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HISTORICAL SECTION

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

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25 SEP 1947

Operation "BLOCKBUSTER": The Canadian Offensive
west of the Rhine, 26 Feb - 23 Mar 45

Reference Maps: G.S.G.S. 4414, Germany 1/25,000,
4202, 4203, 4204, 4302, 4303,
4304, 4305, 4402, 4403, 4404, 4405.

1. The present report describes the planning and execution of the operation by 2 Cdn Corps during late February and early March 1945 to break through the strong German defences west of the Rhine in the Hochwald area. This report forms a sequel to Report No. 185 (Operation "VERITABLE", The Winter Offensive between the Maas and the Rhine, 8-25 Feb 45).

OBJECT OF THE OPERATION

2. The object of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" was to seize the high ground south of Calcar and Udem, and then to exploit through the enemy's positions towards Xanten and Wesel (AEF: 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/1, Serial 2, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" Outline Plan). Taking meaning from these works, it was, in fact, Phases II and III of Operation "VERITABLE", i.e., The breaching of the enemy's second defensive system east and south-east of the Reichswald and the capture of the localities Weeze - Udem - Calcar and the securing of the communications between them; to be followed by The breakthrough of the Hochwald lay back defence lines and the advance to secure the general line Geldern - Xanten, as originally outlined by General Crerar in his operational directive of 25 Jan 45 (G.O.C.-in-C., 1-O-4/1 (Photostatic copies) 1-O-7/11, 25 Jan 45, Operational Directive to Lt-Gen G.G. Simonds and Lt-Gen B.G. Horrocks).

3. Of all the problems which faced General Simonds in his planning, one stood out. In order to carry out his part of the operation as laid down by the G.O.C.-in-C., he must have a route through which the momentum of the attack could be fully maintained to its successful conclusion. The choice of these routes was limited, the first being in the north; the Moyland - Calcar - Xanten road. This route, however, was, according to intelligence and air photographs, badly cratered and would therefore require too much time to develop. Apart from this, deployment, especially to the left of the road, was limited owing to flooding. Finally, this route would be, to the enemy, the obvious one to choose. The second choice was the line of the railway from Goch to Xanten. This was reported to be a well-founded embankment, free of mines, and so far as air reconnaissance could show, untouched by demolition. The third and last route was the Goch - Kervenheim - Sonsbeck road, a good road, but in the 30 Corps area for the general plan, and would therefore become too congested; also, from the direction of Udem the approaches were too narrow and unfit for heavy traffic. General Simonds, appreciating the relative value of each, decided to use the line of the railway, from which his engineers would rip up the track and improve the road bed to the required standard as the line moved forward. (AEF: 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/F, Docket III: Memo of Interview with Lt-Gen G.G. Simonds by Maj P.A. Mayer, 17 Dec 46)

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4. To the Corps Commander, the key to final success lay in the capture of the Hochwald position astride the railway. For once this formidable objective was in his hands he would be in the best possible position to exploit. Yet General S. well knew that the terrain between the Udem - Calcar ridge and the Hochwald Forest held grave disadvantages; it was low soggy ground traversed by numerous small waterways, which spelt bad "going" for his armour. It might easily mean an infantry battle which, if unsupported by the existence of a good firm base along the Udem - Calcar ridge, might prove disastrous and require a further deliberate attack. Furthermore, his hold on the high ground south of Calcar had to be strong enough to withstand any counter-attack from the east; where he appreciated that the enemy forces would react with considerable violence. These, then, were the facts and considerations which governed the resultant plan. The first blow was to fall against the positions on the high ground west of Calcar, where the enemy was known to be strong. This attack would accomplish three things:

- (i) Push the enemy off an important feature necessary to the general plan;
- (ii) Mislead him into thinking the attack would take the northern axis;
- (iii) Draw his reserves to the north and create a jumping off point for a rapid switch to the south with the intention of capturing the Udem ridge.

When the ridge south of Calcar and east of Udem was captured, then it would be possible to strike again to the east, seize the Hochwald position, and at the same time secure the proposed maintenance route through which the Corps Commander intended to accomplish the high level object of the operation. (Ibid)

5. The ground over which the Canadian Army was to advance beyond the line of Moyland, Calcar, Udem and Weeze was of a varied nature. Directly east of Moyland a long flat plain stretched to the south-east following the west bank of the River Rhine to Xanten. The first ridge which would be encountered began south of Calcar, continued in the shape of a drawn bow to the eastern outskirts of Udem, then across the railway to the Gochfort feature (9939) north of Kervenheim (9938). Between Kervenheim and Weeze lay well watered farmlands bound in by the Muhlen Fleuth and the Niers River. Afforestation was in evidence everywhere, and the young trees were especially thick south of Weeze, whence the Canadian line turned in a northerly direction across the low-lying fields towards Siebengewald and on to the east bank of the Maas River near Afferden.

6. East of the Calcar - Udem escarpment there exists an arable valley which starts from the Hohe Ley south of Appeldorn (0447) and winds thinly to the south through Udemerbruch and on again towards the areas north of Winnekendonk and Kapellen. Beyond to the east lies the vast greenness of the Hochwald Forest covering the quickly rising ridge which takes shape south of Marienbaum and stretches south-west to the line of the railway, where a small gap separates it from the lesser Balberger Wald. From here the high ground continues and turns slightly east, to end north-east of Sonsbeck (0635). From the line of the large forests towards Veen and Winnenthal on to the banks of the Rhine, innumerable farms dot a landscape which is almost unbroken in its regular plain except by a few minor high features such as the water-bound wood between the gap on the Hochwald feature on Xanten, the Staats Forst Xanten, west of Birten (1328), the Birkenkamp south of Winnenthal (1335) and the large wood north of Veen (1135). The section of land to the south which includes

such towns as Wallach (1933), Alpon (1531) and Bonninghardt (1231) begins east of Kapellen with a series of large forest areas running eastwards in which the vegetation gradually thins out to result in open country liable to flood. It was against this choice background that the Hochwald "lay back" defence line had been laid.

7. These defences consisted of a recently constructed line situated along the undulating ground roughly 12 kilometres east of the Reichswald Forest. It ran from the left bank of the Rhine opposite Rees (0752) to just east of Kehrum (0346), whence it continued south past the western edge of the Hochwald and Balberger Forests towards Geldern (0125). Its main feature consisted of two, sometimes three, lines of continuous trenches between 600 and 1000 yards apart. Except where it approached the Hochwald, which was regarded in itself as a satisfactory anti-tank obstacle, there existed between the trenches a deep and formidable anti-tank ditch, while in front of each trench line lay an almost unbroken belt of wire. The sector between the Rhine and the Hochwald had, in addition, a mine belt in front of the western wire barricade. The effect of recent defence work had been to convert the layout into a "defence net". The area was split up into a series of self-contained boxes enclosed by trenches with stretches of anti-tank or water barrier. Fitting into this system was the transformation of towns and villages into strongpoints, defended by elaborate trench works and other anti-tank obstacles. Chief of these were Weeze, Kervelaer, Udem and Calcar. The strength of each was soon to be tested (AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket 111: Operation "VERITABLE", Section 3, paras 26, 27 and 28, 8 Feb - 10 Mar 45).

8. As H Hour for "BLOCKBUSTER" approached, the enemy's situation began to clear itself. On 24 Feb the most significant feature was the resistance to our attacks at Weeze, and the continued absence of whatever remained of 116 Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div. This, with the increased activity and gun strength sited in the Hochwald and south of it, might well mean that forces had been collected to hold the Hochwald hinge, which was now as vital to his line on our front as the Caen hinge had been six months ago in Normandy. The German reaction to 53 (W.) Div's progress towards Weeze now offered an excellent opportunity for the Canadian attacks between Calcar and Udem. If the enemy counter-attacked or reinforced Weeze from the east, the right flank of his counter-attack or relieving forces would be exposed to any thrust south from Udem. On the other hand, if he did not reinforce or counter-attack he risked the quick loss of Weeze and subsequent exploitation southwards towards the rapidly advancing Ninth U.S. Army. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 239, 24 Feb 45, para 6)

9. By 0600 hours, 25 Feb, however, the enemy seemed to have once again balanced himself by hurriedly gathering any such odd units as were available, for his ranks in the many once proud formations were sadly depleted and suffering from the bitter encounters of the past two weeks. The bulk of 6 Para Div remained in the Calcar region; in addition elements of 346 Div and the Pz Lehr Div lurked in attendance with 116 Para Div north of Marienbaum. It was suspected that 84 Div would be responsible for the actual "lay back" defences in the Hochwald, while 15 Pz Gr Div and odd units of 8 Para Div guarded the south-western approaches to Xanten. The area of Weeze, which 53 (W.) Div was at present containing, was held by 7 Para Div with some assortments from 2 Para Div. At Afferden, 52 (L.) Div was confronted by 180 Div together with some members of 190 Div, the bulk of which remained, presumably, in reserve near Geldern. (4/Sum C.I.G.S./2/6, C.I.G.S. Summary No. 265, Map "A", 25 Feb 45)

THE REGROUPING AND PLAN

10. For the new attack a regrouping was necessary, and by 2300 hours, 25 Feb, the following allocation of formations had resulted:

30 Brit Corps (Lt-Gen B.G. Horrocks)
Gds Armd Div
6 Gds Armd Bde
8 Armd Bde
34 Armd Bde
3 Brit Div
15 (S.) Div (who came into army reserve on relief
by 3 Brit Div on 26 Feb)
51 (H.) Div
52 (L.) Div
53 (W.) Div

2 Cdn Corps (Lt-Gen G.G. Simonds)
4 Cdn Armd Div
11 Armd Div
2 Cdn Armd Bde
3 Cdn Inf Bde
43 Inf Div
2 Cdn A.G.R.A.

This was accompanied by a corresponding re-distribution of units of 79 Armd Div. Meanwhile, the inter-corps boundary was adjusted from Udem to the south-east, bringing the right of 2 Cdn Corps to just east of Kervenheim (9938) to inclusive Sonsbeck (0535) (Operation "VERITABLE", Section 18, paras 105 and 106).

11. "BLOCKBUSTER" was to be carried out in four phases. In the first phase, 2 Cdn Inf Div would attack at H Hour, with two regiments of 2 Cdn Armd Bde travelling at tank speed to seize the high ground and escarpment south of Calcar. The main weight of the assault was to be carried out by 6 Cdn Inf Bde with a supporting attack by 5 Cdn Inf Bde in order to broaden the base. At the same time, on the right, one battalion of 8 Cdn Inf Bde, with one armoured squadron moving at infantry pace, would position itself astride the road Calcar - Udem in the area north-west of Steeg (9845). At the conclusion of this phase it was appreciated that 4 Cdn Inf Bde would be pinched out. The second phase would then commence with the two remaining battalions of 8 Cdn Inf Bde attacking on the right to capture the line of the road from the junction south-west of Sport Pl to inclusive Keppeln (9844). Coinciding with this attack, 4 Cdn Armd Div's Armoured Brigade battle group, consisting of two infantry battalions and two armoured regiments, would then push south between 2 and 3 Cdn Divs to establish themselves on a line exclusive Keppeln to the road near Husmanns. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army, February 1945: Appces BB - JJ, No. 114, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", Outline Plan 24 Feb 45) (See Appx "A".)

12. Phase III would be put into operation at a time to be decided by the Divisional Commanders concerned. 3 Cdn Inf Div was to pass 9 Cdn Inf Bde through to assault Udem. 4 Cdn Armd Div would strike south again to seize the high ground directly north-east of Udem, while 4 Cdn Inf Bde cut in behind 6 Cdn Inf Bde areas to take over the ground vacated by 4 Cdn Armd Div's battle group. 11 Armd Div would now come into the battle picture west of Udem by moving forward, conforming with 9 Cdn Inf Bde's progress and be in readiness to commit itself to the fourth phase. This last phase called for 11 Armd Div

to by-pass Udem to the south-west and advance on the axis Udem - Sonsbeck (0535) and the high ground immediately north-east of Sonsbeck, leaving a firm base on the Gochfort feature (0040 - 0039). 3 Cdn Inf Div would then follow up the advance of 11 Armd Div by leap-frogging brigades by battalions along the line of the River Grossley, the object being eventually to relieve 11 Armd Div at Sonsbeck. Simultaneously, the Infantry Brigade Battle Group from 4 Cdn Armd Div would go forward over the ridge east of Udem and seize positions astride the railway line (0340 - 0440) in the region of the gap between the Hochwald and Balberger Wald. At this time 2 Cdn Inf Div, while retaining one brigade on the hills south of Calcar and one on 4 Bde's objective for Phase II, would pass the third brigade through to relieve the elements of 4 Armd Div holding the high ground east of Udem, who would themselves exploit eastwards across the valley. On the northern flank which 43 (W.) Div was to protect, 214 Inf Bde was to relieve one of 2 Cdn Inf Div's brigades on the Calcar feature on the afternoon of D Day. (Ibid)

13. Regarding exploitation, no forecast was possible, but alternatives were suggested, first, that 4 Cdn Armd Div might be directed on Xanten, and 11 Armd Div on Menzelen (1636) and the Wesel crossing places; a second possibility was that both armoured formations could be thrown forward to Xanten, when 11 Armd Div might turn south-east towards Menzelen. Lastly, if 4 Cdn Armd Div were held up after the fourth phase, 11 Armd Div would be directed towards Xanten while the Canadian armour cut across its rear and struck for Menzelen as soon as an opportunity presented itself. (Ibid)

14. Apart from air support, a gigantic artillery programme was to back up the operation. For the first phase a barrage of twelve field regiments, six medium and three heavy regiments, moving at tank pace, would be fired, while the effort by 3 Cdn Inf Div would go in behind a similar shoot from seven field and two medium regiments at infantry pace. During the second and third phases, six field regiments, four 5.5-in and one 4.5-in regiments were to provide the bombardment for the advance of 4 Cdn Armd Div, and concentrations would be available on call if any enemy were still active between 2 Cdn Inf Div's forward positions and 4 Cdn Armd Div's start line. For 3 Cdn Inf Div, the barrage would consist of nine field regiments and six heavy batteries at infantry pace, with extra concentrations on call should the enemy's guns at Udem interfere. For the further advance of the armoured divisions in Phase IV, each division was to have the support of three field regiments and five medium (including one 4.5-in) regiments. The counter-battery resources throughout the attack consisted of twelve medium regiments, two 155-mm batteries, one regiment of H.A.A. and six batteries of 7.2-in howitzers. (Ibid, paras 1-4)

1/200
2: 1/200

15. The proposed air plan in direct support of the operation provided 24 specified targets (of which Nos. 1 to 18 were for fighter bombers) in the path of the advance. Targets 1, 2 and 3 were on call, and they centred on the crossroads south of Etoshhof (0146), the Todtenhugel feature (0045) and the village of Kirsell (0043). Targets 4, 8, 7, 6 and 5 inclusive ran from Udem in a curve along the ridge east and north of the town in that area. No. 4 was Udem, No. 8 Katzen (0042), No. 7 at Point 54 (0043), No. 6 Pauls (0044) and No. 5 was the bare hill east of Thulskath (0145). The bombing of targets 4 to 8 was to be carried out before Phase III, but they would remain on call again thereafter. Targets 9, 10 and 11 were the Gochfort feature (0011) and the two small hills directly to the north-west. The attack on these targets would be over by 1100 hours after which time they would be on call for 11 Cdn Armd Div. Targets 12, 13 and 14 were "beat-up" areas for

003.9

fighters along the edges of the scattered woodlands north-west of Udemerbruch (0240). Areas 15, 16, 17 and 18 were also fighter bomber tasks. (Ibid)

0039
16. Target 15 took in the eastern slope of the ridge east of Udem from Gochfort (0011) and followed the pattern of the road through Rosmannshof (0142) to Hartmannshof (0244). No. 16 was the line of the dirt road from the crossroads at Bossenhof (0139) north through Rauenshof (0242) and as far as Huf (0242). Target 17 included the triangular road junction south of Udemerbruch and followed the track north to Nachtigall (0342). No. 18, tracing the western edge of the Hochwald and Balberger Wald Forest began at Drissenkath (0437) in the south and carried through Nachtigall and Schmachdarm (0343) to Godenhof (0445). These four targets were to be completed before 1400 hours but to remain on call after that time. Of the remaining targets Nos. 19 to 21 inclusive were for medium bombers using anti-personnel bombs, and ran in priority, No. 19 before 1100 hours, No. 20 before 1200 hours, while targets 22 to 24 were interdiction targets in order 23, 24, 22, No. 23 on Marienbaum and No. 24 on Sonsbeck. These would be carried out at any time during D Day, while No. 22 at Kehrum (0346) was due to be completed before 1500 hours (AEF: 45/2 Cdn Corps/S/H, Docket 11: Trace of Proposed Plan of "BLOCKBUSTER").

THE GENERAL SITUATION

17. Meanwhile as 2 Cdn Corps planned and regrouped itself for the coming offensive, on 23 Feb, Ninth U.S. Army to the south launched its long delayed Operation "GRENADE" and swept across the Roer River between Roermond and Julich. By the afternoon of 24 Feb, 22 battalions had crossed the water barrier and some 11 bridges of various types were established over the river. The build-up on this front proceeded at a fast pace, and by 26 Feb the line Oberemdt (1363) - Opherten (0868) - Holzweiler (0673) - Venrath (0477) and Erhelenz (0177) had been reached by XIX and XIII U.S. Corps, while XVI U.S. Corps, the left flanking formation, had seized Gladbach (9378). So far 5800 prisoners had been taken in this operation which had originally been scheduled to coincide with the offensive by First Cdn Army 13 days before. (Operation "VERITABLE", Section 18, paras 111, 112). However, as General Crerar stated later:

The resultant delay of thirteen days had served to emphasize the weight and importance of our operation through the Reichswald and encouraged the enemy to commit a very large proportion of his best troops to withstand our advance. He had done this only by denuding his front to the south and thus produced one of the most seriously adverse features of the German position.

(General Crerar's Dispatch,
5 Apr 45)

18. In the area between 2 Cdn Corps and the Ninth Army's offensive, 30 Brit Corps, under Lt-Gen Horrocks, was thrusting south and east from its zig-zag line beyond the battered town of Goch. While on the extreme right in positions bordering the Maas River, 52 (L.) Div attempted to advance eastwards across the front held by 32 Gds Bde, 51 (H.) Div struck south-westwards from Goch to link up with them, at the same time keeping pace with 53 (W.) Div who were attacking Weeze. On the left of 53 (W.) Div, 15 (S.) Div made steady but small gains towards the road joining Cleve and Udem. Other forces from Gds Armd Div filled in the gap between 15 (S.) Div

and 9 Cdn Inf Bde some 3000 yards north-west of Keppeln. The task of capturing Weeze, however, was not easy. The initial assault by 160 Bde, which began at 0600 hours, 24 Feb, met extremely strong opposition, although by nightfall Housenhof (9241) and Host (9340) were clear, and a foothold had been obtained in Rottum (9339). Finally, in view of the heavy counter-attacks and large losses in tanks, it became clear that there was little chance of breaking through from the north, and 53 (W.) Div was ordered to contain the objective. Lt-Gen Horrocks now ordered 53 (W.) Div not to try to enter the town until the local situation had eased off, for the time was ripe for Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" to commence, and artillery of 30 Brit Corps would not be available, the attack by 2 Cdn Corps having priority in fire support.* And so the drive on Weeze was halted temporarily some 2000 yards short of the town (Operation "VERITABLE", Section 18, paras 107 and 108).

19. While Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" was being carried out, Ninth U.S. Army was to continue its drive from the south, and 30 Corps would exert every means to advance southwards to make contact with the American formations.* 30 Corps' attack was to be in the form of a subsidiary operation. 53 Div would attempt on 24 Feb to capture Weeze and the high ground to the south-east. On 26 Feb, 3 Brit Inf Div would advance on Kervenheim and Winnekendonk and if the progress presented a favourable opportunity, Gds Armd Div might be pushed through. Up until 26 Feb our air forces had so far been faced with bad weather conditions. No flying had been possible on 23 Feb. On 24 Feb, medium and heavy bombers of No. 2 Group, R.A.F., attacked Rheinberg with 43 aircraft, while an additional 45 planes rained down their loads on Rees. On that day, 8th U.S.A.A.F. also sent out 70 aircraft to destroy the bridge at Wesel, but without success. 25 Feb was again a day of small air effort, and close support was almost impossible although a few pre-arranged targets, such as the church at Weeze, were successfully dealt with, and an enemy counter-attack which was seen to be forming up north of Weeze was completely smashed by rocket-firing Typhoons. Hence it became the object of honest prayer on all levels that the weather would clear for 2 Cdn Corps' operation (Ibid, Section 18, paras 113 and 114).

20. By the evening of 25 Feb, the considerable regrouping which the plan entailed had been accomplished. 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs had changed over, putting 3 Div on the right and 2 Div on the left, each with one brigade up. 4 Cdn Armd Div had already moved into the area of Cleve, and 11 Armd Div was moving towards the north-eastern edge of the Reichswald forest. On a smaller level "A" and "B" Sqns of 10 Cdn Armd Regt were withdrawn to refit, and "C" Sqn took over the counter-attack role with 4 Cdn Inf Bde who held the forward positions of 2 Cdn Inf Div. 27 Cdn Armd Regt now reverted to brigade command from 3 Cdn Inf Div, and 6 Cdn Armd Regt went under command that division and placed one squadron forward with 9 Cdn Inf Bde (AEF: 45/2 Cdn Armd Bde/C/F, Report on Ops by 2 Cdn Armd Bde, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", para 2).

21. Everything was now ready for the battle. At the southern extremity bordering on the Maas River near Afferden (8038), 52 (L.) Div faced west across the river to positions held by Second British Army, and south. 156, 155 and 157 Bdes lined the river in that order from the area of Zwarte Heide (8041) to Rempeld (8238) in the south. The Lowlanders' line ran north from here along the edge of the Broedensbosch Woods towards Heikamp (8340), thence eastwards in a backward curve towards Vrij (8541) and Schanz (8641) where 32 Gds Armd Bde held its ground. Further to the west, 51 (H.) Div controlled the areas of Broeckelt (8842), Gaesdonk (8840) and Hulm (9040) with outposts running south to Boyenhof (8839). East of Hulm the positions of 53 (W.) Div slung down in a steady arch towards

* See para 111 below, and Appx "B".

Weeze and took in the village of Rottum (9239). From this village the forward line went north-eastwards past the Schl Kalbeck woods (9442) through which 3 Brit Div was preparing to advance. North of 3 Brit Div in the Halvenboom sector, 5 Gds Bde held positions which linked them with 9 Cdn Inf Bde, whose own front extended from Oldbershof (9647) to Molk (9747). Here 9 Cdn Inf Bde's left flank linked up with 4 Cdn Inf Bde whose positions presented a strong front in a northerly direction to the woods north-east of Moyland, where 129 Bde of 43 Div took up the responsibility of an area which included Huisderden (9655) and Wirrtegen (9557). It was from this line that First Cdn Army would leap forward on the morning of 26 Feb (4 Summ C.I.G.S./2/6, W.O. Summaries, North-West France, No. 266, 26 Feb 45, Map "A" and Ibid, No. 265 Map "A", 25 Feb 45).

22. The detailed disposition of 2 Cdn Corps was as follows: On the right flank north of 5 Gds Bde, 9 Cdn Inf Bde held the area of Verkalt (9646 - 9746), with on the right Nth N.S. Highrs controlling the villages of Hoffmanshof (9746), Gottern (9746), Faubenhof (9746), Brunshof (9646) facing the enemy, and Am Lindschen (9546), Schwarzen (9646) and Kranenbergshof (9646) to the right and rear (W.D., R.H.L.I., February 1945: Appx 117, Trace Locations, 24 Feb 45). On the left, H.L.I. of C. held Ebben (9746), the farmhouses along the road to the west and the scattered buildings to the north-west of Point 37 (966473). The reserve battalion, S.D. & G. Highrs, was on the rising ground just west of the main crossroads (962488) at Louisendorf (Ibid). In the centre, 4 Cdn Inf Bde held a line from the crossroads (982470) north-east of Ebben to Schroanenhof (986476) with R.H.L.I., whose rear positions were firm on the Goch - Calcar road for some 500 yards each side of Molk (977475) (Ibid).

23. The responsibility of the terrain from the region of Schroanenhof north and west to Gr Heseler Feld (9749) belonged to R. Regt C. with under command two companies R. de Mais, of which one company was in position at the farm (969499) 1000 yards west of Roskamp (978497). 4 Cdn Inf Bde's reserve battalion, the Essex Scot, lay in the slit trenches to the south-west of R. Regt C. and directly in the rear of R.H.L.I. (Ibid). The left was secure in the care of 129 Brit Inf Bde. Flanking 4 Cdn Inf Bde's sector, 5 Wilts held the hamlets of Rosenboom (9750), Bramerskath (9750), Hufshe (9750) and Langehorst (9650) as well as the woods between and south of the two last named places. Moyland and the high ground astride the road to the south were firmly in the hands of 4 Wilts, while 4 Som L.I. was consolidated in a good position astride the main road to Bedburg just north of the lake (9551) (Ibid). In close attendance to these forward positions were elements of 2 Cdn Armd Bde in a supporting role (W.D., 10 Cdn Armd Regt, 24 Feb 45; W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, February 1945: Appx 1, Sitreps and Messages, 24 Feb 45, p.3, 25 Feb 45, p.2).

THE DIVISIONAL PLANS

24. In accordance with the Corps Commander's plans, 2 Cdn Inf Div now subdivided and co-ordinated its own efforts, which included the seizing of the high ground south of Calcar by 6 and 5 Cdn Inf Bdes in the first phase, the passing through of 4 Cdn Inf Bde to the objective gained by 4 Cdn Armd Div in Phase II, and the follow-up in the fourth phase by 5 Cdn Inf Bde (upon relief by 43 (W.) Div) to a firm base in the area of Nachtigall with the later object of relieving 4 Cdn Armd Div in the gap between the Hochwald and the Balberger Wald. From the start of the operation Calg Highrs and one squadron 10 Cdn Armd Regt were to form the divisional reserve and hold themselves in readiness in the area north of Molk (9649).

4 Cdn Inf Bde would form a firm base in its present position through which the main assault would be launched, while 43 (W.) Div, whose primary task was to protect the left flank of 2 Cdn Inf Div, was to be ready to relieve the brigades of that division as the battle progressed.

25. The plan for the divisional reconnaissance units was formed to coincide with the foregoing phases. In the first phase, one squadron 8 Cdn Recce Regt was to probe forward on the axis Moyland - Calcar, in order to open the proposed "Emerald" route should the enemy withdraw from Calcar under the assault. Two further tasks were assigned; to take place during the next three phases. The first of these would be to proceed from Calcar to Xanten in concert with the operation, but not to become heavily committed. The second task was to provide flank protection along the axis of Delsenhof (0244) - Schmachdarm (0343) for 5 Cdn Inf Bde as soon as this formation moved forward to follow up 4 Cdn Armd Div. Furthermore, if the situation permitted, reconnaissance would be carried out up the valley towards Kehrum (0346). 2 Cdn Inf Div B.C.E. would open up the divisional axis known as "Onyx" route and develop "Emerald" route towards Calcar and through it if the town fell. For its main attack on the high ground south of Calcar, 6 Cdn Inf Bde was to have under command the following troops: One company 10 Cdn Fd Amb, and in support:

- 27 Cdn Armd Regt
- 10 Cdn Armd Regt less one sqn
- One Tp "C" Sqn 22 Dgns (flails) (remainder of sqn on call if required)
- Half squadron 141 R.A.C. (crocodiles)
- 1 Cdn Armd Carrier Regt (kangaroos)
- 23 A.Tk Bty
- 33 S.P. A.Tk Bty
- 11 Cdn Fd Coy
- One M.M.G. company, Tor Scot R. (M.G.)
- Heavy mortar company, Tor Scot R. (M.G.)
- Air Sp Contact Car

(W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army,
February 1945: Appx 114, Op Instr
2 Cdn Inf Div, "BLOCKBUSTER",
24 Feb 45) (See Appx "C")

In its supporting attack to clear the woods south-east of Calcar (9849) and the position astride the Goch - Calcar road in that area, 5 Cdn Inf Bde (less Calg Highrs) would have under command one company 18 Cdn Fd Amb and in support:

- One Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt
- 23 Cdn A.Tk Bty
- One M.M.G. Coy, Tor Scot R. (M.G.)

(Ibid)

26. The intention of 3 Cdn Inf Div as governed by General Simonds' plan was to attack and destroy all the enemy in the area of Keppeln and Udem preparatory to following up 11 Brit Armd Div. The first phase consisted of an attack by one battalion of 8 Cdn Inf Bde (Q.O.R. of C.) to clear the area of Lookerhof (9845) - Steeg (9845) - Wemmershof (9946). This would complete Phase I of the Corps plan in conjunction with the attacks by 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes towards Calcar. Thereupon the remaining two battalions of 8 Bde would press the advance southwards to carry out Phase II and clear Sport Pl (9743), Bonshof (9844) and Keppeln. On completion of this phase, a second brigade group (9 Cdn Inf Bde) would pass through

to capture Udem. For Phases I and II, 8 Cdn Inf Bde would have under command:

Two platoons "D" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.)
"B" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.)
52 Cdn A.Tk Bty
One company 22 Cdn Fd Amb.

and in support:

Two squadrons 6 Cdn Armd Regt
Two platoons "D" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.)
"A" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.)
56 (S.P.) Cdn A.Tk Bty
Two sections 16 Cdn Fd Coy

(W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army,
February 1945: Appces BB-JJ, 3 Cdn
Inf Div Ops Instr No. 13, 24 Feb 45)
(See Appx "D")

27. During Phase III 9 Cdn Inf Bde would have under command:

Two platoons "D" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.)
"C" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.)
94 Cdn A.Tk Bty
One company 23 Cdn Fd Amb

and in support:

One armoured regiment, 2 Cdn Armd Bde
One troop 284 Aslt Sqn R.E. (A.Vs.R.E.)
Two platoons "D" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.)
"B" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.)
Two sections 18 Cdn Fd Coy

7 Cdn Recce Regt were to remain in divisional reserve at Headquarters 3 Cdn Inf Div, while 7 Cdn Inf Bde was allotted tasks with a view to further operations after Phase III. The first of these was to hold the high ground east of Udem with under command:

One platoon "D" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.)
"A" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.)
4 Cdn A.Tk Bty
One company 14 Cdn Fd Amb

and in support:

One Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt

the second task being to protect the southern flank of 11 Armd Div from Udem to Sonsbeck along the line of the River Grosse Ley. In rear of the advance, but closely following up as the objectives were gained, 3 Cdn Inf Div R.C.E., were to maintain and develop the brigade axis and such routes as operations permitted (Ibid).

28. For its role in Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", 4 Cdn Armd Div was split up into two main forces, "Tiger" Group under Brigadier R.W. Moncel, and "Lion" Group, commanded by Brigadier J.C. Jefferson. "Tiger" Group consisted of 4 Cdn Armd Bde in

full, with under command:

Linc & Wellb R.
A. & S.H. of C.
One battery 5 Cdn A.Tk Regt
One squadron 22 Dgns

and in support:

Two troops 141 R.H.C. (crocodiles)
One troop A.V.R.E.
24 Ram Towers from 2 Cdn Corps A.Tk Regt

"Lion" Group would be made up of:

29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt
Alq R.
10 Cdn Indep M.G. Coy
One battery 5 Cdn A.Tk (S.P.)

and under command:

One squadron 22 Dgns
Two troops 141 R.A.C. (crocodiles)
Three troops A.V.R.E.

4 Cdn Armd Div's operation was broken up into phases relative to the Corps plan. Moving up during Phase I "Tiger" Group would carry out Phases II and III of the Corps' intention with "Lion" Group in reserve, while "Lion" Group was to be responsible for Phase IV. "Tiger" Group, which was to be in turn split up into five separate forces, would go into action as soon as 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs had completed the first phase. They were to pass through and occupy the general line of high ground running west and east of Totdenhugel (0045), leaving infantry groups at key points until elements of 2 Div were able to occupy them during the follow-up. As soon as 2 Cdn Inf Div relieved 4 Cdn Armd Div on its first objective, the armoured division would pass on to the south-east to occupy the hills north and east of Udem as 3 Cdn Inf Div invested the town. On completion of Phase III "Lion" Group would lunge forward to seize the gap between the Hochwald and the Balberger Wald. Finally, as the infantry units of "Tiger" Group became available they would pass to command of "Lion" Group to enable the latter to strike out south-east and east, while "Tiger" Group would also advance eastwards to strengthen the Hochwald position. (AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II, Folio 1, G.S. Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", Special Report 2CC/1) (See Appx "E")

29. 11 Brit Armd Div, which would be working its way up gradually on the right of 3 Cdn Inf Div during the first two phases, was to pass to the south-west of Udem as soon as the attack on the town started. The intention for this formation was to seize the high ground north of Sonsbeck and then be prepared to exploit eastwards to Xanten or to the Rhine at Wesel. Its role was to be carried out in three phases under the following groupings:

(a) 4 Armd Bde	Greys
	44 R. Tks
	2 K.R.R.C.
	4 K.S.L.I.
	"B" Sqn 22 Dgns (Flails)
	One troop 81 Aslt Sqn R.E.
	One platoon 2 Indep M.G. Coy
	One section 11 Armd Div Pro

(b) 159 Inf Bde 15/19 H.
3/4 C.L.Y.
1 Herefords
3 Mon
Half squadron 141 R.A.C. (Crocodiles)
(W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army,
February 1945: Appx HH, 11 Armd
Div O.O. No. 17, 24 Feb 45)
(See Appx "F")

30. In the event of considerable armoured exploitation being possible, 3/4 C.L.Y. was to be prepared to revert to command of 4 Armd Bde and similarly, 4 K.S.L.I. to command of 159 Inf Bde and 15/19 Hussars to Div Tps. At the onset 4 Armd Bde would pass through south of Udem and establish themselves on the high ground about Gochfortzberg (0039). From this firm position armoured patrols would be sent forward to the line of the road Krebbershof (0336) - Udemerbruch (0240). The second phase involved the seizing of the high ground north of Sonsbeck by either brigade and the breaching of the defence line running south and south-east from Udemerbruch. At this time, while whichever brigade was free would go on to capture Sonsbeck, a battalion of 3 Cdn Inf Div which should at this stage be moving up in the rear of the armour and taking over firm bases and right flank protection, would relieve the armoured brigade on the high ground Gochfortzberg (0039). On completion of the third phase, 11 Armd Div would exploit wherever possible. The divisional reconnaissance regiment (Inns of Court) was to remain concentrated near 11 Armd Div Headquarters until called forward (Ibid).

