder, an area as large as the Rhineland; and three more German armies have been routed. The Russian armies are within about 35 miles of Berlin.

4. Overhead, the Allied Air Forces are pounding Germany day and night. It will be interesting to see how much longer the Germans can stand it.

5. The enemy has in fact been driven into a corner, and he cannot escape. Events are moving rapidly. The complete and decisive defeat of the Germans is certain; there is no possibility of doubt on this matter.

6. 21 ARMY GROUP WILL NOW CROSS THE RHINE. The enemy possibly thinks he is safe behind this great river obstacle. We all agree that it is a great obstacle; but we will show the enemy that he is far from safe behind it. This great Allied fighting machine, composed of integrated land and air forces, will deal with the problem in no uncertain manner.

7. And having crossed the Rhine, we will crack about in the plains of Northern Germany, chasing the enemy from pillar to post. The swifter and the more energetic our action the sooner the war will be over, and that is what we all desire; to get on with the job and finish off the German war as soon as possible.

8. Over the Rhine, then, let us go. And good hunting to you all on the other side.

9. May "the Lord mighty in battle" give us the victory in this our latest undertaking, as He has done in all our battles since we landed in Normandy on D-Day.

(W.D., 2 Cdn Fd Hist Sec, March 1945:
Appx 1, Personal message from C.-in-C.,
21 Army Gp, March 1945)

Thus inspired, the assault troops gathered in their hideaways for the final briefing and waited anxiously for the order to "get on with the job". That order, signalling the commencement of the last great offensive of the European war, came from Field Marshal Montgomery at 1530 hours on 23 Mar, for as he explained later, "the weather was good". (Field Marshal, The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, K.G., G.C.B., D.S.O., Normandy to the Baltic, p. 204)*

46. A British officer touring the crowded assembly areas at this time noted:-

Driving round, I saw very odd sights: Pioneer Corps companies with bridging material and the R.A.S.C. making dumps, both in the front line; our medium and heavy artillery deployed within enemy mortar range; some gun-crews stripped to the waist digging frantically for victory, while other soldiers wandered past them on bicycles and even on horseback (there was no shelling this morning); odd men milking cows; thirty dead cows in a minefield; some ownerless and rather skinny pigs scavenging round; masses of tanks and lorries containing bridging material moving forward; many notices put up by 3rd Division asking us to minimize our dust... The Huns seem to have been evacuated from here... It was all

* Normandy to the Baltic; the page numbers referred to in this report are those of the edition published by Hutchinson and Co.

a mystery to me as I strolled around in the sunshine, no smoke screen on this last and most vital day, and yet no shelling either.

(Lt-Col Martin Lindsay, D.S.O.,
So Few Got Through, p. 232)

47. This almost disturbing quietness was finally broken late that afternoon. At 1700 hours on 23 Mar, heavy gunfire roared out from the artillery positions concealed on the west bank of the Rhine. (W.D., H.Q. R.C.A., 4 Cdn Armd Div, 23 Mar 45). The intensity of this preliminary bombardment increased with each passing minute, and as darkness fell the leaping muzzle flashes presented an unforgettable picture. (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. R.C.A., 2 Cdn Inf Div, 23 Mar 45).

It was a very impressive show, for there seemed to be a solid row of guns firing from our side of the Rhine from Nijmegen bridge stretching miles to the south. The whole sky would burst into flame as hundreds of guns seemed to fire salvos continuously and hurled hundreds of tons of shells into the Boche's last defence line.

(History of the 12th Canadian Field Regiment, p. 58)

THE ASSAULT, 23 MAR 45

48. At 2100 hours, as the massed guns thundered their encouragement, the curtain rose on the opening phase of the last major battle of the European war. The L.Vs.T. carrying the life-belted Scots of 51 (H.) Div, picked a way across the flats toward the dark waters of the Rhine. Opposite Rees the river, visible in the dull glare reflected by the searchlights from the low clouds, was entered without undue trouble, and the snorting vehicles turned their bows to the east bank. Seven minutes later the suspense and anxiety of those waiting at the various headquarters on the west bank was broken, and the report came through that the first waves of infantry were safely ashore on the far side. (AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket II: Notes on the Operations of 21 Army Group, 6 Jun 44 - 5 May 45; W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 23 Mar 45, Serial 13)

49. 51 (H.) Div attacked with two brigades up, 153 Bde on the right with 5/7 Gordons and 5 B.W. leading, while on the left 154 Bde's thrust employed 7 A. & S.H. and 7 B.W. as spearheads. Immediately behind the infantry came the first squadron of Staffs Yeo in D.D. tanks. This success was quickly followed by the crossing of the Commandos at Wesel. Their effort began at 2200 hours and within thirty minutes the troops were formed up outside Wesel waiting for the R.A.F. to commence bombing only 1500 yards away. They did not have long to wait; the bombs came down, the veteran commandos dashed in, and by 0600 hours were all well into the battered town, struggling fiercely with the German garrison. To the left of the Commando Bde, 15 (S.) Div having crossed at 0200 hours, had seized all their initial objectives. Still farther to the south the Americans of Ninth U.S. Army were pouring over the Rhine on a front of two divisions. (Notes on the Operations of 21 Army Group, op cit, p. 51; H.Q.C. 206-227-1-T51 (D.W.D. 2) Military Operation Research Unit Report No. 12, "The Assault on Wesel")

50. While the Highland Division was establishing its initial bridgehead about Rees, the main body of H.L.I. of C. which was to be the first Canadian battalion to cross, was being marshalled north-east of Calcar. (W.D., H.L.I. of C., 23 Mar 45; W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, March 1945: Appx 5, 9 Cdn Inf Bde Op Instr No. 1, Op "PLUNDER", 22 Mar 45, para 5). The advance party, already with elements of 154 Bde on the east bank, consisted of nine other ranks commanded by Capt Donald Pearce. Their task was to become familiar with the ground in order to lead the battalion to its assembly area when it arrived on the far side. These men were thus the first Canadians to cross the Rhine. (AEF: 45/9 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II: Interview with Lt-Col R.D. Hodgins, O.C., H.L.I. of C., 20 Apr 45). At 0345 hours, the battalion received orders to move, and by 0425 hours the fighting men of the four rifle companies with lifebelts "Mae West" slung round them, and laden with 24 hour ration packs, were piled into their Buffaloes. (W.D., H.L.I. of C., 24 Mar 45; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 18, Confirmatory Notes - Conference 0930 hours, 19 Mar 45, Op "PLUNDER"; 51 (H.) Div Op Instr No. 35, Op "PLUNDER", para 6). Under sporadic shelling the amphibians carried the unit to its landing place on the east bank about four kilometres west of Rees. The guides led the battalion to the assembly area, a progress which was enlivened for "C" Coy by the capture of 30 members of the Volkssturm. (W.D., H.L.I. of C., 24 Mar 45)

THE AIRBORNE ATTACK, 24 MAR 45

51. The substantial bridgehead produced by the night's fighting was soon increased in the most spectacular manner by our airborne forces.

...The two mighty air fleets converged near Brussels and made for the Rhine. Over the bridgehead area an air umbrella was maintained by nine hundred fighters, while deeper into Germany fighter formations kept enemy aircraft away from the battle zone. A great weight of artillery fire from the west bank of the Rhine prepared the way for the airborne drop, and a few minutes before 1000 hours the ground troops saw the aircraft of the first parachute serial arrive.

(Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, p. 205)

From that time on thousands of aircraft flowed across the great river in the clear morning air to pour down their loads of men and equipment exactly as planned. From one Canadian gun position it presented a dramatic spectacle.

A spectacular sight indeed was the Airborne operation. The entire Bty saw planes and their gliders flying overhead in a seemingly never ending stream and then the tugs breaking loose leaving the gliders on their own. One Hamilcar glider broke loose prematurely and glided down to a very smooth landing near our position. One "tug" and all the occupants suffered a quick death when it turned completely over and executed a vertical dive to earth.

(H.S. File 142.97, 013 Docket I:
History of 1 Cdn Rocket Bty, R.C.A., p. 26)

The tug, which the Canadian gunners saw thus plunge to destruction was probably one of the many victims of the enemy's flak.

52. In the earlier stages of the airborne assault casualties were light, but by the time that the gliders began to arrive (at about 1030 hours) the enemy gunners had recovered their balance as well as their courage and were once again manning their weapons. Curiously enough, although many gliders and tugs fell victim to the flak, so successful had been the air attacks on the German landing grounds, that there was no attempt at interference by the enemy's fighters. (AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket II: p. 352; AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/S/F: Air Action in Support of the Battle of the Rhine, p. 5, para 16). Immediately after the initial phase there followed a daring, low-level re-supply mission by 240 American Liberator bombers, which delivered 540 tons of petrol, food and ammunition. Fourteen of the four-engined giants were shot down but luckily about 85 percent of their cargoes were accurately dropped. (Ibid; and Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, pp. 204-205)

53. By midday the success of the airborne operation was apparent. The British 6 Airborne Division had landed right on its objectives, and Diersfordt Wood, Hamminkeln and the bridges eastward on the River Eissel were soon seized. (AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket II: p. 353; and 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 24 Mar 45, Serial 30). Among these dashing, red-berretted shock troops were the men of 1 Cdn Para Bn, who jumped with 3 Para Bde to the north of the Diersfordt Wood. Brigadier S.J.L. Hill, D.S.O., M.C. commanding the brigade wrote Lt-Gen P.J. Montague* from his headquarters in Germany on 9 Apr:

...I thought you would not mind my writing to you direct to tell you what a very wonderful show the Battalion has put up since our operations over the Rhine on March 24th last.

They really put up a most tremendous performance on D Day and as a result of their tremendous dash and enthusiasm they overcame their objectives, which were very sticky ones, with considerable ease, killing a very large number of Germans and capturing many others.

Unfortunately the price was high in that they lost their Colonel, Jeff Nicklin, who was one of the best fellows that I have met, and was the ideal man to command that Battalion as he fairly used to bang their heads together and they used to like it and accept it. He is and will be a tremendous loss to the Battalion and of course to me. I only hope that the people back in Canada appreciate the really wonderful job of work he has done in producing his Battalion at the starting line in such outstanding form.

(AEF: 45/1 Cdn Para Bn/C/D, Docket II: Folio 5)

54. The battalion's dropping zone lay along the northern edge of Diersfordt Wood. Owing to the high speed of the aircraft there was considerable dispersion in the jump, and the zone itself was found to be under heavy fire. Nonetheless

* At that time Chief of Staff at C.M.H.Q. London.

the battalion quickly concentrated, and before midday had cleared its objectives on the western edge of the wood and captured a large number of prisoners. In the afternoon contact was made with reconnaissance elements of 15 (S.) Inf Div. (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 24 Mar 45).

55. That the veterans of 6 Gds Tk Bde, whose task it was to give the airborne troops armoured support, felt their responsibility keenly is recorded in the Brigade history:

It was difficult at the time to forget the tragedy of the previous September when another tank formation of the Brigade of Guards had been given the task of joining up with another airborne force. Would this be a second Arnhem?

From the beginning, however, the adventure seemed destined to success. Soon after the landing took place, the Scots Guards picked up the 6th Airborne Headquarters on the wireless and during the late afternoon and early evening they moved down by stages to the banks of the Rhine near to the village of Wardt. There, in the middle of the night, the tanks were driven onto rafts and towed across the river to the further side. Left Flank immediately drove off in an easterly direction and, after going four miles, linked up with the 6th Airborne Division in a clearing of the Diersfordt Wald. The paratroopers were thus provided with armoured reinforcements little more than twelve hours after their descent.

It had all seemed so easy that it came as a shock to learn that the 6th Airborne Division had suffered terrible casualties soon after they had landed. Within a few hours of leaving England, they had been plunged into a inferno of desperate hand-to-hand fighting. But they had emerged victorious, having trapped the German paratroopers (old enemies of the Brigade) and routed them completely. Now they were as keen as ever to continue the battle.

(Forbes, 6th Guards Tank Brigade, p. 123)

56. The American drop was equally successful in spite of 513 Regimental Combat Team being dropped north of its correct zone. The Americans made contact during the afternoon with 1 Cdo Bde in the area north of Wesel and 6 Airborne Div linked up with 15 (S.) Inf Div. By midnight 24/25 Mar, the two airborne divisions were on their objectives and had established firm contact with 12 Corps. (AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket II: p. 353; and Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, p. 206). The impact of the airborne attack had completely overwhelmed the enemy in the area of the dominating Diersfordt Ridge, disrupting the control of his artillery and of his rear positions. In 14 hours the airborne corps took 3500 prisoners, mostly troops of 84 Inf Div, but with 7 Para Div yielding a small share. (AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket II, p. 353). The Commander of 84 Inf Div, Maj-Gen Heinz Fiebig, admitted that his division was practically completely destroyed, for its forward troops received the full impact of the 12 Corps attack and thousands of paratroopers landed right in his rear area. So sweeping was the Allied

success that only a few signals, engineer and anti-tank units survived. (AEF: First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket II, Folio 19: Special Interrogation Report, Maj-Gen Heinz Fiebig).

57. Much of the success achieved so far must be attributed to the tremendous Allied air effort, summarized by the Supreme Commander as follows:

Prior to the arrival of the transport planes and gliders, the Ninth Air Force and the Second Tactical Air Force planes attacked the enemy flak positions, with the result that interference with the airborne elements from this source was considerably reduced. Also, in immediate co-operation with the armies, medium bombers attacked 18 towns which were either strong-points or communication centers. Gun and mortar sites and the enemy forward positions generally were relentlessly strafed and bombed, while armed reconnaissance was maintained against the German supply lines. The whole weight of the Eighth Air Force bombers, apart from one division of Liberators used for airborne resupply, was employed in the attacks on the jet airfields.

(Report by the Supreme Commander, op cit, p. 99)

In addition, General Eisenhower continued:

...diversionary air operations were also conducted during the day. One hundred and fifty bombers of the Fifteenth Air Force, with five groups of fighters, flew 1,500 miles from their Italian bases to Berlin and back, while other forces from Italy were raiding airfields in the south. Over Berlin itself fighters of the Eighth Air Force provided cover. This raid successfully fulfilled its object of drawing enemy fighters away from the Rhine battle area. The second diversion was carried out by RAF Bomber Command, which attacked the rail center of Sterkrade as well as oil targets in the Ruhr. In all, during the four days, 21-24 March, American and British air forces, based in Britain, Western Europe and Italy, flew over 42,000 sorties against Germany.

(Ibid)

A special word of praise must be added for the Allied photographic reconnaissance planes which had provided our forces with highly accurate intelligence;

Conversely, the enemy's failure, from D Day onward, was partly due to his own lack, by reason of his air weakness, of the facilities which the Allies enjoyed in this respect.

(Ibid, pp. 98-99)

58. That the enemy's air force was not able to interfere effectively with the Allied assault is substantiated by the fact that although on 24 Mar alone the Allies flew some 8,000 aircraft and 1,300 glider sorties, fewer than 100

enemy aircraft appeared in the air. (Ibid, p. 121). No one appreciated the air support more than the ordinary soldier who had to face the enemy with his personal weapons, and every fighting man's thoughts must indeed have been re-echoed in Field Marshal Montgomery's personal message to Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris of Bomber Command in which the C.-in-C. expressed his thanks:

My grateful appreciation for the quite magnificent co-operation you have given us in the Battle of the Rhine. The bombing of Wesel last night was a masterpiece and was a decisive factor in making possible our entry into that town before midnight.

(Harris, Marshal of the R.A.F., Sir Arthur, Bomber Offensive, p. 255)

59. The degree of surprise which our assault gained may be gathered from the remarks of the German Generals who were responsible for the sector against which our attacks were directed. General Eugen Meindl admitted that he had been gravely concerned regarding a parachute offensive but, as he informed his interrogator, he had little with which he could counter it. (Meindl's appreciation of our intentions must of course be accepted with reserve, for his statements were made after the war was over.) Nevertheless he felt that the main attack would be made against Rees. On the other hand he claimed that General Alfred Schlemm, the commander of First Parachute Army, expected an assault on Emmerich or Wesel. As it was, the actual attack came two days before Meindl expected it, and thus he was not prepared to meet it. (Special Interrogation Report, General Eugen Meindl). During his own interrogation Schlemm explained that:

...A parachute drop over the Rhine was considered inevitable, and efforts were made to determine the most probable spot. Schlemm had captured an Allied report analyzing the parachute drop at Arnhem in September 1944, and from this document he learnt that Allied views were now against a paratroop landing too far away from the ground troops destined to contact it. By plotting the areas that were topographically suitable for a parachute drop and not too far from the Rhine, Schlemm claims the most likely area seemed to be just east of Wesel. It was in this neighborhood that he therefore expected the crossing attempt would be made...

(Ibid, General Alfred Schlemm)

Schlemm's views however were not considered sound by his superiors at Army Group "H" or by Field Marshal Von Rundstedt:

...The expected northern crossing was to take place, according to these latter opinions, in the neighborhood of Emmerich. The assault would be directed north-east and designed to take the Ijssel line in the rear. Since this was to be the big attack, Schlemm was ordered to send a large part of his artillery to Twenty Fifth Army who would be faced with this new offensive...

