

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 Vehlenger (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 - Vrsasselt 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 Winnipegs 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 Veldhunten, 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 Veldhunten, 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 McGill'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 Veldhunten 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 IJSEL, 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 Hoeh 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 Zeddam. 7 Cdn Recce Regt was even further ahead and had two squadrons on the way to Zeddam 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 Zeddam 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 Stokkumer 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 Ruimzicht 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 & Welld 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.