31. The task assigned to 43 (W.) Div was to protect the left flank of 2 Cdn Corps' advance and to take over the ground won in the early stages by 2 Cdn Inf Div.

129 Inf Bde would remain deployed with one battalion ready to leapfrog forward to the escarpment south of Calcar.

214 Inf Bde would relieve 5 Cdn Inf Bde on its forward objective on the Corps Commander's order and 130 Inf Bde was to remain in reserve.

It was probable that as the advance progressed, 129 and 214 Bdes of 43 (W.) Div would have the task of clearing the town of Calcar and the ground between the Rhine and the Hochwald feature. 130 Bde, which had suffered so heavily during "VERITABLE" would be used solely to hold the northern flank or to take over captured ground (Ibid: Appx II, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", 0.988, 24 Feb 45, Appx "A", para 6). (See Appx "G")

32. On 25 Feb, Lt-Gen Crerar, sensing that the requirements for "BLOCKBUSTER" might not be fulfilled in time, passed on the following directive to his Corps Commanders:

1. In view of the determined enemy resistance 24/25 Feb, North of WEEZE, and consequent inability of 53 (W.) Inf Div firmly to secure that town before Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" by 2 Canadian Corps commences, it will be necessary to reconsider the draft basic plan outlined to you in my memorandum of yesterday - in particular the proposals contained in para 5. The importance of 30 Corps clearing the WELL - WEEZE road at an early date, in order

that the WANSSUM - WELL bridge may be constructed, entails this reconsideration. On the above basis, the following Army plan will be discussed at our meeting this afternoon.

2. If possible, 2 Canadian Corps will complete "BLOCKBUSTER" as planned, and firmly secure the general line KERVENHEIM - SONSBECK - XANTEN. It will then clean up all enemy remaining between this line and the RHINE (see para 4 of yesterday's memo).*
3. If by D Plus 1 it is obvious that to complete "BLOCKBUSTER" a considerable regrouping, and a further deliberate attack, is required, then a "partial" "BLOCKBUSTER" will terminate the operation - i.e., the completion of Phase III and the securing of the high ground East of the CALCAR - UDEM road.
4. Throughout either "complete" or "partial" "BLOCKBUSTER", the principal responsibility of 30 Corps will be to secure the right (southern and western) flank of 2 Canadian Corps against enemy intervention, by keeping its left shoulder well up and to exploit any favourable situations (see para 3 of yesterday's memo).

(G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0-7/11, Directive to Corps Comds 25 Feb 45)

33. Owing to the wet condition of the ground, the forming up was not a simple procedure. It began after dark, 25/26 Feb, and despite some very heavy shelling on the rather obvious yet only available F.U.P., the procedure went through in a satisfactory manner (AEF: 45/6 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket 1, Memo of Interview No. 2CD/6, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", Role of 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Feb 45, Account given by Brigadier R.H. Keebler, C.B.E., D.S.O., E.D., Comd 6 Cdn Inf Bde to Historical Officer, 2 Cdn Inf Div, 16 Mar 45). A further measure of discomfort and possible disarrangement occurred when an enemy counter attack developed against the positions of R.H.L.I. The trouble began gradually; at about 1930 hours (25 Feb) the enemy laid smoke across the front of R.H.L.I.; this was the first sign. At about 2100 hours an enemy S.P. gun appeared. This vehicle had approached the Hamilton unit lines unobserved and opened fire quickly, knocked out the anti-tank gun attached to "D" Coy, and disappeared before our troops could take any counter action. (W.D., R.H.L.I., 26 Feb 45)

34. There now followed a quiet period during which the enemy was evidently preparing for the assault which came in against "D" Coy R.H.L.I. (commanded by Major E.L. Froggett) in the early hours of the morning (Tbid; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, February 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 25 Feb 45, Serial 23, 26 Feb 45, Serial 6). It was a serious moment indeed, for the ground which the Hamilton men held was vitally important as a start line for the large scale operation which was about to begin. The enemy threw in his infantry supported by about six tanks, and a fierce engagement followed during which "D" Coy R.H.L.I., was heavily pressed, but the troops rose to the occasion nobly and after some tense moments, during which even Brigade Headquarters considered the situation critical, drove off the attackers with the aid of well directed artillery and small arms fire which cost the enemy heavy losses (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 26 Feb 45, Serials 8 and 10; W.D., R.H.L.I., 26 Feb 45).

* See Appx "B".

"BLOCKBUSTER" GOES IN - 26 FEB 45

35. The start line was now secure; at 0345 hours the guns belched forth their concentrations of high explosive, to blast everything in the path of the advance, and at 0430 hours "BLOCKBUSTER" commenced. Under the beams of four searchlights which provided artificial moonlight, 2 Cdn Inf Div went forward, 5 Bde on the left, 6 Bde on the right (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 26 Feb 45, Serials 11 and 16; AEF: 45/2 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D, Docket IV, Folio 17, Report on Ops by 2 Cdn Armd Bde, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", p.3). 6 Cdn Inf Bde crossed the start line in the following formation: on the right "A" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt and Camerons of C. in three columns, the tanks leading, followed by the infantry in Kangaroos of 1 Cdn Carrier Regt. On the left, "B" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt and S. Sask R. attacked in two columns each with one troop of tanks leading the Kangaroo-borne infantry. The centre force consisted of "A" and "B" Sqns 10 Cdn Armd Regt, who with "C" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt under command were to ferry Fus M.R. on to their objective, which included the buildings about the crossroads (984473), 1000 yards due east of Schroanenhof (9847). The objectives of the other two battalions lay further to the east. S. Sask R. was to consolidate the high ground, north, east and south of Kellerhof (005481), while Camerons of C. would occupy the ridge around Etohshof (013469), the built up area directly south of this village and the buildings along the road westwards through Fus M.R. position (Ibid).

36. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, supported by "A" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt, attacked with on the left R. de Mais who were directed on to that part of the Calcar ridge which straddled the dirt road running south-east from Rosskamp (978486). R.H.C. were to occupy the open ground east of the Calcar - Goch road - an operation which would fill in the left flank of Fus M.R., protect the rear of S. Sask R. and create a strong flank facing north along the crest of the ridge some 1000 yards south of Calcar itself (AEF: 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I: Memo No. 2 CD/8, "BLOCKBUSTER", Account given by Brigadier W.J. McGill, D.S.O., Comd 5 Cdn Inf Bde, to Hist Officer 2 Cdn Inf Div, 24 Mar 45). Simultaneously, directly on the right of this effort by 2 Cdn Inf Div, Q.O.R. of C. of 8 Cdn Inf Bde advanced supported by "C" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt, with the areas of Steeg (980455) and Wemmershof (989465) as the final objectives (AEF: 45/8 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II, Folio 2, Memo No. 6, Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" by Lt-Col S.M. Lett, D.S.O., O.C. Q.O.R. of C., as given to Hist Officer 3 Cdn Inf Div, 16 Mar 45).

37. On 6 Bde's front, the centre column, ferrying Fus M.R. commanded by Lt-Col J.A. Dextraze, was the first to reach its objective. This was accomplished with only slight infantry losses, but the tanks were not so lucky. One hit a mine and ten bogged down. The remainder, however, moving in a staggered line within troops so that each vehicle would make its own track, forced their way forward and arrived on the objective without trouble at approximately 0510 hours. Forty minutes afterwards what was left of the two battered squadrons of 10 Cdn Armd Regt were released and returned to concentrate as one squadron behind R. Regt C. (9748). From here one troop was despatched to support R. de Mais of 5 Cdn Inf Bde in place of "A" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt. During the day those tanks which had bogged down were recovered, and both "A" and "B" Sqns 10 Cdn Armd Regt were reformed. "C" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt stayed with Fus M.R. (Ibid). On the left, S. Sask R. and "B" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt had a more difficult time negotiating the wet ground. The two columns having crossed the start line about 200 yards apart, moved steadily behind the

barrage and encountered a good deal of machine gun and Bazooka fire. Happily no tanks were hit, although a number became completely mired in the deep mud. The rest accompanied the infantry, one troop of two tanks reaching the objective well ahead of the marching troops. The gains were consolidated by first light with the supporting armour in the centre of the position as a counter attack force. The enemy, however, had been taken completely by surprise, and there was no immediate sign of retaliation. (Ibid)

38. Camerons of C. and "A" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt also experienced some difficulties. Mines along the Calcar - Udem road and the soft terrain delayed the force, and after waiting some time for the Flails to clear a path the column moved forward again, only to find itself unable to advance when a tank became bogged in a crater and blocked the way. During the period of waiting the enemy mortared and shelled the area incessantly and it became obvious that the axis of advance must be changed. At 0600 hours, therefore, having re-formed quickly, the column swung north on the route previously used by Fus M.R. By this time the immediate artillery support had ended and tanks and infantry met considerable enemy fire as they moved on to their objective. The tanks responded nobly to the challenge and succeeded in neutralizing the opposition while Camerons of C. fought their way forward. It was at about this time that the commander of the Camerons, Lt-Col E.P. Thompson, D.S.O., was killed and his I.O. wounded by a direct hit on the Kangaroo in which they were riding (W.D., Camerons of C., 26 Feb 45).

39. By 0830 hours, while the three forward companies consolidated, the area to be occupied by the reserve company was discovered to be still in German hands. Nevertheless, Major D.M. Rodgers personally took charge of the situation and the battalion, and quickly completed the capture of all objectives. Meanwhile, though 5 Cdn Inf Bde had been fighting hard, by 0745 hours the enemy was still active in their area. The supporting tanks were urged to push on, in spite of the fact that the Germans still held the ground through which they were to pass and the squadron's strength was down to 12 tanks. A direct assault with tanks leading and supported by 12 field and eight medium guns went in at 0800 hours, and although mines and the soft ground reduced the speed of the advance, by 0830 hours the objective was seized (AEF: 45/2 Cdn Armd Bde/C/F, Docket II: Report on Op "BLOCKBUSTER", para 27).

40. The attack by 5 Cdn Inf Bde did not progress as well as its counterparts to the south. In front of R.H.C. the two right hand objectives were swept by the fast barrage which preceded 6 Cdn Inf Bde, while on the right hand objectives a slow barrage was employed to assist "C" Coy R.H.C. and "D" Coy R. de Mais to their respective positions astride the main road junction (990490). But because of the direction of the axis of 6 Cdn Inf Bde's advance, it was not possible to move this supporting fire on to the R.H.C.'s most easterly objective 600 yards north-west of Kellerhof (0048). As a result the capture of these buildings (001484) had to be planned separately later. The eastern part of R.H.C.'s area had already been reported clear of enemy, but as the right flank of the attacking column moved forward it was pinned down. Although "A" and "D" Coys were unable to advance, "D" Coy on the left secured its portion of the road on the high ground. The Commanding Officer now held "B" Coy back with a squadron of armour in case the situation should fail to improve, for it was clear that both "A" and "D" Coys must reorganize quickly if the whole Corps battle were not to be slowed down. Accordingly, a new plan was hatched. "B" Coy was ordered to by-pass the troublesome enemy position on the

north, and then pause to shoot it up while "A" Coy carried out the actual assault. "B" Coy was then to press on to the eastern objective, the crossroads (001484). This attack eventually got under way, and both positions (989482) and (001484) were cleared and consolidated by 1005 hours and 50 prisoners were gathered (AEF: 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I: Memo No. 2 CD/8, Brigadier W.S. Megill's Account).

41. Meanwhile, R. de Mais, three of whose previously defined objectives had been occupied before the actual attack started, were in action against the area of the wood junctions (987493). "D" Coy was directed towards this objective but in attempting to cross the open ground to the west met heavy fire. Later prisoners declared that this particular region had been recently reinforced from Calcar. The company was being badly mauled from all sides, and a slow infantry fight developed in such close contact with the enemy that artillery support was difficult to arrange. While this opposition was being contained, all available tanks were kept ready to assist R.H.C. who had the vital task of maintaining contact with 6 Cdn Inf Bde on the right (Ibid). At about 1020 hours as the situation cleared in front of R.H.C., first one, then two troops of tanks were shifted over to support R. de Mais, whose "B" Coy went forward under the covering fire of the armour to assault the last enemy positions. Wasp flame throwers were used against the stubborn resistance, yet it was later reported that many Germans preferred to remain in the slit trenches and be killed rather than surrender (Ibid).

3 CDN INF DIV'S FIRST V.C. - 26 FEB 45

42. Further to the south Q.O.R. of C. had an extremely rough time. The sogginess of the ground made direct tank support impossible, and the troops were compelled to cross the start line at 0440 hours without the armour. Q.O.R. of C. advanced with on the right "C" Coy; on the left "D" Coy. From the start line of the road between Hoffmanshof (974465) and Ebben (979469) "C" Coy quickly gained its first objective, the farm at Veuenbrauenshof (978462), and although a counter attack was thrown in the ground was held. On the left, "D" Coy found their task harder, but after much confused fighting in which they were assisted by elements of "B" Coy and "C" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt who had now moved into the battle, the company finally reached Mooshof. Here again, the enemy attempted to drive the Canadians off, and for a time the situation was critical (AEF: 45/8 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II: Folio 2, Memo No. 6, Lt-Col S.M. Lett's Account; W.D., Q.O.R. of C., 26 Feb 45; W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Feb 45; AEF: 45/2 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D, Docket IV: Report on Ops by 2 Cdn Armd Bde, "BLOCKBUSTER", 26 Feb 45, pp 3 and 4).

43. It was an hour of test which finally turned to one of triumph. Fighting was fierce and casualties heavy, and it was during this particular action that B.46495 Sgt Aubrey Cosens, Q.O.R. of C., won the Victoria Cross. The citation covering this glorious achievement read as follows:

In Holland, on the night of 25th/26th February 1945, the 1st Battalion, The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, launched an attack on the Hamlet of Mooshof, to capture ground which was considered essential for the successful development of future operations.

Sergeant Cosens' platoon, with two tanks in support, attacked enemy strongpoints in three farm buildings, but were twice beaten back by fanatical enemy

resistance and then fiercely counter-attacked, during which time the platoon suffered heavy casualties and the platoon commander was killed.

Sergeant Cosens at once assumed command of the only other four survivors of his platoon, whom he placed in a position to give him covering fire, while he himself ran across open ground under heavy mortar and shell fire to the one remaining tank, where, regardless of danger, he took up an exposed place in front of the turret and directed its fire.

After a further enemy counter-attack had been repulsed, Sergeant Cosens ordered the tank to attack the farm buildings, while the four survivors of his platoon followed in close support. After the tank had rammed the first building, he entered it alone, killing several of the defenders and taking the rest prisoner.

Single-handed he then entered the second and third buildings and personally killed or captured all the occupants, although under intense machine gun and small arms fire. Just after the successful reduction of these important enemy strongpoints, Sergeant Cosens was shot through the head by an enemy sniper and died almost instantly.

The outstanding gallantry, initiative and determined leadership of this brave NCO, who himself killed at least twenty of the enemy and took an equal number of prisoners, resulted in the capture of a position which was vital to the success of the future operations of the Brigade.

(Overseas R.O. No. 5824,
23 May 45)

This was the first award of its kind to go to 3 Cdn Inf Div.

44. By 0900 hours, all the objectives for Phase I had been reached with the exception of one, that of Q.O.R. of C. whose "A" Coy had now come up to resume the advance against stiff resistance. Yet despite the fact that the first phase was not fully completed, the remaining battalions of 8 Cdn Inf Bde were ordered to begin their advance. At about the same time to the north, the objectives of 2 Cdn Inf Div were sufficiently under control to enable 4 Cdn Armd Div to commence operations, and they began to pass through. This they did amid some confusion, for the advancing armour mistook some of 2 Cdn Inf Div's troops for the enemy and fired on them. By 0915 hours, however, "Tiger" Group of 4 Cdn Armd Div was on its start line and ready to move forward. This force was broken down into these five individual battle groups:

"Snuff" Force	22 Cdn Armd Regt (less one sqn)
Comd - Lt-Col	2 Corps A. & S.H. of C.
H.A. Smith,	One troop Flails
D.S.O., M.C.	One troop Crusader Towers (5 Cdn A.Tk Regt)
"Gerry" Force	28 Cdn Armd Regt (less one sqn)
Comd - Lt-Col	Two companies, Linc & Welld R.
G. Chubb,	One troop Flails
D.S.O.	24 Ram Towers (2 Cdn Corps A.Tk Regt)

60/76 1241-

<u>"Jock" Force</u>	A. & S.H. of C. (less two companies)
Comd - Lt-Col	One squadron 22 Cdn Armd Regt
F.E. Wigle,	One troop A.Tk (S.P.)
D.S.O., O.B.E.	One troop Crocodiles
<u>"Smith" Force</u>	21 Cdn Armd Regt
Comd - Lt-Col	Lake Sup R. (Mot)
E. Smith,	One troop Crocodiles
D.S.O.	One troop A.Tk (S.P.)
<u>"Cole" Force</u>	Linc & Wellld R. (less two companies)
Comd - Lt-Col	One squadron, 28 Cdn Armd Regt
R.C. Coleman	One troop A.Tk (S.P.)
D.S.O., M.C.	One troop Crocodiles

"Tiger" Group was commanded by Brigadier R.W. Moncell, D.S.O., O.B.E.

45. "Tiger" Group formed up near the crossroads east of Schroanenhof, and at approximately 1015 hours, after considerable trouble caused mainly by the heavy going, the start line (a true line running east to west through M.R. 996477) was crossed. Movement was slow and difficult on the muddy ground, but the groups managed to work their way forward with "Snuff" and "Gerry" Forces leading on the right and left respectively. "Jerry" Force's effort was made first to the south-east, then south towards Todtenhugel, while "Snuff" Force moved directly south in the direction of Steeg. The enemy put up a fight all along the routes, knocking out several tanks with Panzerfausts and Bazookas, but the armour gradually overran the German's forward positions, gathering in large batches of prisoners. The advance south continued with the remaining forces ("Jock" and "Cole"), mopping up in the wake of the tanks. By 1315 hours both "Cole" and "Jerry" Forces had reached their first objectives; "Jock" and "Smith" groups had also gained valuable ground.

46. As the hours passed further advances were made by "Jock" and "Cole" Forces, and by 1550 hours Lt-Col Chubb's infantry and tanks were firm in the area north of New Louisendorf (0045) with Lt-Col Coleman's troops approaching the hamlet of Spielfhof (0044). Both groups had suffered considerable casualties in infantry and tanks from the mortar and shell fire. At about the same time "Snuff" Force, whose commander, Lt-Col Smith, had been badly wounded, was establishing strongpoints to the north-east of Heibauershof (9946) and Lt-Col Wigle's "Jock" Column, having reached Michelshof (9945) was preparing to advance on Fallingshof (9944). "Smith" Force was hanging back around the crossroads south-east of Etohshof prior to taking on the final objective of 4 Cdn Armd Div's phase. This task, which called for the consolidation of the ridge north-east of Udem began at 1750 hours. (AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II; G.S. Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER"; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 26 Feb 45; W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 26 Feb 45; W.Ds., 21, 22 and 28 Cdn Armd Regts, A. & S.H. of C., Linc & Wellld R., Lake Sup R. (Mot), 26 Feb 45)

47. In the meantime on the right and to the south, 3 Cdn Inf Div was forging ahead to complete its part of Phases I and II of the Corps plan. Shortly after Mooshof fell, Q.O.R. of C. launched "A" Coy against the area of the road junction (983459) 300 yards north-east of Lookerhof and "B" Coy was moved up to assist "D" Coy in the capture of the houses which lined the road just west of Loefhof (988465) (AEF: 45/8 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II: Folio 11, Account of "BLOCKBUSTER" by Lt-Col S.M. Lett, D.S.O., O.C. Q.O.R. of C. as given to Hist Officer 3 Cdn Inf Div, 16 Mar 45). This operation, however, did not progress so well,

for at about 1100 hours, even though Q.O.R. of C. were still not on their objectives, the supporting tanks of "C" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt were withdrawn and despatched to the aid of N. Shore R. (W.D., 6 Cdn Armd Regt, February 1945: Appx 20, Report on Ops "C" Sqn, 26 Feb 45).

48. On arrival at Headquarters N. Shore R., the O.C. "C" Sqn was put into the picture. At 0845 hours "B" and "C" Coys N. Shore R. had begun an attack, but after advancing some 800 yards ran into heavy mortar and machine gun fire. The troops, not being able to move, were forced to dig in. Armoured support was called for, but it was not available and the companies had to rely upon the artillery to contain the opposition, while a request was made to Q.O.R. of C. for what tanks they could spare. Now that the required support was here a pause was allowed to form a new plan of attack (AEF: 45/8 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II, Folio 2, Attack on Keppeln by N. Shore R., 26 Feb 45).

49. To the right of N. Shore R., R. de Chaud, who had also crossed the start line at 0845 hours, was meeting varying opposition. The attack commenced with "A" and "B" Coys moving forward on the left and right, following closely on the line of artillery fire. "A" Coy seized its first objective, the area of Felemannshof (9644), but "B" Coy ran into a hidden enemy post some 400 yards in front of its objective at the buildings (965445) to the west. An artillery concentration was called on the troublesome nest, and this resulted in its capture. The men now pressed on to "B" Coy's final objective, the crossroads (965445) 500 yards to the south-east where they consolidated at about 1000 hours. On the left flank resistance against "A" Coy was stiffer, and no sooner had Felemannshof been cleared at the point of the bayonet than the company was pinned down by heavy fire from Keppeln. This flanking fire from the N. Shore R.'s objective was creating considerable confusion among the French Canadian troops, while at the same time fire from Hollen (9744) on which "A" Coy was to firm up was the cause of some aggravation to N. Shore R. (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Feb 45).

50. Everything now depended on N. Shore R.'s renewed effort against Keppeln, and once the pressure on "A" Coy R. de Chaud was relieved "C" Coy would be able to pass through to Bonshof. The right flank, however, was in a good state and "D" Coy passed through "B" Coy to take on the farm directly north-east of Sport Pl. The troops pushed on to within 100 yards of the buildings (975440) and here a somewhat costly misunderstanding took place. What appeared to be a white flag was seen in the enemy position, and mistaking this for a sign of surrender, the company relaxed its watchfulness. A dear lesson followed, for three Panther tanks suddenly appeared and machine gunned the unbalanced troops, causing heavy casualties and forcing a withdrawal to "B" Coy's first position (965445) (AEF: 45/8 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II: Folio 3, Memorandum No. 7, Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" given by Major F.J. L'Esperance, 2 i/c R. de Chaud, to Hist Officer 3 Cdn Inf Div, 19 Mar 45).

51. By this time N. Shore R., whose two forward companies were still pinned down and suffering numerous casualties, had a new plan in conjunction with "C" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt. The squadron, 11 tanks in all, was to advance on Keppeln with one platoon of "A" Coy mounted on them. "B" and "C" Coys would move forward from their present positions to follow the armour. The battalion's Wasps and carriers were to follow up as closely as possible to take on all anti-tank opposition which disclosed itself. The remainder of "A" Coy and "D" Coy were to form up north of Brunshof and be ready to move up on the C.O.'s order. At 1412 hours the assault began. A squadron of tanks and the

infantry platoon moved towards Keppeln. Almost immediately several enemy tanks located along the road (978452) which runs north-west from Keppeln opened up, knocking out three of our tanks. At this point the infantry platoon dismounted to continue the advance, while the regimental Wasps swung down on the positions from which the enemy tanks had fired and promptly burnt them out. The infantry advance across the open terrain was costly in the face of terrific machine gun fire, but by 1430 hours the town had been entered. The C.O. immediately ordered "D" and "A" Coys forward. By 1515 hours "A" Coy was firmly in the town, its objective consolidated, and in another two hours the entire battalion was firm in Keppeln. N. Shore R. casualties for this operation were two officers and 26 other ranks killed, five officers and 57 other ranks wounded. In equipment the regiment lost two carriers and four Wasps as well as one anti-tank gun (Ibid, Folio 5, Attack on Keppeln by N. Shore R., 26 Feb 45; W.D., N. Shore R., 26 Feb 45).

52. The capture of Keppeln relieved the situation for R. de Chaud on the right. "A" Coy moved forward towards Hollen with the impetus of N. Shore R.'s attack. R. de Chaud's assault went in with the tanks - for Hollen contained several anti-tank guns - and the infantry advanced so quickly that the objective fell without much trouble. In the village a German half track full of ammunition was captured intact as well as one 88-mm and two 50-mm guns and 84 prisoners; 15 enemy dead were counted. Now that Hollen and Keppeln were in Canadian hands "C" Coy R. de Chaud, passed through Hollen to the farm at 977443, where they seized another anti-tank gun. On the right "B" Coy replaced the already badly battered "D" Coy and outflanked the original "D" Coy objective by attacking it from "C" Coy's position on the Hollen - Bonshof road. This movement was supported by a heavy concentration of artillery behind which the armour edged forward to shoot the infantry on to the objective. The manoeuvre was effected with complete success and a further platoon was pushed on to Sport Pl without much resistance. By 1900 hours, R. de Chaud had gained its objective. The battalion had experienced some very hard fighting, but it had accomplished a great deal. Some 224 prisoners were taken, to say nothing of a full company of the Para Recce Regt which, thinking themselves cut off from Keppeln, withdrew from Sport Pl and surrendered to 5 Gds Bde to the right of R. de Chaud. The day's casualties for the battalion amounted to 15 other ranks killed, three officers and 52 other ranks wounded. (Major F.J. L'Esperance's Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER")

53. While the battle for Keppeln and Hollen had been raging, Q.O.R. of C. were still attempting to fight their way ahead. "A" Coy met extremely stiff resistance as they moved up the slope from Mooshof towards the road junction (983459) north-west of Lookerhof and only after a vicious attack with the aid of Wasps was the objective won. Consolidation began here at 1200 hours. Shortly afterwards "B" Coy moved east from Mooshof to occupy the buildings (986467) facing Wemmershof. At this point it was reported that the armour had already cleared the enemy from the battalion's final objectives at Steeg and Wemmershof, but as it turned out, the enemy had only been driven to shelter in the cellars of these places, and much hard and costly fighting took place before 1700 hours, when Steeg and Wemmershof were eventually secured. This phase of operations cost the battalion seven officers and 100 other ranks in killed and wounded. (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Feb 45).

54. It had been a battle marked by the heavy artillery and mortar fire of the enemy, on whose part there had never been ready surrender, and considerable fanatical resistance had only been overcome after the most vicious hand to hand fighting.

Such tanks as had been available supported the infantry brilliantly, and were a deciding factor in routing the Germans out from their well dug in positions. The success of 8 Cdn Inf Bde so far meant the completion of Phases I and II in so far as these affected that formation. (Lt-Col S.M. Lett's Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER")

THE ATTACK ON UDEM AND THE BREACH OF THE
HOCHWALD DEFENCES - 26 FEB-1 MAR 45

55. With some 350 prisoners already in the divisional cage and the opposition lessening, "Tiger" Group of 4 Cdn Armd Div resumed its advance at 1750 hours. The objective was the high ground north-east of Udem. The attack went well, although a part of the start line had to be fought for, and after an hour, while "Smith" Force was driving south towards the main objective, "Cole" Force relieved "Gerry" Force who were positioned on the left in the area of New Louisendorf. At the same time "Jock" Force attacked Fallingshof. The village fell to A. & S.H. of C. at about 2030 hours, and 21 Cdn Armd Regt reported that one squadron which had reached the high ground (010435) on the Udem ridge, was being counter attacked by horse drawn artillery and infantry. These efforts, however, were repelled, and by midnight, 26/27 Feb, Phase III of 4 Cdn Armd Div's plan was complete, with 21 Cdn Armd Regt and elements of Lake Sup R. (Mot) ("Smith" Force) holding the northern portion of the Udem ridge (010435). From here, this group dominated all the approaches to this feature by fire. The rest of 4 Cdn Armd Bde was firm in the areas about New Louisendorf, Fallingshof and Heibauershof, which localities formed a firm base for the long curved salient at present held by "Smith" Force, from Todtenhugel east towards Thulskath and south towards their final objective at Paul's Berg (0143). (W.Ds., 21, 22 and 28 Cdn Armd Regts, Linc & Welld R., Lake Sup R. (Mot), A. & S.H. of C., 26 Feb 45). At this time it was planned that possibly one brigade of 3 Cdn Inf Div would take over "Smith" Force's objective, and that "Tiger" Group would concentrate for further operations. It was quite clear that the ground to the east was unsuitable for tanks, and General Simonds had already decided that Phase IV of the Corps plan would be mostly carried out by the infantry (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 26 Feb 45).

56. As "Smith" Force proceeded to further consolidate the ground and to probe towards Kirsell, several small counter attacks by the enemy developed against the various positions which lined the route to the Paul's Berg. These were dealt with without much trouble. To the west, however, "Lion" Group of 4 Cdn Armd Div under Brigadier Jefferson, was having considerable difficulty in finding the necessary routes towards Kirsell, from where it was intended to launch Alq R. and 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt eastwards to the Hochwald feature which lay beyond the Udem ridge. (W.Ds., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, Alq R., 26 Feb 45). Meanwhile, as "Lion" Group edged forward gradually behind the reconnaissance elements of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt who were moving on Kirsell from the west, a fierce battle was raging about 9 Cdn Inf Bde's objectives at Udem. 9 Cdn Inf Bde passed through 8 Bde at about 2130 hours with S.D. & G. Highrs on the right and H.L.I. of C. on the left, each battalion with two companies up, but without tank support, which was not available at that time (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Feb 45).

57. S.D. & G. Highrs pressed forward with "B" and "D" Coys on the left and right respectively. By 2220 hours "D" Coy was fighting its way through the wooded area of Schneiershof (982431) and a little later "B" Coy had reached the anti-tank

ditch across the main Udem - Hollen road, and secured it before the enemy could blow the charges laid beneath it. The troops then pushed into the outskirts of the town, and by 2400 hours were consolidating their objective in the northern sector of Udem. "D" Coy was still having trouble getting ahead, and Lt-Col Rowley ordered "C" and "D" Coys to team up, pool their efforts and keep going. At the same time "A" Coy began to close up in order to pass through "B" Coy on the left. (W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 26 Feb 45)

58. The first part of the assault (on the left) by H.L.I. of C. went well. Under the beams of artificial moonlight, "D" and "C" Coys reached the first objectives after some difficulty caused by the numerous mines which littered the area, and shortly after midnight "A" and "B" Coys passed through to begin clearing the rear portion of the town. At this point the opposition increased, and "B" Coy experienced several counter attacks which kept the men busy until the first light of day appeared. "A" Coy was firm on its new ground by 0330 hours. The past hours had also seen much improvement for the S.D. & G. Highrs' left hand companies. "C" and "D" Coys crossed the anti-tank ditch north of Udem at 0130 hours, whereupon "D" Coy consolidated in line with "B" Coy on its left, and "C" Coy passed on to flank "A" Coy. The move was completed at 0400 hours, by which time Nth N.S. Highrs were already up to the positions of S.D. & G. Highrs' rear company, preparatory to going through to secure the final objectives about the railroad south of the town. (W.Ds., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, S.D. & G. Highrs, H.L.I. of C., Nth N.S. Highrs, 26-27 Feb 45)

59. Meanwhile, as 9 Cdn Inf Bde pressed its effort amid the shell-scarred ruins of Udem, the situation to the north-east was changing; 4 Cdn Inf Bde had come forward to assume control over the bulk of 4 Cdn Armd Div's sector about Todtenhugel, which "Tiger" Group had captured. R.H.L.I. took over the area New Louisendorf, Essex Scot the region of Fallingshof, with R. Regt C. directly to the north in a reserve role. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde and Units, 26-27 Feb 45). Brigadier Moncell's "Tiger" Group now concentrated north of 4 Cdn Inf Bde's positions (AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II: Special Report No. 200/1, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", para 5). Brigadier Jefferson's "Lion" Group - composed of Alq R. and 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt - was also well forward by this time. After much reconnaissance a route up to Kirsell had been found by the armoured reconnaissance unit, who, after considerable by-passing of obstacles and sidetracking from the main roads, discovered that the village was clear. The assaulting elements of "Lion" Group were thus closing up to begin the attack which was to carry them over the Udem ridge to the Hochwald Gap. (Ibid: W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, Alq R., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 26-27 Feb 45)

60. In the far north, the operation had developed favourably. 129 Bde of 43 (W.) Div relieved 5 Cdn Inf Bde, and by midnight, 26/27 Feb, Brigadier McGill's three battalions were concentrated north and north-west of Schroanenhof - R.H.C. at 9843, R. de Mais at 9748, and Calg Highrs at 9648. In these positions the troops rested, received food and fresh orders prior to passing through 4 Cdn Inf Bde on another attack (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Feb 45; AEF: 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I, Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", para 11). 6 Cdn Inf Bde, which had taken some 450 prisoners in its initial assault, remained in well dug trenches on the high ground south of Calcar, and apart from heavy mortar and shell fire, experienced little of interest (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 26-27 Feb 45).