As subsequent events will prove, this was a miscalculation of some significance. (Ibid)

THE EXPANSION OF THE BRIDGEHEAD BY 51 (H.) DIV, 23-25 MAR 45

60. Meanwhile the Highland Division, while still hard bent in its effort to breakout of the bridgehead, had suffered a serious loss. Its brilliant G.O.C., Maj-Gen T.G. Rennie, an outstanding veteran of the North African Campaign, was killed by mortar fire while visiting his men on the east bank. Nevertheless, despite the loss of their leader the "Jocks" gained ground steadily. On the right especially, the operation by 153 Bde to capture Rees was progressing favourably, for while 5 B.W. had isolated that place by their thrust on Esserden and 5/7 Gordons established themselves on the island south-east of the town, 1 Gordons deployed to advance on Rees itself from the west. Additional pressure was brought to bear in this sector by the subsequent arrival of 152 Bde which, led by 2 Seaforth with 5 Camerons in close attendance, cut in between Esserden and Rees to straddle the main road leading north from the town. On the left however, 154 Bde had run into difficulties. While 7 B.W. moved north towards Reesward to clear the western flank and 7 A. & S.H. held the narrow road linking Esserden and Rathshof (0452), 1 B.W. was passed through to seize Klein, Esserden and Speldrop. Within a short time the opposition in the former had been dealt with but Speldrop soon became a centre of serious trouble. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 23 Mar 45, serials 15, 16 and 20; 24 Mar 45, serials 1, 2, 4, 6-10, 18, 29, 43 and 45)

61. A careful examination of the ground in this area shows that the exit from the bridgehead is bounded by the Millinger Meer and the Alter Rhein. To expand northward therefore the villages of Speldrop and Bienen must be taken. Speldrop itself lies at the heel of the great horseshoe of which the Alter Rhein is the western side. Bienen at the northern end is the toe of the horseshoe and the waters of the Millinger Meer form the eastern side. A breakout could only be accomplished by securing Bienen, but Bienen could not be taken so long as the Germans held Speldrop. The enemy had fully appreciated the tactical value of these places, and although 1 B.W. managed to enter Speldrop they were very quickly counter-attacked and driven out with heavy losses. (H.S. File 235C3 013(D6), Op "PLUNDER", Report by Hist Offr, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, Capt R.F. Gray, 30 Apr 45). A second attempt by the Black Watch did not prove completely successful and by 1400 hours it was decided to withdraw as many of the Scots as possible and send H.L.I. of C. in to take Speldrop, instead of Bienen their original task (Ibid: AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V, Folio 15: 14 Cdn Fd Regt, R.C.A., Artillery Notes of Ops "PLUNDER"; also W.Ds., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 24 Mar 45, and H.L.I. of C., 24 Mar 45). Under cover of a smoke screen the battered members of the Black Watch withdrew, leaving their wounded sheltered in the cellars. One platoon which could not be extricated was advised by wireless to take what cover they could from our artillery fire. As we shall see, this first Canadian commitment east of the Rhine was to be no easy task. (W.D., H.L.I. of C., 24 Mar 45; AEF: 45/9 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II, Folio 1: Memo of Interview with Lt-Col R.D. Hodgins, O.C., H.L.I. of C., 20 Apr 45)

62. The attack by H.L.I. of C. was to be well supported; six field and two medium regiments, as well as two heavy batteries (7.2s) were available to back up our attempt to gain the village of Speldrop. At 1600 hours, behind

a series of linear artillery concentrations and with the left flank screened by smoke to give protection against the German fire from the north, "B" Coy H.L.I. of C. went in from the west. (Interview with Lt-Col Hodgins; W.Ds., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde. and H.L.I. of C., 24 Mar 45; AEF: 3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V, Folio 15: Artillery Notes on Op "PLUNDER")

63. The Canadians pressed on across 1200 yards of flat, open fields, which despite our smoke screen were swept by the enemy's machine guns, artillery and mortar fire. Hugging the shelter of our own barrage, the leading company reached the outskirts of the built-up portion of the town but immediately ran into stiff resistance. "A" Coy was then passed through to meet the determined paratroopers who were defending the fortified houses. A bitter fight followed, but even the resolution of these well trained toughs melted before the horrid jets of flame which the Wasps sprayed among them, and the backbone of their resistance was broken. Another company, ("C"), succeeded in clearing the southern part of the town and liberating the trapped platoon of 1 B.W., while the fourth rifle company sent patrols north of the town and captured several machine gun crews who were, curiously enough, asleep at their guns. It was evident that the past 24 hours of almost continual attack and bombardment had rendered the German infantry completely exhausted. (W.D., H.L.I. of C., 25 Mar 45; and Interview with Lt-Col Hodgins, H.S. File 235C3 013(D6), Op "PLUNDER", op cit)

64. While H.L.I. of C., was mopping up around Speldrop, 7 A. & S.H. were ordered to pass through 1 B.W. at Klein - Esserden and to capture Bienen. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 24 Mar, serials 46 and 50). The Scots attacked Bienen at 2000 hours, but were so heavily opposed that it became clear that additional forces would be needed to reduce the village. This necessary support, however, was already on its way, for by this time 9 Cdn Inf Bde's other battalions were on the east bank of the Rhine. S.D. & G. Highrs had crossed first in Buffaloes and concentrated near the river south-east of Speldrop. Nth N.S. Highrs followed at 1700 hours using the storm boat ferry service, and concentrated in the area recently vacated by H.L.I. of C. (W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 24 Mar 45, and March 1945: Appx 4, marked map 2; W.Ds., Nth N.S.-Highrs and H.Q., 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 24 Mar 45)

65. During the night of 24 Mar a reshuffle to further the Canadian commitment on the left took place. S.D. & G. Highrs relieved 7 B.W. and occupied the area of Reeserward between the main river and the Alter Rhein. The position was very exposed, but the troops, taking advantage of whatever cover the moonlit night offered, moved in. Once in place, they found themselves occupying the unique position of the extreme left of the whole allied force which had crossed the Rhine. (W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 24 Mar 45; and AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V: Report 9 Cdn Inf Bde, Op "PLUNDER", 15 May 45). The relief completed, 7 B.W. returned to concentrate northwest of Rathshof, leaving S.D. & G. Highrs to plan an attack on Grietherbusch for the early hours of 25 Mar. (W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 24 Mar 45; 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 25 Mar, serials 5, 6, 9 and 31)

66. By first light on 25 Mar, the situation, though still strongly contested, was improving all across the front. On the far right, 5/7 Gordons were exerting pressure on Rees from the south while 1 Gordons strove energetically to clean up the last defenders in the town. To assist in this, 5 B.W.

having cut across south of Esserden from the west, were now firmly settled on all the exits leading north from Rees. Along the main road above Rees, 152 Bde had 5 Seaforth fighting in Groin and 5 Camerons clearing the built-up area between Groin and the Millinger Meer; the third battalion, 2 Seaforth, occupied a firm base around the factory site (081536) 1500 yards north of Rees. In the centre H.L.I. of C. held Speldrop and waited to be relieved by 1 B.W. (presently at Klein - Esserden) at 0900 hours. Their advance northward to Bienen had not been possible, for the Germans completely dominated the road from the east. Bienen was still to be captured, 7 A. & S.H. being strongly held in all their efforts against this village, which was stoutly defended by tanks and self-propelled guns. Indeed, 7 A. & S.H. experienced such a mauling here that Nth N.S. Highrs were ordered forward to carry on the attack at 0900 hours. The left flank was, however, already being carried forward by S.D. & G. Highrs, who had assaulted Grietherbusch at 0630 hours. Meanwhile N. Shore R. had been brought over to the east bank to give depth to the bridgehead and was now under command 9 Cdn Inf Bde. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 25 Mar 45, serials 6, 9 and 31)

67. The attack on Grietherbusch by S.D. & G. Highrs was carried out with great dash. By noon 25 Mar the enemy, despite suicidal stands along the road from Grafenhof to the farm at Tillhaus, had been subdued, and the Glengarrians were probing along the many watery tracks and sideroads of the area in search of further resistance. (W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 25 Mar 45; Report 9 Cdn Inf Bde, Op "PLUNDER", op cit). Meanwhile the Nth N.S. Highrs had also begun their first battle on the east bank of the Rhine, and as if to show the significance of this action the war diary of this veteran unit contains the heading "the day of the battle 25 Mar 45"; as though everything else which had befallen since 6 Jun 44 was as nothing compared to this costly day. (Report 9 Cdn Inf Bde, Op "PLUNDER" op cit; also W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs. 25 Mar 45; and Appx 8, "Operations Against Bienen")

68. At 0530 hours the orders for the day's fighting were given to the Company Commanders. The objective was Bienen, which 7 A. & S.H., had so far, not been able to enter. The Scotsmen's last two attempts had resulted in heavy losses and they had been beaten back to the farm buildings on the south-western edge of the village. The task of Nth N.S. Highrs was to pass through 7 A. & S.H., capture the village and thus open the way for a northward expansion of the bridgehead, which would free our ferries and concentration areas from shell and mortar fire and open the road towards Emmerich, the ultimate objective of 3 Cdn Inf Div and, indeed, of 2 Cdn Corps. The plan for the battalion attack was divided into two phases. In the first phase "A" Coy would seize the right hand portion of the village and "B" the left, thus securing the start line for "C" and "D" Coys in the next phase, in which the east and west portions of the rest of the village would be taken. In the first phase a troop of D.D. tanks, (Essex Yeo), which had swum across the Rhine, were to support "A" Coy. The approach over 300 yards of flat, open country, was to be supported by heavy artillery fire including a liberal use of smoke by both field guns and the battalion's three-inch mortars. H Hour for the attack was set for 0900 hours, 25 Mar 45. (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 25 Mar 45; and March 1945: Appx 8, "Operations Against Bienen", Trace of Operation "ASTER")

69. The first hint of trouble came well before H Hour, when "A" Coy reported at 0825 hours that it was already being pinned down on its way to the start line by machine guns, snipers and some mortaring. Shortly after this, "B" Coy, closing the start line, sent in a similar message. At that time both companies were suffering casualties. At 0845 hours, however, the smoke for the supporting fire plan began, and using it for temporary protection, the troops managed to make headway and succeeded in forming up for the attack. Within five minutes Lt-Col D.F. Forbes learnt that his men were again pinned down, that some of the platoons were out of contact and that casualties were mounting. As the diarist records, "the Battalion had quite definitely lost the initiative and contact between platoons was next to impossible because of the murderous fire and heavy mortaring". An attempt was made to reorganize and press on but loss of contact and casualties among officers and N.C.Os. made control a serious problem. At 1145 hours Brigadier J.M. Rockingham, D.S.O., made a personal appreciation of the situation on the battle ground and directed that the Battalion "start from scratch and do the attack over again using the two remaining companies". (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 25 Mar 45; "Operations Against Bienen", op cit)

70. At 1430 hours, supported by an additional troop of tanks - Shermans of the 4/7 Dragoon Guards - and a fresh artillery programme, "C" and "D" Coys pushed off. Within 15 minutes "C" Coy, after suffering ten killed and 23 wounded in their advance of 500 yards across an open field, had reached the first houses on the fringe of the town. (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 25 Mar 45; and March 1945: Appx 8, "Busting into Bienen with 'C' Coy"). "D" Coy though losing men left and right and badly disorganized (the Company Commander having been wounded), still succeeded in taking 100 prisoners. At 1700 hours a third attack started with the limited objective of completing the clearance of what had been originally the battalion objective for Phase One. This was successful but at about 1815 hours enemy armour in the unwelcome form of self-propelled guns appeared. They knocked out two of the Shermans for the loss of one assault gun, which fell victim to one of the new self-propelled 17-prs of 3 Cdn A.Tk Regt. (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 25 Mar 45; and W.D., 3 Cdn A.Tk Regt, R.C.A., March 1945: Appx 11, "17 pdr S.P. Valentine in Action"). At this stage it appeared as though the enemy was about to counter-attack. Then, at 1950 hours, the Commanding Officer ordered the battalion simply to clear a start line in Bienen for H.L.I. of C., who were to pass through at 2300 hours and finish the job. Even this limited task entailed clearing the extensive buildings of a creamery, and exploiting to the far end of Bienen. At the end of the day the battered remnants of the Maritimers were able to take stock of themselves after "a long, hard, bitter fight against excellent troops who were determined to fight to the end". In this battle to open the bottleneck restricting the bridgehead the battalion lost 35 other ranks killed, seven officers and 72 other ranks wounded. (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 25 Mar 45; "Operations Against Bienen" op cit)

71. The Company Commanders have recorded typical incidents of this fierce struggle for an obscure German hamlet:

We picked up three tanks and started into the town along the left road. The tanks, our big brothers, covered our right flank by "brewing up" each house in

turn, while we moved up the left. A couple of the boys were hit by snipers firing from the big house, so we got a tank to "brew it up." Ten platoon got into the place and started to clear it. This made Jerry very unhappy, and he started firing through the floors. We finally, with the help of 12 platoon and the moral support of the tanks, got forty prisoners and a couple of officers out of the place.

(W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, March 1945:
Appx 8, Composite Sheet, R. 3, Bienen,
Account by "B" Coy)

The Commander of "C" Coy was particularly impressed by the gallantry of his stretcher bearers:

The work of stretcher bearers and jeep-drivers during the attack was particularly commendable. In spite of the fact that 2 stretcher bearers were killed by M.G. fire while attending to wounded in the open field the remainder carried on with their job under fire and all wounded were evacuated quickly.

(Ibid: "Busting into Bienen with "C" Coy")

COMMAND OF LEFT SECTOR PASSES TO 43(W.) INF DIV, 25 MAR 45

72. Thus the night of 25/26 Mar found 9 Cdn Inf Bde holding the western end of the 30 Corps bridgehead but no longer under the guidance of 51(H.) Div. According to the plan created prior to the battle, 43 (Wessex) Div had assumed control of the left sector at 1600 hours 25 Mar, taking 9 Cdn Inf Bde under command. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 25 Mar 45, Serial 45). Just after midnight the leading brigade of the Wessex Division (130 Bde) crossed the river, and it was announced that it would move through Speldrop to attack Androp (0755), the main village on the southern bank of the Millinger Meer. During the hours of darkness the enemy was not allowed much respite. H.L.I. of C., advancing from their recent conquest of Speldrop, took up the offensive against Bienen and spent the night clearing out the last defenders there. S.D. & G. Highrs continued to hold the left flank, while Nth N.S. Highrs stood on the western edge of Bienen silently sorting themselves out after their last bloody battle. (W.Ds., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 25, 26 Mar 45)

73. 43 Inf Div's first task was not a heavy one. By 0615 hours 5 Dorsets of 130 Inf Bde had seized Androp against very light opposition and 7 Hamps began to move up on the left. At this time 4 Dorsets was concentrated in Esserden and the first two units of 129 Bde, (4 Wilts, 4 Som L.I.), were already crossing the Rhine. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 26 Mar 45, Serials 7, 11 and 22). With Bienen and Androp firmly in our hands the next obvious objectives were the localities of Millingen and Am Stevert occupying an advantageous position between the northern end of Millinger Meer and the railroad. The capture of these communities would give 43 Brit Inf Div a firm cornerstone for subsequent operations northwards to the autobahn, and west-

wards along the railroad track to Emmerich. This most essential task fell to the N. Shore R., who were now directed to pass through H.L. I. of C. at Bienen at 1200 hours and drive on to take Millingen. (W.Ds., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde and N. Shore R., 26 Mar 45)

74. After clearing Bienen H.L.I. of C. had pushed forward "D" Coy to the anti-tank obstacle north of the village; this gave N. Shore R. a secure start line, and on the stroke of noon the New Brunswick unit swept through to the attack. The advance was not uncontested, and their Commanding Officer, Lt-Col J.W.H. Rowley, was killed by shell fire at an early stage in the operation. The battalion, however, pressed on under its Second in Command and by 1845 hours had captured most of the northern half of the town. (W.Ds., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde and N. Shore R., 26 Mar 45; AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket I: 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 26 Mar 45, Serials 37, 38, 43 and 55). Meanwhile, over on the extreme left S.D. & G. Highrs had been relieved by Nth N.S. Highrs, who now took over the area of Grietherbusch. The Glengarrians were then launched, at 1800 hours, through H.L.I. of C. towards the line of the railway. The move to the objectives was not greatly opposed and by 2000 hours our troops were out of contact altogether. Nightfall found the S.D. & G. Highrs firmly positioned astride the railroad track north of Heuth (0658) and zu Bienen (0558) with other elements in both these hamlets and patrolling to the north-west. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, Serials 66 and 67; 27 Mar 45, Serial 3; W.Ds., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde and S.D. & G. Highrs, 26 Mar 45). In the Canadian sector, 9 Cdn Inf Bde was now five battalions strong. During the afternoon of 26 Mar 1 C. Scot R. of 7 Cdn Inf Bde had crossed the river to come under Brigadier Rockingham's command. For the time being this battalion was positioned around Resserward and given the task of protecting the rear against possible infiltration towards the bridges by Germans from the "island" formed by the Alter Rhein. (W.D., 1 C. Scot R., 26 Mar 45; and March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 26 Mar 45, Serial 14; and W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 26 Mar 45)

THE GENERAL SITUATION AT MIDNIGHT 26/27 MAR 45

75. Elsewhere on the 30 Corps front, operations were progressing well. In the region of Millingen 130 Bde of 43 Inf Div had passed 7 Hamps and 4 Dorsets through N. Shore R. with the object of clearing the southern part of Millingen and gaining control of the ground between the Millinger Meer and the railway track to the east. Of Maj-Gen G.I. Thomas' other brigades, 129 Bde was concentrated at Esserden and waiting for its marching orders; 214 Bde was about to leave its marshalling area on the west bank and cross the Rhine. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 27 Mar 45, Serials 1 and 3). The general picture along the front of 51 (H.) Div also looked promising, on the far right contact with 15 (S.) Div of 12 Brit Corps had been made that afternoon by 5/7 Gordons of 153 Bde who had crossed the Alter Rhein east of Rees and reached the villages of Wolfersom (1052) and Wasmannshof (1052). (*Ibid*; and 26 Mar 45, Serial 11). Rees was clear, and the participants in the battle for the town, 1 Gordons, were linked up with 5/7 Gordons on the east and 5 B.W. to the north (*ibid*; Serial 21). The advance to the railway north of Rees, however, was being bitterly opposed, 154 Bde had passed through 152 Bde, which

was then able to concentrate its effort east of Groin. The first task of 154 Bde now was to force the main rail and road crossing east of the Millinger Meer. An attack by 7 B.W. was so sternly opposed by elements of 15 Pz Gren Div that some of the Scots were forced to turn back and it became a matter to be settled by the two other battalions. A successful thrust by 1 B.W. supported by the tanks of N. Yeo went in at 2100 hours, and both the crossing and the bridge southeast of it were seized intact. That this bridge was in good condition was undoubtedly due to the efforts of a platoon of 7 B.W., which 1 B.W. contacted. While the Black Watch enlarged their positions between Hurlshof (0856) and Laakhausen (0956), 7 A. & S.H. followed through and pressed on north-eastwards to the wide motor road. (Ibid; 27 Mar 45, Serials 2, 3 and 35)

76. The elimination of the Germans in Rees gave our troops an additional advantage. By denying to the enemy any further observation of his artillery fire on our bridging operations, it greatly reduced the hazard to which the engineers had been exposed from the start of the assault on 23 Mar. West of Rees, General Horrocks already had two bridges, one a class 15, the other a class 9; while a class 40 was expected to be complete within a few hours. Despite traffic limitations, however, the build-up of men and material had gone on without let up, and now both 30 and 12 Corps were in a position to expand to the north and to the east. 12 Corps had already begun to pass 53 (W.) Div over the water and had 7 Armd Div alerted to follow as soon as possible. The immediate object of 30 Corps was now to open up not only the routes north and north-east of Millingen but also the main road from Rees to Isselburg so that 43 (W.) and 51 (H.) Divs might break out. In anticipation of this course, several field regiments and some medium guns had been brought over, and 8 Armd Bde was almost complete on the east bank. (AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/C/H, Docket V: March 1945, Liaison Offrs Report, 261630A, G. Ops, Second Brit Army; also AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket I)

77. The American Armies were also swarming across the Rhine. At the southern end of the Allied front, elements of Seventh U.S. Army were over the river north and south of Worms and rapidly strengthening the link with Third U.S. Army on their left. General Patton's Third Army had already established numerous bridgeheads around Koblenz, Boppard and St. Goarshausen, and having burst out from one of these crossing places at Oppenheim to capture Darmstadt, had crossed the Main River at Aschaffenburg and was threatening Frankfurt. First U.S. Army experienced similar good fortune. The break-out from the Remagen area had carried General Hodges' men to a point beyond Hasselback. This advance was followed by an almost complete collapse of the enemy's defences around Remagen and by the evening of 26 Mar the Americans were at the gates of Limburg. (AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I: First Cdn Army Int Summaries Nos. 268 and 269, 25, 26 Mar 45)

78. The last 48 hours had seen the armies of the Reich reeling back. The myth of their superior skill at arms was broken, the glory of past conquests remained only as bitter memories. The once orderly tread of marching feet which bespoke iron discipline could no longer be heard; it had become the unsteady stagger of the old boxer battered and groggy from sustained punishment. The enemy had suffered a

series of paralyzing blows, and now the greater part of the Rhine could no longer be considered German territory. As if to prove the point, Mr. Churchill himself crossed the river on 25 Mar, and to all who saw him his presence alone must surely have struck a note of prophecy, indeed one of inevitable disaster to the German Aggressor. (Ibid)

79. Much of the Allied success so far must be attributed to the effort of our air forces. The weather had been good, and invariably by first light many hundreds of fighter aircraft could be found covering the enemy's airfields, particularly those which harboured jet aircraft. The landing areas east of the Rhine were kept under constant surveillance; flak and gun positions were strafed and bombed; strong points were obliterated. The enemy's lines of communication also received continuous attention from medium and heavy bombers. The Luftwaffe had been forced to abandon most of its airfields in the vicinity of the Rhine, and on those fields in the immediate rear of the battle there was the everlasting task of runway and other repairs to keep the strips serviceable. These frenzied attempts to maintain the airfields in good state were being continually hampered by further Allied air action. Over Field Marshal Montgomery's bridgehead, the extensive use of armed reconnaissance paid extremely good dividends, for, apart from keeping the ground commanders well informed on the movement of German reserves, many tanks, tracks and other forms of equipment were rendered useless by our devastating bomb and rocket attacks. At last light on 26 Mar, there was little to indicate that the enemy had any "punch" left in his air arm. (Ibid; and Appx "A" to Intelligence Summaries 267, 268 and 269, 24-26 Mar 45)

80. The successful course of operations up to the morning of 27 Mar presented large possibilities to the C.-in-C. and he was quick to seize upon them. On that day General Crerar visited Field Marshal Montgomery's Tactical Headquarters at Venlo, where, to quote the Canadian Commander's own words:

...He advised me that in view of the favourable situation which was developing in front of the two assaulting armies, he had decided to thrust them forward to the river Elbe. The consolidation of our positions across the Rhine was now proceeding satisfactorily and there appeared to be weak enemy forces facing the Americans and the British right wing. He had ordered Lt-General Simpson, therefore, to advance in strength, with his right aimed at Magdeburg, and Lt-General Dempsey to thrust forward with his left towards Bremen and Hamburg. The C.-in-C. anticipated that a break-through might thus be developed by the two armies within forty-eight hours. The initial tasks of First Canadian Army were to continue according to his previous instructions, but when the general line between Almelo, Apeldoorn and Renkum had been secured, I should expect to move north and northeast with my left flank on the German coast and my right linking up with and somewhat echeloned behind Lt-General Dempsey's left.

It then seemed most probable that shortly after Lt-General Dempsey commenced this deep drive with the 8th and 12th British Corps, the 30th British Corps, comprising three infantry divisions, would come

under my command in order to enable me to cover the right flank of the 2nd Canadian Corps in its thrust north to the Almelo - Deventer line and connect up with the British left. As the operations developed, however, this possibility did not take place.

(General Crerar's Despatch, paras 10-12; see also W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 3, Notes on Conference with C.-in-C., 27 Mar 45)

81. Up to the morning of 27 Mar much of the credit for the build-up - so far as it had progressed - belonged to the skilled sappers and hardworking pioneers who - often under well directed shell fire - had done much of the work of ferrying. L.Vs.T., the D.U.K.Ws., and numerous boat ferries, supplemented by Class 50 and/or 60 rafts for tanks and other heavy vehicles, were a satisfactory means of transporting the army across in the early stages, but the great objective of the sappers was to bridge the river. A series of bridges would result in a steady circulation of traffic through an arterial system without the delays and uncertainty inherent in a sequence of transfusions by ferry. The first engineer task on 30 Corps front was the construction of "Caledonian Road," a service road for the ferries in the early stages and for the bridges later (AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket I). This road was built by the British sappers and pioneers under shell fire - kept to the minimum by the counter-battery fire of 5 A.G.R.A. directed on the offending enemy batteries. The first bridge on 30 Corps front was completed at 0100 hours on 26 Mar. This was a Class 9 folding boat bridge and it was followed at 0830 hours the same day by the completion of a Class 15 Pontoon bridge. "London Bridge", a Class 40 Bailey pontoon bridge, was finished at 2345 hours. These structures would have been completed sooner had not the original plan sited them so close to Rees that the delay in capturing that town resulted in an 80 per cent increase in the time needed to complete the engineers' task. (Ibid; and AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket II: Notes on the Operation of 21 Army Group, 6 Jun 44 - 5 May 45, p. 52)

82. The Royal Canadian Engineers must also be allotted an honoured place among those whose work resulted in the greatest bridging feat of the European War. "Blackfriars Bridge" (06155155), a class 40 Bailey pontoon bridge 1814 feet in length, was the first Canadian built bridge to span the Rhine. Work started on 26 Mar, and was completed at noon, 28 Mar. The construction was done by 29, 30 and 31 Cdn Fd Coys, R.C.E., with unskilled labour being supplied by British Pioneer Corps personnel. The sappers and pioneers toiled by night as well as by day, using "artificial moonlight" produced by a searchlight beam reflected from low clouds, and whenever fog set in (as it did late in the night of 27 Mar) the light was moved to the bridge, and its beam aimed directly along the structure. (AEF: 45/2 Cdn Corps/RCE/C/D, Docket V: Report "Blackfriars Bailey Pontoon Bridge"; and AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket I)

83. As the bridging situation improved, so the build-up of Canadian troops on the east bank increased. H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde and the two remaining battalions of the brigade (R. Wpg Rif and Regina Rif) crossed via "Waterloo Bridge" and "London Bridge" on 27 Mar and concentrated west of Esserden. (W.D.,

H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, March 1945: Appx 12, 7 Cdn Inf Bde Report on Operation "PLUNDER", para 9). In addition, the guns of 12 Cdn Fd Regt crossed with the brigade groups and deployed at Grietherbusch. This artillery unit was the first Canadian field regiment to reach the east bank. (AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V: 12 Cdn Fd Regt Op "PLUNDER", 28 Apr 45). Tactical Headquarters of 3 Cdn Inf Div was also established on the eastern shore and took over the left sector from 43 (W.) Inf Div at 1700 hours 27 Mar. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 27 Mar 45, Serial 19; and 28 Mar 45, Serial 2). The first task of 7 Cdn Inf Bde was to thrust north-west along the Praest - Emmerich road, and for this purpose 1 C. Scot R. returned to command of the Brigade. (Report on Op "PLUNDER", as above)

THE APPROACHES TO EMMERICH, 27-28 MAR 45

84. In anticipation of the westward thrust by 7 Cdn Inf Bde, S.D. & G. Highrs spent the day (27 Mar) in expanding along the axis of the railway. Opposition was negligible and Praest was reached that evening. (W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 27 Mar 45). The next move was by 1 C. Scot R., who now reverted to under command 7 Cdn Inf Bde with orders to pass through the Glengarrians. "A" and "B" Coys of 1 C. Scot R. went forward astride the main road Praest - Vrasselt - Emmerich at 2215 hours. The "Scottish" met practically no resistance but progress was delayed by necessity of having to search all buildings. This cautiousness, however, was repaid, as 19 prisoners were collected on the route. By 2345 hours the leading infantry was in Vrasselt, and here the battalion was ordered to reorganize, consolidate and to send patrols out to explore the crossings over the stream on the eastern outskirts of Emmerich. (Report on Op "PLUNDER", as above; and 2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 28 Mar 45, Serial 3)

85. While 1 C. Scot R. went about its task of probing forward and of mopping up in Vrasselt, Regina Rif were brought forward to Praest and from there sent on south-westwards to seize Dornick. The advance was only lightly opposed; by 0600 hours on the 28th Regina Rif were firmly in the village and were patrolling along the lower dyke road in the direction of Emmerich. (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Mar 45; also Report on Op "PLUNDER", as above). In the meantime 1 C. Scot R. had completed its sweep through Vrasselt and gone on to seek contact. The reserve battalion, R. Wpg Rif, was also well forward, concentrated in the area of Praest, and ready to participate in the advance. (Ibid). Leading troops of 1 C. Scot R. crossed the obstacle provided by the Landwehr stream south of the Klein Netterden cement works (0661) at 0800 hours. The Canadian Scottish were then ordered to build up a bridgehead while Regina Rif, who had occupied the brick works (9959) to the south of the railway, felt out along the left flank of the brigade. The battle of Emmerich was about to commence. (Ibid; and W.Ds., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 28 Mar 45)

LT-GEN SIMONDS' 2 CDN CORPS ENTERS THE BATTLE 28 MAR 45

86. With the scimitar shaped left flank of the Allied thrust secure, and 7 Cdn Inf Bde testing the strength of the gates of Emmerich, the enemy was no longer able to disrupt the large scale operations for spanning the Rhine. The bridging crews, for the last 24 hours had worked almost unmolested with

the result that on 28 Mar "Blackfriars Bridge", was finished. Its completion provided the required axis for 2 Cdn Corps, and according to the original agreement between General Crerar and Lt-Gen Dempsey, (see para 8) Second Army passed the responsibility of the left sector to Lt-Gen Simonds at 1200 hours, 28 Mar. 3 Cdn Inf Div then came under command 2 Cdn Corps from Lt-Gen Horrocks' formation. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 28 Mar 45; 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 28 Mar 45, Serial 51; First Cdn Army Ops Log, 28 Mar 45, Serial 140)

87. A review of the situation to the east of 2 Cdn Corps disclosed a satisfying picture. On the far right, by 1200 hours 28 Mar, 153 Bde had entered Isselburg. The Highland brigade had reached this town, which lies on the Issel river some ten thousand yards to the north-east of Rees, after a spectacular advance from the railway line south-east of Millingen. The railway had been crossed first by 154 Bde who, having established a sound perimeter on the east side, allowed 153 Bde to pass through early on 28 Mar, with 5 B.W. pressing on into Isselburg. 152 Bde then came forward to relieve 5 B.W. and, launching 2 Seaforth across the Issel river without trouble, began to build a bridge. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 28 Mar 45, Serials 16 and 22). East of Rees, 51 (H.) Div had been relieved of its commitments by 3 Brit Inf Div. In the centre, 43 (W.) Inf Div was now on its way to Anholt. Operations were developing favourably for Maj-Gen Thomas, who after sweeping over the ground south of Millingen with 130 Bde, thrust out north-eastwards from Am Stevert using 129 Bde to expand his holdings towards the autobahn so that 214 Bde could advance on a wide front on the ancient town of Anholt. The brigade crossed the great new motor road late on 27 Mar in the area of Vehlinger (0959) and drove through the wooded lands to the north against desperate opposition, while the left flanking battalion (5 D.C.L.I.), together with elements of the divisional reconnaissance regiment, was dispatched along the open left flank to seize Megchelen (0761). (Ibid; also AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket I).

THE ASSAULT ON EMMERICH BY 7 CDN INF BDE, 28 MAR 45

88. Although the left sector was in the course of being passed from one command to another there was no delay in the battle. The headquarters staff of 3 Cdn Inf Div had drawn up a firm plan for the continuance of the operations against Emmerich and the Hoch Elten feature. 7 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, supported by one squadron of 27 Cdn Armd Regt, one squadron of British crocodiles, and 7 Cdn Recce Regt, was to capture Emmerich and the wooded area immediately north of the town known as "Muhlenbergerweg". The task of 7 Cdn Recce Regt was to provide protection for the northern flank from Praest westward. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945; Appx 14, 3 Cdn Inf Div Op Instr No. 1, 28 Mar 45). 8 Cdn Inf Bde, which had completed crossing the Rhine at 0620 hours on 28 Mar was given a supporting role. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 28 Mar, Serial 17). The brigade, with under command "B" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.) plus a platoon of the heavy mortar company of the same battalion, 52 A.Tk Bty, two sections of 16 Cdn Fd Coy and one company of 22 Cdn Fd Amb was to concentrate behind 7 Cdn Inf Bde ready to clear Emmerich and Muhlenbergerweg if this proved beyond the power

of the assaulting formation alone. 8 Cdn Inf Bde was also to prepare to clear the Hoch Elten feature. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, who had largely "carried the ball" for the division since the crossing, would be relieved by 6 Cdn Inf Bde and would deploy in the Praest - Dornick - Vrasselt triangle. In the same area, 27 Cdn Armd Regt, less the squadron fighting with 7 Cdn Inf Bde, would remain in divisional reserve. (Ibid)

89. It was clear that the task ahead was not going to be easy. 7 Cdn Inf Bde already had its hands full. In their newly established bridgehead 1 C. Scot R. were running into heavy machine gun fire from the north and west. This hazard, however, was not sufficient to stop our troops; gradually the spearhead turned westwards while elements of R. Wpg Rif moved up and patrolled north over the Landwehr stream. (Report on Op "PLUNDER", as above; and W.Ds., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde and units 28, 29 Mar 45). The object of immediate priority was still for 1 C. Scot R. to consolidate a limited bridgehead astride the railroad, and at 2200 hours the battalion lunged forward. [But the resistance was stiff, and the enemy shelling so effective that not much progress could be made. Meanwhile R. Wpg Rif began their assault on Klein Netterden (0061) from the original crossing place. This bridge site was later to be developed so that 7 Cdn Recce Regt could be employed on the open flank. The Winnipeg attack was carried out with considerable speed and proved most successful. The foremost of the German strong points on the Emmerich road above the cement factory was overrun by "A" Coy, and the opposition in the rest of the village, though fierce, was silenced by 0300 hours 29 Mar. The bag of prisoners taken by R. Wpg Rif was impressive; over 80 members of 346 Inf Div and the redoubtable 6 Para Div surrendered to our troops.

90. By this time 1 C. Scot R. had gained several hundred yards' more ground and was positioned on the western outskirts of Emmerich in a line running from the oil refinery south of the railway to the thinly housed area above Groendahl (9960). Regina Rif was also in the battle; one company having been placed at the disposal of 1 C. Scot R. at 0400 hours. Their task was to protect the left in order that a class 40 bridge might be built over the stream on the site of the demolished sluice gate (990601). The advance of the Canadian Scottish had loosened the enemy's grip in this area and although the engineers were forced to work under fire they did succeed in completing their bridge by 0630 hours (29 Mar). (AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V: H.Q. R.C.E., 3 Cdn Inf Div Battle Narrative, Op "PLUNDER"; 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 29 Mar 45, Serials 3, 12 and 21)

91. H Hour for the assault by Regina Rif was set at 0800 hours 29 Mar 45. The support for the operation on hand was considerable. Lt-Col A.S. Gregory had at his disposal one troop of tanks from 27 Cdn Armd Regt as well as a troop of British flame-throwing crocodiles. Although direct artillery support was not considered possible (as our own troops would naturally be scattered all through the broken buildings of the town), an artillery representative was to remain with the unit should the need for gun support arise. Immediate heavy fire would be provided by the tanks and crocodiles; apart from this the main artillery support was to be in the form of counter battery fire on the Hoch Elten feature besides a "pepper-pot" shoot, which was to be put on by the massed tanks of 4 Cdn Armd Bde from the south bank of the Rhine. The general plan was for Regina Rif to sweep on westwards as far as the road joining the harbour and the railroad track; 1 C. Scot R. would then push through to

participate with the Reginas in a leap-frogging movement to clear the main portion of the town between the railroad and the Rhine; R. Wpg Rif meanwhile would assume responsibility for the area north of the railway. The brigade commander appreciated that the heavier defences would be met in the town proper along the river bank, but the plan was subject to change depending on the degree of success achieved in each individual area. (AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V: folio 6, Special Report No. 47, Op "PLUNDER", Capture of Emmerich prepared by Regina Rif).

92. The thrust into the ruins began on time as the riflemen attended by their tanks and crocodiles advanced from the bridgehead across the Landwehr (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, 29 Mar 45; 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 29 Mar 45, Serials 15 and 22). "B" and "C" Coys moved forward together through the Scottish positions, the flame-throwing vehicles, with "B" Coy on the right, the tanks with "C" Coy on the left; "A" and "D" Coys were ordered to remain firmed up but on notice to move forward. The Wasps from the carrier platoon stayed at the command post ready to proceed to the aid of either company when called for. In support of the leading infantry the heavy mortars of C.H. of O. (M.G.) joined the battalion's own lighter pieces in providing a concentrated curtain of high explosive fire north of the railway (and in square 9761) so as to neutralize the enemy's activity there. (Ibid). The leading troops advanced against heavy shelling, mortaring and sporadic sniping but despite the fact that casualties occurred among the officers and N.C.Os., control remained good. They reached the road running north from the harbour (97656050) and took some 25 prisoners. So far there had been no organized resistance, the enemy's tactics generally consisted of firing into our ranks and causing our troops to deploy. He would then withdraw and the procedure would be repeated when he fired again. A noticeable factor was the large number of automatic weapons which the enemy was using. Our own vehicle loss up to this time was one crocodile knocked out by a German self-propelled gun, which caused the armoured support to slow down somewhat.

It was difficult for our own tanks to manoeuvre in the town because of the rubble and well-sited road blocks. The obstacles which caused our troops the most trouble were railway boxcars filled with rubble which were placed across many of the roads.

(AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V: folio 9, Special Report No. 25, Op "PLUNDER", 7 Cdn Inf Bde, Part I)

93. At 1300 hours fresh companies were committed and the battle became more dogged. Immovable road blocks and the rubble piles clogged the streets preventing close support, and since the clearing of these obstacles was obviously an engineer task, the operation became a straight infantry fight. The historical officer of the division gave this picture of 7 Cdn Inf Bde's objective:

The city of Emmerich, once highly industrialized, and the home of several oil refineries, was but a pile of rubble when this attack was started. It was demolished by R.A.F. attacks earlier in the war.

The enemy, however, used this rubble to resist our attack most stubbornly. The assistance of artillery, tanks, crocodiles and Wasps, were (sic) invaluable, in this type of town clearing. At times, however, our tracked vehicles were immobilized by the piles of rubble everywhere.

(AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V: Special Report No. 19, Op "PLUNDER" Report prepared by Hist Offr, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, 30 Apr 45)

For the next six hours the slugging match continued, the troops fighting their way from house to house. All this time the entire town was subjected to heavy enemy shelling but by 1900 hours about half the town had been cleared against decreasing opposition. Lt-Col Gregory's intention was now to make one final push using three companies to reach the western outskirts of Emmerich and, after some reorganization, "A", "C" and "D" Coys again went forward at 2300 hours. (Special Report No. 27, Op "PLUNDER", as above; and W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 29 Mar 45)

94. While Regina Rif had been steadily clearing to the south of the railway the situation to the north had greatly improved. Shortly after midday 1.C. Scot R., also supported by tanks and flame throwers, had attacked with the intention of clearing the area bounded by the railway and the Emmerich-Leegmeer road. In this area the cement works on the right flank, set afire by a concentration of heavy mortar fire, were by-passed, and the two leading sub-units advanced without trouble and consolidated at the cross roads on the Klein Netterden road to Leegmeer on the right, and around the factory north of the harbour on the left. The next task for the Scottish was to clear the road (Wassenbergstrasse) between these points as a start line for the projected attack by the R. Wpg Rif later. The Winniegs themselves were relieved of their hold on Klein Netterden when "A" Sqn of 7 Cdn Recce Regt took over the protection of the right flank, at 1500 hours. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 29 Mar 45). Brigadier Gibson ordered the battalion to be prepared to attack through 1.C. Scot R. during the night of 29/30 Mar with the object of clearing that sector directly north of the main town. At 2045 hours, R. Wpg Rif passed through 1.C. Scot R. and within half an hour was well on the way to the objectives. Close on midnight the task was completed, with two forward companies on the western edge of the town, along the 'sHeerenberger Strasse, and two companies in the two cemeteries (9760). (AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V: folio 8, Special Report No. 25, Op "PLUNDER", 7 Cdn Inf Bde, and attached map). During the night of 29 Mar and early morning of 30 Mar there was increased activity on the left, but Regina Rif, though tired from continuous marching and fighting, regrouped and continued the advance to clear whatever opposition remained in the south-west corner of Emmerich. (Ibid)

95. At 2300 hours the three rifle companies started off on their respective jobs. "D" Coy cleared the area south of the railroad junction (970604) by 0300 hours. Thirty minutes later "C" Coy had control of its allotted area on "D" Coy's left, but "A" Coy met very sticky opposition. To take

one strong point, made up of three fortified houses on the western outskirts, they had to call for assistance from "C" Coy. The offending stronghold baffled the riflemen throughout the morning of 30 Mar. At 0400 hours elements of "C" Coy attempted to clean it out from the right and did succeed in penetrating the outer-defences; but this success was short-lived, as our troops were quickly expelled by panzerfaust and concentrated machine gun fire. Meanwhile much of the obstruction had been cleared from the road up to the forward lines and additional support in the form of Wasps was brought into action, yet even against these dreaded weapons the enemy refused to yield. The little fortress which our men now knew to be two houses with connecting cellars remained in German hands. A final effort was organized; and to quote an official report

Wasps were refuelled, 2 secs flamed both the buildings, setting them on fire but still the point resisted. It was not till plenty of grenades had been thrown down the cellars that some 50 odd enemy decided that the war for them was over and gave up.

(AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V:
Folio 6, Special Report No. 27 - Regina Rif)

This success, at 1300 hours, cleared the western edge of the town for use as a start line for the forthcoming attack of 1 C. Scot R. (Ibid: Folio 8, Special Report No. 25, Op "PLUNDER" as above).

96. 1 C. Scot R. had itself experienced an exciting moment during the past morning. While the Reginas were busy mopping up the last remnants of the German garrison, an alarm spread through the Scottish lines. A prisoner divulged the news that a counter-attack by German infantry supported by two self-propelled guns and six tanks was threatening. Our artillery was at once called upon to harass this force. Nevertheless at 0610 hours the counter-attack came in, but not against 1 C. Scot R. It was R. Wpg Rif who bore the onslaught, a sharp ferocious effort which managed to penetrate one company's area. It did not last long, for the riflemen drove the enemy back, one German tank being knocked out by a gun of 105 A. Tk Bty. (Ibid; and W.D., 1 C. Scot R., 30 Mar 45; and Appx 1, "I" Log, 30 Mar 45, Sheet No. 23, Serials 238-240 and 243).

97. The time was now ripe to commence the last phase of exploitation west of Emmerich. The task fell to 1 C. Scot R., the object being to capture the large cement works (or the brick factory) west of the town in order to secure start lines for 8 Cdn Inf Bde's attack in a north-westerly direction toward the Hoch Elten feature, and 9 Cdn Inf Bde's forthcoming assault on the Muhlenbergerweg (AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V: Special Report No. 25, 7 Cdn Inf Bde, p. 8; and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 14, G.O. 7, Op "PLUNDER", 3 Cdn Inf Div Op Instr No. 2). The attack ordered by the G.O.C. at 0900 hours and originally planned for 1330 hours was finally launched at 1400 hours without armoured support, for the troop of tanks and troop of crocodiles which should have supported it were unable to get through the rubble of Emmerich. (Special Report No. 25; and 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 30 Mar 45, Serial 55). "B" and "D" Coys went forward together (left and right) with the former making fair progress, but "D" Coy had hardly passed

its start line, when the men of Regina Rif, through whom it had passed, were attacked from the north. The Regina company had to abandon its position temporarily, and as a result the right hand effort by 1 C. Scot R. bogged down. The Commanding Officer decided to reinforce the success of "B" Coy by pushing "A" Coy through. By 1650 hours most of the objective was dominated by our troops and tanks were on the way forward to assist the consolidation. The newly won ground was secure by 1850 hours with 1 C. Scot R. firmly disposed around the vital cement works some 800 yards west of Emmerich. (W.D., 1 C. Scot R., 30 Mar 45; 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 30 Mar 45, Serials 57 and 59; Special Report No. 25, p. 8; and W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 Mar 45)

2 CDN INF DIV ARRIVES IN THE BRIDGEHEAD, 29 MAR 45

98. The task of 7 Cdn Inf Bde was completed; next on the list was the thrust onto the formidable feature of the Hoch Elten and expansion to the north. To this end operations had gone pretty well according to plan and the front line of 2 Cdn Corps generally presented a promising picture. 6 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, the first elements of 2 Cdn Inf Div had already crossed the Rhine west of Rees on 29 Mar; and this group, which included a field company R.C.E., an anti-tank battery, a squadron of 8 Cdn Recce and 10 Cdn Armd Regt, was now on the east bank with the prospect of being committed on the right flank of 3 Cdn Inf Div. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 28 Mar 45; and 2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 28 Mar 45, Serials 1975-1977, 1980 and 1981). Maj-Gen A.B. Matthews' main headquarters followed the leading brigade over during the morning, and 5 Cdn Inf Bde came over "Blackfriars Bridge" later in the day.

The planning of Operation "PLUNDER" visualized 2 Cdn Inf Div becoming the spearhead of the northern advance of 2 Cdn Corps, behind (east of) the enemy's prepared IJssel line with 4 Cdn Armd Div and 3 Cdn Inf Div on the right and left flanks respectively. During the period under review 4 Cdn Armd Div had not yet been committed east of the Rhine, and British elements operated on the right flank of 2 Cdn Inf Div.

(AEF: 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket II:
Weekly Summary of Ops and Activities,
H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 25-31 Mar 45)

99. 6 Cdn Inf Bde Gp was fitted into the battle by relieving 9 Cdn Inf Bde in the Bienen sector, with Fus M.R. taking over Hueth and the Camerons of C. assuming responsibility for zu Bienen. (First Cdn Army Ops Log, 29 Mar 45, Serial 99; W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 29 Mar 45; AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/G: Trace 2359 hrs, 29 Mar 45; AEF: 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/G: Trace 2030 hrs, 29 Mar 45). Originally the battalions had expected to go forward at first light with 8 Cdn Recce Regt out ahead, but this advance was postponed by the delay in the operations of 43 (W.) Div on the right. (See para 87) (W.D., Camerons of C., 29 Mar 45). In the afternoon the battalions moved forward without opposition to new positions some 2000 yards farther north across the Dutch frontier, where Camerons of C. took up position with their headquarters in a farm, at Schriek, just inside the Dutch frontier. Fus M.R. were 1000 yards to the east, S. Sask R. and 8 Cdn Recce Regt were in the rear. (Ibid; and AEF: 45/2 Cdn

Inf Div/C/G: Trace 2030 hrs, 29 Mar 45). 5 Cdn Inf Bde took up positions well to the rear near Esserden (Trace).

100. The general task of the division had already been defined at a conference held by Lt-Gen Simonds on 29 Mar:

2 Cdn Inf Div was instructed first to capture Netterden and second, to advance along two axes so as to secure Etten (square 0469) and Klein Azewijn (square 0167). In addition the east bank of the river (Oude) Ijssel was to be clear south of Terborg. In fulfilment of this task 6 Cdn Inf Bde was to clear and occupy Netterden, Gendringen and Wieken (square 0564) as a preliminary to the capture of Etten and Klein - Azewijn.

8 Cdn Recce Regt was to relieve 6 Cdn Inf Bde in Netterden and from this firm base was to reconnoitre the Netterden - Klein Azewijn axis with the objective of making contact with 3 Cdn Inf Div in the Emmerich area.

(AEF: 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket II:
Weekly Summary of Ops and Activities,
H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 25-31 Mar 45)

In keeping with these intentions, Camerons of C. sent out patrols towards Netterden. Seventy-two prisoners were brought back. This success encouraged further probing of the village itself, and "D" Coy was assigned to the task of capturing it. (W.D., Camerons of C., 29 Mar 45)

101. With the enemy reported holding the perimeter of the village, "D" Coy attacked at first light. Another company was sent to the north-east to help in the attack. "Bitter fighting ensued". Then a local truce was arranged to permit recovery of casualties. At the end of this respite a stern ultimatum persuaded the twenty-two surviving Germans to surrender. This fierce little local battle produced 130 prisoners, including two officers, but cost the Camerons four killed (including the adjutant) and ten wounded. (Ibid, 30 Mar 45). At 0800 hours the battalion reported Netterden clear. Within half an hour the two battalions were ordered north again, the Camerons on being relieved in Netterden by a squadron of 8 Cdn Recce Regt, to go to Veldhunen, and Fus M.R. to head for Gendringen. At 1312 hours Fus M.R. reported that they were meeting resistance in Gendringen, in the form of heavy small arms fire from enemy in houses. At the same time, three miles to the west 8 Cdn Recce Regt had run into anti-tank guns, upon which they called down fire from their artillery (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 30 Mar 45, Serials 2155 and 2156).

102. During the afternoon Fus M.R. entered Gendringen, while Camerons of C. got their hands on the village of Milt, securing it with two companies. On the left, 8 Cdn Recce Regt ran into flooding on the German-Dutch border at Berenskamp, and were unable to make contact with 7 Cdn Recce Regt of 3 Cdn Inf Div. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 30 Mar 45, Serial 51). At 1915 hours Fus M.R. had got well ahead with clearing their objective, but further west Camerons of C. were still held up short of Veldhunen, with two companies pinned down by heavy machine gun fire. (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 30 Mar 45, Serial 2203). Brigadier Allard appreciated that the enemy was in a strong semi-circular position around the village, with every possibility that he would

try and hold it and Ulft, a somewhat larger place about two miles to the north-east on the Oude Ijssel (Ibid, Serials 2221 and 2238). S. Sask R. were brought up to be passed through Fus M.R. to Etten "if the front should suddenly go soft" (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 Mar 45).

DEVELOPMENT OF OPERATIONS BY 30 CORPS, 29-31 MAR 45

103. In conjunction with the steady push north and westwards by the Canadians, operations on Lt-Gen Simonds' right were going equally well. On a higher level the two assaulting armies under Field Marshal Montgomery had already linked up north of the river Lippe on 28 Mar. Ninth U.S. Army's sector included Gladbeck, Gahlen and Dorsten; in the British Sector Lt-Gen Ritchie's 12 Corps, advancing north-east had got as far as Borken and Rhede, while 30 Brit Corps under Lt-Gen Horrocks, though battling against sterner opposition, had secured the line Haldern - Isselburg - Anholt; Anholt was taken on 29 Mar by the combined efforts of 43 (W.) Inf Div, who launched 130 Bde across the Issel river to assault the town from the north-west, and 51 (H.) Div, which advanced north westwards from Isselburg. Simultaneously the Highlanders pressed on north-eastwards to Dinxperlo on 30 Mar while 43 (W.) Div established crossing places over the Friesterbeek to the west. A full scale break-out was imminent, and in preparation for it Gds Armd Div was in position south of Dinxperlo at 0500 hours 30 Mar ready to begin an all out drive for Aalten (2070). Between the guardsmen and 2 Cdn Corps 43 (W.) Inf Div was prepared to hurl 214 Bde, with under command 8 Armd Bde, on Varsseveld, thus protecting the left flank of the armoured division. (AEF: 45/Second Army/C/ Docket I: Notes on Operations of 21 Army Group, as above; AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/C/H, Docket V: March 1945, Liaison Offr's reports for 281730A, 291200A, 291600A and 301130A).

ORDERS FOR THE FINAL PUNCH 28 MAR 45

104. These successes coupled with those of the American Armies to the south represented the prelude to the all-out effort for final victory which Field Marshal Montgomery had laid down in his directive of 28 Mar. In it he said:

We have won the Battle of The Rhine.

During March the average number of prisoners taken every day by the Allies on the Western front is 10,000; making a total of over a quarter of a million. The enemy divisions were all very weak when the battles for the Rhineland began; they are getting no replacements and are now mere skeletons; there are no fresh and complete divisions in the rear and all the enemy will be able to do is to block roads and approaches with personnel from schools, bath units, pigeon lofts, and so on.

The time has now arrived for quick and determined exploitation by armoured and mobile units of 21 Army Group.

On our right flank, 12 Army Group is advancing north-east from the Remagen bridgehead to effect junction with

the right flank of 21 Army Group in the area about Paderborn.

(G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0, Vol II: Operational Directives C.-in-C., 21 Army Group, Folio 24, M 563, 28 Mar 45).

The C.-in-C. urged that the situation be exploited with all speed. Now was the time "to drive hard for the River Elbe so as to gain quick possession of the plains of Northern Germany" (Ibid).

105. In the C.-in-C.'s outline plan, the right of Ninth U.S. Army was to be directed on Magdeburg, the left of Second Army on Hamburg. General Crerar's orders were to open up the supply route to the north through Arnhem and to clear North-east Holland and the coastal area towards the River Elbe. Once on the Elbe, Ninth U.S. and Second British Armies would halt; Ninth U.S. Army was then to assist 12 U.S. Army Group in clearing the Ruhr, while Lt-Gen Dempsey's troops helped the Canadian Army to complete its allotted task. Finally, in stressing the importance of the work at hand the C.-in-C. wrote:

If this bold plan is to succeed, Ninth and Second Armies must get their full armoured and mobile strength deployed quickly and pushed ahead; this will be done.

The operations will be conducted with speed and violence by the armoured columns; foremost commanders must always be quick to by-pass resistance with the leading troops, and to push on deep into enemy rear areas; if a column is held up on one route, another one must push on.

This is the time to take risks and to go "flat out" for the Elbe.

If we reach the Elbe quickly, we win the war.

(Ibid)

106. The past 48 hours had seen the C.-in-C.'s instructions begin to take their prescribed form. The ground force commanders lost no time in laying out fresh plans, for one look at a battle map was enough to convey the seriousness of the German position. The high dividends from our investment in the deceptive plan opposite Emmerich before the assault on 23 Mar were apparent to all. The enemy, falsely appreciating that our main effort would be against Emmerich, had committed 15 Pz Gren Div in an attempt to neutralize the bridgehead at Rees. As a result, by the night of 30 Mar, that formation was still fully engaged in a rearguard action against 12 Corps' thrust on Bocholt. Equally wrongly placed on 15 Pz Gren Div's right had been 116 Pz Div, which was forced to oppose either our airborne attack or that of Ninth U.S. Army. As the First Cdn Army Intelligence Summary of 29 Mar points out:

...He chose the latter, after toying with the former, and the division arrived too late to effect either; it also is now fighting a delaying action south of the Lippe, with 180 Div right and 190 Div left.

As a result we are now striking East towards Munster without opposition and Northeast to Coesfeld A67, Stadtlohn A47 and Winterswijk A37...

(AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I: First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 272, 29 Mar 45)

107. Over in the Canadian Sector Lt-Gen Simonds' Intelligence staff was also able to construct a clear picture:

...The area of Emmerich as far East as the boundary running from Klein Netterden to Terborg is defended by troops of 346 Div. Both battalions of 858 Gr have been identified along with 346 Fus Battalion and some of the Engineer Battalion fighting as infantry. 857 Gr, another regiment of 346, was identified today as far East as Stadtlohn A4377. This is just one small example of how divisions in North-West Holland must be losing personnel to reinforce the badly mauled formations on other parts of the Western Front...

(AEF: 45/2 Cdn Corps/L/F, Docket I: Folio 7, 2 Cdn Corps Int Summary No. 150, 30 Mar 45)

There was little information available regarding the enemy's immediate reserves among the curious mixture of troops which opposed us:

...On the left of 346 East of the line Klein Netterden - Terborg 6 Para Div controls a miscellany of its own battalions, some Volkssturm and a Fortress MG Battalion. From Right to Left (the enemy's Right) the sector is held by II Battalion 17 Para in the Klein Netterden - Netterden area, 6 Volkssturm Battalion between Netterden and Wieken, 30 Fortress MG Battalion under command 17 Para Regiment North of Gendringen, on its Left the hodge-podge of the battalions of 16, 17 and 18 Para Regiments over to the boundary with 8 Para Div which according to a captured trace runs through Isselburg. The forward line of 8 Para has been broken and it seems that the division is falling back onto Groenlo...