61. In its left flank protection role, 43 (W.) Div was already probing east as well as south with 129 Bde, which was maintaining contact with S. Sask R. of 2 Cdn Inf Div on its right. On the other flank, to the south of 3 Cdn Inf Div, Maj-Gen G.H.P. Roberts' 11 Brit Armd Div had begun to move towards the region of Stein (9741), but during the previous night had encountered severe opposition in the form of anti-tank, mortar and machine gun fire, much of which was at that time coming from 9 Cdn Inf Bde's final objectives at Udem. Even by the morning of 27 Feb the British armoured division had made little progress against the enemy's tanks and S.P. guns, which seemed to be in abundance in this section. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 26 Feb 45, Serials 78; 27 Feb 45, Serials 8, 14, 20)

62. In the central sector north of Udem which Brigadier Rockingham's men were still trying to clear, Maj-Gen Chris Vokes' troops of 9 Cdn Armd Div was about to advance. The battle group, ably commanded by Lt-Col R.A. Bradburn of Alq R., was at Kirsell, ready to become the spearhead of the main thrust eastwards (by "Lion" Group). For the past three hours, Alq R. and elements of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt had been floundering about in the muddy fields to the north of Kirsell, and now, at approximately 0445 hours 27 Feb, the Algonquins waited on the tanks of the reconnaissance unit in the sunken road north-east of the village. Here the final details were tied up, the wireless sets re-netted, and a last check given to the weapons upon which the individual soldier, section, platoon or company was to rely. Officers buzzed from one tank to another, speaking to their men who were either huddled against the sides or sitting on the top of the idling vehicles. The delay was annoying. The troops had received their orders, but a platoon from one of the assaulting companies had lost its way, and Lt-Col Bradburn felt that he must have the additional manpower for the tasks which lay ahead. At about 0500 hours the enemy began to search the area with fire, and one after another the shells came nearer to the forming up place. Then several missiles straddled it, and it seemed that if there were any further delay the men might be caught out of cover. Besides this, daylight was approaching, and each passing minute gave the enemy better visibility of the Udem ridge over which the attack was to be launched. (W.D., Alq R., 26-27 Feb 45)

63. The immediate objective, the high ground between the Hochwald and the Balberger Wald, lay just inside the last Siegfried defences before the Rhine. A special plan of attack had been drawn up. "A" and "B" Coys Alq R., each unit with under command one troop of "B" Sqn 29 Cdn Armd Regt, were to move over the crest south of Paul's Berg and to attack to the east to capture the line of trenches and intricate defences which scarred the slope of the Hochwald feature west of the gap. Once this line was consolidated "C" and "D" Coys Alq R. would pass through to seize the second line and then push on to firm up in the gap itself. To coincide with this effort, a diversion was planned. "A" Sqn 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt and the carrier platoon Alq R. would move south from Grenenhof (0042), cross the railway at the rail and road junction (0040) then move south-eastwards to the crossroads west of Kunderen (0340); at this point the force would change direction to strike north again, recross the railway tracks and thus be available in the vicinity of the Alq R. objective should "B" Sqn fail to negotiate the valley. "C" Sqn of the reconnaissance regiment was to line the Udem ridge facing east, in order to support whatever course the operation might take in the daylight hours following. (W.Ds., Alq R., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 27 Feb 45)

64. The artillery fire plan took the form of heavy concentrations on all known enemy positions. The initial programme was to last from H-30 to H plus 90. From then on,

the field regiments would engage the enemy's western defence lines, while the medium guns blasted the area of the Gap. In addition to these tasks, a good proportion of gun fire was to be available on call to the company commanders concerned. The darkness would prove no hindrance to the infantry or tanks, as red star shells were to be fired into the Hochwald gap and Bofors tracer would be directed at the objective to aid the troops. A particular feature of the fire plan which proved very successful was the use of code words for target groups. These groups, which were made up of individual stonks and concentrations, were on call either in part or as a whole (W.D., 19 Cdn Fd Regt S.P., February 1945: Appx 5, Fire Plan "BLOCKBUSTER").

65. At Kirsell, in the forming up place, Lt-Col Bradburn's force was still waiting for the missing sub units, when at about 0510 hours the enemy began to get the range of the area; the force commander realized first, that unless the operation proceeded at once, he could not possibly hope to be on the objective by first light, and secondly that the element of surprise would be lost completely. Therefore, as the guns were all ready to begin firing, he decided not to wait any longer. At 0515 hours, "A" and "B" Coys Alq R. were ordered to advance. (W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, Alq R., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 27 Feb 45)

66. The infantry moved on foot up the slope, followed by the supporting tanks. The noise of the heavy vehicles' engines, the slushing as the tracks gripped the wet ground, the voices of the commanders as they gave and received orders over the wireless sets - all these lent tension to the atmosphere while the missiles from the guns of First Cdn Army whined overhead. That part of the ridge was still in enemy hands was obvious for as the troops cleared the crest, "B" Coy passed a Panther tank dug in and waiting for bigger game. As the troops felt their way over the darkened soggy terrain, the enemy on the ground began to react. Wild small arms fire swept across the front as the leading sections came down the eastern slope, and the tank which had been by-passed turned about to engage the infantry from the rear as the first lateral road north of Hauskalk (0041) was reached. (W.D., Alq R., 27 Feb 45). This interference, however, was quickly and most effectively silenced by one of the supporting Shermans, which destroyed it at a range of 40 yards (Ibid).

67. The first group of buildings was speedily overrun, and both "A" and "B" Coys put out flank protection groups as they surged forward, taking some prisoners and killing many of the enemy who could be seen attempting to withdraw. The tanks, however, were not able to move so freely; one by one they became deeply mired in the mud. The infantry, realizing that movement in the valley would become more costly as daylight approached, pressed on. The flow of troops into the low ground increased as the reserve companies of Alq R. moved up, and the opposition eased slightly across the front until the wood bordering the road 500 yards south of Kehllemanskath (0241) was reached. Here, heavy enemy machine gun fire put the left hand column to ground. During the next ten minutes, while "B" Coy was pinned down by three well-hidden positions on the left, the right hand force under Major R.B. Stock was able to gain some ground, though the enemy swept the ground with vicious mortar and machine gun fire. To the rear the small group which had remained to guard "B" Coy's left flank was also involved in a short furious action with a large body of enemy supported by self-propelled guns, who were obviously attempting to cut off the base of the attack. This counter attack was effectively dispersed by automatic fire, and by the bold use of P.I.A.Ts. and a captured enemy mortar, at a cost to the Germans

of some 38 dead and 91 prisoners. (W.D., Alq R., 27 Feb 45)

68. Meanwhile as "A" Coy forged ahead into Hockshof (0240), "B" Coy's remaining tank was guided forward to a position from which the enemy opposition was neutralized. The troops could now pass through the shattered wood, cross the road and reach the anti-tank ditch bordering the Siegfried Line. The infantry flung itself into the ditch, along which platoons deployed extensively in preparation to crossing the shallow minefield beyond, stretching forward to the wire obstacle bordering the actual defence line. Meanwhile on the right, "A" Coy was battling hard amidst the burning buildings around Hockshof, where a short, fierce fight took place before the troops moved forward again to consolidate. "B" Coy at the anti-tank ditch wasted little time; as one they clambered up the steep sides to go over the rim in typical 1918 fashion, uttering as they went weird and diabolical sounds of exultation. The minefield was quickly traversed, the few mines which exploded fortunately causing no casualties; and passing through the knee-high wire, which luckily the artillery had gapped in numerous places, the men finally reached the trenchworks - the last German fixed positions before the Rhine. The few opponents here were either killed or captured and consolidation began (W.D., Alq R., 27 Feb 45).

69. Lt-Col Bradburn received the news of success at 0700 and 0715 hours from "A" and "B" Coys respectively, and he at once urged his reserve companies to push on. It was while this order was being carried out that the enemy counter attacked on the left and right, supported by mortar and shell fire and by some armour. One attack, coming in from the left, was effectively beaten off by tank and small arms fire, but on the right Major Stock, already wounded, had more to do. The enemy seemed bent on driving the Canadians off, and attacked repeatedly only to be pushed back by the heavy defensive fire called down by this gallant company commander. (For his bravery in this action Major Stock was subsequently awarded the Distinguished Service Order.) As soon as the fresh companies had passed through, the enemy, having got the range, began systematically to plaster every yard of the newly-won ground, but Lt-Col Bradburn's men, well seasoned and full of the zest of battle, dug in and could not be budged (W.D., Alq R., 27 Feb 45).

70. Unfortunately, where success had been achieved in the area of the gap, disaster had befallen the right hook by "A" Sqn 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt and the carrier platoon of the Alq R. This force, having skirted to the south of Udem, passed the rail-crossing south of the town, and almost immediately ran into a hornet's nest of German armour. Within a few minutes the first three tanks were brewing, and the rest, one by one, were subjected to heavy fire from all sides. The majority of the carriers met a similar fate, and after some tense moments Major G.L. MacDougall, the force commander, aided by the survivors, gathered as many of the wounded as possible and worked his way back. While the area of the Hochwald gap was now undergoing some of the heaviest enemy shelling experienced, the remaining units of 10 Cdn Inf Bde moved up to participate in the attack, Linc & Welld R. and A. & S.H. of C. having reverted to command at 0500 hours that morning. (W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, Linc & Welld R., A. & S.H. of C., Alq R. and 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 26, 27 Feb 45)

71. By this time, in the north, 5 Cdn Inf Bde was moving towards Schmachdarm (0343) on the western edge of the forest. The initial thrust across the valley was made by Calg Highrs under Lt-Col R.L. Ellis, with R. de Mais and R.H.C. following up (W.D., Calg Highrs, 27 Feb 45). By 1000

hours Brigadier McGill's spearhead had reached the outskirts of Schmachdarm, R. de Mais was close behind, while R.H.C. was awaiting developments to the west and south in the area of Paulshof (0142). These points of occupation were now consolidated pending final orders for a new thrust into the forest itself. (W.Ds., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, R.H.C., R. de Mais, Calg Highrs, 27 Feb 45; AEF: 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I: Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", paras 12 and 13)

72. The battle for Udem was not yet over. Nth N.S. Highrs of 9 Cdn Inf Bde, who had passed through S.D. & G. Highrs and H.L.I. of C. the previous night were still engaged in a terrific fight to get ahead, while its two sister battalions had been opposed equally hard in their attempt to clear their respective objectives (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde and Units, 27 Feb 45). 8 Cdn Inf Bde was still in reserve and remained static except for Q.O.R. of C., who were now under orders to pass through the hamlet of Kirsell and to relieve "Smith" Force of 4 Cdn Armd Bde's "Tiger" Group on the high ground north-west of Udem (W.Ds., Q.O.R. of C., 21 Cdn Armd Regt; W.Ds., H.Qs. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Feb 45). 7 Cdn Inf Bde had by this time begun to move up to concentrate between Udem and Keppeln (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, Serial 81; W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Feb 45).

73. Amid all this movement forward by the Canadian divisions, 43 (W.) Div, 11 Armd Div and 30 Corps to the south-west were by no means static. While 43 (W.) Div patrolled forward towards Calcar on the northern flank, 11 Armd Div, whose advance elements had reached the railroad south-west of Udem at 0800 hours, ran into considerable opposition in the region of the road fork south-east of Tokotshof (9940), and soon discovered that the enemy held in strength all approaches to the main objective. At 1330 hours, 27 Feb, after the objective had been very heavily shelled, 4 Brit Armd Bde was still unable to advance, and Maj-Gen G.H.P. Roberts, G.O.C. 11 Armd Div, decided to pass 159 Inf Bde through. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 27 Feb 45, Serials 26, 29, 31, 60, 62, 69 and 71). In the meantime, in the sector of 30 Corps' operations, 52 (L.) Div on the extreme right broke out of their positions and drove eastwards towards the ground held by 51 (H.) Div in the area of Siebengewald. The positions to the south of Afferden were held pending 1 Cdo's arrival from Second British Army to operate on the general axis Afferden - Well (8269). 3 Brit Div, having relieved 15 (S.) Div, struck south through the wooded areas to cut the road Weeze - Udem some three miles west of Kervenheim. The situation along the front of Ninth U.S. Army was progressing steadily. All three corps, (XLIII, XVI and XIX) were attacking vigorously and gaining ground. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, February 1945: Appx 31, Highlights of Ops up to 0730 hours, 27 Feb 45, re Ninth U.S. Army)

74. Throughout 27 Feb the enemy opposition had stiffened to slow down our advance, and bad weather generally had deprived the troops of close air support, although later that day Marienbaum and Sonsbeck were visited by 62 medium bombers (AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Operation "VERITABLE", paras 117 and 122). The entire situation now centred on the Hochwald forest, where elements of 4 Cdn Armd Div were being severely shelled, and on the afternoon of 27 Feb Brigadier Jefferson decided to pass Linc & Welld R. and A. & S.H. of C. through the Gap. At the same time Q.O.R. of C. of 8 Cdn Inf Bde relieved "Smith" Force (21 Cdn Armd Regt and Lake Sup R. (Mot) on the Paul's feature, thus freeing it for further employment to the east, and 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt reverted to command 4 Cdn Armd Div, a welcome addition to the troops involved (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Feb 45; W.Ds., Q.O.R. of C., 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 27 Feb 45).

75. That evening, as Linc & Welld R. and A. & S.H. of C. prepared to move up to the area of the gap, General Vokes accented his intentions for 27-28 Feb 45. 10 Cdn Inf Bde was to seize and hold the ridge between the two forests, and 4 Cdn Armd Bde was to then move one battle group on to 10 Cdn Inf Bde's objective, in order to push further along the axis of the railway towards Xanten. Another battle group, consisting of 22 Cdn Armd Regt and Lake Sup R. (Mot) was to push ahead at first light on 28 Feb and take the woods north-east and east of Herstges (0541) (0640) (0740) (AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II: Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", para 7). Meanwhile, 9 Cdn Inf Bde's efforts to the south of Udem had been rewarded. Nth N.S. Highrs, which had been forced to slow down its activities for lack of armoured support, remained in the town until 1100 hours, when some tanks of 10 Cdn Armd Regt arrived on the scene. The battalion then struck out southward with "D" Coy in the lead. Aided by tanks, the infantry battled from house to house against strong opposition. "A" Coy was sent to assist "D" Coy, which by 1300 hours was on its objective on the south-eastern fringe of the town. Gradually the other companies cleared their part of the battalion area, and by 1730 hours, all three units of 9 Cdn Inf Bde had consolidated after many hours of hard fighting. (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde and Units, 27 Feb 45)

76. To the north there was little change. 6 Cdn Inf Bde was relieved by 214 Bde of 43 (W.) Inf Div and concentrated near Kirsell, preparatory to advancing past the prospective objective of 5 Cdn Inf Bde in the Hochwald forest (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Feb 45). 43 (W.) Inf Div made substantial gains, exploiting to the full; 5 Wilts entered Calcar almost unopposed in the early evening of 27 Feb, and 43 Recce Regt grasped an opening which resulted in one squadron being passed through to Hanselaer (0149). By the morning of 28 Feb the 43 Recce squadrons were operating boldly well forward of Calcar and Honnopol (0251). (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 27 Feb 45, Serials 101 and 103; and 28 Feb 45, Serial 8)

77. The front remained fairly static until the early hours of 28 Feb, when 5 Cdn Inf Bde of 2 Cdn Inf Div launched R.H.C. into the Hochwald forest; but no sooner had the men of the Black Watch passed through the forward positions of Calg Highrs than they were subjected to terrific volumes of fire which pinned them to the ground. Heavy casualties resulted, and most of these could not be moved until later in the day. As the hours passed, control of the troops became more difficult, and close support from the tanks of "B" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt almost impossible. Thus R.H.C. were forced to hold their ground under heavy fire. During the day, however, a new plan was hatched. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, at present near the Hochwald gap, was to be relieved that it might attack to the north-east, and by last light, 27 Feb, R.H.C. were under orders to withdraw from the forest. They would be joined by two companies of R. de Mais in the relief of 6 Bde. The rest of R. de Mais would plug the gap left by R.H.C. and come under command Calg Highrs. After dark all of R.H.C. except "B" Coy were pulled out. "B" Coy stayed with Calg Highrs to help hold the forest bridgehead. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde and Units, 28 Feb 45)

78. By this time, to the north of 5 Cdn Inf Bde, Maj-Gen A.B. Matthews, commanding 2 Cdn Inf Div, had ordered 4 Cdn Inf Bde to reach out towards the northern part of the Hochwald. This operation had started on 27 Feb when R. Regt C. moved eastwards to occupy the high ground (0144) west and north-west of Delsenhof. The position was reached against light resistance and consolidated, in spite of strong counter attacks. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 27 Feb 45, Serials 90 and 108; W.D., R. Regt C., 27 Feb 45). On 28 Feb R. Regt C. was ordered to exploit

its gains and secure a start line for Essex Scot, who would push on to the outskirts of the Hochwald where R.H.L.I. would take up the advance to the north-east. The attack by R. Regt C. went in, but movement was slow. By 1900 hours, however, the Royals were on their objective in the region north-west of Lohmannshof (0244) with minor elements exploiting to the east. Then at 2100 hours Essex Scot's "A" and "B" Coys passed through to continue the advance into the Hochwald. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde and Units, 28 Feb 45)

79. Meanwhile in the area of the Hochwald gap, the fury of the enemy's reaction against 4 Cdn Armd Div had increased beyond description. Alq R. clung to its positions west of the gap all through 27 Feb, under tremendously heavy shell and mortar fire which raked every square yard of ground. With the advent of darkness it was clear that this sector was the cornerstone of the enemy's resistance, and Brigadier Jefferson, determined to break through, launched A. & S.H. of C. supported by 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt into the attack (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 27-28 Feb 45). In a short space of time A. & S.H. of C. were heavily involved. Some of the troops did manage to get to the eastern slope between the two forests, but gradually as time passed the situation became difficult to control or follow. A. & S.H. of C. received a terrific mauling throughout the night and the following morning. It was now planned to push Linc & Welld R. past them; Lt-Col R.C. Coleman led his men up the western slope on the morning of 28 Feb to make a two-pronged attack with "B" and "C" Coys. The other companies were to follow along the railroad and pass through as soon as the forward troops had consolidated. Linc & Welld R. had in support one troop 28 Cdn Armd Regt and one troop 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, borrowed from A. & S.H. of C. (History of 10 Cdn Inf Bde, pp 58 and 60; W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde and Units, 27-28 Feb 45).

80. The attack proper began at 1100 hours, but hardly had the troops entered the woods west of the gap than a stonk of enemy mortar and rocket fire caught them and caused such heavy losses that the effort became disorganized. The Linc & Welld R.'s companies were now forced to retire a short distance, and while they were doing so the enemy continued to pour shells into the area, which being heavily wooded, caused the missiles to burst in the tree-tops killing and wounding many of the unprotected infantrymen on the ground (*Ibid*). Later that morning one company of Alq R. swung to the south and crossed the railway tracks to clear the area of Udemerbruch. 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt sent up armoured support to the eastern side of the gap, where for the rest of the day A. & S.H. of C. and Linc & Welld R. clung to their positions. (*Ibid*, and W.D., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 28 Feb 45). At 2230 hours a new effort to advance by tanks of 22 and 28 Cdn Armd Regts failed, as the enemy guns took such heavy toll that movement became virtually impossible (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 28 Feb 45). The ground troops were now urged to hold all along the line until 6 Cdn Inf Bde arrived to relieve them the next morning (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Feb 45).

81. During the past day, events to the south-west in the sectors controlled by 3 Cdn Inf Div and 11 Armd Div had gone well. 7 Cdn Inf Bde had already stepped in to follow up 11 Armd Div and was now positioned south of the railroad astride the Udem - Kervenheim road (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde; W.Ds., Regina Rif, R. Wpg Rif, 1 C. Scot R., 27 Feb 45). 11 Armd Div, like its Canadian counterpart, was also having difficulties. 159 Inf Bde Gp, which General Roberts had ordered to push on during the previous night towards the Schleiffen line and Sonsbeck, moved around the southern slopes of Gochfortzberg, but found the terrain there boggy and treacherous. The main

obstacle in the path of the advance had been a small stream, with banks so soft that it had been necessary to establish a regular infantry bridgehead. By midday, 28 Feb, a few tanks had crossed, but the first efforts to thrust forward met with disastrously heavy artillery and anti-tank fire. In the late evening, 1 Hereford, recently relieved by 7 Cdn Inf Bde, passed through with 15/19 H., and a mile beyond the forward positions of 159 Bde Gp encountered the first Schleiffen defences. (Taurus Pursuant, "A History of 11 Armd Div", pp 84 and 85)

82. By 0900 hours, 1 Mar 45, the situation on the fronts held by 30 Corps and Ninth U.S. Army had improved steadily. 156 (L.) Bde with 32 Gds Bde under command had completely taken over from 51 (H.) **Inf Div** the area between Siebengewald and Hulm with a view to exploiting to the south. The Lowland patrols soon entered Grootte Horst (8639) to find it clear of the enemy, and the Cameronians established a strongpoint in the wood south of Boyenhof (8739). 160 Bde of 53 (W.) **Inf Div** complied with the corps' intention of the day (AEF: 45/30 Brit Corps/C/1, Docket III(b): Folio 49, Intention 30 Corps Task, 28 Feb 45) and relieved 8 Bde of 3 Brit Div in the area of the Kampshof bridgehead (9539), keeping up the pressure against Weeze. On the shortened sector now held by 3 Brit Div, 1 Suffolk completed the clearance of the wood north-east of Kampshof, while 185 Bde attacking south through 9 Bde at 1400 hours 28 Feb, made sufficient progress in the direction of Kervenheim to allow the assault on the town to go in at 0900 hours, 1 Mar (AEF: 45/30 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III: Sitreps, P.A. to G.O.C.-in-C., Nos 120 and 121, 28 Feb 45). Meanwhile Gds Armd Div remained in position and had nothing of interest to report. 51 (H.) Div now concentrated for rest in the areas of Nijmegen, Goch and Kessel. (AEF: 45/30 Corps/C/1, Docket II, Folio 39, 30 Corps Tasks of 28 Feb 45)

83. XIX Corps of Ninth U.S. Army after being held up temporarily on the railway line from Munchen-Gladbach to Elsen, had lunged out and advanced eight miles to reach the line Steinhausen, Glehn and Hemmerden. To the south and west of Munchen-Gladbach, XIII U.S. Corps had penetrated as far as Hardt, while on the left, XVI U.S. Corps was steadily gaining ground through the Biegerwald north of Birgellen (8980). In comparison, progress on First Cdn Army front was limited by the increasing enemy resistance to the consolidation of previous gains. Apart from a little expansion of the gap between the Hochwald and Balberger Wald forests by 2 Cdn Corps and the establishment of bridgeheads over the Muhlen Fleuth stream which ran east from Weeze by 30 Corps, few changes had occurred. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 2, Folio 61, Ops Summary 266B, 272400-282400 February 1945)

THE ENEMY SITUATION, 1 MAR 45

84. The enemy had now been able to stabilize his line, and in spite of our rapid advances during the period 0400 hours, 26 Feb, to 1200 hours, 28 Feb, he had succeeded by hard fighting in keeping his ground losses to a minimum. Although 2 Cdn Corps had managed to pry him out of the gap between the two forests, no progress had been made into the country beyond. The enemy strength lay in his mortars and rocket projectors. 86 Werfer Regt had already been identified, and interrogation of prisoners pointed to the fact that at least 54 projectors of the 15-cm and 24-cm varieties were probably still in operation. The enemy's artillery fire, which had been surprisingly heavy and accurate, was supplemented by railway guns operating from the east bank of the Rhine. A few tanks and self-propelled guns

presumably from 16 Pz Regt, still remained west of the river. The German infantry were identified as 116 Recce Pz Unit in the gap, 60 Pz Regt in the Hochwald and 156 Pz Gr in the Balberger Wald, all of 116 Pz Div. There was also evidence in the gap of 7 Para Regt of 2 Para Div. Further to the north 6 Para Div held from the northern end of the Hochwald to the Rhine. 15 Pz Gr Div was reported to be coming into the Hochwald area. (First Cdn Army Int Summaries, 242, 243, 27 and 28 Feb 45)

85. The front from west of Balberger Wald to the railroad in Weeze was entrusted to 8 Para Div, with left 22 Para Regt, 24 Para Regt, and right, oddments from 84 Div and 12 Para Recce Unit. Para Lehr Regt, its third unit, had quite certainly gone over towards the Maas to help 2 Para Regt. West of the Niers River, 7 Para Div still held the right, two battalions of 190 Div defended the centre, while 180 Div with 1211 Gr Regt, Para Lehr Regt and 2 Para Regt blocked the left (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 242, 27 Feb 45; No. 243, 28 Feb 45).

86. The predicament of both the German corps - 47 Pz Corps under General von Luttwitz and 2 Para Corps under General Meindl - was subsequently demonstrated when these two officers were interrogated:

When the American break-through over the Roer became serious about 25/26 Feb, Luttwitz lost two of his armoured formations - Pz Lehr and 15 Pz Gr divisions. This left him with only 6 Para and 116 Pz Gr divisions to meet the large scale Canadian attack against the Hochwald Forest. This attack from the north, coupled with the American successes in the south, forced First Para Army to give up its positions which had been facing in opposite directions, and form a bridgehead on the west bank of the Rhine.

(Special Interrogation Report,
General von Luttwitz)

Similarly General Meindl's formation, which had also received a severe mauling, was forced to give ground.

By the end of the month Meindl estimated he had lost one-third of his remaining strength...

(Special Interrogation Report,
General Meindl)

87. The Corps Commanders were not however the only ones in serious distress. The Army Commander himself, General Schlemm, was receiving a stream of orders and counter orders from Berlin. These orders all played on the same subject; under no circumstances were any of the bridges in his sector to fall into Allied hands.

Bridges could not be blown immediately, but must be kept standing for as long a period as possible. This was to enable civilians to be evacuated to the east and make possible the salvaging of industrial machinery and equipment. In addition military reinforcements and supplies had to use these bridges to keep the bridgehead forces in action. Then the bridges were to be blown only at the precise moment when the Army commander personally felt they were in imminent danger of seizure by Allied troops. Not a moment before. Schlemm said "I had nine bridges in my army sector, and I could see my hopes for a long life rapidly disappearing in the distance".

...The second restrictive order emanating from Berlin at this time was that under no circumstances was a single man or a single piece of fighting equipment to be evacuated across the Rhine without the Army Commander first obtaining the special permission of Hitler himself... Nevertheless the bridgehead was still to be held, and what was far worse, no man was to be sent to the east bank. This meant that the connecting bridgehead was cluttered up with all the abandoned junk and useless personnel of an Army that has just been through a heavy, losing action. There were damaged tanks that could no longer run, vehicle car parks jammed with fuelless transport, artillery without ammunition and supply personnel of no earthly use in so restricted a space. In addition the tail-end supply remnants of Army Group 'B', who had been caught by the American attack across the Roer, had largely escaped north into Schlemm's army area and were now uselessly occupying space in the bridgehead without weapons or equipment to be of any use. This heap of twisted metal, broken horse carts and purposeless personnel had to be pushed off the roads into hiding where it rested as a futile gesture to a stupid order.

By the 1 March 45, this military rubbish had so increased in volume that it seriously handicapped operations in the bridgehead. Schlemm complained bitterly to Blaskowitz at Army Group 'H' pointing out that manoeuvre space had become so limited that unless he was permitted to get rid of some of it he could not be responsible for what was likely to happen... But again it was not up to the Army commander to decide what was to go and what was to stay, but instead a specific list of items to be evacuated was sent down from Berlin and to these items Schlemm was confined. By this new order Schlemm was allowed to send to the east bank of the Rhine only the vehicles that could not be used because of damage or lack of petrol, the guns without ammunition and the supply personnel who were physically unfit to carry on the fight or who were needed in the actual work of moving supply weapons across the river. To ensure that no men potentially capable of fighting escaped the bridgehead, each commander had to sign a paper certifying that the men of his unit whom he was sending away could not possibly fight any more.

(Special Interrogation Report,
General Alfred Schlemm)

These high level difficulties, however, were not apparently known to the fighting troops, who by their reaction to our efforts made it quite clear that every yard the Allies gained would be paid for dearly. Truth of this state of mind was to be seen during the next few days, especially in the region of the Hochwald and Balberger Wald.

88. The weather for the past two days had by no means been perfect, and the full weight of Allied air-power had not therefore been able to support the advance. The 123 sorties flown on 27 Feb had mostly been abortive due to low clouds. On 28 Feb, however, cloud remained reasonably high enough to allow a fairly full air programme. The village of Winnekendonk behind the enemy's lines was almost obliterated and Sonsbeck

received heavy treatment. Nearer the line of battle, concentration areas, factory buildings and gun and mortar positions were attacked. (First Cdn Army Int Summaries, 242, 243, 27 and 28 Feb 45, and 84 Gp Int Summaries 201, 202, 27 and 28 Feb 45)

89. The operation was three days old, but the initial progress, which had held promise of early success, was for the moment slowed up. However, General Crerar had already instructed General B.G. Horrocks to develop 30 Corps' main thrust along the axis of Winnekendonk - Issum, and General Simonds to press on, using two lines of advance, the northern to pass through Xanten - Rheinberg, the southern through Sonsbeck to Bonninghardt. (Lt-Gen H.D.G. Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45, paras 40 and 41). In summing up the situation at this time, General Crerar stated:

By the beginning of March the Winter offensive, entrusted to First Cdn Army, to destroy the enemy west of the Rhine and prepare the way for an envelopment of the Ruhr, was well advanced. The spectacular successes gained within the brief space of seven days by 9 U.S. Army brought the concluding stages well in sight... Lt-Gen Simpson's troops were now only some 17 miles from the enemy's position opposite our own lines, and by thus encroaching upon his rearguard area, threatened his way of escape.

(Ibid)

90. The enemy was now quite obviously fully sensitive to the threat looming up from the rapid American advance to the north, and it was clear that he must go east of the Rhine. The debatable question was how would he do it. His hold on Munchen-Gladbach had been broken and although the bridgehead protecting the Rhine crossings remained, it did not in itself protect the rear of the troops opposing First Cdn Army. Already it was evident that the German left wing was retreating. The Wesel bridge and the ferries on each side of it were in full use, and it was appreciated that the enemy's determination not to give ground to First Cdn Army was in effect part of his programme for the protection of this exodus (First Cdn Army, Int Summary No. 244, 1 Mar 45).

A V.C. FOR THE ESSEX -1 MAR 45

91. The third and fourth phase of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" continued with renewed vigour. At first light, 1 Mar 45, 6 Cdn Inf Bde relieved 10 Cdn Inf Bde in the Gap. Linc & Wellb R. handed over to S. Sask R., Alq R. to Camerons of C., and Fus M.R. took over the positions recently won by A. & S.H. of C. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 1 Mar 45, Serial 23). While Linc & Wellb R. and the greater part of A. & S.H. of C. concentrated to the rear, Alq R. who already had elements south of the railway tracks, was ordered to link up with 11 Armd Div. This project, however, was abandoned and the regiment moved back to come under command 4 Cdn Armd Bde and concentrate in the crowded area south-east of Kirsell. Here Lt-Col Bradburn was informed that three companies of his unit would be moving on foot through the Gap to relieve Lake Sup R. (Mot); the fourth company would await Lake Sup R.'s return and group with them for another attempt by 4 Cdn Armd Bde to break out in the east. (W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 1 and 2 Mar 45; W.D., Lake Sup R. (Mot), 1 Mar 45).

92. Pending this new attempt by 4 Cdn Armd Bde to break out, 6 Cdn Inf Bde held the Hochwald Gap with orders to exploit to the south (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Mar 45). The rest of 2 Cdn Inf Div persisted in their efforts to move forward in the northern part of the forest. The enemy pressure in front of 5 Cdn Inf Bde eased considerably during the night of 28 Feb/1 Mar, and by skilful endeavour patrols had penetrated by last light as far as the Gap itself, just east of the S. Sask R. positions (AEF: 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I, Memo No. 2 CD/8, Brigadier W.J. McGill's Account). Pending this new attempt by Brigadier Moncell's armour to break out towards Xanten, 6 Cdn Inf Bde had come forward to hold the Hochwald Gap with orders to exploit to the south (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Mar 45). Apart from patrols forward and to the flank, little of interest happened, although the enemy shelled the sector without a stop. (Ibid)

93. Further to the north 5 Cdn Inf Bde was still solidly situated at the western edge of the forest with Calg Highrs, on whose front resistance generally both from the ground and from the enemy's guns was decreasing noticeably (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Mar 45). Snipers were, however, extremely active in this area, and patrols were sent out to round them up. As a result of these ventures, six prisoners were captured and contact was made with S. Sask R. on the immediate right flank, and with Fus M.R. near the Gap between the two fronts (W.D., Calg Highrs, 1 Mar 45). The rest of the day was taken up by local company operations to clear the woods about the battalion position (Ibid; and Brigadier W.J. McGill's Account).

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94. To the left of 5 Bde, Brigadier F.N. Cabeldu's 4 Cdn Inf Bde had been in action all day, experiencing some extremely fierce fighting. It began at 0745 hours when Essex Scot under Lt-Col J.E.C. Pangman struck out towards the enemy-held fringe of the Hochwald (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde and Units, 1 Mar 45). The intelligence reports previously given to Essex Scot prior to the attack were by no means wrong. The enemy was there at the western edge of the forest, well dug in, heavily armed and well protected by wire entanglements. Yet despite this opposition, "D" Coy on the right, reached the edge of the forest without suffering too heavy casualties. On the left, however, "C" Coy gallantly led by Major F.A. Tilston, ran into serious trouble. The enemy was determined to throw the Canadians back, and wild hand to hand fighting raged for some considerable time before "C" Coy, though sadly depleted, was able to get on to the objective just inside the forest (W.D., Essex Scot, 1 Mar 45). For his part in this most bloody action, Major Tilston was later awarded the Victoria Cross. His bravery was announced to the world in these words:

The 2nd Canadian Division had been given the task of breaking through the strongly fortified Hochwald Forest defence line which covered Xanten, the last German bastion West of the Rhine protecting the vital Wesel Bridge escape route.

The Essex Scottish Regiment was ordered to breach the defence line Northeast of Udem and to clear the Northern half of the forest, through which the balance of the Brigade would pass.

At 0715 hours on 1st March, 1945, the attack was launched, but due to the softness of the ground it was found impossible to support the attack by tanks as had been planned.

Across approximately 500 yards of flat open country, in face of intense enemy fire, Major Tilston personally led his Company in the attack, keeping dangerously close to our own bursting shells in order to get the maximum cover from the barrage. Though wounded in the head he continued to lead his men forward, through a belt of wire ten feet in depth, to the enemy trenches shouting orders and encouragement and using his Sten gun with great effect. When the platoon on the left came under heavy fire from an enemy machine gun post he dashed forward personally and silenced it with a grenade; he was first to reach the enemy position and took the first prisoner.

Determined to maintain the momentum of the attack he ordered the reserve platoon to mop up these positions and with outstanding gallantry, pressed on with his main force to the second line of enemy defences which were on the edge of the wood.

As he approached the woods he was severely wounded in the hip and fell to the ground. Shouting to his men to carry on without him and urging them to get into the wood, he struggled to his feet and rejoined them as they reached the trenches on their objective. Here an elaborate system of underground dugouts and trenches was manned in considerable strength and vicious hand-to-hand fighting followed. Despite his wounds, Major Tilston's unyielding will to close with the enemy was a magnificent inspiration to his men as he led them in, systematically clearing the trenches of the fiercely resisting enemy. In this fighting two German Company Headquarters were overrun and many casualties were inflicted on the fanatical defenders.

Such had been the grimness of the fighting and so savage the enemy resistance that the Company was now reduced to only 26 men, one quarter of its original strength. Before consolidation could be completed the enemy counter-attacked repeatedly, supported by a hail of mortar and machine gun fire from the open flank. Major Tilston moved in the open from platoon to platoon quickly organizing their defence and directing fire against the advancing enemy. The enemy attacks penetrated so close to the positions that grenades were thrown into the trenches held by his troops, but this officer by personal contact, unshakeable confidence and unquenchable enthusiasm, so inspired his men that they held firm against great odds.

When the supply of ammunition became a serious problem he repeatedly crossed the bullet swept ground to the Company on his right flank to carry grenades, rifle and Bren ammunition to his troops, and replace a damaged wireless set to re-establish communications with Battalion Headquarters. He made at least six of these hazardous trips, each time crossing a road which was dominated by intense fire from numerous well-sited enemy machine gun posts.

On his last trip he was wounded for the third time, this time in the leg. He was found in a shell crater beside the road. Although very seriously

wounded and barely conscious, he would not submit to medical attention until he had given complete instructions as to the defence plan, had emphasized the absolute necessity of holding the position, and had ordered his one remaining officer to take over.

By his calm courage, gallant conduct and total disregard for his own safety, he fired his men with grim determination and their firm stand enabled the Regiment to accomplish its object of furnishing the Brigade with a solid base through which to launch further successful attacks to clear the forest, thus enabling the Division to accomplish its task.

(Overseas R.O. 5823, 23 May 45)

Nightfall saw the Essex Scot consolidating its costly gains, waiting for R.H.L.I. to move through (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Mar 45; W.D., Essex Scot, 1 Mar 45).

95. The northern flank on which 43 (W.) Div was operating still showed no sign of breaking open. Appeldorn (0447) and Ner Mormter (0650) were both reported to be strongly held, but the divisional reconnaissance squadrons roamed far and wide exploring each possible line of advance (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 1 Mar 45, Serial 70). On the other flank, south of the railway, 3 Cdn Inf Div had joined 11 Brit Armd Div in its drive to the east. The divisional plan was to attack and occupy Tuschen Wald and Balberger Wald with 8 Cdn Inf Bde, and on the completion of this phase to pass 9 Cdn Inf Bde through to seize the Hammerbruch feature (0636). 8 Bde with in support "A" and "B" Sqns, 6 Cdn Armd Regt, was to carry out this operation in three phases (AEF: 45/2 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D, Docket IV: Folio 19, p.5, 6 Cdn Armd Regt Report, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER"). In the first phase R. de Chaud, supported by "A" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt was to clear the Tuschen Wald from north to south to as far down as the line Gelemannshof (0339) - Wesselshof (0439). Then the troops would swing left to face eastwards and advance across the open ground towards the north to south road west of Rosenthalshof (0439). The second and third phases which called for the clearing of the Balberger Wald would be taken on by N. Shore R. and Q.O.R. of C. supported by "B" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt. (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde and Units, 1 Mar 45)

96. The wooded area which separates the Hochwald and Balberger Wald south of the railway line, was entered by R. de Chaud at approximately 1815 hours (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 3 Mar 45, Serial 16). The initial attack went in with "D" Coy on the right, "C" Coy on the left, and progressed well until 2030 hours, when the enemy put down such an overwhelming concentration of artillery, mortar and rocket fire that Lt-Col Taschereau's men were forced to pull back. As it was clear that the task of assaulting this thickly wooded ground could not be carried out in darkness, the attack was postponed until daylight (Ibid; W.D., R. de Chaud, 1 Mar 45; AEF: 45/8 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II, Folio 4, Memo No. 8, Account by Lt-Col J.W.H. Rowley, D.S.O., O.C. N. Shore R. as given to Hist Officer, 3 Cdn Inf Div, 16 Mar 45).

97. On that same day both N. Shore R. and Q.O.R. of C. moved into concentration areas between Gochfort and the railway. Here, these two regiments awaited the developments of R. de Chaud's action (W.D., N. Shore R., Q.O.R. of C., 1 Mar 45). The remaining elements of 3 Cdn Inf Div were widely scattered. 9 Cdn Inf Div was still around Udem, while 7 Cdn Inf Bde, whose task it was to protect the open flank of 11 Brit Armd Div, had

moved 1 C. Scot R. and R. Wpg Rif to take up new positions in that role. 1 C. Scot R. assumed control of the south-westerly slopes of the Gochfort feature (0139) with R. Wpg Rif to the south and east of the shallow stream near Hunerpasshof (0038). (W.Ds. H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 C. Scot R., R. Wpg Rif, 1 Mar 45)

98. The difficult struggle for manoeuvre continued in the sector held by 11 Armd Div, and it now came the turn of 4 Armd Bde Group to go forward across the water-logged ground overlooked by Balberger Wald and the high ground north of Sonsbeck. 4 Armd Bde advanced with 2 K.R.R.C. and 44 Royal Tks on the right, 4 K.S.L.I. and the Greys on the left. While the right group made slow progress against the strong opposition, the left-hand column became bogged down, for the infantry were unable to move in the face of intense machine gun fire. Further north, however, a line of advance was found to exist just inside the Canadian boundary. As a portion of the Greys and K.S.L.I. now went forward to secure a start line, the remaining troops and tanks extricated themselves from their present difficulties to come in behind them. This took until long after dark. Meanwhile 44 Royal Tks and 2 K.R.R.C. closed up to the enemy positions and engaged in the dangerous procedure of wood clearing at night along the open right flank.

30 CORPS AND NINTH U.S. ARMY - 1 MAR 45

99. Meanwhile 30 Corps had not decreased its pressure in the south-west. 185 Bde of 3 Brit Div fought for Kervenheim throughout the day, and by midnight, though enemy strongpoints in the castle and cemetery grounds were still holding out, the major part of the town was under British control. 8 and 9 Brit Bdes were strung out to the north-west and preparing to pass through the objective (AEF: 45/30 Corps/C/H, Docket III: Folios 118 and 119, Sitreps of 1 Mar 45). 53 (W.) Div maintained its offensive operations against Weeze with 71 Bde, while 158 Bde hammered away at the woods (9837) east of the town. 160 Bde rested in reserve. To the west of Weeze 53 (W.) Div reconnaissance troops prodded the enemy's lines, and further on 52 (L.) Div had met with some local successes. 156 Bde captured Ober Helsum (9039), Nieder Helsum (9038) and Heereven (8638). On the extreme right flank the Lowland armoured cars, striking down the railroad from Afferden (8038) towards Langstraat (8333), reached the concrete works north of Heukelom (8237), where they were stopped by the enemy in some strength. (*Ibid*)

100. Throughout 1 Mar the Ninth U.S. Army had made spectacular gains, Munchen-Gladbach having fallen to XIX Corps, who pressed on to the outskirts of Neuss (8927), while XVI Corps entered Venlo and Roermond. It was in the area of Munchen-Gladbach that the enemy produced elements of Pz Lehr Div, though to no avail. The Panzers, unable to check the lightning thrust of the Americans, lost very heavily. (AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III, Operation "VERITABLE", 8 Feb-10 Mar 45, Sec 19, para 121). The weather on this day had not been favourable and the air effort had necessarily to be restrained to short periods. Sonsbeck was attacked four times, however, and armoured reconnaissance was able to search the battle area, while four squadrons "beat up" the north-eastern fringe of the Hochwald. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 244, 1 Mar 45; 84 Gp Int Summary No. 203, 1 Mar 45)

EXPLOITATION BY 2 CDN CORPS - 2,3 MAR 45

101. The early morning of 2 Mar saw the entire front flare up with activity as each division struck out. In the far north 129 Bde of 43 (W.) Div moved down to the right to relieve elements of 4 Cdn Inf Bde who were to push on further into the forest. 4 Som L.I. and 5 Wilts respectively occupied the areas east of Todtenhugel and north of Delsenhof (0244). 4 Wilts remained in Calcar (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 2, Sitrep 020600 hours, 2 Mar 45). 214 Bde continued to prod carefully towards Kehrum, and by 0600 hours, 3 Mar, 5 D.C.L.I. had reached Spierhof (9346) against light opposition. 1 Worc R. found Kehrum unoccupied, but further to the north the armoured cars bumped into stern resistance on the approaches to Ner Normter. At this time it was not certain whether Appeldorn or Marienbaum were clear. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 2 Mar 45, Serial 20, 3 Mar 45, Serials 4, 10 and 15)

102. On 2 Cdn Inf Div's front the attack by 4 Bde continued with renewed fury. At 0630 hours, R.H.L.I. passed through the badly battered Essex Scot and advanced, heavily supported by artillery and mortar fire. "C" and "D" Coys had little trouble in consolidating the first objectives which lay just inside the forest, some 500 yards north-east of Schmachdarm and south of Neuenbauershof (0344). "A" and "B" Coys then took up the lunge forward, and by 1000 hours all of R.H.L.I.'s objectives were secure. Brigadier Cabeldu directed that R. Regt C. should push through deeper into the forest on 3 Mar (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, R.H.L.I., R. Regt C., 2 Mar 45). South of this position, 5 Cdn Inf Bde, whose advance patrols had already journeyed south to the region of the gap, held its ground with Calg Highrs, while its two sister units were to the rear preparing to take over from 6 Cdn Inf Bde as soon as the latter formation was ready to start its operations in the southern part of the forest (W.Ds., H.Q. 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes, 2 Mar 45). The plan was for Camerons of C. to pass to the left of Fus M.R. and secure a firm base along the edge of the forest west of Dailschenhof (0541). Once this was achieved, S. Sask R. and Fus M.R. would follow through. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Mar 45)

103. In the Hochwald gap itself there was being enacted a scene of bitter encounter which would rarely be equalled in its ferocity. For while Fus M.R. of 6 Cdn Inf Bde stood astride the space between the two forests, and two companies of Alq R. dug themselves in on the eastern slope, there was forming up a battle group consisting of Lake Sup R. (Mot) and "D" Coy Alq R. (now under command 4 Cdn Armd Bde), supported by the tanks of 21 Cdn Armd Regt (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, Lake Sup R. (Mot), Alq R., 21 and 22 Cdn Armd Regts, 1-2 Mar 45). Brigadier Moncell's plan was a bold one. Two companies of Lake Sup R. (Mot) mounted on Kangaroos were to pass through Alq R.'s forward positions which ran across the eastern slope of the gap. These companies must occupy the two farmsteads 400 yards west of Paelshof (055408). When that point was reached, a third company of Lake Sup R. (Mot) would go on to Paelshof itself; on the capture of these objectives, "D" Coy Alq R. was to dash eastwards again to the edge of the large wood east of Herstges (057410) (W.D., Lake Sup R. (Mot), March 1945: Appx 6, Operation "CHURCHILL"). The operation had been timed for 0200 hours, but there were considerable delays, as the Kangaroo force of 1 Cdn Carrier Regt ran into some enemy on the way to the assembly area. Finally, however, the vehicles arrived; each took on its cargo of fighting men, and at 0430 hours the attack began. (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 2 Mar 45)

104. A terrific hail of anti-tank fire met the attacking force as it cleared the crest of the Hochwald gap, and within a few minutes the whole area became a veritable hell. Tanks went up in smoke as they were struck by 88-mm fire, and men were machine gunned as they tried to extricate themselves from the burning hulls. Yet despite this fierce opposition, the leading companies of Lake Sup R. (Mot) gained their first objectives by 0715 hours, and the rest of the troops of Lake Sup R. (Mot) and Alq R. pressed on. By this time, however, it was broad daylight, and the enemy, thick on the ground and supported by many S.P. guns and Tiger tanks, raked the entire area unmercifully. Soon the forward troops had lost contact and small groups found themselves surrounded. That the Canadians put up a good fight cannot be doubted, for many enemy dead were found later, but there was not sufficient direct support against the well concealed German tanks, and as the day passed, the situation became more desperate. General Vokes, realizing the plight of his men, ordered Alq R. to push out along the axis of the railway to relieve the beleaguered companies; but the enemy, equally strong on either side of the track, put down a devastating fire to drive our every effort back with heavy losses. (Operation "CHURCHILL": W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 21 and 22 Cdn Armd Regts, Alq R., 2 Mar 45). Even some of the wounded carried on the fight locally wherever possible, but gradually all but a small group under Major T.H. Murray had been put out of action. This gallant officer fought on with his men until finally relieved early that night. Of the force involved in the original attack, only a few members of Lake Sup R. (Mot) returned. Of the Alq R. company there were even less; they had been wiped out almost to a man. (W.Ds., Lake Sup R. (Mot), Alq R., 2 Mar 45)

105. Meanwhile north of the Gap, 6 Bde's plan to pass Camerons of C. through Fus M.R. had taken shape. The Camerons began their advance at 1030 hours, but little progress could be made against the strong opposition, and the Highlanders were eventually forced to dig in and hold, about 500 yards short of the objectives along the south-eastern fringe of the front. As a result, neither S. Sask R. nor Fus M.R. who were to follow up to the north, were able to move. (W.Ds., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde and Units, 2 Mar 45). South of the railroad, the effort by 3 Cdn Inf Div against the Tuschen Wald had met better fortune. After an inactive night during which the enemy shelled the area consistently, R. de Chaud, supported by tanks of 6 Cdn Armd Regt, advanced again at 0730 hours on 2 Mar. "A" and "B" Coys led the way with "A" Sqn of the armoured regiment giving close support. Some very hard fighting followed and lasted throughout the morning, but luckily casualties were light. Finally, at about 1400 hours, R. de Chaud were effectively deployed in a rough sagging line just north of Nabershof (0439) to the area of Gelemannshof as they consolidated their gains. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 1, Ops Log, 2 Mar 45, Serials 23, 39, 44, 49 and 56)

106. The way was now clear for N. Shore R. and Q.Q.R. of C. to take up the task, and at 1430 hours these two regiments passed through to drive the enemy from the Balberger Wald. The advance was made against scattered opposition, which nevertheless was so fanatical that it delayed both units to the extent that even by 2200 hours, 2 Mar, only half of the objectives had been reached. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 2 Mar 45, Serials 69, 79, 83 and 87). Q.Q.R. of C. by last light held the western edge of the wood opposite Gelemannshof and Jungermannshof (0338), while three companies of N. Shore R. established themselves firmly on the brigade left flank from Wesselshof (0437) to the track junction some 1500 yards to the south (0438). The fourth company of N. Shore R. had wandered off the axis towards the south-east, but in so doing had made contact with elements of 11 Armd Div in the vicinity of Neuenbauershof (0338). The brigade held for the night in the western edge of the Tuschen

Wald. (W.Ds., Q.O.R. of C., R. de Chaud, N. Shore R., 2 Mar 45; AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Docket II: Memos Nos. 6, 7 and 8, Memorandums of Interviews with Os.C. Q.O.R. of C., R. de Chaud, N. Shore R., 16 Mar 45). 9 Cdn Inf Bde was now preparing to move from Udem into the more active battle area (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde). 7 Cdn Inf Bde rested in its consolidated positions, with the exception of 1 C. Scot R. who shifted further to the south-east later that night in order to relieve a portion of 11 Armd Div in the area of the crossroads north-east of Maasbruch (0136). (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Mar 45)

107. The tasks performed by 2 Cdn Armd Bde for the first two days in March had been of a wide and varying nature. 6 Cdn Armd Regt, having relieved 10 Cdn Armd Regt on 1 Mar, came under command of 3 Cdn Inf Div at Udem and operated with 8 Bde during the Balberger Wald fighting. 27 Cdn Armd Regt was providing armoured support for 2 Cdn Inf Div, "A" Sqn with 6 Bde, "B" Sqn with 5 Bde and "C" Sqn with 4 Bde. The last named sub-units, however, were released on the night of 2 Mar to concentrate with H.Q. 27 Cdn Armd Regt near Hartmannshof. 10 Cdn Armd Regt was now refitted and waiting for further employment near Schroanenhof. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, March 1945: Appx 1, Sitreps for period up to 030800; W.Ds., 10, 27 and 6 Cdn Armd Regts, 1 and 2 Mar 45)

108. The attack by 11 Armd Div to the south was resumed again at 0300 hours, 2 Mar, with the Greys and 4 K.S.L.I. of 4 Armd Bde Gp thrusting southwards between the two lines of trenches which constituted that part of the Schleiffen defences. The operation so far had gone exceedingly well, and as the light of day appeared, the ridge on the western side of the forest was captured. It was during the consolidation that the enemy seemed to revive; he counter attacked fiercely, but only to be driven off with heavy losses. 4 Armd Bde's second battle group then passed through and 44 Royal Tks and 2 K.R.R.C. moved in to clear the end of the line south of Neuenbauershof. The Germans in these positions put up a terrific fight, especially on the right flank, where the approaches to Sonsbeck were well cratered and covered by numerous strongpoints. By dawn on 3 Mar, however, in spite of the determined resistance, the 4 Armd Bde Gp had overcome the many obstacles and reached Kellervaldshof (0336) where they awaited relief by 159 Bde Gp, who were to press on towards Sonsbeck. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 2 Mar 45, Serials 46, 48, 52, 3 Mar 45, Serial 6)

109. Whereas the advance by 2 Cdn Corps had been bitterly opposed, 30 Corps swept southwards without much interference. On the extreme right 1 Commando Bde had entered Langstraat (8333). 156 (L.) Bde, having occupied Petruheim (8736) and Hasenhof (8836) cleared the wooded sector west of Steeg (9237). 71 Bde of 53 (W.) Div combed the town of Weeze while 158 Bde passed through the woods to the west and got astride the main road to Kavelaer, from where strong patrols were despatched into the northern outskirts of the town. 3 Brit Div, attacking to the south-east from the woods above Ratzenhof (9639) took Winnekendonk without opposition, while its reconnaissance elements fanned out towards Schravelen (9733). (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 9, "Highlights of Ops" up to 030730 (2 Mar 45)). The American Ninth Army was now advancing with unprecedented rapidity. So far 17,473 prisoners of war had passed into the cages. Neuss and Kapellen were assaulted by XIX Corps, and by the morning of 3 Mar, while Kapellen was in American hands, half of Neuss was clear and the River Rhine was reached south-east of the town and east of Krefeld, which XIII Corps was investing. Elsewhere on the XIII Corps' front the troops did not gain much ground, but XVI Corps on the left seized Nieukerk (0518) and raced on northward

towards 30 Brit Corps (Ibid: Sitrep, Ops Summary 012400-022400).

110. An Army Intelligence Summary for 2 Mar, summed up the enemy's plight in the following words:

At long last the enemy has recognized the threat to the rear of First Para Army. For a long time despite his public declarations that the operations in the REICHSWALD were a diversion, he cheerfully diverted all his best infantry and armour in the WEST to slowing our progress. Now he is paying the price and moving too late the troops which ought to have been kept for use against the main effort.

The difficulties of the ground and the season are NO longer enough to compensate for the basic weakness of his positions in the WEST.

Events promise to move swiftly. The American thrust has already broken the new SOUTH facing line of First Para Army at KREFELD A10, KEMPEN A00 and NIEUKERK A01. The HOCHWALD line is pierced at LABBECK A04 and SONSBECK A03. Although in the NORTH he is still counter attacking fiercely, his forces are more tired and depleted than before. In the SOUTH he can hardly have a firm line organized.

Thus in the next 24 hours he may expect to see further disengagement and definite steps taken to provide more protection for the escape route through WESEL. But this is NOT enough. He must begin to "hot foot" it and at once.

At this stage two things are decisive. The first, the speed and vigour with which he meets his present situation. The second, the weather. Now is the time for good weather for he must move by day or be trapped, if either the Americans or ourselves break further through.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary
No. 245, 2 Mar 45)

111. Now that the enemy's front gave every evidence of crumbling, the situation foreseen in General Crerar's directive of 24 Feb 45 began to take its final form:

If situation develops propitiously, 2 Canadian Corps will carry its armoured thrust through to XANTEN, and secure it and the high ground to its south. It will then take aggressive steps to clear the enemy from the area between the general line UDEM - SONSBECK - XANTEN, and the R RHINE.

In similar circumstances, 30 Corps will develop a thrust South East, with Guards Armd Div, to cut and hold the GELDERN - WESEL road in the vicinity of road and railway junctions and crossings in map squares 1430, 1431 and 1633. 3 Brit Inf Div, keeping East of the WEEZE - GELDERN road, will be directed South, securing WINNEKENDONK and then GELDERN. 53 (W.) Inf Div will secure KEVELAER, and make contact with 3 Brit Inf Div. 52 (L.) Inf Div will develop pressure southwards, and

clear the enemy from East bank of R MEUSE.

(G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0-4/1 Operational Directives First Cdn Army, No. 46, 24 Feb 45) (See Appx "B")

112. The G.O.C.-in-C.'s directive was furthered by the 30 Corps and 2 Cdn Corps' intentions issued on the night of 2 Mar. The intentions for 30 Corps were to

1. (a) Adv on axis HEES - WEMB - TWISTEDEN - WALBECK - GELDERN.
- (b) Continue clearance rd AFFERDEN - WELL.
- (c) Clear tps and tpt WEST of rd GOCH - WEEZE - KEVELAER by 031030A.

53 (W.) Inf Div

2. (a) 71 (W.) Inf Bde concs area GOCH.
- (b) 8 Brit Armd Bde with one inf bn to capture KEVELAER, and exploit to GELDERN.

3. Gds Armd Div

To adv at 1030 hrs to capture KAPellen and ISSUM.

4. 3 Brit Inf Div to exploit to KAPellen and be prepared to follow behind Gds Armd Div where latter have passed through.

(W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 9, "Highlight of Ops" to 030730A, p.2, "Introduction")

113.

The intentions for 2 Cdn Corps were:

1. 11 Brit Armd Div - to continue adv on SONSBECK.

2. 3 Cdn Inf Div

- (a) To clear BALBERGERWALD SOUTH of rly.
- (b) With 7 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes to attack from BALBERGERWALD and capture spur to O9 easting.

3. 4 Cdn Armd Div - to prepare to adv on axis LABBECK 0539 - VEEN 1135.

4. 2 Cdn Inf Div

- (a) To clear HOCHWALD forest.
- (b) To regroup for subsequent adv to XANTEN axis of rly.

5. 43 Brit Inf Div

- (a) To continue sweep on LEFT flank.
- (b) To take over to MARTENBAUM from 2 Cdn Inf Div.

(Ibid)

114. By the morning of 3 Mar, the situation north of the railroad was beginning to show signs of loosening up. Thereafter 43 (W.) Div on the left made steady gains throughout the day. With its left protected by the divisional reconnaissance, who were operating on the axis Henopel - Ner Normter and Hanselaer - Appeldorn, 214 Bde reached the outskirts of Marlenbaum by way of Kehrum by midnight, and immediately pushed elements into Vynen (0945). (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 4 Mar 45, Serials 6, 15 and 20). In the area of the Hochwald Gap, 4 Cdn Armd Bde, who had been under severe pressure since the previous night, and had beaten off several counter attacks, handed over to 5 Cdn Inf Bde, and retired to concentrate between Udem and the south-western tip of the forest. Here at 1500 hours, General Vokes issued fresh orders. 4 Cdn Armd Bde with under command Alq R. would reorganize into two battle groups and be ready to move south of the railway as from 0600 hours, 4 Mar. A 10 Cdn Inf Bde battle group, consisting of Linc & Wellb R. with 28 Cdn Armd Regt, would precede 4 Cdn Armd Bde in the same direction at 0200 hours, using the few precious intervening hours to regroup and rest. (AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II: Special Report 2 CC/1, G.S. Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", 16 Mar 45)

115. As soon as 5 Cdn Inf Bde had relieved Alq R. in the Gap, 6 Cdn Inf Bde resumed its advance to the north-east. Camerons of C. quickly seized the south-eastern fringe of the woods to allow S. Sask R. to pass through, at 0730 hours, and although movement was difficult and confined in the forest, S. Sask R. reached its objectives by 1200 hours. Two hours later Fus M.R. followed up and went on clearing the eastern part of the forest to as far north as Point 136 (0542). The brigade now firmed up for the night and patrolled north and east to deal with any remaining opposition (W.Ds., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, S. Sask R., Camerons of C., Fus M.R., 3 Mar 45). In the meantime 5 Cdn Inf Bde further adjusted its dispositions, as R. de Mais placed itself to the right of R.H.C. Calg Highrs retained their positions pending developments to the north and east. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 3 Mar 45)

116. In the northern half of the Hochwald 4 Cdn Inf Bde made good progress. R. Regt C., who had gone in early that morning, met little organized resistance, and by noon had all their objectives consolidated. Mopping up continued until nightfall, when all three regiments were firm and in complete control of the north-western section, with Essex Scot north of Schmachdarm, R.H.L.I. opposite Neuenbauershof and Olbershof (0344), and R. Regt C. well forward to the north-east with roving patrols in the vicinity of Godenhof (0448) and Horte Veen (0545). (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, R. Regt C., R.H.L.I. and Essex Scot, 3 Mar 45)

117. The day's efforts by 3 Cdn Inf Div south of the railway met with only limited success. 8 Cdn Inf Bde returned at first light to its task of clearing the eastern portion of the Balberger Wald, using the north to south ryde through the forest as a start line. Q.O.R. of C. on the right and N. Shore R. on the left went forward; the final objectives were the eastern edge, with Q.O.R. of C. taking everything below the village of Hasenacher (0538) and N. Shore R. all to the north.

118. The fight through the woods was strongly contested. Mines, both anti-tank and anti-personnel were numerous and cleverly placed. These, together with an unusually heavy mortar and rocket bombardment, made the advance slow and costly, but by evening, N. Shore R. was on its objectives, having captured Pauhof (0539) and Rosenthalshof (0539). Q.O.R. of C. was not so fortunate; after a lengthy hold-up at the start line, the attack finally got under way at 1000 hours, 3 Mar, only to encounter serious difficulties almost immediately. The tanks,

unable to move through the mined areas, were forced to support the infantry from stationary positions, a hard problem among the many trees. A further set-back occurred as the enemy, taking advantage of the delays in our advance, counter attacked the right-hand companies. Confused fighting developed, and nightfall found the left-hand column held up halfway to its objective, while the southern force was pinned down, still at the start line, resisting a series of fierce counter attacks and under very heavy fire. (W.Ds., Q.O.R. of C., N. Shore R., 3 Mar 45; AEF: 45/8 Cdn Inf Bde/C/G, Docket II: Memos 6, 7 and 8, Accounts of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" by Os.C. Q.O.R. of C., N. Shore R. and R. de Chaud, 3 Mar 45). The remaining unit of 8 Cdn Inf Bde, R. de Chaud, working between the area of the main attack and the railroad, was occupied in mopping up the enemy who held out in the open ground east of the Tuschen Wald. This task was completed by 2400 hours, 3 Mar, by which time R. de Chaud lined the road from the road and railroad junction on the right of R.H.C.'s positions to as far south as Wesselshof (0439).

119. Meanwhile, both 7 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes, though comparatively inactive operationally, were on the move. Regina Rif of 7 Cdn Inf Bde had already shifted to the western fringe of the Balberger Wald, where it came under command 8 Cdn Inf Bde (W.D., Regina Rif, 3 Mar 45). 1 C. Scot R. also changed its location again from the area of Schreibershof (0237), where it was relieved by 7 Cdn Recce Regt, to the more comfortable farms south-west of Udemerbruch (0240). R. Wpg Rif maintained their positions east of Kervenheim. (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde and Units, 3 Mar 45). 9 Cdn Inf Bde, fresh after its lengthy concentration at Udem, had recently been briefed on its next task - the capture of the high ground north of Sonsbeck - and on the evening of 3 Mar, the three regiments marched into the Balberger Wald, filling in the open spaces between the bogged down 8 Cdn Inf Bde attack to the east and Regina Rif (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 3 Mar 45).

120. In contrast to the difficulties being encountered by 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs, on the narrow front south of the Balberger Wald 11 Brit Armd Div was almost continually out of contact with the enemy, and now that the defensive belt south-west and west of the forest was clear, the general advance changed its tone to one of extensive patrolling (Taurus Pursuant, A History of 11 Brit Armd Div, p. 85). On this front General Roberts could do little else but wait for further developments on his flanks.

121. The general situation across 30 Corps' front had developed according to the promise shown earlier in the day. Rapid advances were carried out all along the sector and by the morning of 4 Mar, 52 (L.) Div had elements of 1 Cdo Bde in Well, while to the east 155 and 156 (L.) Bdes were in complete control of the road from Wembe (9133) to Klein Kevelaer (9330). Further eastwards, 53 (W.) Div was fast approaching Geldern from the north-west. 158 Bde was within two miles of the town with 71 and 160 Bdes firm along the axis back to Kevelaer and Weeze. 3 Brit Div had already launched 185 Bde against Kapellen, while 9 and 8 Bdes remained concentrated in the areas of Winnekendonk and Kervenheim respectively. The new advance by Gds Armd Div was also under way, though this operation was held up temporarily by bad road conditions along the Goch - Weeze highway. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 12, "Highlights of Ops" up to 040730 hours; and Folio 55, Ops Summary 258B, 022400 - 032400 hrs, "30 Brit Corps")

122. From the south the tempo of the American advance towards First Cdn Army mounted steadily. XIX Corps cleared Neuss and claimed yet another portion of the west bank of the Rhine near

Dusseldorf. XIII Corps, though still fighting in Krefeld, passed some of its armour to the north to reach Moers and capture Kempen, and XVI Corps, which was in the process of attacking Geldern and Sevelen, pressed on to within three miles of Rheinberg. With all this Allied pressure it was anticipated that the enemy's line would not hold much longer. His predicament was defined by the First Cdn Army Intelligence Summary of 3 Mar:

The most significant development on our front has been the fiendish efficiency of the preparations to withdraw in WEEZE E 9337 and the country to the WEST of it. It is evident that the enemy deliberately prepared for his departure and has created an area which delayed us today and promises to be a menace for some time to come...

Thus it has been that today we have NOT been able to follow up the enemy swiftly on our right and he has held us on our left.

His position seems clear enough. He must pull out but has apparently appreciated that his greatest asset is the staunch front he has presented to our attempts to break through the HOCHWALD. On this he can pivot back to the WESEL bridgehead and from it he can start his withdrawal.

The speed of his departure will be determined by the Americans' success in overrunning his rear areas. On present form, he must pull out on this basis at once...

Already he has blown up bridges at NEUSS F. 28 and KREFELD A.10. He is using the bridges at DUISBURG A.31 and the ferries at ORSOY as his main escape routes. The function of the road bridge at WESEL is as evident as its present condition is mysterious. In the past two days over ten reports have been received, alternately establishing that the bridge has a span down or that it is open for traffic. Better photographs are awaited but in the meantime it must be accepted that the bridge can be used. It is possible that the enemy has developed at WESEL, a deceptive device designed to make us believe that the bridge is closed. The railway bridge is open for single line traffic.

However as his lines contract, and the American advances continue, the only main route out which is left is through WESEL.