(Ibid)

108. It was evident that the foe was in sore straits; as one report pointed out:

...The enemy has suffered in the West a series of shattering defeats. He has lost most of his armies here and vast stretches of Germany itself. He has lost the use of the greatest industrial district in Europe. He has lost the confidence that he can win the war. But, he has NOT lost the will to go on fighting and until that is lost, the war will go on. The whole issue is, as it has been for some time, how long?

He has the great Nazi asset, the firm will never to capitulate. But as long as he endeavours to hold two vastly long fronts on East and West, with decreasing

forces, he is bound to fail in his fight. As long, too, as he continues to withdraw from the East and the West on to central Germany, he does NOT gain any shortening of his line and he invites the disasters which now pursue him.

...he is almost completely putting the Army under the control of Nazi and SS higher commanders, he may no longer have available leaders who can do anything else but lead their men to stand and fight. The best brains of the Wehrmacht have been retired or captured or liquidated...

...For months past, his crises have been cumulative. There must come a point when he can physically no longer adjust his front nor react to new situations. That point may have been reached.

(AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket
I: First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 273,
30 Mar 45)

109. Possibly the best way to describe the general situation is to follow the words which the Supreme Commander used in his final report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

Within a week of the crossing of the Rhine, the Allied spearheads were thrusting eastward, isolating corps and divisions, and cutting off one army from another. Despair gripped the German forces as never before, and the disintegration of the entire Western Front developed rapidly. Already the task of exercising unified command over the German detachments was becoming almost an impossibility. Communications were breaking down, and reports filtered through so slowly that Kesselring could never be sure what the position at a given moment might be. By the time information had been received and instructions sent back to the armies, the Allied advance guards had probably pressed forward 50 miles and the entire situation had been transformed. Under such circumstances, the local commanders were increasingly compelled to make their own decisions, irrespective of what might be happening elsewhere, and to act independently of the higher command. In consequence, Kesselring found himself increasingly unable to exercise any real control over the situation, and the organization of the Western Front collapsed completely. Only one thing was certain: by Hitler's order, the fight was to go on.

(Report by the Supreme Commander to
the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the
Operations in Europe of the Allied
Expeditionary Force, 6 June 1944 -
8 May 1945, p. 127)

110. No great natural or man-made defensive barrier remained to the enemy, so as General Eisenhower went on to explain:

If the Nazi leaders, in appointing Kesselring to the command of the German forces in the west, expected him to repeat his defensive successes of Italy, they

were to be sadly disappointed. With the Rhine crossed, he had here no Gustav Line, no Monte Cassino, upon which to make a stand. So completely had the Germans relied upon their ability to hold out in the Siegfried Line that east of the Rhine there were no artificial barriers ready to halt our progress other than hastily constructed local defence works.

(Ibid, p. 126)

THE SITUATION FROM THE ENEMY'S POINT OF VIEW, 30 MAR 45

111. At a later date after the cessation of hostilities, the German commanders who were interrogated confirmed our beliefs that there was literally nothing left to prevent the total destruction of Hitler's forces. General Eugen Meindl, at that time commanding 2 Para Corps said that once the Allied bridge-heads were secured he realized that Germany was finished; consequently when the breakout began at the end of March his formation began to fall back in a north-easterly direction towards the German North Sea ports. (AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket III: Special Interrogation Report, General Eugen Meindl). According to General Gunther Blumentritt, the Commander of 1 Para Army, Meindl's divisions were the only useful ones left.

Of the formations under Blumentritt's command only Meindl's Parachute Divisions, holding a sector from the Dutch border to the Ems River, were capable of carrying on any real resistance. The other two Corps were chiefly heterogeneous remnants of broken infantry divisions. Great gaps had been torn in the line in many places and it was no longer intact. There were no reserves, the artillery was weak, there was no Air Force whatever and only a few tanks remained. Communication facilities were completely inadequate and the reinforcements that did arrive had been hastily trained and badly equipped.

(Ibid: Special Interrogation Report, General Gunther Blumentritt)

It was against this unstable background that Kesselring's weary soldiers were forced to brace themselves to meet the offensive which continued with renewed vigour.

THE SITUATION ON THE LEFT FLANK, 30/31 MAR 45

112. The evening of 30 Mar saw 2 Cdn Corps poised on a line running from the concrete works west of Emmerich straight eastwards through the areas of Leegmeer, Klein Netterden and Netterden. East of the last named place, a salient curved northward to the Veldhunten - Ulft road, where 2 Cdn Inf Div was already in control of a good portion of the ground immediately west of the Oude Ijssel with 6 Cdn Inf Bde. East of the Issel*

* On the German side of the international boundary the river is called the Issel (not to be confused with the Ijssel River further west, which joins with the Oude Ijssel Channel at Doesbrug).

30 Corps was making rapid strides with the intention of penetrating deeper into the enemy's territory so as to protect the left flank of Second Army. Early on 30 Mar, Gds Armd Div had struck out for Aalten. At the same time 43 Inf Div, running out north from Anholt, had taken Sinderen on the road to Varsseveld and on the left, having by-passed the defended village of Nieuwdorp, went on to seize Silvolde, thereby forming a protective wing over the Canadian troops moving up along the south bank of the river some two miles to the west. Varsseveld was entered and occupied during the night against gradually decreasing opposition. Aalten however, was still to be cleared, though it only remained for the road leading to it to be repaired sufficiently to allow a co-ordinated effort to be made in mopping up the town. (AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket I; and Notes on Operations, 21 Army Group, as above; also AEF: 2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 30 Mar 45, Serials 18, 42). From Aalten Gds Armd Div were instructed to follow the axis Lichtenvoorde - Groenlo - Eibergen - Enschede, while 43 Inf Div, accompanied by 8 Armd Bde, would press on towards Ruurlo, Lochem and Hengelo. Behind these spearheads, 3 Brit Inf Div was under orders primarily to follow the Guards though it could be used to reinforce the Wessex formation if necessary. In reserve there remained 51 (H.) Div, ready to take up the role of left flank protection as soon as 43 Inf Div side-stepped to the northeast. (AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket I; also Notes on Operations, 21 Army Group, as above)

8 CDN INF BDE PASSES THROUGH TOWARD THE HOCH ELTEN, 30 MAR 45

113. With the ruins of Emmerich in our hands the task of passing 8 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes through to the west and north began on 30 Mar. 8 Cdn Inf Bde had moved up behind Brigadier Gibson's battalions in readiness to take on the Hoch Elten feature north-west of the devastated city; 9 Cdn Inf Bde, faced with clearance of the Muhlenbergerweg region, already had Nth N.S. Highrs positioned in the area bounded by the railway and the tramway tracks leading north from Emmerich. In this somewhat forward assembly area, the North Novas went about the job of house-clearing to ensure a start line for their drive to the north. 8 Cdn Inf Bde's advance commenced at 2200 hours when R. de Chaud moved forward from a line connecting the two concrete factories and the railway. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serial 4; also 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 30 Mar 45, Serials 80, 94; also W.Ds., H.Qs. 8 Cdn Inf Bde and 9 Cdn Inf Bde and Nth N.S. Highrs, 30-31 Mar 45)

114. The enemy did not offer much resistance and by 0150 hours the French-Canadians were in Huthum, half-way between Emmerich and Hoch Elten. The reserve companies then passed through; one to take the small woods immediately north of Huthum, while the other thrust half a mile south-west to In der Klei. (W.D., R. de Chaud, 30 Mar 45; also 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serials 11 and 14). By 0730 hours 31 Mar the battalion was consolidated along the road which runs at right angles to the railway from In der Klei to the small woods north of Huthum, and had 70 prisoners "in the bag". All this time (since 0200 hours 31 Mar) Q.O.R. of C. had been moving up steadily on the right of the Chaudieres, with the intention of taking the Hoch Elten feature from the north-east while the French-Canadians attacked from the south. (AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V, folio 4: Special Report No. 29 - 8 Cdn

Inf Bde, para 4). At 0525 hours the riflemen had yet to encounter opposition, and as R. de Chaud consolidated south of the railway, Q.O.R. of C. had one company close on their right flank on the north-easterly extension of the same wood near Ingenhof (9462). (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serials 15, 16, 29)

115. The morning was taken up by aggressive patrolling, in the course of which R. de Chaud reached the power station (9261) on the Rhine 2000 yards south of Hoch Elten village (*ibid*, Serial 32; 2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serial 19). This power station is only 300 yards from the Dutch frontier and it was not occupied by the enemy. By 1300 hours Q.O.R. of C. had improved their holdings on the right and had companies firm at Ingenhof (9462), Lohhof (9463) and Hassent (9463). The reserve unit, N. Shore R., which had been concentrating in the vicinity of Laarfeld (9562), sent elements to seek contact around the village of Borghees (9663). The Chaudieres had also gained ground and had reported the curved line of railway track to the west clear from the power station up to its junction with the railroad about 700 yards south of Hoch Elten (9264). It was planned that Q.O.R. of C. should proceed in a north-easterly direction to capture Vorthuizen (9464), cross the stream there (the Grenskanaal) and firm up south of the autobahn, between Vorthuizen and Ritbroek (9365). At the same time R. de Chaud would approach the Hoch Elten area from the south-west. N. Shore R. was to rest in reserve ready to exploit any success. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serial 62)

116. Probing and thrusting with two battalions, the 8 Cdn Inf Bde felt its way forward to the feature which had dominated the minds of commanders (as well as the Rhine lowlands) for so long. While R. de Chaud adjusted its forward line of troops, the Queen's Own went on to Vorthuizen. No opposition was encountered on the way, but as the troops were digging in to hold their gains a heavy mortar and artillery concentration raked them and inflicted several casualties. The situation, however, improved quickly and by 1600 hours "B" Coy (of Q.O.R. of C.) attacked from Vorthuizen, lunged across the stream and carried the advance on up the slope. Supported by the tanks which had been providing excellent covering fire the tired soldiers consolidated. Meanwhile on the left, R. de Chaud were gradually closing in on the village of Hoch Elten and H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div was asked what further steps should be taken towards the objective. At 1625 hours the answer came back, "Go on to Hoch Elten". (AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V, Folios 2 and 3: Special Reports Nos 30, 31, Op "PLUNDER", Q.O.R. of C. and R. de Chaud; also 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serials 73, 81, 89, 93)

117. Within half an hour it was reported that 8 Cdn Inf Bde was attacking the Hoch Elten feature by sending patrols forward, then building them up, though it was not considered possible that the final attack would be made until at last light. (First Cdn Army Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serials 99, 104). Now that the Queen's Own were at the foot of the feature and R. de Chaud equally far west nearer the river, resistance was slackening somewhat, but it was "still hard going" (*ibid*, Serial 109). The advance continued throughout the late afternoon and evening against intermittent shell fire, and by 2315 hours R. de Chaud^{*}

* The area of Huthum recently vacated by R. de Chaud was now occupied by Regina Rif of 7 Cdn Inf Bde, who were brought up at 2000 hrs to fill the gap left by R. de Chaud (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, as above, 31 Mar 45, Serials 105, 110, 111).

had entered the feature from the south, and N. Shore R., having passed through Q.O.R. of C. were 1000 yards east of them. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serial 49). The men of the brigade found the feature devastated and deserted, a tribute to the effective engagement by artillery, the "pepper-pot", and the R.A.F. Mitchells.

So heavy was the shelling that in some places the contour of the feature had noticeably changed, and little but stumps and shattered trunks remained of the heavy growth of trees which had covered the hill. Over a period of a few days the area had approximately four million rounds on it. The few snipers who were left were successfully taken on by our artillery with success. The 1st Canadian Rocket Battery firing on this feature proved its efficiency and effectiveness.

(The History of 13 Canadian Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery 1940-1945, p. 120)

118. The message at 2300 hours that "at least one company of infantry are now on top of Hoch Elten feature", was heartily welcomed at Headquarters of First Cdn Army (First Cdn Army Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serial 168). This was indeed good news, for 1 Cdn A.G.R.E. had begun the task of bridging the Rhine at Emmerich at 1030 hours that morning. The completion of the low level class 40 bridge could now go ahead without fear of observation and shelling from the enemy on those dominating heights. The expected time for completion of the Emmerich bridge was first set at 1800 hours on 1 Apr, but later that night this estimate was corrected to 0600 hours, 2 Apr. It was now becoming apparent that the conditions for the return of 2 Cdn Corps to First Cdn Army were being fulfilled. The event was forecast for 2 Apr. (First Cdn Army Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serial 109)

THE OPERATIONS OF 9 CDN INF BDE, 30-31 MAR 45

119. Meanwhile as 8 Cdn Inf Bde slogged its way up the wood slopes of Hoch Elten, the battalion of 9 Cdn Inf Bde had made excellent progress against limited resistance in their drive to the north. Lack of contact on the previous night had indicated that the enemy was withdrawing. As Nth N.S. Highrs consolidated south of the woods below and to the left of Muhlenbergerweg, Brigadier Rockingham, anxious to keep S.D. & G. Highrs abreast of the Nova Scotians, ordered the Glengarrians forward at 0030 hours. By 0560 hours the battalion was up level with Nth N.S. Highrs, awaiting H Hour, which had been set at 0700 hours 31 Mar. (W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 31 Mar 45). At the allotted time the two battalions moved across the start line, and in an hour Nth N.S. Highrs reported that they were firmly established on the north side of the wood, having taken some prisoners but met no opposition (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serial 42). At about the same time S.D. & G. Highrs reported a successful advance ending in consolidation on the north side of the wood (Ibid, Serials 43 and 44).

120. The next phase of the brigade's advance was a job for H.L.I. of C. The battalion passed through Nth N.S. Highrs and thrust northward toward the junction of the 's Heerenberg - Emmerich road with the autobahn. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log,

31 Mar 45, Serial 22). At 1035 hours they found their objective mined, and the road blocked (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serial 58). This obstruction was by-passed, and the battalion worked its way forward once more. All this time 7 Cdn Recce Regt had been patrolling northward from Klein Netterden and had contacted the H.L.I. of C. near the autobahn junction. (Ibid, Serial 78). The task of probing to the right and front of 9 Cdn Inf Bde was assigned to "A" Sqn, which Lt-Col Baerman had placed at Brigadier Rockingham's disposal, while he himself established his own tactical Command Post at the headquarters of 9 Cdn Inf Bde. At a little after noon, 31 Mar, the two units, closely attended by some tanks of 27 Cdn Arm'd Regt, had reached the Grens Kanaal, south of 's Heerenberg. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serial 29). By 1400 hours, however, it was clear that the enemy intended to hold 's Heerenberg. H.L.I. of C. then reported to the brigade that it would be necessary to bridge the "anti-tank ditch" bounding the canal, in order to get supporting tanks forward to root the enemy out of the town. (W.D., H.L.I. of C., March 1945: Appx 5, Int Log Diary, 31 Mar 45, Serial 20)

121. Most of the opposition in front of H.L.I. of C. was coming from a large monastery south of the town. Although the buildings were clearly marked as a hospital the Germans were using it as a strong point. After some time a bridgehead was established, and the monastic fortress was finally occupied at 2100 hours (31 Mar). (W.D., H.L.I. of C., 31 Mar 45). A company was then passed through to take up positions on the left side of the road protecting the bridgehead, and by 2200 hours the engineers were busy putting up a bridge. (First Cdn Army Ops Log, 1 Apr 45, Serial 28). Thus the month of April began with 3 Cdn Inf Div beyond Emmerich on a two brigade front. On the left 8 Cdn Inf Bde was in possession of the coveted heights of Hoch Elten, and on the right 9 Cdn Inf Bde was about to begin clearing 's Heerenberg. Thence the brigade would go to Zeddam and Kilder, which lie on the eastern and northern edge of the great Stokkummer Bosch, the forest which streams up into Holland from the Hoch Elten pinnacle. (Ibid; and Serial 57)

2 CDN INF DIV CONTINUES ITS PUSH NORTHWARD, 31 MAR 45

122. Simultaneous with the freedom of movement enjoyed on the left by 3 Cdn Inf Div, Maj-Gen Matthews' troops had also gone far towards carrying out the tasks of reorganizing 6 Cdn Inf Bde along the road Terborg - Etten - Ziek - Klein - Axewijn and of passing Brigadier Megill's formation through towards Terborg. 5 Cdn Inf Bde's task was by no means an easy one for besides securing Terborg it must also sweep on to Doetinchem. The present task of 8 Cdn Recce Regt was to probe up the Silvolde - Terborg - Doetinchem road, east of the Oude Ijssel, keeping in touch with 43 (V.) Inf Div, operating on the right flank. (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 30 Mar 45, Serial 2231; W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 149, "Highlights of Ops to 310730"). During the night patrols from 6 Cdn Inf Bde had established the village of Veldhuten clear, and Camerons of C. occupied it at 1000 hours. (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serials 2272 and 2276). Fus M.R. then probed into Ulft, finding the "opposition not very stiff" and by 1430 hours, S. Sask R. were on their objectives in Etten.

(Ibid, Serials 2308 and 2332; AEF: 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/G, Trace 312030).