(First Cdn Army Intelligence Summary, No. 246, 3 Mar 45)

THE FINAL CLEARING OF THE WOODED AREAS - 4 MAR 45

123. The proposed course of the battle was clearly outlined in First Cdn Army's intentions for 4 Mar. 11 Brit Armd Div was to be prepared to advance after first light on the axis Udem - Sonsbeck - Bonninghardt. Three tasks were assigned to 3 Cdn Inf Div. 8 Cdn Inf Bde would first complete the clearing of Balberger Wald, whereupon 9 Bde would pass on to capture the Hammerbruch feature north-east of Sonsbeck. Once these two tasks were finished 3 Cdn Inf Div would open the route south.

through Sonsbeck and finally reorganize to face north-east towards Birten and Xanten. 4 Cdn Armd Div would be ready to advance on orders from the Commander, 2 Cdn Corps, on the axis Labbeck - Veen, passing through 3 Div. The clearance of the Hochwald would be left to 2 Cdn Inf Div, after which this formation would regroup to advance along the railway from Udem to Xanten. 43 (W.) Inf Div would continue its attack on Xanten through Kehrum. At the same time as General Crerar issued these instructions, General Horrocks ordered 52 (L.) Div to concentrate as soon as Walback (9622) was reached; 53 (W.) Inf Div to capture Issum and 3 Brit Inf Div to clear Kapellen. Gds Armd Div was then to pass through Kapellen and press on to seize its objectives about Bonninghardt. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 12, "Highlights of Ops" up to 040730; and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 5, Folio 4, Intentions 2 Cdn Corps, 4 Mar 45)

124. Throughout 4 Mar, while the Canadian formations were completing the clearing of the wooded areas, 43 (W.) Div made good progress. The enemy resistance against 214 Bde was gradually disappearing and both 5 D.C.L.I. and 1 Worc R. were able to move forward. 5 D.C.L.I., having cleared the circular wood east of Kehrum, moved through to the east of Marienbaum without trouble and to the south to contact 8 Cdn Recce Regt of 2 Cdn Inf Div. By nightfall, patrols were being pushed through towards Wickermanshof (0943), while to the north-east 1 Worc R. pressed on from Vynen (0845) towards Wardt (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 4 Mar 45, Serial 20; 5 Mar 45, Serials 15, 34). 2 Cdn Inf Div's efforts in the forest between the two railway tracks leading to Xanten also met with considerable success. The northern part was completely cleared by 4 Cdn Inf Bde during the morning and patrols were sent to the south-east to contact 6 Bde who were advancing rapidly up the right side of the forest (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes, 4 Mar 45). Apparently the enemy had withdrawn; Camerons of C. attacking eastwards across the front held by Fus M.R. met little opposition, and in the late afternoon contact was established with R. Regt C. and R.H.L.I. whose main bodies were now concentrated (Ibid). In evidence of the intensity of the past battle the enemy's dead and abandoned equipment lay everywhere (Ibid). The northernmost sector was now taken over by "C" Sqn 8 Cdn Recce Regt and one company R. Regt C. who kept close touch with 43 (W.) Div on the left flank (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Mar 45).

125. In the meantime, as 5 Bde was out of touch with the enemy, Brigadier W.J. McGill shifted his reserve battalions southwards in readiness for a new push. Calg Highrs moved down from the west edge of the Hochwald to the western end of the Gap, and after R.H.C. and R. de Mais had improved their positions east of the forest, the Highlanders passed through at 1700 hours to occupy the woods astride the railway, bringing the Rhine closer by some 2000 yards. Since this objective was gained without fighting, at 2130 hours Calg Highrs pressed on, for the plan now was to push R. de Mais past them at 0330 hours to occupy the high ground in the region of Birken Kampshof (0841) (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Mar 45). H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde now awaited developments from this advance.

126. Meanwhile, in the 3 Cdn Inf Div sector, 8 Cdn Inf Bde had finally accomplished its task of clearing Balberger Wald. This was done by Q.O.R. of C. who, after much costly fighting, reported all companies in position at 1600 hours (W.D., Q.O.R. of C., 4 Mar 45). During the day N. Shore R. remained along the eastern fringe from where a reconnaissance group of 4 Cdn Armd Div consisting of troops of A. & S.H. of C. and 29 Cdn Armd Regt struck out to advance south and capture Labbeck (0639) (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Mar 45). R. de Chaud, apart from holding the start line for Q.O.R. of C., were not committed, but moved

southwards upon relief by part of 1 C. Scot R., while Regina Rif (at present under command 8 Cdn Inf Bde) reverted to 7 Cdn Inf Bde at 1330 hours. R. Wpg Rif's situation along the southern flank was unchanged. (W.D., H.Qs. 8 and 7 Cdn Inf Bdes, 4 Mar 45)

127. The attack by 9 Cdn Inf Bde on the Hammerbruch spur went in at 1900 hours (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 4 Mar 45, Serial 46). S.D. & G. Highrs passed through Q.O.R. of C. and advanced against heavy opposition, but by 2300 hours had completed the first phase. Both H.L.L. of C. and Nth N.S. Highrs now moved up to carry on the assault. (Ibid, 5 Mar 45, Serial 17). 4 Cdn Armd Div had little share in the day's events. The operation against Labbeck and the consequent exploitation towards Haneshof by elements of A. & S.H. of C. and 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt met only slight opposition; the armoured cars of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt were now ordered by General Vokes to see what lay to the south-east (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 4 Mar 45).

THE ENEMY'S LINE IS SHORTENED

128. Though the narrow front held by 11 Armd Div brought small development, the news from the 30 Corps sector showed many promises of success. The front between XVI U.S. Corps and 52 (L.) Div and 53 (W.) Div was fast being closed out, for by the morning of 5 Mar, 1 Cdo Bde had made contact with the Americans in Walbeck (9623), and the Lowlanders, free of commitment, had begun to concentrate south and west of Geldern. 53 (W.) Div, having cleared Geldern with 35 U.S. Inf Div, turned north-east, leaving 158 Bde in the town, and moved along the axis of Geldern - Issum - Alpon with the American forces on its right. Issum was taken without trouble, but progress from here on was slowed by cratering. The advance against Kapellen by 3 Brit Inf Div was also successful. 185 Bde was firm on the objective by 1200 hours, and the divisional reconnaissance unit probed south of the town to make contact with Gds Armd Div, who in their turn had seized Hamb (0831) but were being held up to the north by bad roads and scattered opposition (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 4 Mar 45, Serial 51, and 5 Mar 45, Serial 12).

129. The boundary between Ninth U.S. Army and First Cdn Army from Geldern to Issum was virtually solid as a result of the various contacts established by XVI U.S. Corps and 53 (W.) Div. The avalanche of American armour and manpower surged relentlessly on, and by the morning of 5 Mar, the left bank of the Rhine from north-west of Dusseldorf to opposite Krefeld was reported clear by XIX Corps. XIII Corps had also battered its way to the river north of Homburg, but XVI Corps, meeting strong resistance, were not able to move beyond Camp on the road to Rheinberg. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 16, Folio 55, Ops Summary 259B, 21 Army Gp, Ninth U.S. Army, 5 Mar 45). The ferocity of the opposition both here and about Xanten was obvious proof of the enemy's determination to hold the Wesel bridgehead (First Cdn Army, Int Summary, No. 247, 4 Mar 45).

At long last today he has shortened his line and anticipated our thrusts by drawing back. Photo cover of the last few days has shown a dug line developing NORTHWEST of LUTTINGEN A1142, STAATSFORST XANTEN A1038 and GRINDSDICK A0937. There is little evidence of where it goes after square A0731, but it may well turn SOUTHWEST of BONNINGHARDT A1231 following the higher ground at the edge of the woods from A0831 to A1526 and thence to RHEINBERG A2128.

He would now appear to have sufficient troops to cover the front of such a bridgehead and indeed to continue to protect the ferry crossing at ORSOY A2725. If he should start to withdraw front line troops in any quantity, then three successive lines are available. From the defences facing SOUTHEAST in front of MENZELEN A1636, the first could run from Birten A1238 to OSSENBERG A2030. The second runs clearly from A1640 to A1937 in front of the villages of GINDERICH A1738 and BUDERICH A2038. The last line protects the top of the WESEL bend SOUTHWEST of PERRICH A1840 and FORT BLUCHER A2138.

The whole position depends on the routes out at WESEL where the road bridge, if NOT open, was substantially repaired on 2 March.

As the enemy's strategy becomes more realistic in the face of disaster, so his tactics are designed to defeat a breakthrough and to extricate an army.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary
No. 247, 4 Mar 45)

130. Amid all this good news from the American front, marked improvements occurred in the areas of 30 Brit and 2 Cdn Corps during 5 Mar, to bring mutual satisfaction. The pressure was kept up fully all along the front. The 9 Cdn Inf Bde objective which took in the area of the small woods north-east of Sonsbeck was assaulted by H.L.I. of C. and Nth N.S. Highrs supported by tanks of 6 Cdn Armd Regt at 0630 hours, 5 Mar. The advance progressed well enough, in spite of severe opposition, to allow S.D. & G. Highrs, recently relieved by Q.O.R. of C., to pass beyond to attack the wooded hills south of the Sonsbeck - Xanten road in the late afternoon (AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Docket II, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", Special Report No. 2, paras 11, 12, 13 and 14).

131. In the Balberger Wald 7 Cdn Inf Bde waited in concentration, for Regina Rif had been detailed the job of capturing Sonsbeck as soon as 9 Cdn Inf Bde succeeded in its latest effort. R. de Chaud and N. Shore R. also remained static. It was the success by 43 Div in the far north which cut down on 2 Cdn Inf Div's opportunities on this day. 4 Cdn Inf Bde remained in the northern part of the Hochwald to refit and rest. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, whose advanced elements, the R. de Mais, had reached the region of Birkenchampshof, met heavy fire, but apart from patrolling forward could make no definite gains. Calg Highrs also felt along the southern eastern routes from their position in the wood astride the railway. R.H.C. though on short notice to move, remained east of the gap (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Mar 45). Between the railway and the forest, 6 Cdn Inf Bde put a new plan into operation. While Fus M.R. held the eastern edge of the forest and Camerons of C. concentrated in reserve, S. Sask R. advanced eastward towards Roschhof (0942), where they formed a strong position 1000 yards north of R. de Mais. From here infantry and reconnaissance patrols went to contact the enemy south towards Xanten and north to meet 214 Bde of 43 Div, who had reached the line of Wickermanshof (0943) and Wardt, which 1 Wonc R. entered unopposed. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Mar 45; 2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 5 Mar 45, Serials 34, 35, 37, 48, 52 and 55, 6 Mar 45, Serial 2)

132. The main part of Maj-Gen Vokes' division, at present concentrated east of Udem, eagerly awaited its chance to move into the battle. The A. & S.H. of C. battle group operating

against stiffened opposition in the area south of Haneshof reported a good deal of enemy armour, some of which was doubtlessly being forced into this sector by 3 Cdn Inf Div's drive south of Balberger Wald (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 5 Mar 45; and W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Mar 45). 11 Armd Div was also concentrated, although its forward elements edged ahead gradually to conform with the pressure from 3 Cdn Inf Div. Heavy fighting ensued for 159 Bde Gp near the crossroads west of Sonsbeck (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 5 Mar 45, Serial 40). The entire effort of 30 Corps had now taken a change in direction. On the far western flank 52 (L.) Div rested and 1 Cdo Bde reverted to command of Second Army. Along the parallel flank of XVI U.S. Corps, 53 (W.) Inf Div passed 158 Bde through 71 Bde at Issum and thrust towards Alpon. Directly to the north, Gds Armd Div attacked north-east from Hamb, to capture Metekath, where some hundred prisoners of war gave up, while 185 Bde of 3 Div prepared to clear the wooded area of Winkelscher Busch. The advance continued with unceasing pressure against varying opposition all across the front. (AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Operation "VERITABLE", p. 40, paras 125-128)

133. On the Ninth Army front more of the river bank was cleared by XIX Corps, who advanced freely to report all bridges over the river in their sector blown. XIII Corps had a more difficult task. Despite the fact that the enemy's resistance mounted steadily, Orsoy was taken, but opposition literally vanished before XVI Corps, whose 8 U.S. Armd Div seized Lint-Fort and entered Rheinberg (W.D., H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 20, Folio 40, Ops Summary 260B, 042400-052400, March 1945). In the latter, however, fierce fighting raged long into the night (Ibid).

134. During the hours of darkness, 7 Cdn Inf Bde went forward to attack Sonsbeck. 1 C. Scot R. led the way and on reaching the northern outskirts, Regina Rif passed through to enter the town against moderate resistance (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 11, 14, 16 and 17). Thus by 0800 hours 6 Mar the 2 Cdn Corps line provided a satisfying picture. In the far north from Wardt to Wickermanshof 214 Bde of 43 Div together with 43 Recce Regt were persisting in an all-out effort to reach Xanten. Slightly to the south, the line ran past Roschof (0942) and Schlaymann (0842), now held by S. Sask R., through whom Camerons of C. attacked eastwards at 0615 hours to the large wood astride the railway north-east of Labbeck. This wood was occupied by Calg Highrs. South of this point, around the community of Labbeck elements of 10 Cdn Inf Bde and the armoured cars of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt were still attempting to thrust past Haneshof (0639) across the front held by N. Shore R. of 8 Cdn Inf Bde. The line continued south across the Hammerbruch feature, which 9 Cdn Inf Bde was gradually clearing, to form a salient extending as far as the main Xanten - Sonsbeck road from the area between Furth (0838) and Brandskath (0937) (now occupied by H.L.I. of C.) forward to the wood north of Kirvitt (0736) (which was being cleared by S.D. & G. Highrs), then back to follow the line of the road which bounded the Nth N.S. Highrs' position. Further along this road, to the south-west, 1 C. Scot R. were firm in on the spur which ran from Muscher (0536) to the school north of Pachlandshof (0635). Sonsbeck was now in the hands of Regina Rif, who were patrolling south to establish contact with 3 Brit Div. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 2-7; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, March 1945: Appx 56, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 4 and 68)

135. 4 Cdn Armd Div had also gone over to the offensive. Three battle groups of 10 Cdn Inf Bde supported by 28 Cdn Armd Regt were advancing south through 1 C. Scot R.'s area towards Veen (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 18 and 21). 4 Cdn Armd Bde, with under command Alq R., remained

in the vicinity of Udemerbruch, prepared to join the battle as soon as the opportunity offered (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde and Units, 6 Mar 45). 11 Armd Div still held its ground west of Sonsbeck, but patrolled to keep touch with 3 Cdn Inf Div on its left, and into the so far unclaimed area south of the town towards which 3 Brit Div was advancing, clearing the Winkelscher Busch en route. The rest of 30 Corps was moving steadily forward. Eastwards of Hamb Gds Armd Div was still advancing in the direction of Bonninghardt, while along the southern flank 53 (W.) Div was working its way along the main road to Alpon with 160 Bde in the lead (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 22, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 9 and 17). The American Ninth Army's push to the north-east, which had already taken in most of the Rhine's left bank from Dusseldorf to Homberg, continued with heavy fighting by XVI Corps in Rheinberg (Ibid., Appx 22, Ops Log "Copy", 6 Mar 45, Serial 1).

136. The troops made steady gains throughout the day against strong resistance. On the left, as 43 (W.) Div felt its way towards Luttingen (1142) and Xanten from the north, 2 Cdn Inf Div sent Camerons of C. through S. Sask R. with the north-western outskirts of Xanten as their objective, and moved Fus M.R. eastwards to the area of Heukershof (0843) (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 28, 24 and 26). Camerons of C., however, met extremely heavy opposition and were forced to temporarily withdraw. General Simonds now decided on a new plan, to assault Xanten with 43 (W.) Div and 4 and 5 Cdn Inf Bdes. 6 Cdn Inf Bde was ordered to form a firm base as part of this project and to carry out a relief of 5 Bde, which had not moved from its positions astride and north of the railway. S. Sask R. was to remain in its present positions. Fus M.R. was to relieve R. de Mais and Camerons of C. were to take over from Calg Highrs. 4 and 5 Bdes would then concentrate behind S. Sask R. and Camerons of C. respectively. Apart from the capture of the town by 4 Cdn Inf Bde and the attempt to seize the high ground between Xanten and the Rhine with 5 Cdn Inf Bde assisted by 43 (W.) Div on the left, an alternate plan called for intensive patrolling forward to determine whether the enemy was pulling back. If this were found to be the case, then one battalion of 4 or 5 Bde would be passed through with the greatest possible speed to occupy the vacated position. R.H.C. and R. de Mais would lead the attack for 5 Bde (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 6 Mar 45; and W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, March 1945: Ops Log, Appx "B", Notes of Comds Conference, 6 Mar 45). R.H.L.I. and Essex Scot were picked by Brigadier Cabeldu for the assault of the town proper, after which R. Regt C. would pass through (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde and Units, 6 Mar 45).

137. At the same time, south of the railway both the troops of 4 Cdn Armd and 3 Cdn Inf Divs were engaged in bitter fighting. One small battle group of 10 Cdn Inf Bde after a hard time got past the village of Haneshof (0638) and reached Beckmannshof (0738). Of two other larger groups driving south to cut the Sonsbeck - Veen road, the first, following the main road found its route blocked by craters. These stopped the armour, but the infantry went forward on foot seeking contact. The last group, swinging south past the eastern outskirts of Sonsbeck, turned to thrust eastwards, but it too found its line of advance blocked at many points. Although they reached the village of Veen by nightfall, the troops came under such heavy fire that Brigadier Jefferson decided to plan a special attack for the following morning, with A. & S.H. of C. going in along the main road, supported by elements of Alg R. on the left. A mixed force of 28 Cdn Armd Regt and Linc & Wellb R. was to stand by to pass through. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 22, 25, 27, 32, 41, 43, 47 and 49; W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 6 Mar 45)

138. Meanwhile the positions of 3 Cdn Inf Div had improved considerably. The opposition against S.D. & G. Highrs of 9 Bde, though very stiff during the morning lessened enough for R. Wpg Rif (now under command 9 Bde) to pass on to the south in the afternoon and take Wetherkamp (0736) and Holtges (0836). At the same time elements of Nth N.S. Highrs cut in behind S.D. & G. Highrs and reached the road binding in the eastern side of the hill feature between Burenhof (0837) and the crossroads at Fruth (0738). North-west of this point H.L.I. of C. had advanced to string its companies out as far as Beckmannshof to join hands with N. Shore R. of 8 Bde, who, with troops of 10 Cdn Inf Bde, occupied the areas of Labbeck and Haneshof. Q.O.R. of C. and R. de Chaud did not change position. Further to the south 1 C. Scot R. filled in the gap between 9 Bde and Sonsbeck, which Regina Rif now held firmly (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 39 and 40).

139. By the evening of 6 Mar patrols of Regina Rif had met 3 Brit Div at the road junction south of Sonsbeck (Ibid, Serial 50). This contact now made the line solid and pinched out 11 Brit Armd Div, who had previously been detailed to be prepared to advance through Sonsbeck on to Bonninghardt (Ibid, Appx 5, Folio 5, "Intention of 2 Cdn Corps", 6 Mar 45). The armoured division was now ordered to revert to command H.Q. First Cdn Army and to move back out of the battle (Ibid: Appx 5, Folio 6, "Intention 2 Cdn Corps", 7 Mar 45). In the same order General Simonds instructed 4 Cdn Armd Div to continue the advance through Veen on Menzelen (1636). 3 Cdn Inf Div was to probe towards Xanten forest; 2 Cdn and 43 (W.) Divs were to contain Xanten until the assault proper began (Ibid).

140. The advance to the east by 30 Corps on 6 Mar had also progressed favourably. 3 Brit Div completed the clearing of Winkelscher Busch without trouble, and resumed their advance to the north-east (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serial 46). The drive by Gds Armd Div on Bonninghardt was entirely successful; after a steady advance against moderate opposition the town was captured by 1 Welsh Gds who passed to the east, leaving the Scots Gds to clear the area of the railroad north of the town (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 22, Army Ops Log, 7 Mar 45, Serial 2).

141. On the road to Alpon, however, the enemy put up a much stiffer fight, and gains were slow in comparison to the effort by the divisional reconnaissance regiment through the Die Leucht woods to the south of the highway. The armoured cars roamed freely through the evergreens, and by 1800 hours had reached the eastern and southern fringes to capture a large enemy petrol dump and to link up with XVI Corps just east of Padenhof (1526) (Ibid, Appx 22, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 27, 48 and 57). The infantry battalions were by this time being sorely pressed. After capturing that portion of Die Leucht woods directly south of Alpon, 4 Welch of 160 Inf Bde were heavily counter attacked (Ibid, Serial 93). These efforts on the part of the enemy, however, served no purpose, and the British line remained unbroken. At 2145 hours that same evening, it was announced that 52 (L.) Div would rejoin the battle and relieve 53 (W.) Div who, after their gallant work of the past ten days, were to concentrate and rest near Geldern. (Ibid, Serial 115; 2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serial 1; Ops Log, 7 Mar 45, Serial 1)

142. On the Ninth Army front, rapid advances were forcing the enemy back towards Wesel and congesting his bridgehead. XVI Corps cleared Rheinberg as well as the existing pocket between Rheinberg and Orsoy, and in conjunction with 53 (W.) Div was now facing the railway line from Alpon to Rheinberg, and had strong patrols towards Millingen (1830). XIII Corps cleared

Homberg and the area of the loop in the river. While resistance against XIII Corps was definitely crumbling, the enemy refused to give ground before Ossenberg and by 0900 hours, 7 Mar, 35 U.S. Inf Div of XVI Corps was still held up on the outskirts of the town and on the approaches to Millingen (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 22, Folio 40, Sitrep 070900A Ninth U.S. Army, Folio 51, Ops Summary dated Mar 071305).

143. The changes on the front that day (6 Mar) had consisted chiefly in a shifting of our front line to the eastern edge of the Bonninghardt woods. Sonsbeck and the village of Bonninghardt were found clear, and it was expected that Veen too would be free of enemy when it was entered. The German reaction had been in the form of a well organized demolition and mining plan and co-ordinated defensive artillery fire. His withdrawal was continuing skilfully and without heavy expense to himself. That the retention of Xanten was essential to his plans was plain, for he had counter attacked to hold it. There had been no major change in his troop dispositions except that Para Lehr Regt was now confirmed to be in the area of Veen in 8 Para Div's sector. There was conjecture about his escape route. The Wesel railway bridge was at this time reported by air reconnaissance to be impassable to wheeled traffic, but according to a prisoner it had been open to two-way movement two days previously. The road bridge was also soon to be in an advanced state of repair, but it must be assumed that both bridges would be available when the enemy so desired (First Cdn Army Int Summary, No. 249, 6 Mar 45, para 2).

144. The enemy's intention as shown by his actions today had been to withdraw when pressed, but to stand his ground if permitted. He seemed to have withdrawn no major formations and to have accepted losses in his existing forces. Many of his units were much under strength and were constantly being reinforced. Elsewhere his whole position west of the Rhine was in a state of dissolution. His recent newspaper pronouncements had made clear how important the Rhine and the Ruhr were to his heart and mind. If the river could therefore be crossed before he pulled himself together and built up his western shield again, the Allied armies would take decisive advantage of the blow inflicted on him by the loss of the left bank. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 249, 6 Mar 45, para 6)

145. Even now, with his bridgehead still further shrunk by the fall of Rheinberg, Orsoy and the seizure of the hills about Bonninghardt, General Schlemm was bound in by direct orders from Berlin. The latest one had pointed out that not a single fit man must withdraw behind the Rhine. Schlemm, however, was worried, not so much for his scattered "bodies" as for the remnants of his artillery which lay exposed to the Allied guns. The German General estimated at this time that his own guns were outnumbered by a ratio of 20 to 1. He therefore asked permission to be allowed to pull his equipments back across the Rhine, giving as his reason the alternative of complete destruction. This permission was finally obtained some 48 hours later (Special Interrogation Report, General Schlemm).

146. During the entire first week of March, the weather had been a serious opponent to the Allies. As a result, the air support during the latter phases of operations by First Cdn Army had been small, and although medium and heavy bombers had been up on 5 and 6 Mar, close support had been of negligible quantity. The Wesel bridges, a target of high priority, received two attacks on 5 Mar, when 41 aircraft of 2 Gp R.A.F. dropped 164 one thousand pound bombs on the target of the railway bridge, while another formation of 48 aircraft unloaded 183 bombs aimed at the road bridge. As both attacks were unsuccessful, 39 Mosquitoes of R.A.F. Bomber Command dropped 41 tons of H.E. on

troop concentrations the following day. This was followed on the evening of 6 Mar and morning of 7 Mar by 82 heavies who attacked the bridge again with 463 tons of H.E. Direct support of the ground operations was extremely restricted. (AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III, Operation "VERITABLE", paras 136-138)

147. The next twelve hours (on 7 Mar) provided little of interest. The G.O.C. 30 Corps ordered 53 (W.) Div to hold its ground, keep close contact with 35 Div of XVI U.S. Corps and to withdraw to Corps reserve on relief by 52 (L.) Div. Gds Armd Div and 3 Brit Inf Div were also instructed to maintain their present positions, pending the take-over on the right flank by 52 (L.) Div. The situation was generally quiet, but in reply to an urgent request by General Simonds that pressure be kept up, Brigadier E. Jones, B.G.S. 30 Corps, stated that 52 (L.) Div would attack astride the Wesel road as soon as possible (AEF: 45/30 Corps/C/1, Docket III(B): Folios 39 and 40, Messages 062215A and 080015A, March 1945). In the vicinity of Veen, the 10 Cdn Inf Bde attack during the early hours of 7 Mar had proved unsuccessful. The leadin troops got to within 500 yards of the village but were driven back by a hail of fire. As a result, it was decided to launch a two-battalion attack later in the day. (AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket III, G.S. Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", Special Report No. 200/1: A Short History of 10 Cdn Inf Bde; 2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 7 Mar 45, Serial 32). On the 3 Cdn Inf Div sector patrols were the only activity, but to the north and along the railroad, 2 Cdn Inf Div was busy regrouping for its assault on Xanten. The reliefs and moves as ordered by G.O.C. 2 Cdn Inf Div were carried out without incident. Fus M.R. took over from R. de Mais who turned back some 2000 yards to concentrate with R.H.C. just east of the Hochwald forest. (W.Ds., H.Qs. 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes, Fus M.R., R. de Mais and R.H.C., 7 Mar 45). On the far left 43 (W.) Div probed forward and waited for the order that would start them towards Xanten from the north.

THE ATTACKS ON VEEN AND XANTEN, 7-9 MAR 45

148. In his directive of 25 Feb, General Crerar had anticipated that a special operation might have to be launched to complete "BLOCKBUSTER" (G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0-4/1, Photostatic copies, Operational Directives, First Cdn Army, folio 47, G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0-7/11, 25 Feb 45, para 3) (See Appx "B"). "BLOCKBUSTER" now came into being, in order that Xanten should be taken. The plan of attack against this ancient town called for attacks by 4 and 5 Cdn Inf Bdes and 129 Bde of 43 (W.) Div. 4 Cdn Inf Bde was to move through 6 Cdn Inf Bde and capture the western side of the town, 129 Bde was to advance south through Nieder (1041) and Luttingen to seize the area of Beek (1240) and the town proper. Once this had been accomplished 5 Cdn Inf Bde would pass on to secure the high ground beyond as far as Birten. Exploitation would then be carried out south and east of the bend in the Alter Rhein (AEF: 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I: Brigadier W.J. McGill's Account). The attack was to be supported by elements of 27 Cdn Armd Regt who were now concentrated in rear of 6 Cdn Inf Bde (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, March 1945: Appx 1, Sitrep for period up to 071630A, dated 081030A, March 1945). 10 Cdn Armd Regt still remained south of Calcar in reserve, while 6 Cdn Armd Regt kept their positions at the south-eastern end of Balberger Wald, in support of 3 Cdn Inf Div (Ibid).

149. While 2 Cdn Inf Div made final preparations for its attack on Xanten, 3 Cdn Inf Div's positions stayed unchanged. To the south, however, General Vokes' troops resumed their assault on Veen. The A. & S.H. of C. attack having been broken

up, Linc & Welld R. and Alq R. who reverted to command 10 Cdn Inf Bde that morning, went forward supported by 28 Cdn Armd Regt at 1600 hours. The infantry's movement began under a heavy smoke screen, while the artillery blasted the objective with high explosive. Two companies of Alq R. advanced on the left to seize a portion of the road near Oimannshof (1036). At the same time two companies of Linc & Welld R. supported by tanks of 28 Cdn Armd Regt were committed along the southern axis of Boomenhof (0934) - Holtershof (1036) - Veen; while still another group of Linc & Welld R. and 28 Cdn Armd Regt worked wide to the right in an endeavour to outflank Veen from the south-east (W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Mar 45, Linc & Welld R., Alq R., 28 Cdn Armd Regt, 7 Mar 45).

150. The two frontal attacks developed into a savage slugging match in which every yard of ground became precious in the face of murderous small arms fire, continuous shelling and mortaring. But the right hook had better luck; opposition was light and prisoners numerous so that by midnight this force had consolidated the crossroads at Dormemannshof (1235) some 1300 yards south-east of the village (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Mar 45). At about 2000 hours, a fresh company of Alq R. was pushed past the Linc & Welld R. and reinforcements were despatched to the flanking force to the east (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 7 Mar 45, Serial 39, 8 Mar-45, Serials 3, 4 and 5).

151. During the darkness, the enemy's reaction reached a peak of ferocity, and the advance slowed down against the increased resistance (Ibid, 8 Mar 45, Serials 7 and 10). By 0600 hours, 8 Mar, though the majority of Alq R. was still pinned down on the left, Linc & Welld R. and 28 Cdn Armd Regt had made minor gains on the right, and another squadron of 28 Cdn Armd Regt had joined the battle group to the south-east (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Mar 45). As soon as it was light enough, each column began to probe forward again, but the enemy, by skilful use of his rockets, mortars and anti-tank guns, added to the already numerous casualties in tanks and personnel. Furthermore armour manoeuvre was most difficult on the soggy ground. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Mar 45)

152. In the meantime, on 8 Mar, to the south, as 10 Cdn Inf Bde had been fighting its way towards Veen, 52 (L.) Div relieved 53 (W.) Div on the approaches to Alpon, with orders to attack the town as soon as possible. Gds Armd Div with 8 Brit Inf Bde under command, made only small advances, while 3 Brit Div remained static in the area of Winkelscher Busch (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 27, Sitrep up to 080900, folio 29). On the far right of the battle ground, the troops of XVI U.S. Corps were still hammering at Ossenbergl and the line of Millingen - Huck, where the enemy was putting up a tremendous effort to stop the advance (Ibid). The highlight of the day, however, came from the First U.S. Army sector, where 9 U.S. Armd Div announced that they had captured a railway bridge intact over the Rhine at Remagen, in the vicinity of Epermay (F6520). This vital opportunity was quickly used to advantage, and by the morning of 8 Mar, one motor battalion and several tanks were across the river fighting bitterly to maintain the new bridgehead (Ibid). The importance of this event is emphasized by First Cdn Army intelligence in its daily summary:

The capture of a bridgehead complete with bridge over the RHINE is a measure of the enemy's complete disorganization from COLOGNE SOUTH to the MOSELLE. His one overriding aim in the WEST must be to prevent us from gaining a foothold over the only effective barrier to our advance.

His commanders are preoccupied with the problem of getting the troops out of the EIFEL and to the EAST, and the fact that the drive SOUTH EAST, from EUSKIRCHEN F 32 cut across the inter army boundary must have raised difficulties in control similar to those caused by Ninth U.S. Army's advance to MUNCHEN GLADBACH F 08 across the inter Army Group boundary. The combination of this thrust, which had carried on to SINZIG F 61, with Third US Army's unopposed drive down the Autobahn to the only other RHINE bridges at KOBLENZ is producing the virtual encirclement of some six or more enemy divisions. Some further Corps Headquarters may be included, in addition to yesterday's bag, which now turns out to be NOT 13 Corps but 53 Corps. In fact events on this front may be considered more immediately damaging to the enemy in loss of prisoners and of the RHINE crossing than those of the front from COLOGNE NORTH. The threat to the RUHR remains, and the enemy's disintegration here too is pointed by the fact that our patrols crossed the RHINE near DUISBURG A 21 and only met weak parties of his troops.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary,
No. 250; 7 Mar 45)

153.

Regarding the enemy's intention the report continued:

The two features of the enemy's bridgehead are the tenacity with which it is being held and the lack of fuss in its evacuation...

From the group of 65 PW captured chiefly on 3-4 March, PW from nine units reported orders to hold to the last and none had orders which permitted more than a short tactical withdrawal, to more favourable ground. A PW from 16 Para Regiment's HQ captured 5 March 45 spoke of a GOC's order "who crosses the RHINE gets shot". It is quite evident that the enemy had a plan and a very good one for his withdrawal, but whether it is on a "time" or "ground" basis is a different matter... That it should be complete by to-morrow is always possible, but the next step seems rather to depend on the enemy's continued hold of XANTEN A 14 and its woods and of the SOUTH flank of the bridgehead than on the passage of time. Then the occupation of successive positions back to WESEL may well in turn depend on our penetration. The only safe basis to plan upon is that time of his withdrawal depends on our plans and NOT on the enemy's.

Undoubtedly in our sector a large amount of equipment and rear area troops have crossed the RHINE. The method has been in sharp contrast to the confusion farther SOUTH. At WESEL there has been no visible queueing at ferry sites, no daylight crowding of the bridges, which indeed still indicate by day that they are damaged. No traffic has been seen on them. The probability grows therefore that what we see by day at the bridges is now the result of design and NOT accident. By night the scene changes, and traffic moves freely eastward, by both bridges and ferries. It has been impossible to check this because weather and smoke screens have prevented night observation photography.

(Ibid)

154. 8 Mar was a day of momentous events all across the front. At 0540 hours, while troops of 4 Cdn Armd Div were still attempting to take the village of Veen, both 2 Cdn Inf Div, supported by 27 Cdn Armd Regt, and 43 (W.) Div went forward to the attack on Xanten (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 8 Mar 45, Serials 11 and 12). 4 Cdn Inf Bde broke out of the S. Sask R. positions to lead the way with on the left Essex Scot and on the right R.H.L.I. Simultaneously, 129 Bde of 43 (W.) Div launched its two forward battalions, 5 Wilts from Wardt and 4 Som L.I. along the Marienbaum - Xanten road. By 0700 hours Essex Scot reported that part of the objective, in the wide fork of the two main roads leading into the town from the north-west and south-west, was taken, but R.H.L.I. held up by large road craters, were under heavy fire (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Mar 45). As the morning wore on, the situation concerning R.H.L.I. became obscure, as some of their troops had lost contact with Battalion Headquarters. Essex Scot moved ahead, but very slowly, until crocodiles came forward to flush out the buildings in the line of advance. Thereafter movement became freer, and by midday Essex Scot announced that the objective was being consolidated. Since the progress of R.H.L.I. was still held up, R. Regt C. was launched into the battle, in the hope that their attack might relieve pressure on the right (*Ibid*). At the same time 129 Bde, who after experiencing some disorganization in the area of its start line had regrouped, were moving on to the town of Xanten (*Ibid*, Serials 21, 25, 28 and 29).

155. The battle continued against fierce resistance all afternoon as R. Regt C. aided by Wasp flame-throwers pressed on, and troops of 129 Bde fought their way into the built-up section of the town. At 1815 hours Brigadier Cabeldu received the first news from R.H.L.I., who had suffered extremely severe casualties, and he decided that either the battalion must be reinforced or that the attack by 5 Cdn Inf Bde must go in to ease the pressure. However, a little later, although R. Regt C. was sparing no effort to reach its objective, General Matthews informed Brigadier Cabeldu that 5 Cdn Inf Bde would go in as soon as it could get into its forming up places. As darkness descended, Fus M.R. came up on the right to relieve elements of R.H.L.I., while the R. Regt C. left column contacted 129 Bde of 43 (W.) Div in the town. 5 Cdn Inf Bde was preparing to pass through. (*Ibid*, Serials 41, 44, and W.Ds., H.Q. 4 and 5 Cdn Inf Bdes, 8 Mar 45)

156. Meanwhile, some three miles to the south, enemy resistance in the Veen area was still strong. Our infantry were kept under withering fire all day, and the armour, its manoeuvre restricted by the soft ground and many mine fields, was being battered by numerous anti-tank guns. Approaching the town from the west and north-west Alq R. were unable to make progress. The thrust from the south-east by Linc & Welld R. supported by 28 Cdn Armd Regt was being held, although one small group managed to cut the Veen - Winnenthal road about half a mile east of Veen. During the day 4 Cdn Armd Bde prepared to join the battle once more. 22 Cdn Armd Regt, with one company of Alq R. under command, drove past Sonsbeck to the crossroads north of Bonninghardt, ready to outflank Veen. The operation, however, was postponed, and the force remained in Bonninghardt with the exception of one squadron which proceeded north to Die Schanx (1234); from here it engaged the woods south of Winnenthal (W.D., 22 Cdn Armd Regt, 8 Mar 45). 21 Cdn Armd Regt had a similar task on the left, where the tanks harassed the Latzen Busch north-west of Veen. Lake Sup R. (Mot) did not participate in any of these actions but remained concentrated north of Sonsbeck (W.Ds., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div and Units, H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Mar 45). The fight for Veen continued long into the night.

157. The past two days had seen many important changes in the sector occupied by 30 Brit Corps. At 1800 hours on the 8th, H.Q. 30 Corps had passed to command Second British Army,

while its troops all came under Lt-Gen Simonds' command. 52 (L.) Div, having completed the relief of 53 (W.) Div, attacked towards Alpon with 156 (L.) Bde and entered the town, subsequently continuing its advance to the north-east to assault an enemy strongpoint at Haus Loo (1634). 32 Gds Bde of Gds Armd Div swung its weight against the triangle formed by the railways at Menzelen, while 8 Bde of 3 Brit Div waited slightly behind the armour to pass through as soon as 156 Bde took out the opposition at Haus Loo (1633) (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 30, 9 Mar 45, Folio 103, Highlights of Ops up to 090730A). On the Ninth U.S. Army front, XIX and XIII Corps, having closed up to the west bank of the Rhine, had nothing to report, but XVI Corps, though still involved in stiff fighting for Ossenbegg and Huck, had captured Millingen (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 9 Mar 45, Serial 37).

158. Surprisingly enough, further to the south, the American bridgehead across the Rhine was being securely held, and up to 2200 hours, 8 Mar, there was no sign of any enemy counter attack in this area. In summing up, the daily Intelligence Report stated:

As our pressure increases, the enemy's preparations to withdraw from the WESEL bridgehead continue... There are still many prisoners who have been ordered to fight to the end, but an increasing proportion now report plans to withdraw over the river and particularly the departure of guns and rear echelons, with our penetration of XANTEN - RHEINBERG A2128 road. To the EAST of that road he can depend on gun fire from the sides of the salient on the right bank of the RHINE, and on demolitions to hold us up. His need for infantry and close support weapons will be less once he has his back to the bridges and ferries. We may then expect his rate of evacuation to accelerate but NOT yet to exceed the rate of our advance. The railway bridge at WESEL has several times been reported by PW as being used for traffic.

The great magnet in the whole front is the growing American bridgehead at REMAGEN F62, close to the important clutch of airfields EAST of BONN. The enemy having sustained a major defeat WEST of the RHINE cannot now rely on time to reorganize his defence for the battle EAST of the RHINE. It is already upon him - and upon him without reserves and all.

During February the enemy lost over 75,000 prisoners in the WEST, an average of over 2700 per day, and since 23 February the rate has exceeded 5000 per day. In the same period he has suffered his major reverses and the greatest losses of German territory since Napoleon's day. The day will come when there will be NO barrel left to scrape.

But whatever there is must be whipped into a battle to contain the Americans at REMAGEN. That means that everything available must go now: - the panzer divisions which failed on the left bank, some of the reserve and ersatz units which were brought up to line the left bank and some of the good troops in the NORTH. For this reason we may expect to see some of the concentration of guns and troops at WESEL turned southwards again. The holding of a small bridgehead on the right bank is now comparatively unimportant.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary, No. 251, 8 Mar 45, para 6)

159. The night of 8/9 Mar brought more good news as 2 Cdn Inf Div pressed home its effort about Xanten. At 2245 hours 5 Cdn Inf Bde, with under command S. Sask R., began their attack. The use of the latter unit had been urgently requested by Brigadier W.J. McGill, D.S.O., who considered that, in order to carry out his part of the operation successfully, he must have troops tight against Xanten forest in enough strength to protect his right flank. R. de Mais travelling down the main Calcar - Xanten road in kangaroos and supported by tanks of 27 Cdn Armd Regt and flails went first, and, by 0030 hours, 9 Mar, captured the wooded and hilly feature just south of Beek against light opposition, collecting 118 prisoners. R.H.C., who had marched eastwards from Birkenkampshof, passed through to the Furstenberg feature (1239) and reported all objectives by 0415 hours. At this point the Commander 5 Cdn Inf Bde ordered S. Sask R. forward in its role of flank protection to the area of Dasshof (1139). Once this move was completed, Calg Highrs advanced to secure the south-eastern tip of the Staatsforst Xanten opposite Birten. Following this R. de Mais passed through R.H.C. at 0930 hours with the object of crossing the canal south of Birten. This effort ran into considerable trouble as the enemy put down an exceedingly heavy mortar bombardment. R. de Mais flung back a counter attack with much loss to the enemy in prisoners and killed. It was from one of these prisoners that the C.O. R. de Mais learned that some 300 enemy were forming up nearby in Birten Wood. Brigadier McGill, never at a loss to take advantage of any opportunity, ordered his crocodiles forward. A flaming assault got under way with all speed, and with the help of tanks and the regimental Wasps, the threat from Birten Wood was squashed and some 200 prisoners gathered in (AEF: 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I: Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" by Brigadier McGill).

160. Word now arrived that 6 Bde had released Camerons of C. for the purpose of relieving elements of R. de Mais and the Calg Highrs. These battalions were now directed to cross the canal south of Birten and secure a bridgehead (Ibid).^{*} With this bold object in view, units of 5 Cdn Inf Bde returned to Xanten at approximately 1600 hours to prepare for the attack, as Camerons of C. came forward (W.Ds., H.Q. 4, 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes, 9 Mar 45). The remaining unit of 6 Bde - Fus M.R. - was also committed during 9 Mar, clearing the upper portion of Die Hees wood to consolidate finally in the south-eastern end of the wood on the former Calg Highrs' objective (W.Ds., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, Fus M.R., 9 Mar 45). An extra formation was added to 2 Cdn Inf Div when 7 Cdn Inf Bde

* According to the 5 Cdn Inf Bde War Diary, the troops were told that this was part of a brand new plan "to bounce" a crossing of the Rhine. This startling plan called for a dash by R.H.C. to Ginderich (1738) in kangaroos, whereupon Calg Highrs, also in kangaroos, would rush across the Wesel Bridge followed by R.H.C. R. de Mais would then move up to occupy positions on the west bank of the river, while S. Sask R. would revert to command 6 Cdn Inf Bde and clear Die Hees Wood, west of Birten. 4 Cdn Inf Bde was to follow up 5 Bde on the projected crossing (W.Ds., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde and R.H.C., 9 Mar 45). (In an interview with the narrator at C.M.H.Q. on 8 Feb 47, General Simonds stated that he had no knowledge of this plan and expressed the belief that it may have been born of the moment by Comd 5 Cdn Inf Bde (AEF: 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/F, Docket III: Memo of Interview with Lt-Gen G.C. Simonds by Major P.A. Mayer, 17 Dec 46)).

came under command at 1315 hours. This was done in view of the possibility of a complete break through by 2 Cdn Inf Div (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 1, Ops Log, 9 Mar 45, Serial 1167). As a result of this, 7 Cdn Inf Bde moved north, and by 1530 hours were in positions on the left of the railway line two miles north-east of Labbeck (Ibid, Serials 1183, 1191, 1223, 1227).

161. Amid all these events 3 Cdn Inf Div, less 7 Cdn Inf Bde, maintained its positions and watched the developments on the Veen - Winnenthal sector, where 4 Cdn Armd Div was still meeting determined opposition. The outskirts of both towns had been reached in the early hours of 9 Mar, when a fresh plan involving the use of both brigades of 4 Cdn Armd Div was put into effect with the object of clearing Veen and Winnenthal and of linking up with 2 Cdn Inf Div. The latter task was detailed to a battle group consisting of one company of Alq R. and one squadron of 22 Cdn Armd Regt. The major intention, however, was to push a force of Linc & Welld R. and 28 Cdn Armd Regt's tanks through to the high ground east of Winnenthal, while Lake Sup R. (Mot) and tanks of 21 Cdn Armd Regt captured the woods south of the town. At the same time the Alq R. - 22 Cdn Armd Regt team would be directed on to the junction point north of Winnenthal to meet 2 Cdn Inf Div (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 9 Mar 45). Further, once Lake Sup R. (Mot) had completed its task in the woods, 22 Cdn Armd Regt would take over the area, allowing Lake Sup R. (Mot) to push on to the next objective, the town of Winnenthal itself (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 9 Mar 45).

162. The new operation quickly got under way. The infantry of 10 Cdn Inf Bde supported by flame-throwers made good progress against the heavily defended positions in Veen. A. & S. H. of C. were first into the town, followed closely by the left and right flanking groups of Alq R. and part of Linc & Welld R. who were all in Veen by 1130 hours. A. & S.H. of C. began to clear the buildings; Alq R. started searching the woods to the north, and the Linc & Welld R. - 28 Cdn Armd Regt force passed on to its previously allotted task of taking the high ground north-west of Winnenthal. Meanwhile, Lake Sup R. (Mot) had been relieved on their first objectives and proceeded to assault Winnenthal. They met stiff opposition, the enemy holding tenaciously to every building, but flame-throwers gradually turned the tide, and as darkness descended upon the smoky battle area, Winnenthal was clear with the exception of the monastery on the east side of the town. Here, according to a prisoner, were 250 fanatical paratroopers well-armed with automatic weapons, who intended to hold out to the last man. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 9 Mar 45). While Lake Sup R. (Mot) continued to exert pressure against the remaining resistance in Winnenthal, Linc & Welld R. reached the high ground west of the town, after having met considerable opposition. Veen was now isolated, however, and written off operationally. (Ibid; and W.Ds., H.Qs. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 9 Mar 45).

163. The enemy's bridgehead, battered and dented by the advances of 2 Cdn Inf and 4 Cdn Armd Divs, shrunk further in the face of attacks by 52 (L.) Div and 32 Gds Armd Bde on 9 Mar. 156 (L.) Bde had cleared Alpon, and now pressed on to assault the strongpoint at Haus Loo. The first attack on this fort proved unsuccessful, but 155 (L.) Bde made a second attempt. This further effort, carried out against bitter resistance, brought about the fall of the fort and the adjacent wood. By midnight, 9/10 Mar, 52 (L.) Div was well-established some 2500 yards north-east of Alpon, and was patrolling forward. 32 Gds Armd Bde, on the left, having advanced approximately another 1500 yards, held a section of the Xanten - Rheinberg road from the main railway and road junction south-west of Menzelen south-eastwards along the highway to within 500 yards of the crossroads (W.D., G. Ops

H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 34, Folio 38, Ops Summary 082400 - 092400).

164. On the right flank, during 9 Mar, XVI U.S. Corps was brought under the control of First Cdn Army (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, 9, 10 and 11 Mar 45). As General Crerar later stated in his despatch of 5 Apr 45:

It was agreed that for the purpose of co-ordinating and accelerating the clearance of the remaining enemy bridgeheads the 16th U.S. Corps would come under my operational direction forthwith.

(General Crerar's Despatch,
5 Apr 45, para 46)

165. In turn, Lt-Gen Simonds assumed operational control of the American Corps and held a conference with Maj-Gen Anderson, Comd XVI U.S. Corps, to co-ordinate the final phases of the battle (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 9 Mar 45). By 0900 hours, 10 Mar, one task force of 35 U.S. Inf Div, having completed mopping up in Ossenberg, Millingen and Huck, had captured Drupt (1732) and was at the gates of Wallach, some three miles south of Buderich. Another force was fighting in Borth against moderate opposition. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 10 Mar 45, Serials 16 and 27)

166. During the night 9/10 Mar, as 2 Cdn Inf Div and 4 Cdn Armd Div continued operations against the enemy, 8 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes of 3 Cdn Inf Div, "pinched out" of the battle, remained in the area north of Sonsbeck. 53 (W.) Div and 11 Armd Divs were now completely out of the fighting and had reverted to command Second British Army (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 33, Folio 38, 10 Mar 45, Ops Summary, No. 264B, 082400 - 092400A). On the far left 214 Inf Bde of 43 (W.) Div relieved 129 Bde in Xanten and north of the town (Ibid). The impending disaster to the Wesel bridgehead was now a matter of time, certainly not more than a few days. Yet out of the present disorganization three questions arose regarding the enemy's plight. An Army Intelligence Summary for 9 Mar put the queries and suggested answers in the following words:

The first is the progress of the withdrawal at WESEL, the second the destination of the heavy fire power opposed to us, and the third the effect on the whole front and war of the situation on the American front.

The operation of ferries at WERRICH A1641, WESEL A2140 and WALLACH A2133, the confirmed repair of both bridges at WESEL, the evacuation of the artillery and flak, the mounting toll of prisoners and the limited withdrawals executed today, all lead to the view that the enemy will continue to withdraw steadily but firmly before our advance, and will NOT make a BRESKENS bridgehead stand.

The volume of fire from mortars and guns in the VERITABLE battle has been the heaviest and the best applied that we have met on the continent. At Appendix "B" [not included here] an estimate has been made from order of battle sources of the mortars and guns believed to have been available to First Para Army early in March. It is believed that there were over five hundred 8 and 12 cm mortars, counting as separate mortars the barrels of the multiple nebelwerfers, seventy-five 16 cm mortars, thirty 21 cm, thirty 30 cm mortars, over 450 field and infantry guns of various types,

180 medium guns, 200 anti-tank guns and 140 heavy flak guns.

Much of this weight has already been pulled back but where it is to go now, is a difficult problem. Some of it, and particularly the armoured elements will move away with their formation. Some and particularly the para elements will cover the withdrawal out of the bridgehead. Then we may expect two developments, the first a spreading out of the guns along the right bank of the RHINE where crossings were most feared and second the deployment of flak units against airborne landings. With good photo weather, we should be able to check these areas. On our front the right bank from WESEL A 14 to ELTEN E9165 is the most likely.

The bridgehead at REMAGEN F 62 must continue to be the most imperative demand on the enemy in the WEST until he either contains or controls it, or it overwhelms him. He must contain it or the whole war in the WEST is lost. Thus we may expect everything he can spare on the land or in the air to be used to delay and diminish our build-up and to increase and hasten his.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary,
No. 252, 9 Mar 45, para 6)

"BLOCKBUSTER" IS COMPLETED

167. The intention of 2 Cdn Corps for 10 Mar was that 52 (L.) Div extend to its left, take over from 32 Gds Armd Bde and assault Menzelen. 3 Brit Div was also to be committed again, this time to pass through the 32 Gds Bde area, and, assuming control of the left flank, attack along the axis of Birten - Ginderich. Gds Armd Div was to stand fast. 4 Cdn Armd Div still had to clean up in the area of Winnenthal, but after this the division would concentrate north of the main road from Sonsbeck. The orders passed to 2 Cdn Inf Div were for that formation to stand down unless progress during the night warranted further movement forward. 7 Cdn Inf Bde was to return to command 3 Cdn Inf Div. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 5, "Intentions", Message G.O. 67, 092359; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 1, Ops Log, 10 Mar 45, Serials 1262, 1267, 1293).

168. The morning of 10 Mar saw the end in sight of the operations for the Canadian divisions, as the enemy's sector opposite Wesel was chopped even smaller. On 2 Cdn Inf Div's front, Calg Highrs of 5 Cdn Inf Bde had pressed on south-east of Birten to reach the area of the road junction at Schreven (1437). All along the route were blown bridges and craters; the enemy had withdrawn - patrols were sent forward towards Ginderich to engage what resistance might remain. A contact was eventually made near Poll Br (1538), not with the enemy, but with 52 (L.) Div, who had attacked north of the Alpon - Wesel road across the front of 32 Gds Armd Bde, taken Rill (1734), and were now advancing on Menzelen. 2 Cdn Inf Div's task was now over, and 27 Cdn Armd Regt (along with its sister units) was put once more under command 2 Cdn Armd Bde and ordered to concentrate (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Mar 45; 2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 10 Mar 45, Serial 40). Menzelen, Ginderich and Gest all fell on 10 Mar to 157 (L.) Bde, while on the right Buderich surrendered to XVI U.S. Corps (Ibid, Serials 46 and 47). Back in the area north-west of Winnenthal contact was made between 2 Cdn Inf and 4 Cdn Armd Divs; the opposition around the monastery soon crumbled

as elements of Lake Sup R. (Mot), Alq R. and 22 Cdn Armd Regt blasted the enemy out, capturing 100 prisoners (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 10 Mar 45, Serials 15 and 39; W.Ds., H.Qs. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 10 Mar 45).

169. Thus with the exception of Fort Blucher (2138), which was entered by 35 U.S. Inf Div at 0830 hours, 11 Mar, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" was finished. The Rhine River had been reached along the entire 21 Army Group front (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 11 Mar 45, Serial 16). 2 Cdn Inf Div was now directed to take over the line of the River Rhine from Emmerich to Millingen and General Matthews ordered that 8 Cdn Recce Regt and Tor Scot R. occupy the new front line. 4, 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes were moved westwards into concentration areas for a well earned rest (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 10 Mar 45). 3 Cdn Inf Div received similar instructions and commenced preparations to move; 4 Cdn Armd Div, already concentrated, also awaited transfer to the west (W.Ds., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, H.Qs. 7, 8 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes, 10 Mar 45). Thus the First Cdn Army intention as announced at 0730 hours, 11 Mar, only affected 52 (L.) Div, which was to take over and hold the south bank of the Rhine between the Alpon - Wesel road on the right and on the left the Hochwald forest, Marienbaum and the bend in the river at Normter. As soon as 8 Brit Inf Bde was released back to 3 Brit Div by 52 (L.) Div, 3 Div would hold the river line from the Lowlanders' left boundary to the 2 Cdn Inf Div right boundary along the Cleve - Copray (9659) road. 43 (W.) Div on being relieved by 52 (L.) and 3 Brit Div would move to Second Army reserve (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 37, Folio 69, Highlight of the Ops up to 110730A).

170. 11 Mar was a day of continuous movement within the Army area as the various formations adjusted themselves to new positions. Each village was carefully combed and many prisoners were added to the already enormous numbers. Operation "VERITABLE" (of which "BLOCKBUSTER" was the finale), by First Cdn Army and Operation "GRENADE" by Ninth U.S. Army had achieved their objects; 21 Army Group was now lined along the west bank of the Rhine. Each operation had definitely had a direct bearing on the other (AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Operation "VERITABLE" Part V, Section 21, p. 45, para 139). Confirming this fact at a later day, in his reflections on the battle of the Rhineland, Field Marshal Montgomery added:

Although it had not been intended, the delay in mounting the southern attack of the battle had not in the end been to our disadvantage. When it could start the rapidity and violence of the Ninth Army thrust caught the enemy off balance; it relieved the pressure on the Canadian front, and by 1 March the enemy was threatened with encirclement and had no choice but to get as much as possible of his personnel and material back across the Rhine. The main features of the operations were the appalling weather conditions in the early stages, and the intense opposition of the enemy.

The Germans had committed the third major blunder of the campaign. Following the failure in the Ardennes, the only sound course open to the enemy was to stage a withdrawal back across the Rhine. His remaining resources might well have succeeded in causing us considerable delay on that barrier. But the tremendous importance of the Ruhr, battered as it was, and the impotence of his Air Force to act in its defence led him to stand and fight west of the Rhine in the hope of masking that area.

After all that had gone before, the crippling losses sustained by the enemy in the Rhineland brought the end of the war to a matter of weeks. The Germans had not the manpower to raise new divisions, and in any case their industry could not have equipped fresh formations. Their remaining oil refineries and storage plants were being subjected to increasingly heavy air attacks, and their communications were rapidly being reduced to a state of chaos. Once we were across the Rhine the Wehrmacht would no longer have the tanks, transport or fuel necessary to compete with the Allied forces in battle.

(Normandy to the Baltic, pp 244, 245)

171. Apart from the fanatical resistance put up by the individual German soldier, First Cdn Army had had two unexpectedly great obstacles to contend with during the course of the operation. The first was the weight of enemy fire power, which in many instances almost overshadowed our own ability in this respect. The Canadian Army Commander, himself a gunner of note, declared:

During the concluding stages our own infantry suffered heavy casualties from shelling, mortaring and rockets. This was consistent with the enemy's tactics throughout the whole of the operation. His fire-power, particularly from machine-guns, mortars and cannon had been more heavily and effectively applied than at any other time in the Army's fighting during the present campaign. Not including self-propelled guns, I estimated that at the beginning of March over 700 mortars and more than 1,000 guns of various calibres were available to the First Parachute Army. Only rarely did there appear to be any shortage of ammunition, and on a narrow front, the enemy gunners were able to concentrate their fire on our points of penetration in the natural defiles along the line of advance. The combined effects of guns and going made themselves felt in the loss to us of some 300 tanks.

(General Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45)

172. The second was the weather, changes of which have even in modern times brought disaster to armies in the field. Regarding its effect on the operation, General Crerar continued:

Our material superiority was not without its effect, but the state of the ground and the prevailing wet and overcast weather prevented the full deployment and exploitation of our strength. For in the words of a congratulatory message from the Supreme Commander, "probably no assault in this war has been conducted under more appalling conditions of terrain".

(Ibid)

173. Yet in spite of the bad flying conditions, a great deal of valuable assistance came from the air forces, and although daily reports on air operations invariably began with the words "Due to poor weather, etc", 753 sorties of all kinds were flown from 26 to 28 Feb 45 inclusive, with a further 1487 from 1-10 Mar inclusive (W.D., G. Air, H.Q. First Cdn Army, 26-28 Feb 45 and 1-10 Mar 45) (See Appx "H").

174. The weather's effect on armoured operations had also been widely felt. The tanks, which had played such a gigantic part in past battles, often found the low ground too

soft, and many of the high features in the battle area too thickly wooded for satisfactory co-operation with the infantry. Hence 2 Cdn Armd Bde, commanded by Brigadier G.W. Robinson, had not been able to participate in its fullest capacity. Yet casualties in both personnel and armoured vehicles proved beyond doubt that on such occasions as the armoured regiments were committed, they fought brilliantly, regardless of loss (AEF: 45/2 Cdn Corps, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", pp 1, 8). Tank losses for these operations since 8 Feb 45 amounted to 300, of which approximately two-thirds belonged to the Canadian armoured brigades (General Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45).

175. As against the number of troops involved, losses in men were light. 243 Canadian officers and 3395 Canadian other ranks were killed, wounded and missing from 26 Feb to 12 Mar. During the same period in 30 Brit Corps and other British and Allied formations of First Cdn Army the casualties amounted to 263 officers and 3733 other ranks (See Appx "J") (W.D., A. & Q., H.Q. First Cdn Army, February 1945: Appx 7, C. & S. States for 26-28 Feb 45, and March 1945: 1-11 Mar 45). On the enemy's side of the ledger, apart from the thousands our troops killed or wounded, 166 German officers and 9329 other ranks fell into our hands during the period 26 Feb - 10 Mar, making a grand total of 141,185 captured since First Cdn Army took the field on 23 Jul 44 (First Cdn Army Int Summary, No. 254, 11 Mar 45, para 6).

176. By 12 Mar the Canadian Army front once more assumed a relatively quiet appearance. The flow of prisoners, together with the captured documents which helped so greatly to build up our knowledge of what lay beyond, had almost ceased, and as a result the enemy picture as seen through the eyes of our Intelligence was correspondingly less clear.

To give a precise idea of the line up of the German forces along the RHINE from ARNHEM to DINSLAKEN A 33 from the existing evidence would not be possible at the moment. One thing, however, is plain and that is that the enemy is maintaining at least one armoured if not two armoured divisions in this general area. To call them armoured divisions would be an insult to any self-respecting armoured formation, since 116 Pz and 15 PG, for these are the two concerned, are little more than inflated regiments. Nevertheless, we must assume that every effort will be made to restore them to some semblance of their old form as quickly as possible since by their continued presence here his anxiety for this area is reflected.

During the last stages of his withdrawal over the RHINE he betrayed one of his greatest fears, namely the airborne peril, for which he wanted special multiple barrel 20 mm guns with the utmost speed. Evidently his are in this direction, expecting as he does an airborne assault coupled with a full scale land operation to seize a bridgehead over the RHINE in this general area. His fears are founded on the solid fact that a bridgehead here threatens the whole of the NORTH WESTERN German plain.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary,
No. 257, March 1945)

177. Meanwhile in the south the American bridgehead at Remagen continued to attract enemy attention, though fruitlessly.

The bridgehead was further subjected to bitter counter attacks from the land carried out by elements of 106 Pz Brigade as well as 11 Pz Div. At no point was any penetration achieved and in some places the area occupied was even extended. The GAF continued to pay great attention to the bridges, but gained nothing for their trouble.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary,
No. 257, 11 Mar 45)

178. Now that the battle was over, Headquarters 2 Cdn Corps was placed under command Second Army so that Canadian participation in future operations might be thoroughly discussed and planned (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 11 Mar 45). On 12 Mar General H.D.G. Crerar left for a short visit to England and Lt-Gen G.G. Simonds was detailed to act as Army Commander in his absence (Ibid, 12 Mar 45).

179. By the morning of 13 Mar the troops of First Cdn Army were settled down in their new locations, and the front line along the river had been readjusted to suit the regroupings. 52 (L.), 3 Brit Inf and 43 (W.) Divs all passed under command 8 Brit Corps of Second Army at midnight 12/13 Mar (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 45, Sitrep No. 463, 13 Mar 45). 2 Cdn Inf Div was now concentrated by brigades, 4 Cdn Inf Bde at the north-western end of the Reichswald, 5 Cdn Inf Bde south-east of Nijmegen in the area of Beek, and 6 Cdn Inf Bde around Cleve. 3 Cdn Inf Div had also set up bivouac in the Reichswald, with 9, 7 and 8 Cdn Inf Bdes lining the Gennep - Cleve road through the forest in that order from north to south. 4 Cdn Armd Div, exhausted after its brilliant, though expensive, showing in the Hochwald battles, had wandered far from the front and now occupied the area of Boxel with 10 Cdn Inf Bde, while the armoured brigade together with 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt found billets just south of Tilburg. 2 Cdn Armd Bde was taking its rest on the rising ground between Mook and the western side of the Reichswald (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, March 1945: Appx 1, Sitrep, for period up to 130800A; and W.Ds., G.S., H.Qs. 2, 3 Cdn Inf and 4 Cdn Armd Divs, 13 Mar 45). In all areas of concentration, the troops were permitted to relax. Nevertheless, since more battles lay ahead, training programmes were organized, and the repair of vehicles, weapons and equipment began.

NEW PLANS AND PREPARATIONS

180. While at the front the spotlight of attention was being directed on the activities of 1 Brit Corps, along the Maas River, and elements of 2 Cdn Inf Div on the Canadian-held frontier of the Rhine bank, great plans were in the making for the proposed crossing of the river barrier. Field-Marshal Montgomery had issued the pertinent directive on 9 Mar at Headquarters 21 Army Gp. In it, the C.-in-C. announced his intention and gave his outline plan to cross the Rhine on a front of two armies between Rheinberg and Rees. On the right would be Ninth U.S. Army, on the left Second Army, and after capturing Wesel, they would expand northward, southward and to the east (G.O.C.-in-C., 1-0, Vol II, Operational Directives, C.-in-C., 21 Army Gp, M 59, 9 Mar 45, paras 6-9).

181. In his consequent instructions on 10 Mar, General Crerar described the general situation in these words:

The enemy has now been driven back over the RHINE on a wide front by 21 Army Group and this front is being extended southwards by 12 Army Group. The recent establishment by 12 Army Group of a bridgehead over the RHINE, to the South of BONN, should produce most important results, and advantageously affect the front of 21 Army Group.

The time has come for 21 Army Group to cross the RHINE: the last great river barrier left to the Germans on the Western front. This intention will be carried out by effecting a crossing North of the RUHR, securing a firm bridgehead and then developing operations to isolate the RUHR and to penetrate deeper into Germany.

The 21 Army Group plan, in outline, is to cross the RHINE on a front of two Armies, between inclusive RHEINBERG and REES, Ninth US Army on right, Second British Army on left. These armies will capture the communication centre of WESEL and expand this initial bridgehead on the East bank of the RHINE:

- (a) Southwards, for a sufficient distance to secure the road centre of WESEL from enemy ground action.
- (b) Northwards, to enable the river to be bridged at EMMERICH and the road centre at that place to be used.
- (c) Eastwards and north-eastwards, in order rapidly to secure a deep and firm bridgehead from which further offensive operations can suitably be developed.

Following the expansion of the initial bridgehead, outlined above, the Ninth U.S. Second British and First Canadian Armies are to be positioned East of the RHINE and North of the RUHR, so that further operations deeper into Germany can be developed quickly, as may be ordered.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx, G.O.C.-in-C., 1-O-4/1, Directive to Corps Commanders, 10 Mar 45)

182. For these operations the following regrouping of formations was to be carried out.

RIGHT - 2 Cdn Corps

2 Cdn Inf Div
3 Cdn Inf Div
4 Cdn Inf Div
2 Cdn Armd Bde
2 Cdn A.G.R.A.

CENTRE - 1 Cdn Corps

49 (W.R.) Div

LEFT

1 Brit Corps

1 Pol Armd Div
4 Cdo Bde
116 Royal Marine Bde
Royal Netherlands Bde

ARMY RESERVE - and to be allocated to Corps as the situation indicates, following their arrival and concentration:

1 Cdn Inf Div
5 Brit Inf Div
5 Cdn Armd Div
1 Cdn Armd Bde
1 Cdn A.G.R.A.

(Ibid)

183. For the commencement of the new attack:

2 Cdn Corps will be placed under operational command of Second British Army, by agreement between the Army Commanders concerned, shortly before the operation of crossing the RHINE (Code Name "PLUNDER") is launched. Formations of 2 Canadian Corps will be passed over the REES bridges by Second British Army, at the appropriate time, and would be used to extend the bridgehead area north-west, towards DOETINCHEM and ELTEN and to secure the communications at EMMERICH. The RHINE will be bridged at EMMERICH by First Cdn Army as early as possible and when this had been done 2 Cdn Corps will revert to command of First Cdn Army.

(Ibid)

184. The inclusion of Lt-Gen C. Foulkes' First Corps, newly arrived from the Italian front, in the plan constituted a happy event for it meant that by far the greater part of First Cdn Army would now truly be Canadian. The decision to bring 1 Cdn Corps from the Mediterranean front had been reached on 3 Feb 45, when the Chiefs of Staff committee decided that, on reduction of the troops in 15 Army Group in Italy, 1 Cdn Corps would move to North-West Europe to First Cdn Army. Naturally until the Canadian Corps actually was launched into offensive operations, the whole matter was to be kept as "Top Secret" as indeed it was (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, February 1945: Appx 3, Notes on Conference held by C.-in-C. 21 Army Group, 4 Feb 45). Headquarters 1 Cdn Corps actually opened at Wijchen (6158) at 0500 hours, 13 Mar 45 (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 49, Folio 16, Sitrep 140900, 14 Mar 45). At 1200 hours, 15 Mar, 49 (W.R.) Div and 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt came under command (Ibid: 15 Mar 45, Appx 52, Folio 20, Sitrep 150900; and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 15 Mar 45).*

* See Report No. 181, Operation "GOLDFLAKE", the move of 1 Cdn Corps from Italy to North-West Europe, February-March 1945.