123. It was now the task of the engineers to provide a means of crossing the Oude Ijssel at Ulft and to the south-east of Gendringen. Although these bridges would not be ready until 1900 and 1630 hours respectively, the G.O.C. instructed "5 Cdn Inf Bde to try to push through Ulft directed on Terborg - Doetinchem axis. Troops to cross by any means. When bridge is finished F echelon is to go across". (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serials 2296, 2309, 2326 and 2278). Brigadier McGill's leading battalion was the long famous Black Watch (R.H.C.) which had been on the road in carriers and T.C.Vs. since 0640 hours that morning (31 Mar). Moving up in bounds, they were first halted at Milt, where orders were issued for an advance riding on the tanks of "B" Sqn 10 Cdn Armd Regt. When this was cancelled, the battalion moved to Ulft, and in the late afternoon crossed the Oude Ijssel in storm boats and assembled in the region of Silvolde. The carriers followed on hastily assembled class 5 raft ferries operated by 7 Cdn Fd Coy, while the heavier vehicles of the support company and the reconnaissance regiment crossed by the bridge, which, although promised for 1900 hours was not completed until 2130 hours. Terborg, the next objective, was to be attacked with tank and artillery support at 0100 hours, 1 Apr. (Ibid, Serials 2399, 2407; W.Ds. R.H.C., 7 Cdn Fd Coy, 31 Mar 45). The other two battalions of the Brigade were close at hand and ready to leap-frog through (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 31 Mar 45)

THE RECONNAISSANCE EAST OF THE OUDE IJSSEL, 31 MAR-1 APR 45

124. As the pace of our advance accelerated, the reconnaissance men (of 8 Cdn Recce Regt) experienced more scope for their peculiar trade. On the left one squadron was working its way ahead with S. Sask R. while "A" Sqn had crossed the Oude Ijssel, and by 1100 hours had made its way to the crossing over the Priesterbeek stream already established by 43 (W.) Inf Div near Braakhorst (110643). By using this bridge the armoured cars were now able to commence a drive northwards to contact the enemy along the east bank of the Oude Ijssel. Progress was delayed however for this was 43 (W.) Inf Div's sector and the roads leading away from the bridge were crowded with the Wessex division's echelon transport which was following up the battle to the north. As the roads cleared, the Cdn Recce squadron began to make some headway; by 1230 hours it reported passing the crossroads south of Groot Breedenbroek (1064); from here the cars had an open "run" and at 1400 hours leading elements of the recce were reported near Silvolde. At the same time another sub-unit was in Nieuwdorp which was empty but under shell-fire. Contact with the forward troops of the Black Watch was made at 1630 hours. (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serials 2280, 2292, 2296, 2303, 2311, 2325, 2357; and W.D., 8 Cdn Recce Regt, March 1945: Appx II, Ops Log, Serials 408-414, Messages ATO RHQ 1605 and 1700). Extra length was lent to 2 Div's vision by the addition of a squadron of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, which was placed under command of the Division at 1500 hours on 31 Mar (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, Serial 2362). This squadron was made responsible for maintaining contact between the right hand brigade of 2 Cdn Inf Div and 43 Div (Ibid, Serial 2416)

125. An interesting and somewhat amusing sidelight during the current events is provided in examples of the "Recce" men's messages to their respective headquarters. One occurred at 1900 hours when the commander of "A" Sqn sent this message to Regimental Headquarters:

All C/S have curled or are doing so. Am leaving stovepipes and Big Boys with Black Watch until they get support. Savages from the west will pass through the Black Watch if all goes well.

This, translated from the jargon which was supposed to baffle the enemy radio intercept stations, meant that his squadron had halted for the night, but that he was leaving anti-tank guns and heavy armoured cars to support the Black Watch until their heavy weapons and supporting armour crossed the bridge, and if all went well, Calg Highrs would pass through. At 2042 hours the squadron came on the air again:

I have four babies under weather because of shell fire and have only one code sign ready to go in morning. Working on sick babies and hope to have some kind of patrol to help out in the morning.

This meant that he had four vehicles disabled by shell fire, but hoped to get these vehicles in running order to provide a patrol in the morning, since he only had one other Troop (Codesign) available his men were therefore hard at work trying to repair the damaged vehicles. He also reported at that time that R.H.C. had been joined by their supporting heavy weapons. (W.D., 8 Cdn Recce Regt, March 1945: Appx 11, Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Messages 1900 and 2042 hours).

5 CDN INF BDE'S ATTACK TO THE NORTH, 1 APR 45

126. 2 Cdn Corps celebrated the coinciding feasts of Easter and All Fools Day by continued progress against the battered enemy. At 0100 hours 1 Apr, the Black Watch engaged the garrison of Terborg. It was not a long battle, although intervals of fierce fighting were experienced by every platoon. "A" Coy led off the advance supported by the tanks of 10 Cdn Armd Regt and soon came under fire from the windmill (064697) which dominated the road approaches from the south-east; however with the assistance of the carriers, which swung around to a flank, opposition was overcome and a good bag of prisoners was obtained. "A" Coy was then able to continue its frontal assault and after some hard work at close quarters it firmed up about the bend in the railroad east of the town. "B" Coy in its turn passed through and began the tiresome task of clearing every house on the route, but seeing that time was fleeting, the energetic company commander decided to take a chance and go straight for his objective centering on the main church in the village. The remaining 500 yards was quickly covered, with not a shot fired against our troops. Of the other two companies, only the last, "D" Coy, had any trouble. This sub-unit moved up at about 0630 hours to seize the high wooded ground immediately south of Terborg, but on nearing the objective came under intense small arms fire. One platoon managed to disengage and made its way around to the northern end of the woods. The "squeeze play" worked exceedingly well and by 0725 hours R.H.C. reported the success of all its allotted tasks in Terborg. Sixty-one prisoners

were taken in this operation. (W.D., R.H.C., 1 Apr 45; 2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, Serials 2427, 2429, 2433, 2436 and 2440; and W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, March 1945: Appx 19, Message Log, 31 Mar 45, Serials 64, 65, 66 and 67)

127. Meanwhile "A" Sqn of 8 Recce Regt was loose some 2000 yards north of the village, and the time was ripe to pass Calg Highrs through to lead the brigade on to Doetinchem. The plan called for the Highlanders "to go along road not clearing much on the way" and directed that "R. de Mais will start two hours after Calg Highrs and clear the route". Resistance was by no means strong, and by 0840 hours Calg Highrs was over half a mile along the Doetinchem - Terborg road. Further west 6 Cdn Inf Bde was attempting to make contact with the troops of 3 Cdn Inf Div on the left, using carrier patrols which were sent along the Dutch-German border. Camerons of C., working out from Azewijn, were also trying to contact the troops in s'Heerenberg. (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, Serials 2440, 2445, 2446 and 2449)

OPERATIONS OF 2 CDN CORPS, 31 MAR-1 APR 45

128. By noon the situation across 2 Cdn Corps' front was still more favourable. 3 Cdn Inf Div had cleared the last enemy pocket in 's Heerenberg with H.L.I. of G. and had found the opposition softening. 8 Cdn Inf Bde on the Hoch Elten feature was out of contact altogether, and 9 Cdn Inf Bde had pushed a battalion north to clear the woods on the west side of the Emmerich - Wehl road south-west of Zeddum. 7 Cdn Recce Regt was even further ahead and had two squadrons on the way to Zeddum itself. To the right, on 2 Cdn Inf Div's front, 8 Cdn Recce Regt had squadrons probing ahead of 6 Cdn Inf Bde, some 2000 yards ahead of the Klein Azewijn - Etten tramway, which formed the forward boundary of the brigade. On the fringe of Doetinchem, 8 Recce Regt's "A" Sqn reported the enemy retreating out of the town, excellent news for Calg Highrs advancing from Terborg and only a few hundred yards behind the "Recce". (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, April 1945: Appx 2, Sitrep No. 541)

129. By 1400 hours 1 Apr, Calg Highrs and elements of 8 Cdn Recce Regt were actually in Doetinchem. R.H.C. and R. de Mais were strung out behind them along the road back to the Oude Ijssel bridgehead. To the west Camerons of C. of 6 Cdn Inf Bde had contacted H.L.I. of C. in 's Heerenberg and cleared Azewijn. S. Sask R. was on its way across the Oude Ijssel to relieve R.H.C. of 5 Cdn Inf Bde. Fus M.R., while maintaining its positions north of Veldhunten, sent out strong patrols westwards to keep contact with 3 Cdn Inf Div. North of the Etten - Klein Azewijn road the armoured cars of 8 Cdn Recce Regt were swanning out freely to cover the area of Warm and Bieverde on the road to Braamt. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Apr 45, and First Cdn Army Ops Log, 1 Apr 45, Serial 71). 4 Cdn Inf Bde, as yet uncommitted, was on the east side of the Rhine, its battalions concentrated between Wieken and Netterden (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 1 Apr 45, Serial 28).

130. In Maj-Gen Keebler's sector on the left, 7 Cdn Recce Regt was in control at Zeddum and had troops in Lengel (9966) and Mengelenberg (9866). Behind the "Recce", S.D. & G. Highrs of 9 Cdn Inf Bde had pushed past H.L.I. of C. in 's Heerenberg and were advancing north on the left of the 's Heerenberg -

Zeddarn road with the object of clearing the large woods which formed the southern part of the Stokkummer Bosch. Further west 8 Cdn Inf Bde had Q.O.R. of C. dominating the autobahn running through the north end of the Hoch Elten feature, while R. de Chaud, which had persisted in its push westwards, had captured the community of Elten itself. N. Shore R. was still firm on the main feature east of the lookout tower (925645). 7 Cdn Inf Bde, reorganized and rested after its gruelling effort among the ruins of Emmerich, had two of its battalions in Emmerich and a third unit occupying Huthum. (Ibid, Serials 11, 24, 25; also 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 1 Apr 45, Serials 24, 34, 41, 43, 44, 67)

131. In the rear areas of 2 Cdn Corps at Emmerich, the Canadian engineers were working furiously at the class 40 low-level Bailey pontoon bridge.^x The moment of its completion was the time at which General Crerar would take 2 Cdn Corps back under his wing from General Dempsey's Second Army and assume responsibility for the northward thrust from the western end of the bridgehead, as laid down by the C.-in-C. in his directive. (See paras 8 and 9). The original estimated time of completion of this bridge was 1800 hours on 1 Apr. This was later set back to 0600 hours on 2 Apr, then advanced to 2359 hours, 1 Apr (First Cdn Army Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serials 128 and 156; and 1 Apr 45, Serials 5, 24). In the meantime the weather was causing anxiety too for the bridge builders, for at 1325 hours high winds and choppy waters on the broad expanse of the river looked as though they might jeopardize the early completion of the structure (ibid, Serial 68). Yet in another five hours the sappers, ever conscious of the urgency of the moment, had advanced the estimated time of completion to 2100 hours (ibid, Serial 121).

132. During the afternoon and evening of 1 Apr pressure was kept up all along the line between Zeddarn and Doetinchem. On the left flank 9 Cdn Inf Bde had been ordered to form a line facing west from Elten to the crossroads south-west of Loerbeek (9470). To this end H.L.I. of C. relieved R. de Chaud in Elten, Nth N.S. Highrs moved through 's Heerenberg to the north-west and occupied the area of Beek, while S.D. & G. Highrs, entering Zeddarn after 7 Cdn Recce Regt, swung westwards to establish its forward troops around the crossroads below Loerbeek, leaving the remainder of the battalion strung out on the higher wooded region to the east. (W.Ds., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, H.L.I. of C., S.D. & G. Highrs, Nth N.S. Highrs, 1 Apr 45). For its thrust northward from Zeddarn 7 Cdn Inf Bde had ordered R. Wpg Rif to Kilder. Meanwhile Regina Rif would follow up to occupy the woody slopes about 1500 yards west of Braamt prior to being pushed through the Winnipegs firm base. In conjunction with these moves 1 C. Scot R. was instructed to seize the area of Groot Lobberik (9571). The Reconnaissance Squadron north of the Scottish was to keep on probing forward until it met serious opposition. (Ibid; and AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket V, as above: Special Reports Nos 26, 27, 28).

^x Instructions to begin work on this bridge were received from 2 Cdn Corps early on 31 Mar 45. Bridging operations actually commenced at 1200 hours. 2 Cdn A Tps Engrs began work and estimated the time of completion at 0600 hours 2 Apr. Assisting units were 40 Pnr Coy, 96 Pnr Coy, Carpenters Detachment of 2 Bn, 2 Cdn Fd Svy Coy and a Detachment of "J" Sqn, "U" Force, R.N. with L.Cs.V. (P) which were used as tugs and ferries. But for a 10-foot error in calculation the bridge would have been completed at 1800 hours 1 Apr. However the bridge was finished at 2025 hours and opened for traffic at 2100 hours 1 Apr 45. The bridge was named Melville Bridge after Brigadier J.L. Melville former C.E. First Cdn Army. (Hist Sec File; 143.113013(D1) BRIDGING OPS; Report on construction of bridges over Rhine, by Maj G.L. Bodwell, B.M., 10 May 45).

133. The brigade was well on the move when at 1630 hours 7 Cdn Recce Regt reported one of their vehicles knocked out by enemy fire. The delay, however, was only of short duration; R. Wpg Rif were able to enter Kilder within two hours and take four dejected prisoners from a Marine Flak unit and 858 Gren Regt. 1 C. Scot R. following the Winnipegs, pushed past Kilder but instead of keeping to the original plan swung to the right (see para 132 above) to firm up around Broek. Then came the turn of Regina Rif to continue the advance. A trifle late in getting forward, the Reginas did not reach Kilder until 2130 hours. The unit debussed just north of the town, deployed and immediately dispatched strong patrols to feel out the opposition on the approaches to Wehl, which the Recce men reported held in some strength. At this point the Commanding Officer, appreciating that the line of the railway south of Wehl would be an obvious defence line, ordered his troops to attack and capture it at first light. The assault, timed for 0430 hours was to be supported by tanks of 27 Cdn Armd Regt and by the fire of heavy mortars of C.H. of O. (M.G.). (Ibid). Brigadier J.A. Roberts' 8 Cdn Inf bde, relieved of its task about Hoch Elten, was concentrating preparatory to reinforcing 3 Cdn Inf Div's efforts northward (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 1 Apr 45).

134. The last half of the day produced only a small measure of success for Maj-Gen Matthews' division. The Calg Highrs got into Doetinchem late in the afternoon, but not without a fight, especially in the case of "D" Coy, which had a sticky time on the fringes of the main square. The other companies were more fortunate and managed to consolidate; one at the bridge west of the town, another on the northern outskirts. The situation around the square did not improve and by nightfall it was decided that until the road blocks could be cleared to allow heavier close support, no further attempt would be made to take the town. (W.D., Calg Highrs, 1 Apr 45). Meanwhile R.H.C. had been brought up to swing around to the east of Doetinchem in order to pass on to Langerak. R. de Mais was also prodding its way forward on the right of Calg Highrs and in the late afternoon put in an armoured attack on the north-east portion of the town. Resistance was light and the troops consolidated between Ruimzigt and Eikenberg some 500 yards north of Doetinchem. (W.Ds., R. de Mais, R.H.C., 1 Apr 45)

135. The intention of 2 Cdn Inf Div was now to reorganize 5 Cdn Inf Bde in the area Kruisberg - Doetinchem - Hummelo. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, accompanied by elements of 8 Cdn Recce Regt, was to press on along the axis Doetinchem - Vorden - Bruggink (0496) to cut the road from Lochem to Zutphen and to establish a crossing over the Twente Canal. In addition 8 Cdn Recce Regt was directed to probe west of the Oude IJssel River as far north as Laagkappel, in order to make contact with 3 Cdn Inf Div on the left. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, April 1945: Appx 13, Message Log, 1 Apr 45, Serial 136). For the forthcoming operations the full support of 2 Cdn Armd Bde was available. At the moment 27 Cdn Armd Regt was assisting 7 Cdn Inf Bde, and 10 Cdn Armd Regt was operating around Doetinchem with Brigadier McGill's troops. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, 1 Apr 45; and April 1945: Appx 1, 2 Cdn Armd Bde Log, 1 Apr 45, time 1910, 2000 hours). 6 Cdn Armd Regt was still in reserve near Cleve, but expecting at any moment to move into the battle zone (W.D., 6 Cdn Armd Regt, 1-2 Apr 45).

4 CDN ARMD DIV'S PART IN OPERATION "PLUNDER", 24-31 MAR 45

136. 4 Cdn Armd Div's part in operations thus far had been confined to providing artillery support for the troops on the left of the Rhine bridgehead and pepper-pot shoots by the tanks from the west bank of the River. The armoured brigade there-

fore had been particularly busy for the last few days laying on tank fire in support of our recent attacks on Emmerich and Hoch Elten. The actual fire programme began at 1450 hours on 28 Mar, when the tanks of four armoured regiments opened fire. The opening salvo came from 120 guns firing simultaneously at twelve targets. At 1548 hours on the same day, however, all the pieces engaged a single target with two rounds of gunfire. That the task at hand was of considerable importance can be judged by the expenditure of ammunition. On that day alone, by 1800 hours the brigade group had gone through 18,527 rounds, making on the average 142 rounds per gun. Further and more intensive firing took place on 29 Mar, when by midday the total expenditure amounted to 66,978 rounds, rising to 111,905 rounds at 1100 hours on 30 Mar. This programme went on periodically until 0745 hours 31 Mar. At that time the brigade group disengaged, having fired more than 120,000 rounds. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 21, 22, 28 Cdn Armd Regts; 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 28-31 Mar 45). The divisional guns were kept equally busy:

The original 700 rounds per gun was expended by the 29th, and ammunition numbers were soon busy hauling new supplies. By the end of the week spent in this position each gun had fired over 12 tons of high explosive shells.

(Spencer, History of 15 Cdn Fd Regt,
R.C.A., p. 236).

On 31 Mar the guns came out of action and prepared to cross the Rhine with the rest of the formation. (Ibid; and W.Ds., H.Q. R.C.A. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 15 Cdn Fd Regt, and 23 Cdn Fd Regt (SP), 28-31 Mar 45)

137. As the time approached for 2 Cdn Corps to revert to General Crerar's command, 4 Cdn Armd Div had completed its concentration in the Speldrop - Bienen area, and had formed itself into two battle groups, Tiger Group* under H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, and Lion Group** under the leadership of H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde. Lion Group was already en route to a new concentration area at Westendorp, north-east of Terborg. Maj-Gen C. Vokes' intention was to launch his division with all speed into the areas of Ruurlo and Lochem, relieve whatever elements of 43 (W.) Inf Div were there and seize bridgeheads over the Twente Canal west of Lochem. Lion Group, commanded by Brigadier J.C. Jefferson, D.S.O. was designated to execute these tasks, on the completion of which Tiger Group, under Brigadier R.W. Moncel, D.S.O., was to pass through and launch an armoured attack eastwards against Delden. (AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket I, Folio 13: Memorandum of an Interview given by Lt-Col V.G.M. Robinson, O.B.E., G.S.O. 1, 4 Cdn Armd Div, to Hist Offr, 4 Cdn Armd Div, at Rastede, N.W. Germany, 23 May 45, The Final Punch, Operations and Activities

* H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 22 and 28 Cdn Armd Regts, the Lake Sup R. (Mot), and the Linc & Weild R., plus 23 Cdn Fd Regt (SP), 96 Cdn A.Tk Bty, and 12 Cdn Lt Fd Amb.

** H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 21 Cdn Armd Regt, the Ald R., the A. & S.H. of C., and 10 Cdn Indep M.G. Coy, plus 9 Cdn Fd Sqn, 15 Cdn Fd Amb, and 14 Cdn A.Tk Bty.

of 4 Cdn Armd Div, 30 Mar - 5 May 45). With the arrival in the bridgehead of the armoured division, Lt-Gen Simonds now had a powerful and highly mobile force ideally constituted for the wide open operations which would soon follow.

FIRST CDN ARMY TAKES 2 CDN CORPS UNDER COMMAND, 2359 HOURS 1 APR 45

138. Probably one of the most noteworthy sitreps on record is the one issued by First Cdn Army at 2400 hours, 1 Apr 45. It bears no striking title, just the number 503. Yet that situation report was historic in that it covered the activities not only of 2 Cdn Corps but of Lt-Gen Foulkes' 1 Cdn Corps as well. Now at long last we had an Army of two full Canadian Corps in operation together. 1 Brit Corps, which for so long had been associated with First Cdn Army was no longer under command; it had passed from under General Crerar's control at noon 1 Apr. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, April 1945: Appx 5, Folio 9, Sitrep No 503). On the evening of 1 Apr, 32 hours after the order had been given to the Chief Engineer to begin work, the sappers opened a bridge across the Rhine at Emmerich (W.D., Hist Offr, H.Q. First Cdn Army, 1 Apr 45). The rapid completion of the task made it possible for 2 Cdn Corps to return to General Crerar's command at midnight on the same day, since with his own communications now established across the river he could maintain and fight the Corps in its northward advance. (General Crerar's Despatch, para 14).

139. In his despatch of 29 May 45, General Crerar reviewed the situation existing when he took command of Canadian operations beyond the Rhine.

By the end of the month the battle of the Rhine had been won. The encirclement of the Ruhr, that great manoeuvre envisaged by the C.-in-C. in September, 1944, was almost completed. The Ninth U.S. Army, with patrols into Munster and Hamm, was driving on to link up with the First U.S. Army in Paderborn. Meanwhile, Lt-General Dempsey's forces had crossed the Ems at Greven and Mesum and were nearing Rheine, thus spoiling any chances which the 2nd Parachute Corps might have had of falling back to the line of the river. On the left flank, the 2nd Canadian Corps was attacking Terberg and along the east bank of the Rhine northwest of Emmerich had gained the summit of Hoch Elten from which the German guns had dominated the crossing places farther up the river. Our stubborn adversary, the First Parachute Army, was split in two: the 2nd Parachute Corps, reeling backwards on the north, had lost contact with the 86th Corps in the south.

(General Crerar's Despatch, para 13)

140. A most significant event also, at this time, was the cessation of the enemy's efforts with his long range V-Weapons. As the Allied forces drove deeper into Germany, the maintenance of his launching sites in western Holland became increasingly difficult. The advance of 2 Cdn Corps to the north, moreover, now threatened to cut the few remaining routes along which supplies must pass. The last rocket was fired against the United Kingdom on 27 Mar and the last flying bomb on 30 Mar 45. (Hist Sec, C.M.H.Q. Report No. 137)

141. East of the Canadians, Lt-Gen Dempsey's divisions had covered a good deal of enemy territory since crossing the Rhine. 30 Corps especially had made great gains against varying opposition to secure a firm flank for General Crerar's northward thrust. The Guards overran Groenlo on 31 Mar and by midnight had 5 Gds Armd Bde in Eibergen, while on the left 32 Gds Bde finding Borculo strongly held, swung north-east to Neede. Eibergen fell on the morning of 1 Apr and a passage was forced through Haaksbergen to within two miles south-west of Enschede at 1400 hours. On the same day 32 Gds Bde moving fast from Neede had reached, by 1100 hours a small bridge on the Twente Canal. Some tanks managed to cross the water barrier, but only to have the bridge blown up behind them. They became heavily engaged and were soon all knocked out. The Guardsmen then shifted to the eastern end of the canal and, by-passing Enschede, drove on towards Hengelo with the object of screening Enschede from the north-west. The Irish Guards Group entered Enschede during the afternoon of 1 Apr, and by last light had cleared the town, taking many prisoners. The enemy, however, still held on to the airfield north of the town, although this area was now almost surrounded by other elements (Welsh Guards) of the brigade. (AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket I; and First Cdn Army Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serials 60, 74, 102, 137, 140 and 142; 1 Apr 45, Serials 41, 76, 160 and 97).

142. In 43 (W.) Inf Div's sector, progress had not been so spectacular, mainly on account of the cratering and demolitions encountered. All the bridges north of Varsseveld were out, but during the afternoon of 31 Mar 129 Bde crossed the stream and bridging operations over the Slingerbeek began. The following day saw 8 Armd Bde catch up to the leading infantry by sweeping in to capture Varsseveld after which the tanks pushed to clear Ruurlo. Lochem, the next objective, proved a much tougher problem. (First Cdn Army Ops Log, 31 Mar 45, Serials 59, 130 and 142; 1 Apr 45, Serials 27, 43, 62 and 133). 8 Armd Bde attacked Lochem at about 1730 hours, while 214 Bde pressed on north of Borculo to reach Diepenheim. (Ibid, Serial 146; and AEF: 45/Second Army/C/D, Docket I). Between the right flank of 2 Cdn Corps and the left of 30 Corps, 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt had been doing excellent work. "D" Sqn of this unit came under command 2 Cdn Inf Div at 1500 hours on 31 Mar and set about reconnoitering the region bounded by Halle - Zelhem - Doetinchem. The squadron left Terborg at 0930 hours 1 Apr with two troops up. From then their ability to get around is well illustrated by the entry in the Regimental War Diary:

"D" Sqn left Terborg 0570 at 0930 hrs with 2 tps up to do the task of gen recce of area east of Doetinchem. 19 and 18 tps were up. They found all the brs blown on the river line just North of Terborg. At approx 1300 hrs "D" Sqn's task was changed to dash up to Lochem and seize and hold the brs on the canal to the North. The sqn moved off up to Hengelo 0284 and met some of the Royals (Brit Armd C. Regt) who were supposed to be on their right flank. From Hengelo they moved to Ruurlo really fast, contacted more English tps. By 1830 hrs reached South portion of Lochem.

(W.D., 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 1 Apr 45)

143. It is evident that there was no lack of excitement for as the diary goes on:

Later just South of Lochem in the semi-dark, 16 and 19 tps had fun, they ran into Jerries laying rd blocks and put the coax and the 37 HE to them. H.77086 Sgt Beach, R.K., was comd 16 tp in the absence of Lt W.D. Rose (on leave). He was just starting his Stag rolling again after consulting his map when Panzerfaust artist let fly from the side of the rd nearby. He missed. The projectile landed about ten feet short of the car, Sgt Beach punched the Jerry full of holes with his coax, then hopped out of the car and relieved him of a fine P38 pistol. Both tps then returned to the area South of Ruurlo 1187 where the sqn bivouaced for the night.

(Ibid)

144. Needless to say the Dutch civilian population were amazed at the speed with which the reconnaissance men manoeuvred and indeed could hardly believe that their liberation was imminent (ibid; also Weekly Summary of Ops, 2 Cdn Inf Div, 25-31 Mar 45, as above). As the day ended the Regiment came under command 4 Cdn Armd Div, which was now about to enter the battle (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 1 Apr 45, Serial 2582).

THE ENEMY'S SITUATION AT 2359 HOURS 1 APR 45

145. Although it was still possible that the enemy might take some steps to slow down the advance of the Western Powers, there had been little evidence of it so far. The Allied spearheads continued to penetrate as much as 30 miles daily and there was every indication that soon the heart of industrial Germany would be completely isolated: furthermore, as our Intelligence Staff added:

On the fronts nearest to us, First Para Army has been irrevocably divided. 2 Para Corps on the North is reeling backwards and has no contact with 86 Corps to the South. At Emmerich a curious condition obtains, for 358 Grenadier Regiment is probably in Twenty Fifth Army and based in Holland rather than Germany. It may as a result withdraw to the Ijssel for there can be little profit in pulling troops out of Holland when British troops are cutting the roads to Germany.

The only troops NOT committed and in difficulties are those in Holland and particularly the paratroop reinforcements in the Groningen area. They are now too late to affect the present battle although they may distract forces to deal with them.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 274,
31 Mar 45)

146. As a result it would appear that the Canadian battle was to be a fight on the Ijssel River against an enemy facing east (ibid). Indeed it was the only place where the Germans could afford to have offensive or defensive intentions at this time. For as the Intelligence Summary concluded:

...There he may be planning a position to protect his Dutch investments and to lure forces away from ranging across Germany.

The movement out of Holland has NOT yet been sufficient to prove evacuation, although it has been increasing. The concentrations of vehicles and the intense accurate light flak at Rijssen VII may well indicate some offensive intentions East of the Ijssel. It is difficult to see, however, how these can be entertained in the face of our advances, with the few troops available.

(Ibid)

147. Some light is thrown on the enemy's rearguard manoeuvres during late March by the statements of Lt-Gen Herman Plocher, Commanding 6 Para Div. That formation after its first commitment at Millingen was ordered to defend the line between Gendringen and Isselburg with 8 Para Div on its left and 346 Inf Div on its right. Plocher's men however were soon forced back in a north-easterly direction to face south from Terborg to Aalten. Due to the sustained efforts of 30 Brit Corps, contact with 8 Para Div was lost in a few days, and Plocher was left with orders to hold and delay as much as possible while 8 Para Div was withdrawn farther to the north-east. When Plocher was finally given permission to fall back, the Allied armoured columns had cut off his line of retreat into Germany proper and, as the Interrogation Report explains,

...He was then put under 88 Corps of Twenty-Fifth Army and told to withdraw to the Twente Canal. In a slow fighting withdrawal the division reached the Canal towards the end of March and there took up a line from Zutphen to Lochem to Hengelo. During this withdrawal 346 Infantry Division had crossed over the Ijssel River at Doesburg leaving Plocher to defend the east bank of the Ijssel by himself.

(Interrogation Report, as above,
Folio 24 - Lt-Gen Herman Plocher)

It was while taking up the defence of the Twente Canal that 6 Para Div received a welcome allotment of fresh troops. These came from 31 Reserve Para Regt, which though 1200 strong and accompanied by an artillery regiment, were small encouragement for the bloody trials ahead. As subsequent events will show the stop-over on the Twente Canal was short and costly. (Ibid)

148. The situation, as it existed at midnight on 1 Apr, proved beyond doubt that the enemy could never hope to re-establish a line that would hold the Allied avalanche. His only chance of delaying the overwhelming disaster which shadowed his every step backwards lay in a retreat to the National Redoubt which our Intelligence Staffs knew might be based in the Austrian Alps. At the same time the enemy might continue to resist in the so-called fortresses of Western Europe, such as the port of Dunkirk or in the Channel Islands or in Norway, a possibility on which General Eisenhower later made the following comment:

Knowing the Nazi mentality, I had little expectation of an immediate all-embracing collapse and an abrupt termination of the struggle through complete surrender while these outposts remained unsubdued.

(Report by The Supreme Commander to The Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Europe of the Allied Expeditionary Force, 6 Jun 1944 to 8 May 1945, p.127)

149. However, on 1 Apr an event took place which brought victory to our doorstep. On that day 21 Army Group and Twelfth U.S. Army linked up near Lippstadt, and the physical encirclement of the Ruhr² was completed. This was an operation on which the Supreme Commander had placed the highest priority and which he had considered essential before launching any further thrusts to the east. In speaking of it later he said

The operation constituted the largest double envelopment in history. Inside the pocket we had trapped the whole of the German Army Group B and two corps of Army Group H, including the picked troops who had been massed in March to defend the southern approaches of the Ruhr against the immediate offensive which the enemy had erroneously expected us to launch northward from the Remagen bridgehead.

(Ibid, p. 128)

CONCLUSION

150. It is difficult to explain why Hitler's High Command imagined that it could carry on the fight. The German losses had been enormous and the signs of complete defeat were all too clear.^{**} Moreover it is certain that the most seasoned of his professional soldiers, those high-booted and self-exalted members of the Officers Corps, realized that disaster was imminent and were ready to accept defeat quite unconditionally, (though with the consoling thought of honourable surrender). The answer to the enemy's unwillingness to give in must be looked for among the fanatical principles of the Nazi-cult which decreed that according to the intuitions of one man, The Fuehrer, an entire people must triumph or fall. With speed and violence our attack had driven the enemy into a corner; escape was impossible. Hitler's army was on its knees, the knock-out blow was about to be delivered.

151. This report was prepared by Capt P.A. Mayer, R.C.I.C.

P.A. Mayer, Capt.
for (C.P. Stacey) Colonel,
Director
Historical Section (G.S.).

* The Ruhr had been isolated by air action early in 1945. In addition to the direct damage to factories, the transportation system had been wrecked, and the coal and steel produced there, on which the German war economy largely depended, had been, for the time being denied the enemy. Before operations deep into the German interior could safely be undertaken, however, the Allies had, following the Rhine crossings to complete the encirclement of the Ruhr and the elimination of any danger from the pocket which would be thus created. With this vast armory in Allied hands, and the Russians in control of its Silesian counterpart, Germany's power of continuing to wage war would be destroyed even were her armies to be preserved intact. The essential weapons, ammunition, and fuel produced by the Ruhr would be denied to them, and even the local factories dispersed about Germany to escape the Allied bombs would be brought to a standstill through lack of raw materials, for the bulk of which they were yet dependent upon the Ruhr and Silesian resources.

** See Appx "B" to this report.

HQ 3 CDM INF DIV

TOP SECRET
Copy No 20

Confirmatory Notes

17 Mar 45

Conference 1600 hrs 17 Mar

Ref Maps 1/25,000

Sheet Nos - 4103, 4104, 4203, 4204.

GENERAL

Security

- 1 The fact that the Allies intend to cross the R RHINE in this general area is well known, and it may be accepted that the enemy may still have a means of comn from this area.
- 2 However every endeavour must be made to keep secure the date of crossing and the exact site of the crossing.
- 3 NO OR, except key pers (e.g. Clerks and Draughtsmen) will be briefed until D-1.

Topography

- 4 The area consists mainly of flat low country crossed by many drainage ditches and the undulations of the ALTER RHEINS, rising gradually to the NE, with the main HOCH ELTEN feature to the NW. Further Details - See 30 Corps Int DOSSIER NOT issued to all addressees.

Maps

- 5 This div will op from the 1/25,000 map.

Photos

- 6 Recent air cover of the area will be available shortly. Old cover taken last fall has been obtained and can be issued pending arrival of new photos.

Political

- 7 The initial stages of the op will take place in GERMANY but shortly afterwards the DUTCH - GERMAN border will be crossed again. The actions of the tps must be governed accordingly.

INFORMATION

Enemy

- 8 It is estimated that the enemy is holding the ARNHEM - COLOGNE sector with those divs which were driven across the RHINE by ops VERITABLE and GRENADE, stiffened possibly by certain res, between WESEL and ARNHEM. Four para divs, 2, 6, 7, 8, will probably be encountered with 116 Pz Div in the background as a layback div and possibly a regt of 346 Div available also in a counter-attack role. There are in the WEST seven inf divs (245, 361, 346, 198, 708, 716, div from NORWAY or ITALY) any one of which might be committed between WESEL or ARNHEM. It is expected that the paratps will fight with determination and if forced to give ground under pressure will adopt the policy of strong rearguard actions.

Own Tps

- 9 21 Army Gp is throwing three armies "trans fluvium RHENUM" with RIGHT NINTH US Army, CENTRE SECOND Brit Army, LEFT FIRST Cdn Army.
- 10 SECOND Brit Army is crossing with RIGHT 12 Brit Corps, LEFT 30 Brit Corps.
- 11 30 Brit Corps with under comd 3 Cdn Inf Div is crossing in the area of REES 0752. The initial brhead as per trace att, will be est by 51 (H) Div with under comd 9 Cdn Inf Bde.
- 12 43 (W) Div is then to cross and will take over the left sector of the brhead and will assume comd of 9 Cdn Inf Bde.
- 13 51 (H) Div is to adv NE toward BOCHOLT 2360 and 43 (W) Div towards AALTEN 2070.
- 14 When 43 (W) Div is complete across the RHINE, 7 Cdn Inf Bde followed by Tac HQ 3 Cdn Inf Div will cross over and the following changes in comd will take place.
 - 9 Cdn Inf Bde reverts to comd 3 Cdn Inf Div
 - 3 Cdn Inf Div reverts to comd 2 Cdn Corps.
- 15 Tps coming under comd 3 Cdn Inf Div will probably be:
 - One Armd Regt from 2 Cdn Armd Bde
 - Elements 79 Armd Div.
 - 6 Cdn Inf Bde (if required)
 - One coy lift of KANGAROOS.
 - Additional Arty - details NOT yet firm.

INTENTION

- 16 3 Cdn Inf Div will break out of the 30 Brit Corps brhead at REES with a view to securing a brhead at EMMERICH 9760 to protect bridging ops at EMMERICH by First Cdn Army.

METHOD (Note: No disposition of any armour is yet made in the following allotment of tps)

- 17 The op will be undertaken in phases as follows:

PHASE I

- 18 9 Cdn Inf Bde Gp (under comd 51 (H) Div)
 - with under comd
 - 94 Cdn A Tk Bty RCA
 - "C" Coy CH of O (MG)
 - Two pls "D" Coy CH of O (MG)
 - 18 Cdn Fd Coy RCE
 - One coy 23 Cdn Fd Amb
 - One sec 4 Cdn Pro Coy
 - A mob coln - details later.

Tasks

- 19 (a) To provide one bn gp to under comd 154 Inf Bde.
- (b) To pass the remainder of the bde across under orders of 51 (H) Div.

(c) To pass a mob coln (details later) through with a view to securing the crossing at 9960.

(d) If this is successful and resistance is lt, to bring the remainder of the bn fwd and protect the LEFT flank of the brhead.

PHASE II

20 7 Cdn Inf Bde with under comd

105 Cdn A Tk Bty RCA
"A" Coy CH of O (MG)
One pl "D" Coy CH of O (MG)
6 Cdn Fd Coy RCE
One Coy 14 Cdn Fd Amb
One sec 4 Cdn Pro Coy

and in sp (under comd for move)

12 Cdn Fd Regt RCA.

Tasks

21 (a) To cross over and conc as ordered by 3 Cdn Inf Div.

(b) If 9 Cdn Inf Bde is successful in seizing the crossings at 9960, 7 Cdn Inf Bde will be conc immediately behind 9 Cdn Inf Bde.

If the crossings are NOT taken by 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Cdn Inf Bde will pass through and secure a brhead area 9960 and enlarge brhead towards NETTERDORN.

(c) Enlarge brhead towards EMMERICH.

PHASE III

22 8 Cdn Inf Bde with under comd

52 Cdn A Tk Bty RCA
"B" Coy CH of O (MG)
One pl "D" Coy CH of O (MG)
16 Cdn Fd Coy RCE
One coy 22 Cdn Fd Amb
One sec 4 Cdn Pro Coy

Tasks

23 (a) To cross over, pass through 7 Cdn Inf Bde and capture EMMERICH

(b) If little resistance is met then 8 Cdn Inf Bde will occupy area 3 as per att trace.

(c) If this is NOT possible, to firm up in the EMMERICH area.