185. Meanwhile, the gigantic preparations for the Rhine crossing progressed, and all under an immense smoke screen which hung over the front. This smoke programme had begun originally early in March, when 2 Cdn Corps had needed a form of concealment for a Field Maintenance company which was then operating west of Cleve, but under observation from the Hoch Elten feature. The smoke screen at that time extended from west of Kranenburg to east of Calcar. However, as Second Army began to take over the west bank of the river and the build-up for Operation "PLUNDER" started, a grand deception was deemed necessary to mislead the enemy as to the direction of the coming attack. For this purpose Second Army continued to keep the area under smoke, and the ground opposite Emmerich was well stocked with dummy gun positions. Opposite Rees and Wesel, however, the actual sectors from which the assault was to be launched, the guns and dumps were cleverly camouflaged. As a result, the initial assault met no heavy opposition, whereas subsequent operations revealed a considerable concentration of troops and guns in the Emmerich sector (AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/C/F, Docket III: Appx 19, Report on Smoke Screens carried out by First Cdn Army, Section XI, p.33).

186. All through Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" 1 Brit Corps, with 49 (W.R.) Div attached, had shouldered the tiresome task of guarding the line of the Maas and the Nijmegen salient. It had been a period of constant patrolling and counter-patrolling in which the enemy had taken more than a little part. Each of 62 A.Tk Regt, 11 H., 4 Cdo Bde, 1 Pol Armd Div and 116 R.M. Bde had its allotted spell of watching the river and of making offensive sorties across it - with varying success. Amid all the dullness which governed the role of 1 Brit Corps, however, a spark of the unorthodox had appeared on 7 Mar, when two one-man submarines were reported near Dombert (0637). The first of these capsized and sank after being engaged by small arms fire; the second was later found stranded in the same area, with its pilot unconscious (AEF: 45/1 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III: Folio 49, G.O. 465, Sitrep at 072359 and Folios 50-57 inclusive). On 9 Mar a similar object of war was observed and also despatched to the bottom (Ibid, Folio 47, G.O. 476).

187. The enemy's efforts, however, were not to be stopped so easily. Five motor launches appeared on 11 Mar, two of which were beached by our artillery fire (Ibid, Folio 43, G.O. 492). On the same day 1/3 Dutch Lt Inf Bn came under command 4 Cdo Bde (Ibid). Naval patrols, operating in the sea areas west of the Corps front, had plenty of excitement, and whenever enemy craft appeared did much to discourage the German's inquisitiveness (Ibid, G.O. 499, Sitrep as at 131200A). In the various divisional areas, staff conferences took place daily to discuss training with a view to future operations, and orders were issued that, in preparation for the next assault, all civilians were to be cleared out of the areas west of the Rhine (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 12-14 Mar 45). This clearance was to be followed by a thorough sweep of the sector by troops on the ground. As the hours passed, and the build-up progressed, each road became choked with traffic; guns were sited, dumps were established, while the troops trained and waited (Ibid).

188. By 16 Mar, the enemy picture, which had been indistinct through lack of contact since 11 Mar, began to clear once more; air photo sorties provided the means.

The enemy continues to build up his strength in the angle of the RHINE and the IJSSEL, particularly in AA positions. The latest air cover shows new positions from EMMERICH E96 to ZUTPHEN, at DOETINCHEM A07 and on each side of the HOCH ELTEN E96 feature. Further field artillery also is

being emplaced in the gun areas centred on HOCH ELTEN. A corresponding reduction in AA is seen NORTH and SOUTH of the ZALTBOMMEL E26 bridge.

There is no further clue to the formations to be employed on our immediate front, except that 116 Pz Div still appears to be hovering in the background EAST of EMMERICH.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary,
No. 259, 16 Mar 45, para 2)

189. Three days later, on 19 Mar, the Intelligence staffs of Second Army were able to make a clearer appreciation of enemy dispositions:

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

The time has come now, therefore, to review the enemy situation on the Second Army front and try to fit First Parachute Army into the defensive system which is now being built up with the object of preventing us entering the NORTH German Plain. The boundary between First Parachute Army and Twenty-Fifth Army probably runs to the WEST of EMMERICH and is probably also the dividing line between 346 Infantry Division and 6 Parachute Division. All three of the latter's regiments have been identified between EMMERICH and REES. The left boundary of 6 Parachute Division is probably 4-5000 yards to the WEST of REES and what division is responsible for this town is not known. It is certain, however, to be either 7 or 8 Parachute Divisions and today 18 Parachute Regiment, known to be in the DORNICH area was interested in Battalion GRAFING and Second Battalion 24 Parachute Regiment, both of 8 Parachute Division. It is therefore probably fair to assume that 8 Parachute Division is the division on the left of 6, and is responsible for REES. Coming down to the XANTEN area, less is known except that in the area of BISLICH 84 Infantry Divisional Artillery was concerned with this area two days ago. This division, however, is not strong enough to hold a sector which includes WESEL and there is a gap between it and the left boundary of 8 Parachute Division, wherever that may be. If this surmise is correct, there is a spare parachute division, number 7, which would be suitable to fill this gap. 1222 Grenadier Regiment of 180 Division is SOUTH of the LIPPE in the SPELLEN area and prisoners have reported that of its three regiments only one

is in the line. This may or may not be correct, but whatever the situation, there remains another gap further to the SOUTH before a junction can be made with 2 Parachute Division sitting NORTH of DUISBURG. It is not known what division occupies this sector unless it be 190 Infantry Division, apart of course from Regiment or Division HAMBURG.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary,
No. 263, 19 Mar 45)

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

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

(Ibid)

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

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

So we see a picture of First Parachute Army now sorting itself out EAST of the RHINE, its divisions low in strength but being reinforced with the priority that is still the right of parachute troops, in an area that is not yet ready to prevent our penetration across the river. Nevertheless, whatever the state of the preparation and whatever the strength of the divisions, and however small the mobile backing to that system may be, those parachute troops will fight as well and as fanatically as ever.

(Ibid)

192. Meanwhile the Remagen bridgehead continued to expand, in spite of the enemy's attempts to dive-bomb it (Ibid, and 84 Group Intelligence Summary No. 218). On 17 Mar, however, the bridge, strained to the fullest extent by enemy shelling and the increasing loads of the American build-up across it, collapsed (First Cdn Army Int Summary, No. 260). Pontoon bridges were quickly erected, but next day the enemy reverted to his previous form of trying to destroy the bridges by means of saboteurs, who in Martian-like dress, complete with oxygen equipment, swam out into the icy Rhine waters. The attempt was not successful; the enemy was observed, badly shot up, and several prisoners were taken (Ibid, No. 261).

193. As the build-up for the forthcoming Operation "PLUNDER" continued, 1 Cdn Corps and 1 Brit Corps watching along the River Maas made a few minor changes in their dispositions. On the night of 21/22 Mar, 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt and elements of 2 Kensingtons relieved part of 8 Cdn Recce Regt (under 49 (W.R.) Div since 19 Mar) on the extreme right of the Army sector. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 68, Folio 44, G.O. 103, Sitrep 478, 192400 to 201200). Simultaneously Westmr R. (Mot) of 5 Cdn Armd Div took over from 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt in the area of Wamel. The armoured car regiment now reverted to 2 Cdn Corps (Ibid, Appx 75, Folio 13, G.O. 111, Sitrep No. 481, 211200 to 212400). Over in the 1 Brit Corps sector 11 H. was relieved by 1 H.C.R., and moved to Heythieujzan to come under command 12 Corps, for use by 7 Armd Div (Ibid, Folio 50, Highlight of Ops up to 220730). In 2 Cdn Corps there was a major change of command. On 22 Mar, Maj-Gen D.C. Spry, D.S.O., left 3 Cdn Inf Div to take up new duties as Comd C.R.U. His place as G.O.C. 3 Cdn Inf Div was taken by Maj-Gen R.H. Keefer, C.B.E., D.S.O. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, 21, 22 Mar 45; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 20 Mar 45)

194. By 0600 hours, 23 Mar 45, the colossal stage was set. The great hour was approaching. Through every Canadian bivouac, through every headquarters, surged a wave of expectancy, giving to each man as it passed a lift in heart and a quickening touch of excitement. The minutes could now be counted, as the Canadian brigades waited for the signal that would send them forward. To the east a few hundred yards away, flowed the Rhine, the greatest existing obstacle in Europe. In 1940, from the line of this natural fortress, the Nazi Panzer columns had marched westwards to conquer the world. Now history had completed its inevitable cycle; the enemy had been pushed back and overrun at his starting point. His remnants had been driven to shelter behind the final bulwark, but even here, the countless years of military teaching in which the German General Staff had told its soldier that the Rhine could not and would not be crossed, counted for little in the way of assurance to these hopelessly tired scrapings of the Wehrmacht "pot".

195. By contrast the state of morale among the Allied troops soared high. Here, within reach lay the victory and the peace. There was but one last obstacle. If there were ever

any doubt at all about the success in any single soldier's mind, it vanished when Field-Marshal Montgomery's inspiring message reached him. Every word of it was full of fire and typical of the great commander. The eight words which stood out above all others left nothing to wonder: "21 Army Group will now cross the Rhine".

196. This report was prepared by Capt P.A. Mayer, R.C.I.C., who served with Alq R. during the operations described.

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

OP BLOCKBUSTER
CORPS OUTLINE PLAN

TOP SECRET1 OBJECT

To capture the high ground SOUTH of CALCAR and UDEM: then to exploit through the enemy posns towards XANTEN and WESEL.

2 ENEMY

Enemy def posn is based on CALCAR and the high ground to the SOUTH of it - UDEM - WEEZE. It is probable that the main weight of the enemy inf def will be on the line CALCAR - UDEM with his main A tk def in a layback posn at the approaches to the HOCHWALD forest.

3 METHOD

(See trace given to Watch-keeper Main Army and GSO 2 Ops Tac Army). [Not included]

Phase I

- (a) An attack by 2 Cdn Inf Div at H Hr with two arm'd regts (2 Cdn Arm'd Bde) moving at tk pace to secure the high ground and escarpment SOUTH of CALCAR. Main weight of attack by 6 Cdn Inf Bde, with a sp attack by a bn of 5 Cdn Inf Bde to broaden the base. At the conclusion of this phase 4 Cdn Inf Bde will have been pinched out.
- (b) A subsidiary attack on the RIGHT by one bn, 8 Cdn Inf Bde with one arm'd sqn moving at inf pace, at H Hr, to get astride rd CALCAR - UDEM area 9845.

Phase II

- (a) An attack on the RIGHT by two bns 8 Cdn Inf Bde of 3 Cdn Inf Div to capture line of rd 970433 to incl KEPPELN 9844.
- (b) An attack (co-ordinated by Corps with (a)) by a battle gp (two inf bns, two arm'd regts) of 4 Cdn Arm'd Div to est them on a line excl KEPPELN to rd at 020450.

Phase III - At times to be decided by div comds.

- (a) 3 Cdn Inf Div passes 9 Cdn Inf Bde through to the assault of UDEM.
- (b) 4 Cdn Arm'd Div passes a battle gp through to est itself on the high ground 1942 - 0043 - 0143.
- (c) 2 Cdn Inf Div passes 4 Cdn Inf Bde through to relieve battle gp of 4 Cdn Arm'd Div on the posn referred to in Phase II para (b).
- (d) 11 Arm'd Div conforms to adv of 9 Cdn Inf Bde.

Phase IV

- (a) While 3 Cdn Inf Div is fighting for UDEM, 11 Arm'd Div will by-pass UDEM to the SW and adv on axis UDEM - SONSBECK 0535 and high ground immediately NE of SONSBECK leaving a firm base on escarpment 0040 - 0039.
- (b) 3 Cdn Inf Div will follow the adv of 11 Arm'd Div by stepping up bns by bdes along the line of the R GROSSELEY with the object of eventually relieving 11 Arm'd Div of SONSBECK.

- (c) 4 Cdn Armd Div will adv (as ordered by Div Comd) to est a battle gp astride the rly line 0340 - 0440.
- (d) 2 Cdn Inf Div while retaining one bde on the high ground immediately SOUTH of CALCAR, and one as referred PHASE III para (c), to pass the third bde through to relieve battle gp of 4 Cdn Armd Div on objective referred to in Phase III para (b).

Note: 214 Inf Bde, 43 Div will relieve bde of 2 Cdn Inf Div on high ground SOUTH of CALCAR afternoon of D Day.

EXPLOITATION

No forecast possible but alternatives as follows:-

- (a) To direct 4 Cdn Armd Div on XANTEN and 11 Armd Div on MENZELEN 1636 and the WEZEL crossings, or
- (b) To direct both armd divs on XANTEN, then 11 Armd Div, to turn SE towards MENSELEN, or
- (c) If 4 Cdn Armd Div is held up after Phase IV, to direct 11 Armd Div on XANTEN with 4 Cdn Armd [Div] cutting across its rear directed on MENSELEN at a later opportunity.

4 SP

(a) Arty

Phase I

For 2 Cdn Inf Div, 12 fd regts, 6 med regts, 3 hy regts in barrage at tk pace. 1 Cdn Rocket Unit.

For 3 Cdn Inf Div, 7 fd regts, 2 med regts in barrage at inf pace.

Phases II and III

For 4 Cdn Armd Regt, a barrage of six fd regts, four med regts, one 4.5 regt (concs on call should enemy still be active between posns gained by 2 Cdn Inf Div and SL).

For 3 Cdn Inf Div barrage at inf pace of nine fd regts, six 7.2 btys, (concs to prevent UDEM guns from interfering).

For 11 Armd Div, concs on call from 4 fd regts, 4 med regts, 1 4.5 regt.

Phase IV

For further adv of the armd divs, each will have available 3 fd regts, 4 med regts and a 4.5 regt.

CB Resources throughout 2 med regts, 2 bty 155 mm, 1 regt HAA, 6 btys 7.2.

(b) Air

As known to G (Air) First Cdn Army.

5 TIMINGS

- (a) D Day 26 Feb 45.
- (b) H Hr 0430 hrs.
- (c) Phase I H Hr.
Phase II - Corps Comds decision, earliest 0800 - latest 1000 hrs.

Phase III - Div Comds co-ord decision: probably early afternoon.

Phase IV -- Div Comds decision: probably late afternoon or evening.

6 FORECAST OF OPS

(a) Situation 1600 - 1700 hrs D Day.

- (i) 11 Armd Div: leading battle gp approaching rly line 9641.
- (ii) 3 Cdn Inf Div: one bde in UDEM, one bde area 9744, one bde area VERKALT 9746.
- (iii) 4 Cdn Armd Div: leading battle gp advancing on HOCHWALD at approx 0142; second battle gp holding high ground area 0042 - 0043.
- (iv) 2 Cdn Inf Div: one bde area TODTENHUGEL 0045; two bdes holding original objectives of Phase I.

(b) Situation in forenoon of D plus 1.

- (i) 11 Armd Div: leading battle gp in SONSBECK.
- (ii) 3 Cdn Inf Div: leading bde on way to SONSBECK at approx 0237, one bde in UDEM, one bde area 9744.
- (iii) 4 Cdn Armd Div: one battle gp astride rly line 0440.
- (iv) 2 Cdn Inf Div: one bde advancing to relieve 4 Cdn Armd Div down road DELSENHOF 021452 - SCHMACHDARM 0342, one bde HUSMANNHOF 0245, one bde TODTENHUGEL 0045.

(Sgd) (A.T. Buchan) Maj
CSO II Liaison

241600A

TOP SECRET

GOC-in-C 1-0-7/11

Tac First Canadian Army

24 Feb 45

Lt-Gen GG Simonds, CB, CBE, DSO (1)
Comd 2 Canadian Corps

Lt-Gen BG Horrocks, CB, DSO, MC (2)
Comd 30 Corps

1. While the particular development of operations First Canadian Army, during the next few days, is bound to be conditioned by situations yet to be determined, I would like to discuss with you, tomorrow, the following basic plan.
2. As previously stated by me, the weight of Canadian Army effort will be transferred to its left and from 26 Feb 45, until its conclusion, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", conducted by 2 Canadian Corps, will have priority in available resources.
3. During "BLOCKBUSTER", 30 Corps will keep its "left shoulder up" and will have, as its primary responsibility, the neutralization of any enemy attempts, developing from the South, to interfere with 2 Canadian Corps right flank. 30 Corps will, itself, however, exploit to South East and South, should any favourable opportunities present themselves, providing its primary responsibility is not compromised.
4. If situations develop propitiously, 2 Canadian Corps will carry its armoured thrust through to Xanten, and secure it and the high ground to its South. It will then take aggressive steps to clear the enemy from the area between the general line UDEM - SONSBECK - XANTEN, and the R RHINE.
5. In similar circumstances, 30 Corps will develop a thrust South East, with Guards Arm'd Div, to cut and hold the GELDERN - WESEL road in the vicinity of road and railway junctions and crossings in map squares 1430, 1431 and 1633. 3 Brit Inf Div, keeping East of the WEEZE - GELDERN road, will be directed South, securing WINNEKENDONK and then GELDERN. 53 (W) Inf Div will secure KEVELAR, and make contact with 3 Brit Inf Div. 52 (L) Inf Div will develop pressure southwards, and clear the enemy from East bank of R MEUSE.
6. I will arrange, by telephone, with you this evening a time and place which will be mutually convenient.

Sgd.

(H.D.G. Crerar) Gen
GOC-in-C
First Canadian Army

Copy to: Lt-Gen Sir John Crocker
KBE CB DSO MC
Comd 1 Brit Corps
C of S

(3)

(4)

SECRET

2DS(G)/1-0
Main HQ 2 Cdn Inf Div
25 Feb 45

Copy No...19...

2 CDN INF DIV OP INSTR NO 13OP BLOCKBUSTER

Ref Maps: 1/25,000 sheets 4203 4203 4304 4304
1/50,000 sheets 6 7 16 17
1/100,000 sheets PI QI

INFM1 Enemy

As contained in 2 Cdn Inf Div Int Summaries, ISUMs, def overprints and air phs already issued.

2 Own Tps

(a) The following fmns will take part in 2 Cdn Corps Op BLOCKBUSTER:-

2 Cdn Inf Div ✓
3 Cdn Inf Div ✓
4 Cdn Armd Div ✓
43 (W) Inf Div ✓
11 Armd Div ✓
2 Cdn Armd Bde ✓

The Corps plan has been given to comds verbally.

(b) Additional Tps

2 Cdn Inf Div will have under cmd for the op:-

2 Cdn Armd Bde less 6 Cdn Armd Regt
less one sqn in sp:-

C Sqn 22 Dgns (flails)
1/2 sqn 141 RAC (crocodiles)
1 Cdn Armd Carrier Regt (kangaroos)
33 SP A tk Bty
C Tp 557 SL Bty RA (8 SLs)

(c) Phases as op effects 2 Cdn Inf Div

The op will take place in four phases:-

Phase I - The attack by 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes and 8 Cdn Inf Bde

Phase II - The attack by 3 Cdn Inf Div and 4 Cdn Armd Div and subsequent relief of 4 Cdn Armd Div by 4 Cdn Inf Bde.

Phase III - The push by 4 Cdn Armd Div

Phase IV - The seizure of the HOCHWALD feature by 4 Cdn Armd Div

(d) 43(W) Inf Div will protect the left flank of the corps and will relieve bdes of 2 Cdn Inf Div on that flank as the battle progresses.

(e) Air

The resources of 84 Gp RAF are available but the launching of the op is NOT contingent on air weather. The main fighter bomber effort will be on the HOCHWALD line and forest between 1200 and 1600 hrs on D Day.

INTENTION

3 2 Cdn Inf Div will capture and hold the high ground overlooking CALCAR between 990490 and 013472.

METHOD

4 Phase I

(a) Grouping

6 Cdn Inf Bde with under cmd:-

one coy 10 Cdn Fd Amb

in sp:-

27 Cdn Armd Regt
10 Cdn Armd Regt less one sqn
one tp C Sqn 22 Dgns (flails)
(remainder of sqn on call if required)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ sqn 141 RAC (crocodiles)
1 Cdn Armd Carrier Regt
(kangaroos)
23 A tk Bty
11 Cdn Fd Coy
one MMG coy Tor Scot (MG)
hy mortar coy Tor Scot (MG)
Air Sp Contact Car

(b) 5 Cdn Inf Bde with under cmd:-

one coy 18 Cdn Fd Amb

in sp:-

one sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt
23 Cdn A tk Bty
one MMG coy Tor Scot (MG)

5 Objectives, bdys, SL - see trace 'P'. [Not included.]

6 June pts with 6 Cdn Inf Bde and 8 Cdn Inf Bde - x-rds 992469, with 4 Cdn Inf Bde and 8 Cdn Inf Bde rd junc 987474.

7 Rate of adv - 100 yds in 2 mins.

8 Exploitation - 6 Cdn Inf Bde track junc 997461 and blags 995458.

9 Div Res - Calg Highrs and one sqn 10 Cdn Armd Regt will be assembled in area 9649 and will be on one hrs notice to move from H hr to be employed, on order of Div Comd, to assist if necessary the completion of Phase I.

10 Arty - Fire plan to be issued separately by HQ RCA NOT to all addressees.

11 Engrs - ONYX (div axis) will be developed under arrangements CRE. EMERALD route will be developed to mr 983508 and if CALCAR falls route will be developed through CALCAR.

12 Phase II

Grouping

4 Cdn Inf Bde with under comd:

one coy 11 Cdn Fd Amb

in sp:-

18 Cdn A tk Bty

one MMG coy Tor Scot (MG)

On orders from 2 Cdn Inf Div on completion of Phase I, 4 Cdn Inf Bde will abandon their firm base and conc preparatory to moving to the high ground gained by 4 Cdn Armd Div in Phase II of the op.

13 Phase III

The push of 4 Armd Div into high ground area ROTHERBURG 9941 - PAULS BURG 0143.

14 Phase IV

(a) Grouping

5 Cdn Inf Bde with under comd:-

one coy 18 Cdn Fd Amb

in sp:-

elements of one armd regt as available

flails as required

20 Cdn A tk Bty

7 Cdn Fd Coy

one MMG coy Tor Scot (MG)

hy mortar coy Tor Scot (MG)

(b) Task

To follow up elements of 4 Cdn Armd Div on the axis 012439 - NACHTIGALL 032422 - rd junc 044408. To form a firm base in the area NACHTIGALL, prevent enemy interference with the axis from the forest, and subsequently relieve 4 Cdn Armd Div in the area 0440.

METHOD (continued)

(c) Engrs

The CRE is responsible for opening the axis referred to in para 14(b) above.

15 Recce

(a) Phase I

At first light D day thrust fwd to CALCAR on the axis MOYLAND - CALCAR with the object of opening EMERALD route, if the enemy withdraw from their CALCAR posn on 6 Cdn Inf Bde gaining the high ground. One sqn only to be committed to this task.

(b) Phases II III IV

(i) First task - To continue on the axis CALCAR - ~~XANTEN~~ 1141 in concert with progress of the op if the enemy commences withdrawing. NOT to get committed against any org def.

(ii) Second task - As 5 Cdn Inf Bde commences to follow 4 Cdn Armd Div onto the HOCHWALD feature to provide flank protection on the axis 021466 - DELSENHOF 021442 - SCHMACHDURN 033434. If the state of the enemy defs permit, recce up the valley in the direction of KEHRUM 0346 may be undertaken. The primary task is flank protection - NOT to get committed in the forest.

16 Reliefs

43 Div is responsible for keeping a firm corps left flank and will relieve bdes of 2 Cdn Inf Div as the battle progresses. The first reliefs undertaken are:-

R de Mais posn by 261400 hrs
RHC posn by 261800 hrs.

17 Preliminary Move

To permit the correct and immediate launching of 4 Cdn Armd Div it is necessary to keep the leading elements well fwd. To permit this the following moves and timings are ordered:-

252000 hrs - All vehs and tks of 6 and 5 Cdn Inf Bde Gps required for the attack to be fwd of the rd 948485 - 966504. NO vehs of 4 Cdn Armd Div will cross this rd before 260830 hrs

260600 hrs - NO vehs of 4 Cdn Armd Div will cross the rd 956476 - 978497 before this time.

18 Routes and Tk Tracks

See trace 'Q'. [Not included.]

METHOD (continued)

19 Timings

(a) D day - 26 Feb 45.

(b) Times given below are the earliest which can be expected for H hr:-

		<u>CODE WORD</u>
PHASE I	- 0430 hrs	<u>TURRET</u>
PHASE II	- 0800 hrs	WINGS
PHASE III	- 1200 hrs	DUNHILL

The H hr for each phase will be notified by the code word plus a number of mins.

ADM

20 PW cage located at 936522

21 Pro will maint patrols on div axis to ensure smooth running of tfc.

INTERCOM

22 HQ 2 Cdn Inf Div remains present location.
HQ 4 Cdn Inf Bde 943504
HQ 5 Cdn Inf Bde 944529
HQ 6 Cdn Inf Bde 950505.

23 Liaison

Div LO will be sent to 4 Cdn Armd Div.
8 Cdn Recce Regt (14CH) will provide four offrs with wireless comn at two fwd bns 6 Cdn Inf Bde and right fwd bn 5 Cdn Inf Bde and Div HQ to supplement normal comms.

24 Code names - see trace 'R'. [Not included.]

ACK 'Done'
25 1800A
RDW

Sgd 'H.E.C. Lingley' (?)
for (PW Bennett) Lt-Col
GS - 2 Cdn Inf Div

/r

Time of signature 0145 hrs

SDR/HAND

[Distribution not included]

TOP SECRET

3 CD 1-1

HEADQUARTERS 3 CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION

Copy No 37

24 Feb 45

3 Cdn Inf Div 00 No 13

Op "BLOCKBUSTER"

Ref Maps:

GERMANY

Scale 1/25000: Sheets 4203, 4204, 4303, 4304

Scale 1/50000: Sheets 6, 7, 16, 17

Scale 1/10000: Sheets Pl, Q1

NOTE: Maps Scale 1/25000 and Def Overprints of the same scale will be the only authorized maps for use in this op.

INFM1. Enemy:

- (a) 3 Cdn Inf Div Int Summary No 74 dated 24 Feb 45 is issued in conjunction with this order.
- (b) Revised def overprints and latest air photo cover will be issued as soon as these become available.

2. Own Tps:

- (a) 2 Cdn Corps continues to hold the line of R RHINE from incl KALFLACH CANAL to the area MILLINGEN with 43 Inf Div.
- (b) For Op BLOCKBUSTER, 2 Cdn Corps with:

RIGHT - 11 Brit Armd Div
3 Cdn Inf Div

LEFT - 4 Cdn Armd Div
2 Cdn Inf Div

will be directed on line XANTEN - WESEL

- (c) 2 Cdn Armd Bde, also under comd 2 Cdn Corps, will be allotted in sp 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs and for corps res.
- (d) The op will be sp by the arty resources of 2 Cdn and 30 Brit Corps.
- (e) Remaining in sp 3 Cdn Inf Div:
 - One ML sec 2 Cdn Svy Regt
 - One Radar sec 1 Cdn Radar Bty
 - "C" Flt 660 Air OP Sqn RAF
- (f) To under comd 3 Cdn Inf Div:
 - 179 Fd Regt RA from 43 Inf Div
 - 56 (SP) Cdn A Tk Bty
- (g) To in sp 3 Cdn Inf Div:
 - 6 Cdn Armd Regt less one sqn
 - One armd regt 2 Cdn Armd Bde (after PHASE II)
 - One tp 284 Alst Sqn RE (AVsRE)

3. Air:

- (a) Complete resources 2 TAF RAF are available for the op.
- (b) Med bomber sp may also be available.

INTENTION

- 4. 3 Cdn Inf Div and att tps will attack and destroy the enemy area KEPPELIN - UDEM preparatory to following up 11 Brit Armd Div.

METHOD

5. Gen:

- (a) The attack will be with one bde gp up sp by armour, arty and air with a second bde gp prepared to pass through to final objectives.
- (b) The attack will be carried out in three PHASES:
 - (i) PHASE I - The attack with one bde gp up to clear area LOOKERHOF 9845 - STEEG 9845 - WEMMERSHOF 990465.
 - (ii) PHASE II - The attack by the same bde gp to clear area SPORTPL 972438 - HOMSHOF 961440 - KEPPELIN 9844.
 - (iii) PHASE III - The attack by a second bde gp to pass through leading bde gp on completion of PHASE II to clear area UDEM.

PHASE I and PHASE II

6. Tps:

8 Cdn Inf Bde
with under comd
Two pls "D" Coy CH of O (MG)
"B" Coy CH of O (MG)
52 Cdn A Tk Bty
One Coy 22 Cdn Fd Amb

and with in sp
Two sqns 6 Cdn Armd Regt
Two pls "D" Coy CH of O (MG)
"A" Coy CH of O (MG)
56 (SP) Cdn A Tk Bty
Two secs 16 Cdn Fd Coy

- 7. Tasks: Capture or destroy the enemy on the following objectives as shown on Trace "F" att: [Not included]

(a) PHASE I -
SCOTTIE
SPANIAL

(b) PHASE II -
TORONTO
SETTER

- 8. Assembly Area: To be selected by 8 Cdn Inf Bde in collaboration with 5 Gds Armd Bde and 6 Cdn Inf Bde.

- 9. FUPs: To be selected by 8 Cdn Inf Bde.

- 10. SL: To be selected by 8 Cdn Inf Bde and advised to G 3 Cdn Inf Div by 252200A hrs.

11. Timings:

(a) D Day - 26 Feb 45 (To be confirmed)

(b) H Hr -

(i) PHASE I - (A) Codeword BARGE will rep 0430A hrs on D Day.

(B) Actual H Hr for PHASE I will be notified by this codeword (Meaning 0340A hrs) or the codeword plus or minus mins (meaning that number of mins after or before 0430A hrs).

(C) Probably H Hr - 0430A hrs

(ii) PHASE II - (A) Codeword SLOOP will rep 0800 hrs on D Day.

(B) Actual H Hr for PHASE II will be notified by this codeword (meaning 0800A hrs) or the codeword plus or minus mins (meaning that number of mins after or before 0800A hrs).

(C) Probably H Hr - 0800A hrs.

12. Junc Pts:

(a) Between, RIGHT, 8 Cdn Inf Bde, and, LEFT, 2 Cdn Inf Div:

(i) Rd junc 987474

(ii) X rds 992469

(b) Direct liaison must be est before D Day between fmns and units concerned.

13. Res: 9 Cdn Inf Bde Gp

14. Action on Capture of Objective: Consolidate in the area of the objectives and provide a firm base from which to launch PHASE III of the attack.

PHASE III

15. Tps:

9 Cdn Inf Bde

with under comd

Two pls "D" Coy CH of O (MG)

"C" Coy CH of O (MG)

94 Cdn A Tk Bty

one coy 23 Cdn Fd Amb

and with in sp

One armd regt 2 Cdn Armd Bde

One tp 284 Aslt Sqn RE (AVsRE)

Two Pls "D" Coy CH of O (MG)

"B" Coy CH of O (MG)

Two secs 18 Cdn Fd Coy

16. Task: Capture or destroy the enemy in area UDEM with following objectives as shown on Trace "P" att: [Not included]

BEAGLE
COLLIE
HOUND

17. Assembly Area:)

18. EUPs)

To be selected by 9 Cdn Inf Bde.

19. SL: To be selected by 9 Cdn Inf Bde and notified to G 3 Cdn Inf Div.

20. Timings:

- (a) It is expected that PHASE III of this op will be launched in the early afternoon of D Day.
- (b) Codeword SKIFF will rep 1600A hrs on D Day.
- (c) Actual H Hr for PHASE III will be notified by this codeword (meaning 1600A hrs) or the codeword plus or minus mins (meaning that number of mins after or before 1600A hrs).

21. Action on Capture of Objective: Consolidate in UDEM area to provide a base from which to launch further attacks.

Pts Applicable to all PHASES

22. Forecast of Further Ops:

(a) On completion of PHASE III, 3 Cdn Inf Div will probably be required to hold areas as follows:

- (i) 7 Cdn Inf Bde
with under comd
One pl "D" Coy CH of O (MG)
"A" Coy CH of O (MG)
4 Cdn A Tk Bty
One coy 14 Cdn Fd Amb

and with in sp
One sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt

to hold area of high ground Codeword HAMILTON just EAST of UDEM (see Trace "P" att). [Not included]

- (ii) Up to two bde gps to screen line NORTH of R GROSSE LEY from UDEM to SONSBECK to protect SOUTH flank of 11 Brit Armd Div.

(b) Separate instrs will be issued to implement these tasks.

23. Objectives:

24. Axis:

25. Bdys:

26. Report Lines:

27. Bounds:

28. Ref Pts:

29. Armour:

See Trace "P" att. [Not included]

(a) Two sqns of 6 Cdn Armd Regt in sp 8 Cdn Inf Bde for PHASES I and II.

(b) One armd regt 2 Cdn Armd Bde (to be released by 2 Cdn Corps from in sp 2 Cdn Inf Div) in sp 9 Cdn Inf Bde for PHASE III.

(c) One tp 284 Aslt Sqn RE (AVsRE) in sp 9 Cdn Inf Bde for PHASE III to provide crossings over A tk ditch facing UDEM.

(d) 7 Cdn Recce Regt remains div res in area HQ 3 Cdn Inf Div.