(d) To be prepared to adv in a NORTHERly direction WEST of the HOCH ELTEN feature.

PHASE IV

24 If hy resistance is met by 8 Cdn Inf Bde then 9 Cdn Inf Bde will capture area 3 and will exploit NORTHwards to the line of the obstacle, 930640 - 990650 as shown in Def Overprint.

PHASE V

- 25 In the event that hy resistance is met by 8 Cdn Inf Bde and 9 Cdn Inf Bde then 6 Cdn Inf Bde may be called on to attack and capture the SOUTH end of the HOCH ELTEN feature.

ARMOUR

- 26 Probable that one armd regt of 2 Cdn Armd Bde will be under comd and one sqn Crocs from 79 Armd Div. Further details will be passed on later.
- 27 7 Cdn Recce Regt will be prepared to either be phased in late as a recce regt or to be launched early in jeeps and carriers to take up a holding role on the RIGHT flank of the div. Will also provide Mob Coln under comd 9 Cdn Inf Bde.

ARTY

- 28 12 Cdn Fd Regt will be in sp of and under comd for move of 7 Cdn Inf Bde.
- 29 Arty Comd will move with Tac HQ 3 Cdn Inf Div.
- 30 Remaining two fd regts will remain on WEST bank and will be controlled by CRA 3 Cdn Inf Div through line comms provided by CCRA 2 Cdn Corps.

A TK

- 31 3 Cdn A Tk Regt less three btys will move fwd with residue of the div as ordered. It is possible that 94 Cdn A Tk Bty will be taken from 9 Cdn Inf Bde and move with remainder of 3 Cdn A Tk Regt.

AA

- 32 One Hy AA Bty and one LAA Bty from Corps or Army resources will cross over with 3 Cdn Inf Div coln. 4 Cdn LAA Regt will be emp in the Pepper Pots and will cross over with div residue as ordered by this HQ.

PEPPER POT

- 33 Two pepper pots will be org under comd CH of O (MG):
- (a) Under comd 3 Brit Inf Div to cover the initial crossing.
 - (b) To cover the adv of the Div NW along the RIGHT bank by fire from the LEFT.

ENGRS

- 34 6, 16, 18 Cdn Fd Coys will be under comd 7, 8 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes respectively for all purposes. 3 Cdn Fd Pk Coy will cross over with div residues.

SMOKE

- 35 A large scale smoke programme is in op now, and may be obtained to screen off the HOCH ELTEN feature.

AIR

36 Air programme is shown as Appx "A" att.

PROTECTION

37 In view of the large amount of AA deployed in the area and the likelihood of enemy air attack, it is imperative fullest attention be paid to, dispersion, cam, and wherever possible, overhead cover.

MIL GOVT

38 There will be NO evac of civs across the RHINE, but civs will be conc locally in bldgs and det Mil Govt advised.

ADM

39 Adm instrs will be issued separately.

INTERCOMN

40 Tac HQ 3 Cdn Inf Div will cross over immediately behind 7 Cdn Inf Bde and will assume control as soon as est on the "far shore", (location later).

Sgd M.K. Reed Capt.

for (NLC MATHER) Lt-Col
GS 3 Cdn Inf Div

DRLS

Time of Signature 1125 A hrs

DISTRIBUTION

7 Cdn Inf Bde	1
8 Cdn Inf Bde	2
9 Cdn Inf Bde	3
7 Cdn Recce Regt	4
CH of O (MG)	5
RCA	6
RCE	7
Sigs	8
6 Cdn Inf Bde	9
2 Cdn Inf Div	10
51 (H) Div	11
43 (W) Div	12
79 Armd Div	13
2 Cdn Corps	14
30 Brit Corps	15
Comd	16
G	17
AQ	18
File	19
War Diary	20 - 22

TOP SECRET

Appx "A" to Confirmatory
Notes of Conference
1600 hours 17 Mar. 45

Copy No 20

AIR SUPPORT

Pre-Arranged Targets

1. (a) HALDERN, ISSELBURG, ANHOLT and PRAEST have been submitted as targets to be dealt with immediately before the op.
- (b) The RAF have decided to attack HALDERN and PRAEST with a strong force of fighter-bombers during the last hour of daylight on D minus 1. It is considered that visual attack is better than attack on instruments, as these two villages are NOT good by bomber targets.
- (c) ISSELBURG and ANHOLT will be attacked D minus 1/D with a force sufficiently heavy to ensure their destruction. Last bomb will be not later than first light on D day and probably nearer to 0001 hrs.
- (d) Cratering has been accepted on all four targets.

Interdiction

2. A programme is now in operation designed to produce by D day the maximum paralysis of the railway network in the area -

ZWOLLE - ELBERGEN Bridge - RHEINE - NEUBECKUM - SOEST - SIEGEN - SIEGBURG.
3. This programme includes attacks on viaducts, (the BIELEFELD viaduct was hit by RAF Lancasters with 22,000 lb bombs on 15 Mar) bridges and rly centres both in the above area and leading to it.

Air Support Communications

4. (a) The FCP will be working centrally for the benefit NOT of 30 Corps alone but of the whole of Second Army. It will intercept (and can in suitable cases take on) targets submitted by any formation with a tentacle.
- (b) 51 (H) Div will have -
 - (i) A DD tk fitted with a VHF set and fwd and rearward comms. This will cross with Staffs Yeo and be available for use on the further bank as a contact tank and as a tentacle.

Fighter-Bomber Support

5. (a) Hostile btys are first priority as targets for D day. These will be pre-arranged as far as located and otherwise be dealt with on observation by Tac/R or by fighter-bombers themselves (also by Arty/R).

5. (b) Targets put up through tentacles will be dealt with in the normal way, either under control of Army/83 Gp or of FCP. The Contact Tk or Contact Jeep Outfit can where necessary take control of aircraft.

Recognition

6. (a) Fluorescent Panels will be worn by vehs moving on the EAST side of the river.
- (b) White 5-pointed stars will be cleaned.
- (c) Yellow smoke will be available for use to indicate fwd tps only to the air.

Arty/R

7. Four sorties per day for 4 AGRA and four sorties per day for 5 AGRA have been requested.

Tac/R

8. The area on 30 Corps front will be covered under Second Army control and the contact car with 51 (H) Div can request specific missions by a Tac/R aircraft which can keep in touch with the RAF controller at Div HQ and report to him from the air the results of the recce.

OP "PLUNDER"

CASUALTIES

Since "D" Day and up to 2400 hours 1 Apr 45, The Canadian, British and American Armies had, besides killing and wounding very large numbers of the enemy, taken approximately 1,261,826 prisoners (H.S. File 215Cl. 98(D305) Enemy Casualties. Total to 012400). In view of the results achieved so far, our own losses for the battle east of the Rhine (since the commitment of Canadian troops on 24 Mar 45) had been light. A near estimate can be drawn from the figures as they stood at 0600 hours 1 Apr 45.

Consolidated Casualties

Killed, Wounded, Missing

TOTALS

Officers Other Ranks Officers Other Ranks

3 Cdn Inf Div

7 Cdn Inf Bde	13	156		
8 Cdn Inf Bde	1	64		
9 Cdn Inf Bde	18	241		
C.H. of O. (M.G.)	0	0		
7 Cdn Recce Regt	0	2		
3 Cdn Inf Div Tps	4	22		
	<u>36</u>	<u>485</u>	36	485

2 Cdn Inf Div

4 Cdn Inf Bde	0	1		
5 Cdn Inf Bde	0	2		
6 Cdn Inf Bde	7	100		
Tor Scot R. (M.G.)	0	0		
8 Cdn Recce Regt	0	4		
2 Cdn Inf Div Tps	0	2		
	<u>7</u>	<u>109</u>	7	109

4 Cdn Armd Div

10 Cdn Inf Bde	0	0		
4 Cdn Armd Bde	1	5		
29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt	0	0		
4 Cdn Armd Div Tps	1	12		
	<u>2</u>	<u>17</u>	2	17

2 Cdn Corps

2 Cdn Armd Bde	1	9		
18 Cdn Armd C. Regt	0	1		
2 Cdn Corps Tps	0	3		
	<u>1</u>	<u>13</u>	1	13

First Cdn Army

H.Q. First Cdn Army	0	0		
A. Tps Area First Cdn Army	0	4		
2 Cdn A.G.R.A.	1	12		
	<u>1</u>	<u>16</u>	1	16

Consolidated Casualties

Killed, Wounded, Missing

TOTALS

Officers

Other Ranks

Officers

Other Ranks

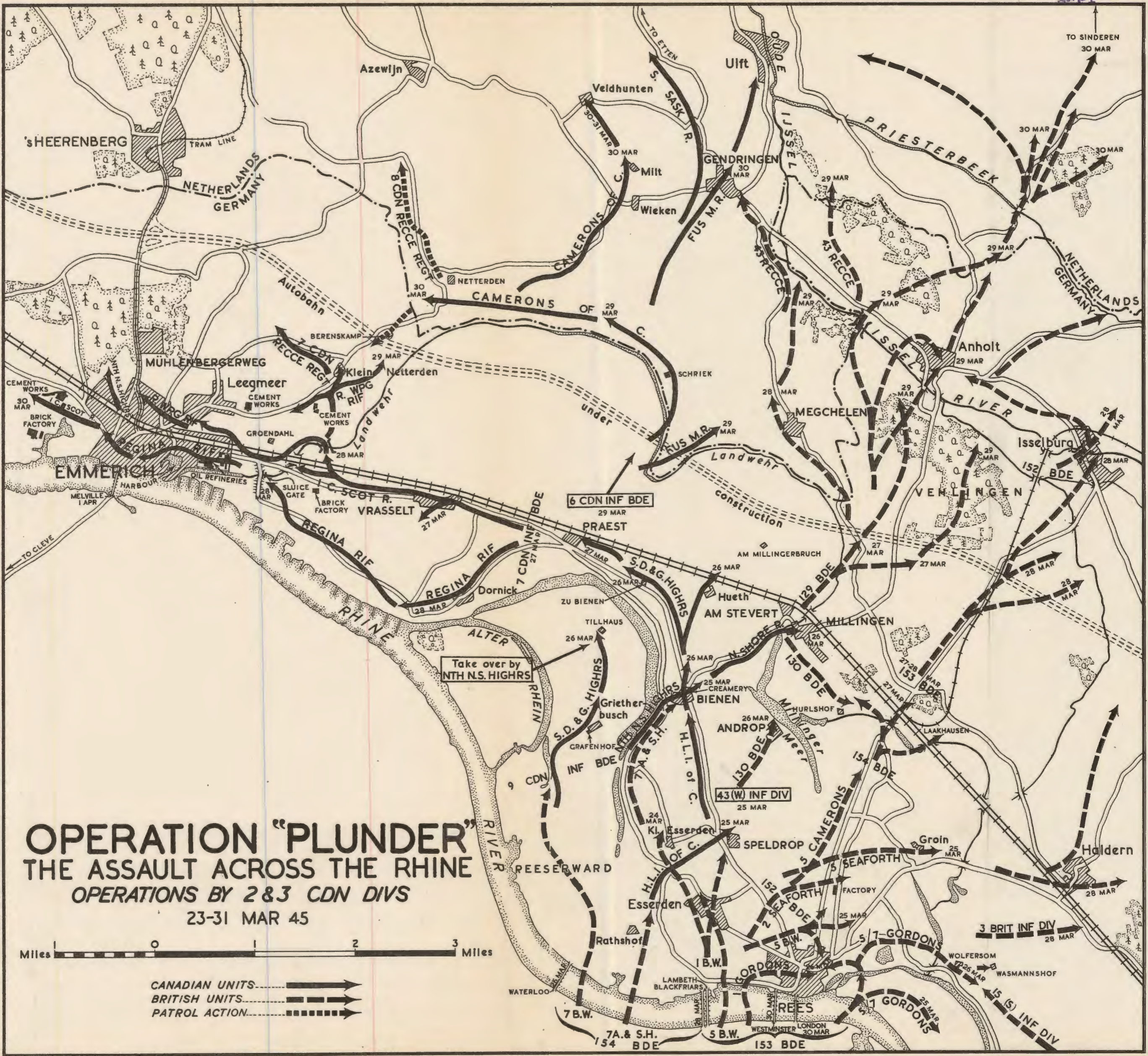
Total Canadian Casualties

3 Cdn Inf Div	36	485		
2 Cdn Inf Div	7	109		
4 Cdn Armd Div	2	17		
2 Cdn Corps	1	13		
First Cdn Army	<u>1</u>	<u>16</u>		
	<u>47</u>	<u>640</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>640</u>

Other Tps attached to First Cdn Army

21 Gp Brit Pnr Corps	0	2		
102 Gp Brit Pnr Corps	0	0		
14 Brit A.G.R.E.	0	2		
74 Brit A.A. Bde	0	0		
107 Brit A.A. Bde	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>		
	<u>0</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>6</u>

(W.D., A. & Q., H.Q. First Cdn Army, April 1945; Appx 8, Consolidated C. and S. State as of 0600 hours 1 Apr 45, Sheet 252, pp. 3 and 4).



OPERATION "PLUNDER"
THE ASSAULT ACROSS THE RHINE
OPERATIONS BY 2 & 3 CDN DIVS
 23-31 MAR 45

Miles 0 1 2 3 Miles

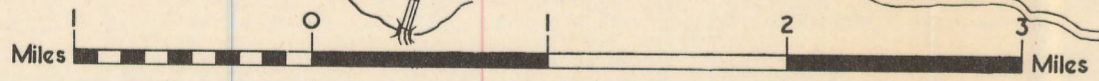
CANADIAN UNITS —————→
 BRITISH UNITS - - - - -→
 PATROL ACTION ······→

OPERATION "PLUNDER"

THE ASSAULT ACROSS THE RHINE

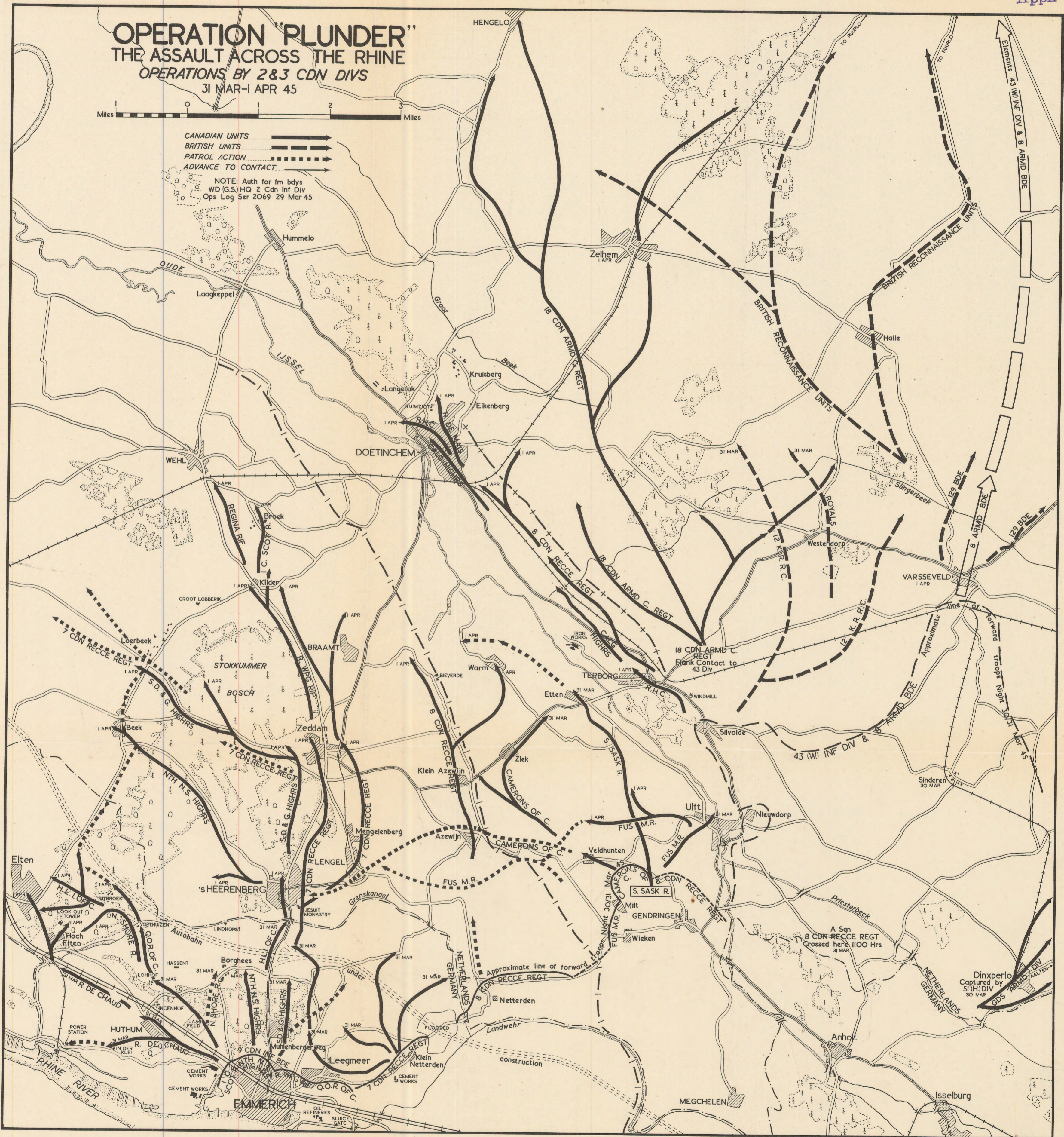
OPERATIONS BY 2 & 3 CDN DIVS

31 MAR-1 APR 45



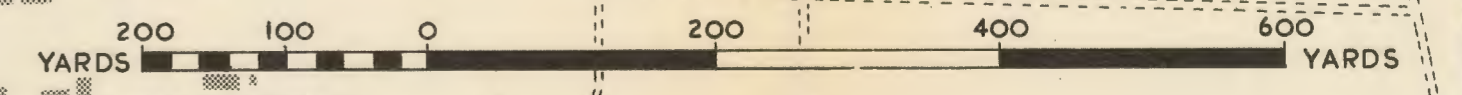
- CANADIAN UNITS
- BRITISH UNITS
- PATROL ACTION
- ADVANCE TO CONTACT

NOTE: Auth for fm bdys
WD (G.S.) HQ 2 Cdn Inf Div
Ops Log Ser 2069 29 Mar 45



CLEARING OF EMMERICH

BY 7 CDN INF BDE
29-30 MAR 45



1 C. SCOT R.
REGINA RIF.
R. WPG RIF.
Areas allotted to
Coys for clearing.