30. Arty:

- (a) Op will be sp by arty resources of 2 Cdn Corps and 30 Brit Corps.
- (b) Prior to D Day HF on corps plan to destroy houses on corps front NORTH of Grid NORTHING 45.
- (c) PHASES I, II and III will be sp by timed concs and others on call: further advs will be sp by pre-arranged targets on call.
- (d) CRA will issue detailed fire plan in sp 3 Cdn Inf Div.
- (e) From PHASE I H minus 30 mins an extensive CB bombardment will be emp on the corps front.

31. A Tk:

- (a) 3 Cdn A Tk Regt less three btys remains in div res.
- (b) Such guns of 3 Cdn A Tk Regt as can be effectively deployed will be available to "Pepper Pot" (See Para 35 below).

32. AA: 4 Cdn LAA Regt responsible for AA protection of:

- (a) Div Adm Area
- (b) Div gun areas and HQ
- (c) Nodal Pts in div area to be detailed later.
- (d) Such guns as can be effectively deployed will be available to "Pepper Pot" (See para 35 below).

33. MMG:

- (a) One coy under comd each bde for attacks.
- (b) All coys to be available for use in "Pepper Pot".

34. 4.2 in Mortars

- (a) Two pls under comd each bde for attacks.
- (b) Resources of whole coy to be available for use in "Pepper Pot" (See para 35 below).

35. "Pepper Pot"

- (a) Gen: During the period PHASE I H minus 30 mins all available arms will fire on the enemy area under the direction of one comd.
- (b) Comd: Lt-Col RM ROSS CH of O (MG)
- (c) Tps:
 - (i) CH of O (MG)
 - (ii) 3 Cdn A Tk Regt
 - (iii) 4 Cdn LAA Regt
 - (iv) Small arms, 3 in mortars and inf A tk guns deployed in 9 Cdn Inf Bde FDLs.
- (d) Task: Lay down a continuous belt of fire beyond our FDLs against known enemy posns and routes; all firing to be coord in one fire plan in collaboration with 5 Gds Arm'd Bde and 2 Cdn Inf Div and to be approved by G 3 Cdn Inf Div.

36. Engrs:

- (a) Assist bdes in opening and maint of tac routes, and bde axis by allotment of two secs fd coy under comd each fwd bde.

36. Engrs: (continued)

- (b) Open and maint div axis in accordance with directive issued separately.

37. Air:

- (a) Details of pre-arranged air sp are NOT yet available but will be notified as soon as possible.
- (b) CAB RANK aircraft will be available on call to fwd bde through Contact Car which will be allotted to it.

38. Artificial Moonlight: will be maint by SLs throughout the op on call by bdes to CRA 3 Cdn Inf Div.

ADM

39. Adm orders will be issued separately.

INTERCOMN

40. Main HQ 3 Cdn Inf Div remains present location 917537

41. Tel ASSU - HQ 3 Cdn Inf Div.
Contact Car - Will be placed in sp leading bde.
FCP - HQ 2 Cdn Corps.

42. Codewords:

- (a) Sec Appx "A" and Trace "P" att. [Not included]
- (b) Att as Appx "B" is Encode and Decode for Place Name Codewords issued by 2 Cdn Corps (To inf bdes and RCA only).

43. Liaison:

- (a) Fmns and units detailed to pass through other fmns and units will deploy reps with those fmns and units.
- (b) 9 Cdn Inf Bde will have an LO from 11 Brit Armd Div and will send one to 4 Cdn Armd Div.

44. Ground to Air Recognition: Detailed instrs will be issued as soon as these become available.

45. Passwords: Will be issued separately.

ACK

(sgd) J. Campier, Maj (?)
(N.L.C. MATHER) Lt-Col,
GS. 3 Cdn Inf Div!

Time of Signature 1330 A Hrs

DISTRIBUTION:

See Appx "C" [Not included]

HQ 4 CDN ARMD DIV MAIN

GOC 4 CDN ARMD DIV VERBAL INSTRUCTIONS

24 Feb, 1945

INFORMATION

1. ENEMY

(a) German divs have been identified on First Cdn Army front since offensive commenced 15 days ago. He has moved the bulk of his reserves on this side of the RHINE to meet threat, leaving his tps in VENLO sector very thin. Most of his units have been thrown in piece-meal but there are some signs of re-organization and better control.

(b) Details of enemy units and formations have been issued separately.

2. OWN TROOPS

(a) Yesterday 9th American Army cross River ROER in str in area south of VENLO. Little opposition. Thrust goes in direction of DUSSELDORF and DUISBURG.

(b) 30 Corps is now attack to capture high ground SE of GOCH.

(c) 2 Cdn Corps is to attack and consolidate high ground incl UDEM excl CALCAR and continue the adv into area south of the HOCHWALD. Further exploitation tasks eastwards to the RHINE.

(d) Cdn Corps incl:

2 Cdn Inf Div)
3 Cdn Inf Div) 2 Cdn Armd Bde
43 Br Div
4 Cdn Armd Div
11 Brit Armd Div

(e) Attack 2 Cdn Corps is to commence 0430 hrs 26 Feb 45 (zero hr NOT to be divulged)

(i) 2 Cdn Div is to attack and capture objective shown on map with under comd a bn of 3 Div on right of objective.

(ii) Between 0800 and 1000 hrs 4 Cdn Armd Div, and 3 Cdn Inf Div are to attack simultaneously, to be co-ordinated by Comd 2 Cdn Corps, to objective shown.

(f) On obtaining their objective Comd 4 Cdn Armd Div and 3 Cdn Inf Div are to attack their second objectives.

(i) 4 Armd Div - High ridge EAST of UDEM
(ii) 3 Inf Div - UDEM

Similarly 11 Armd Div is to adv, by-pass UDEM and get est on high ground to SOUTH of that place, following which it will adv and seize an objective to the south of us in the area SONSBECK and north.

(g) In the meantime, 2 Cdn Inf Div is to carry out relief of TIGER Gp elements on first objective - Comd TIGER Gp and Comd 4 Cdn Inf Bde should liaise closely as this should be done with little delay.

(h) As quickly as possible following capture of high ground EAST of UDEM, 4 Cdn Armd Div is to continue adv into HOCHWALD to objective as shown getting firmly est astride the high ground on either side of the rly.

(i) Following addition arty in support of 4 Cdn Armd Div:

1st objective - 6 Fd
4 Med
1 4.5 regt

2nd and 3rd objectives: above less 3 fd regts.

(j) Following under comd:

one sqn of flails
one sqn less tp AVRE
one sqn crocodiles
24 Ram towers Corps A tk bty.

(k) RAF weather permitting will neutralize area between UDEM Ridge and edge of HOCHWALD posn.

INTENTION

3. My intentions are as follows:

- (a) TIGER Gp will capture and consolidate 1st and second objective destroying all enemy encountered.
- (b) LION Gp will capture HOCHWALD feature.

METHOD

4. Grouping:

(a) TIGER Gp - Comd Brig MONCELL

Bty SP A Tk	4 Cdn Armd Bde
two tps Crocs	Lake Sup R
24 Ram towers	Linc & Welld R
24 Crusader towers	A & SH of C
	one sqn flails tks

(b) LION Gp (initially in reserve) - Comd Brig Jefferson

10 Cdn Inf Bde (less two bns)
29 Armd Recce Regt
Bty SP A Tk
Sqn AVREs (less one tp)
Sqn Crocs (less two tps)

This gp will be built up by two inf bns and additional armour as units of TIGER Gp can be relieved and reorganized.

5. Objectives: As shown on trace. [Not included]

6. Boundaries: For fire and manoeuvre - as shown.

7. Forming up:

- (a) Route from CLEVE to SE will be frozen to other than 4 div tfc from 1800 hrs 25 Feb 45.

- (b) TIGER Gp will commence move fwd so that gp will be deployed for battle on four parallel cross country routes previously reced and marked by 0600 hrs on 26 Feb.

Forward edge of FUP will be as far fwd as consistent with tac security.

From here gp will be moved fwd by well defined bounds as close to start line as possible.

- (c) This gp will be prepared to commence attack at any time from 0800 hrs onwards.
- (d) Wireless links with offr on set must be deployed with armour 2 armd bde operating with 2 div for passage sit reports. This is MOST important. Bde frequency.
- (e) Order to commence attack will be given by me to Comd TIGER Gp who will sta himself with me at HQ 2 Cdn Inf Div from 0600 hrs 26 Feb.

8. START LINE

- (a) There can be no firm start line. It will be a ragged zone. Gp must be prepared to fight its way fwd from the time the order is given.
- (b) Armd waves will move at armoured pace. Follow up waves at inf pace supported by armour.

9. Centre Line:

As shown - wheeled route as close to this as possible will be opened by CRE.

10. FIRE SUPPORT

- (a) For first objective: Barrage moving at tk pace. This will dwell on an opening line until leading waves catch up under it. It is important that leading waves work well under the barrage.
- (b) For second objective - Concentrations or barrage.
- (c) For HOCHWALD, objective - Concentrations on call.
- (d) Throughout the operation UDEM will be bombarded by two hy btys.

11. OBJECTIVES

- (a) 1st objective - action as previously described.
- (b) 2nd objective - action as laid down by brig - there will be a pause on the 1st objective.
- (c) When he is ready to attack 2nd objective Gp Comd will inform me. At least thirty minutes notice must be given for arty programme to commence. I will fix time and give executive order as soon as possible. I would like to co-ordinate with Comd 3 Div.
- (d) Comd TIGER Gp will prepare to exploit success with a mixed battle gp moving via RUDDERSHOFF 019431 across the valley into the HOCHWALD and also explore with strong patrols the rd running SW to the rly at 004410 - this should be accomplished with least possible delay.

- (e) Comd LION Gp will be prepared to exploit rapidly along the line of the rly and rd running south of it to HOCHWALD. As inf units with TIGER Gp can be made available they will be reorganized and placed under comd LION Gp. I do not intend to issue an executive order for Comd LION Gp to continue his adv. He must use forceful initiative in close touch with Comd TIGER Gp. If communications should fail or no order is received for this re-grouping Comd TIGER Gp will implement to the full on his own initiative.

A Word about tactics and thrust

This will be an all out effort. Strip to absolute min of wheeled vehs within units. The tps must be impressed with the vital necessity to get on to destroy the enemy. Subordinate comds must act on their own initiative. Don't sit on the objective if you can press on. Be prepared to go hungry but make every effort to see adequate food available. Tks should try to carry extra to feed inf. Every veh should contain rations and spare petrol. Tks must be topped up in FUP. Don't waste amn.

The Bosche is in a bad way compared to ourselves and is fighting in sheer desperation. He gives up easily when cut off.

This is our opportunity - we must make the best of it.

SECRET
Copy No. 49

24 Feb 45

11 ARMD DIV OO NO. 17

Ref Maps: Germany 1/50,000 6, 7, 16, 17
1/25,000 4202, 4203, 4204.
4302, 4303, 4304.

INTEM

1. Enemy The enemy has now succeeded in regrouping by fmns the units which were widely scattered by the initial attack of op "VERITABLE". All the original divs are however much reduced in str and further rfts will be required if present posns are to be held.

The sector between KEPPELN 4844 and the R NIERS previously held by a much reduced 84 Div has now been strengthened by 7 Para Regt and at least one of the Inf Regts of Pz Lehr Div. In addition some 20 SP eqpts of a hy A tk bn are reported in the area SOUTH of the rly.

The enemy appears to have shifted considerable str from the flanks to the centre, but remains weak in counter attack forces. 15 P.G. Div is now probably WEST of the R NIERS and 116 Pz Div has only recently been withdrawn from ops as no longer battleworthy. Rfts from other sectors of the Western Front are now likely to be diverted to the COLOGNE sector.

2. Own Tps

(a) 9 US Army (under comd 21 Army Group) have begun OP GRENADE and already have two brheads over the R ROER over which about 31 bns have crossed.

(b) 30 Corps during 25 Feb are securing WEEZE 9337 with 3 Br Div and later are prepared to adv to KERVEN HEIM 9938 with a view to passing Gds Armd Div through.

(c) 2 Cdn Corps in OP BLOCKBUSTER are seizing the area 016461 - KEPPELN 9844 - HOLLEN 975446 with RIGHT 3 Cdn Div, LEFT 2 Cdn Div, (both supported by 4 Cdn Armd Bde) and passing 4 Cdn Armd Div and 11 Armd Div through to secure the high ground of the HOCHWALD 0440 to NORTH of SONSBECK 0535 and later to secure XANTEN 1141 and the WESEL br (2140) over R. RHINE. 3 Cdn Div are following 11 Armd Div and taking over ground gained by them.

(d) Details of objectives and phases of the Corps op are shown in trace at appx A. [Not included]

3. Air tgts to be engaged by RAF are shown in trace at appx A. [Not included]

4.(a) Additional tps under comd:-

4 Armd Bde Gp
6 Fd Regt RA
One tp 81 Assault Sqn RE
B Sqn 22 DGNS (Flails)
Half sqn 141 RAC (Crocodiles)

(b) Tps leaving comd:
8 RB to 49 Div

INTENTION

5. 11 Armd Div will:-

(a) Seize the high ground NORTH of SONSBECK and SONSBECK village 045376 - 058350 - 083361 - 080381.

(b) Be prepared to exploit towards XANTEN 1141 or R RHINE br at WESEL 2140.

6. Grouping

(a) 4 Arm'd Bde

GREYS
44 R TKS
2 KRRC
4 KSLI
B Sqn 22 DGNS (Flails)
One tp 81 Assault Sqn RE
One Pl 2 Indep MG Coy
One sec 11 Arm'd Div Pro

(b) 159 Inf Bde

15/19 H
3/4 CLY
1 HEREFORDS
3 MON
Half sqn 141 RAC (Crocodiles)

(c) The above is the initial grouping, but 3/4 CLY should be prepared to revert to 4 Arm'd Bde at immediate notice after phase A in the event of considerable arm'd exploitation being possible.

Similarly 4 KSLI should be prepared to revert to 159 Inf Bde and 15/19 H to Div Tps.

(d) Changes of cmd take effect from 1200 hrs 25 Feb.

7. The op will be carried out in three phases:-

(a) Phase A

(to start same time as phase 3 of Corps op) (probably about 1430 hrs)

4 Arm'd Bde to pass SOUTH of or through the SOUTH end of UDEM and est themselves on high ground GOCHFORTZBERG 001399.

From this firm posn arm'd patrols will be sent fwd to line of rd KREBBERS HOF 024382 - UDEMERBRUCH 024403.

(b)

Phase B

(To start as soon as possible after capture of UDEM possibly by night)

The seizing of the high ground NORTH of SONSBECK by either 4 Arm'd Bde or 159 Inf Bde. This phase will also involve the breaching of the def line running SOUTH and SE from UDEMERBRUCH.

The phase A objective will be taken over by a Bn from 3 Cdn Div.

(c)

Phase C

The capture of SONSBECK by whichever Bde is not undertaking Phase D. Phase C will probably commence before Phase B is completed.

(d)

Exploitation

11 Arm'd Div will be prepared to exploit towards either the high ground 3000 yds SOUTH of XANTEN or to seize the rly br at WESEL.

3 Cdn Inf Div will be stepping up in rear of 11 Arm'd Div and taking over firm bases and RIGHT rear flank protection.

8. Arm'd Cs. Inns of Court will remain in present conc area until called fwd. They are unlikely to be used until after Phase C. They will provide LOS as in para 16.

9. Arty
 - (a) All arty incl 75 A Tk Regt less one tp under CRA.
 - (b) 75 A Tk Regt will probably NOT be moved from present area until completion of Phase C.
 - (c) One SP tp 75 A Tk Regt under comd 159 Inf Bde.
 - (d) 4 RHA come under comd 4 Armd Bde on move fwd.
10. RE
 - (a) One tp 81 Assault Sqn RE under comd 4 Armd Bde.
One tp Fd Sqn RE under comd 4 Armd Bde.

All RE units, less above under comd CRE.
 - (b) CRE will arrange for routes to be marked up to present EDL.
11. Assembly
 - (a) 4 Armd Bde Gp will complete assembly within area 915478 - 914457 - 947434 - 950455 by 1200 hrs D day.
12. Routes Traces and instrs to follow after further recce has been made.
13. Tpt
To economise in rd space tpt will be reduced to a minimum and non-essential vehs will be left in present areas.
14. Bndys for OP BLOCKBUSTER
 - (a) Between 2 Cdn Corps (11 Armd Div) and 30 Corps (3 Br Div).

All incl 2 Cdn Corps GROESBEEK - rd to rd junc 753545 - rd junc 756544 - X rds 761532 - rd junc 772516 - track junc 773517 - X rds 826495 - X rds 844489 - X rds 889469 - X rds 910476 - X rds 931477 - rd junc 928473 - rd junc 954458 - X rds 960462 - UDEM 9842 thence rd KERVENHEIM 9938 - SONSBECK 0535 - WINNENTHAL A1336.

Inter-Corps
No firing line from X rds 947432 - 957425 - track and rd junc 958423 thence line of stream to rd 992391.
 - (b) Between 11 Armd Div and 3 Cdn Div.
All excl 11 Brit Armd Div houses 957449 - track junc 961445 - track junc 973433 - track crossing 978426 - UDEM - and rly crossing 982415 - rly to track junc 008411.
 - (c) Between 11 Armd Div and 4 Cdn Armd Div.
All excl 11 Brit Armd Div rd from X rds 000410 - rd junc 005404 - rd junc 021397 - rd junc 044402 - rd junc 055405.
15. Accn and route recce bndys
 - (a) Between 11 Armd Div and 30 Corps.

X rds 844489 - X rds 889469 - X rds 910476 - X rds 931477 - rd junc 928473 - rd junc 954458 - X rds 960462.
 - (b) Between 11 Armd Div and 4 Cdn Armd Div.
All incl 11 Armd Div from 917490 - track to track junc 934484 thence rd to 945477 to rd junc 934484 thence rd to 945477 to rd junc 952482.

(c) Between 11 Armd Div and 3 Cdn Inf Div.

All excl 11 Armd Div rd from rd junc 952482 to inter-
corps bndy X rd 960462.

ADM

16. Separate instrs to be issued.

INTERCOMN

17. LOs

From Div to

4 Cdn Armd Div
3 Cdn Inf Div
3 Br Inf Div
Gds Armd Div

From 4 Armd Bde

Leading Bde of 3 Cdn Div in phase 3 of
Corps op.
Gds Armd Bde until 4 Armd Bde passed
through, then with leading Bde 4 Cdn
Armd Div.

18. Report Lines See trace at Appx C. [Not included]

19. HQs

Main HQ 11 Armd Div	907518
Rear HQ 11 Armd Div	887522
HQ 4 Armd Bde	915482

20. WT silence until 0100 hrs D day.

21. D day is 26 Feb.

ACK

Time of Signature: 2015 hrs

Method of Despatch: LO

SOR

DRLS

(Sgd) A.H.W.L. Hastings, Lt-Col,
GS 11 Armd Div

DISTRIBUTION separate sheet [Not included]

TOP SECRET

0.988
24 Feb 45

SUBJECT: Operation BLOCKBUSTER

1. Although 43 Div is not taking a leading part in the next phase of Ops, the Div Comd wants all ranks informed of the design of the battle and kept up to date with its progress.

This will be done by:

- (a) Acquainting tps now of the fact that the Cdn Army main effort is about to begin.
- (b) Explaining the 2 Cdn Corps plan. This should be done first thing on morning 26 Feb.
- (c) Passing on progress reports received from this HQ within Bdes and units throughout the Op.

2. The notes at Appx "A" and Trace Appx "B"^{*} give an outline of the Ops planned. NOTHING WILL BE ISSUED IN WRITING AND NO WRITTEN NOTES WILL BE MADE BELOW BDE HQ.

3. Prior to H hr the minimum number of officers will be entrusted with details regarding date, times, and details of fmns involved.

(sgd)

Lt-Col
GS 43 Div

BLA
MTR

DISTRIBUTION

Comd 129 Inf Bde
Comd 130 Inf Bde
Comd 214 Inf Bde
CRA
CRE
C.R. Sigs
OC 43 Recce Regt
OC 8 MX
ADMS
AA & QMG (3 copies)

S T O P P R E S S

Now decided that 11 Armd Div will NOT be launched until attack by 3 Cdn Inf Div on UDEM is begun. Appendices A and B should be amended accordingly.

[^{*} Trace Appx "B" not included.]

Operation BLOCKBUSTER - Plan

1. The op is designed on blitz lines to force a gap through present enemy line sufficiently fast and sufficiently large to pass through two Armd Divs.

These Armd Divs will attempt firstly to "bounce" the enemy HOCHWALD line and secondly to pass on rapidly to XANTEN and the WESEL crossings.

The attainment of these objectives should, in conjunction with the US offensive, go a long way to cutting out all the enemy between GOCH and KEINSBURG.

2. Initially all but a few of the guns of 30 Corps, 2 Cdn Corps, and 1 Cdn Army are devoted to sp of the attack as is the whole air effort available to 21 Army Gp.

Approx 800 guns will be available.

3. The op will be continuous, movement light being used at night.

4. Phase I

Ref to Trace

At 0430 on 26 Feb, 2 Cdn Div with Cdn Armd Bde attacks to gain the high ground SSE of CALCAR, the latter to edge fwd and secure an axis across the low ground WEST of HOCHWALD. One Bde of 3 Cdn Div supports with a limited adv on right to clear that flank

A

A 1

Phase II

Immediately on the heels of this attack 4 Cdn Armd Div passes through 2 Cdn Div directed on the high ground NE of UDEM

B

Simultaneously, 11 Br Armd Div passes through to the SOUTH, by-passes UDEM, and seizes the high ground SE of UDEM

C

3 Cdn Div takes up the attack and advances to capture KAPPELN

D

Phase III

4 Cdn Armd Div thrusts through HOCHWALD line to the HOCHWALD "Gap".

E

11 Armd Div continues adv to secure SONSBECK and high ground NORTH of it when released by 2 Cdn Corps

F

Phase IV

3 Cdn Div continues adv to capture UDEM.

G

Phase IV

4 Cdn Armd Div and/or 11 Armd Div drives on to XANTEN and WESEL Br. As the op progresses, 4 Cdn Armd Div will be followed up by 2 Cdn Div, and 11 Armd Div by 3 Cdn Div.

H

J

5. As a subsidiary operation, 30 Corps:

(a) Launches 53 Div on 24 Feb to capture WEEZE and high ground SE.

X

(b) On 26 Feb, launches 3 Br Inf Div to capture KERVENHEIM and WINNEKENDONK

Y

Y 1

- (c) If the progress of (b) presents a favourable opportunity and going permits, Gds Armd Div may be pushed through.

Z

6. 43 Div will protect the left flank of the Corps during the advance and will take over ground won in the early stages from 2 Cdn Div.

129 Inf Bde remains deployed as at present with one Bn ready to leapfrog fwd to the escarpment SOUTH of CALCAR.

214 Inf Bde will relieve 5 Cdn Inf Bde on its fwd objective.

130 Inf Bde, when relieved from its present role, will be held as reserve.

As the advance progresses, 43 Div will probably have the task of clearing CALCAR and the area between the RHINE and the CALCAR - HOCHWALD high ground.

SUMMARY OF DIRECT AIR SUPPORT OPERATIONS

Breakdown for the 753 sorties flown during the period 26-28 Feb 45 inclusive was:

Interdiction	60
Armd Recce	218
Pre-arranged support	293
Immediate support	39
Tac R.	84
Arty R.	21
Photo R.	Nil
Weather R.	28
Fighter Ops	10
Escort	Nil

(W.D., "G" Air, H.Q. First Cdn Army, February 1945: Appx 2, Summary of Air Sp, Results Nos 57-59, 26-28 Feb 45)

For the period 1-10 Mar 45 inclusive, out of 1487 sorties flown, the breakdown was:

Interdiction	279
Armd Recce	365
Pre-arranged Support	274
Immediate Support	68
Tac R.	132
Arty R.	38
Photo R.	68
Weather R.	28
Fighter Ops	223
Escort	12

(Ibid, Results Nos 60-69, 1-10 Mar 45)

OPERATION "BLOCKBUSTER"

CASUALTIES

(as compiled from First Cdn Army Consolidated
C. & S. States, 26 Feb - 23 Mar 45, as shown
in W.D., A. & Q., H.Q. First Cdn Army,
February and March 1945: Appx 17)

FIRST CDN ARMY - ALL PERSONNEL

	Killed		Wounded		Missing	
	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.
2 Cdn Inf Div. See (a).	23	283	77	1014	2	108
3 Cdn Inf Div. See (b).	12	155	39	632	-	11
4 Cdn Arm'd Div. See (c).	11	191	57	657	11	214
2 Cdn Arm'd Bde. See (d).	3	15	11	42	1	13
First Cdn Army Tps. See (d).	-	5	-	30	-	-
1 Cdn Corps casualties as from 19 Mar 45 to 23 Mar 45 inclusive	1	4	-	17	-	4
TOTAL CANADIAN TROOPS	50	653	184	2392	14	350
TOTAL BRITISH AND ALLIED TROOPS, See (e).	52	608	200	2595	11	530

DAILY CASUALTY RETURNS 26 FEB - 23 MAR 45
(a) 2 CDN INF DIV

Date	Killed		Wounded		Missing		All Ranks Daily Total
	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	
26 Feb 45	4	25	12	161	-	1	203
27	-	19	9	101	-	10	139
28	5	38	2	157	1	7	210
1 Mar 45	-	9	7	44	-	11	71
2	2	5	5	122	-	1	135
3	1	8	1	41	-	-	51
4	2	52	6	111	-	1	172
5	-	16	2	57	-	2	77
6	-	7	3	62	-	11	83
7	-	5	1	12	-	-	18
8	4	36	14	27	-	50	131
9	3	37	10	62	-	2	114
10	1	11	3	22	1	9	47
11	-	1	-	9	-	3	13
12	-	2	1	2	-	-	5
Total 26 Feb - 12 Mar	22	271	76	990	2	108	1469
13-23 Mar	1	12	1	24	-	-	38
GRAND TOTAL	23	283	77	1014	2	108	1507

(b) 3 CDN INF DIV

Date	Killed		Wounded		Missing		All Ranks Daily Total
	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	
26 Feb 45	-	2	3	46	-	1	52
27	6	75	10	153	-	-	244
28	-	1	2	11	-	-	14
1 Mar 45	1	13	8	77	-	-	99
2	-	4	-	19	-	5	28
3	2	1	2	33	-	-	38
4	-	18	4	56	-	-	78
5	2	10	1	14	-	-	27
6	1	5	2	26	-	1	35
7	-	7	5	127	-	-	139
8	-	11	2	20	-	-	33
9	-	2	-	30	-	4	36
10	-	-	-	7	-	-	7
11	-	-	-	2	-	-	2
12	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Total 26 Feb - 12 Mar	12	149	39	622	-	11	833
13-23 Mar	-	6	4	10	-	-	16
GRAND TOTAL	12	155	39	632	-	11	849

(c) 4 CDN ARMD DIV

Date	Killed		Wounded		Missing		All Ranks Daily Total
	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	
26 Feb 45	-	30	4	65	-	1	100
27	2	17	14	62	2	14	111
28	-	14	4	78	1	9	106
1 Mar 45	1	3	5	65	-	3	77
2	-	13	6	69	-	7	95
3	1	18	8	63	3	80	173
4	-	1	-	11	1	3	16
5	1	3	-	26	-	2	32
6	-	7	1	21	-	6	35
7	3	45	4	36	4	72	164
8	1	8	3	36	-	3	51
9	-	15	3	56	-	4	78
10	2	10	3	56	-	5	76
11	-	4	-	2	-	-	6
12	-	-	1	7	-	1	9
Total 26 Feb - 12 Mar	11	188	56	653	11	210	1129
13-23 Mar	-	3	1	4	-	4	12
GRAND TOTAL	11	191	57	657	11	214	1141

(d) 2 CDN ARMD BDE AND FIRST CDN ARMY TPS

Date	Killed		Wounded		Missing		All Ranks Daily Total
	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	
26 Feb 45	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
27	-	-	4	14	-	13	31
28	2	1	3	13	-	-	19
1 Mar 45	-	1	-	7	-	-	8
2	-	3	1	5	-	-	9
3	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
4	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
5	1	1	-	5	-	-	7
6	-	-	-	2	-	-	2
7	-	3	1	15	-	-	19
8	-	-	-	3	1	-	4
9	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total 26 Feb - 12 Mar	3	9	11	66	1	13	103
13-23 Mar	-	2	-	6	-	-	8
GRAND TOTAL	3	11	11	72	1	13	111

(e) TOTAL BRITISH AND ALLIED TROOPS (EXCLUDING U.S. FORCES)
UNDER COMMAND FIRST CDN ARMY AND 2 CDN CORPS

Date	Killed		Wounded		Missing		All Ranks Daily Total
	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	
26 Feb 45	-	25	6	110	-	21	162
27	8	60	28	402	2	94	594
28	7	62	19	263	1	18	370
1 Mar 45	10	46	27	314	1	29	427
2	5	88	21	258	-	55	427
3	8	52	21	242	3	52	378
4	1	11	9	39	1	1	62
5	-	27	9	167	-	33	236
6	5	80	22	252	-	37	396
7	1	31	4	86	1	42	165
8	-	34	12	169	-	43	258
9	1	18	4	46	-	2	71
10	4	57	14	204	2	100	381
11	-	9	-	15	-	1	25
12	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Total 26 Feb - 12 Mar	50	600	196	2568	11	528	3953
13-23 Mar	2	8	4	27	-	2	43
GRAND TOTAL	52	608	200	2595	11	530	3996

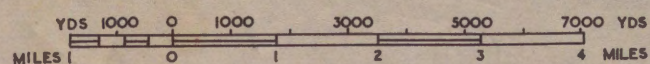
APPx C

26 FEB - 11 MAR 45

FIRST CDN ARMY

NINTH U.S. ARMY

ENCIRCLED FIGURES DENOTE DATE OF CAPTURE



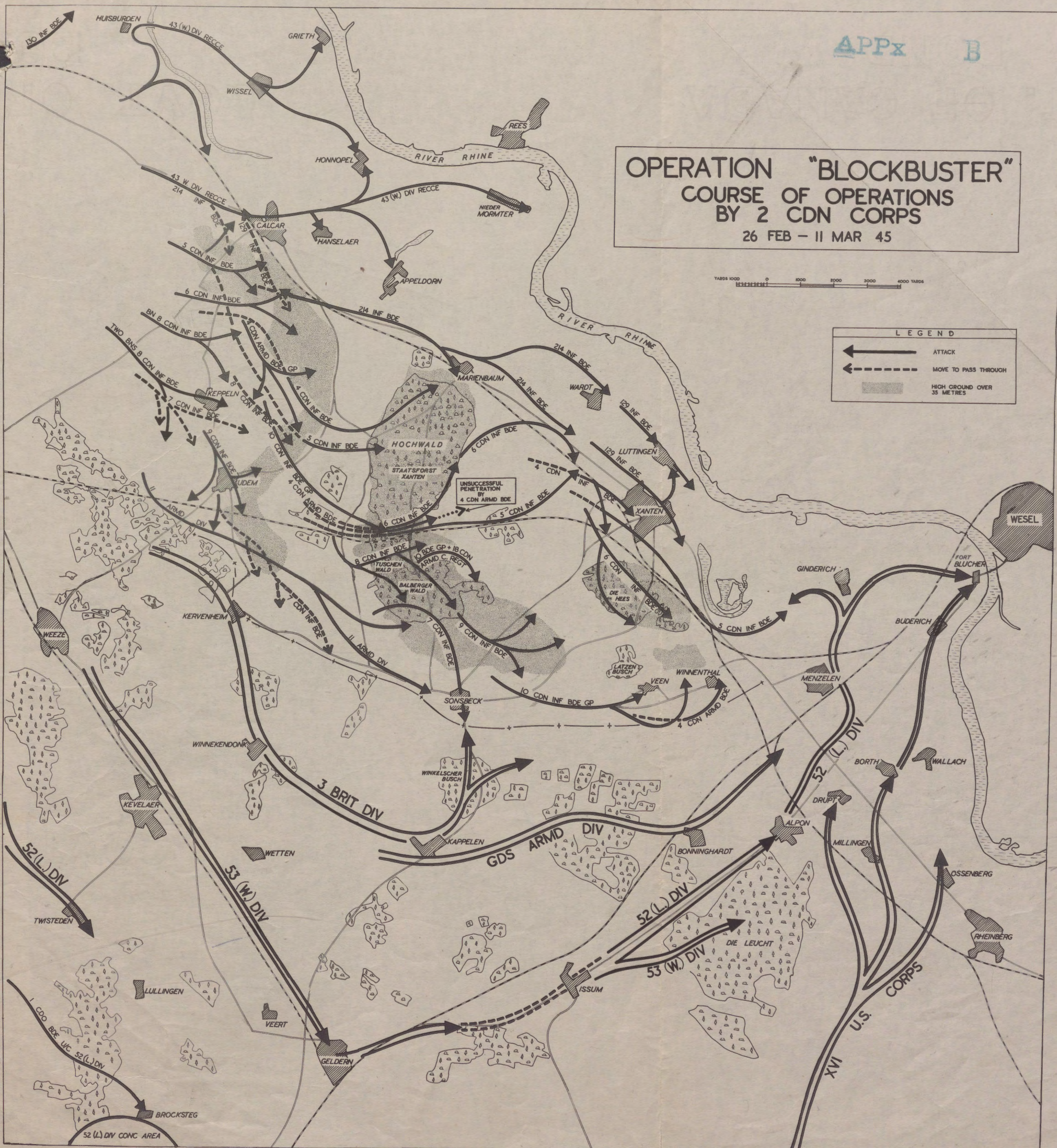
APPx B

OPERATION "BLOCKBUSTER" COURSE OF OPERATIONS BY 2 CDN CORPS 26 FEB - 11 MAR 45

YARDS 1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000

LEGEND

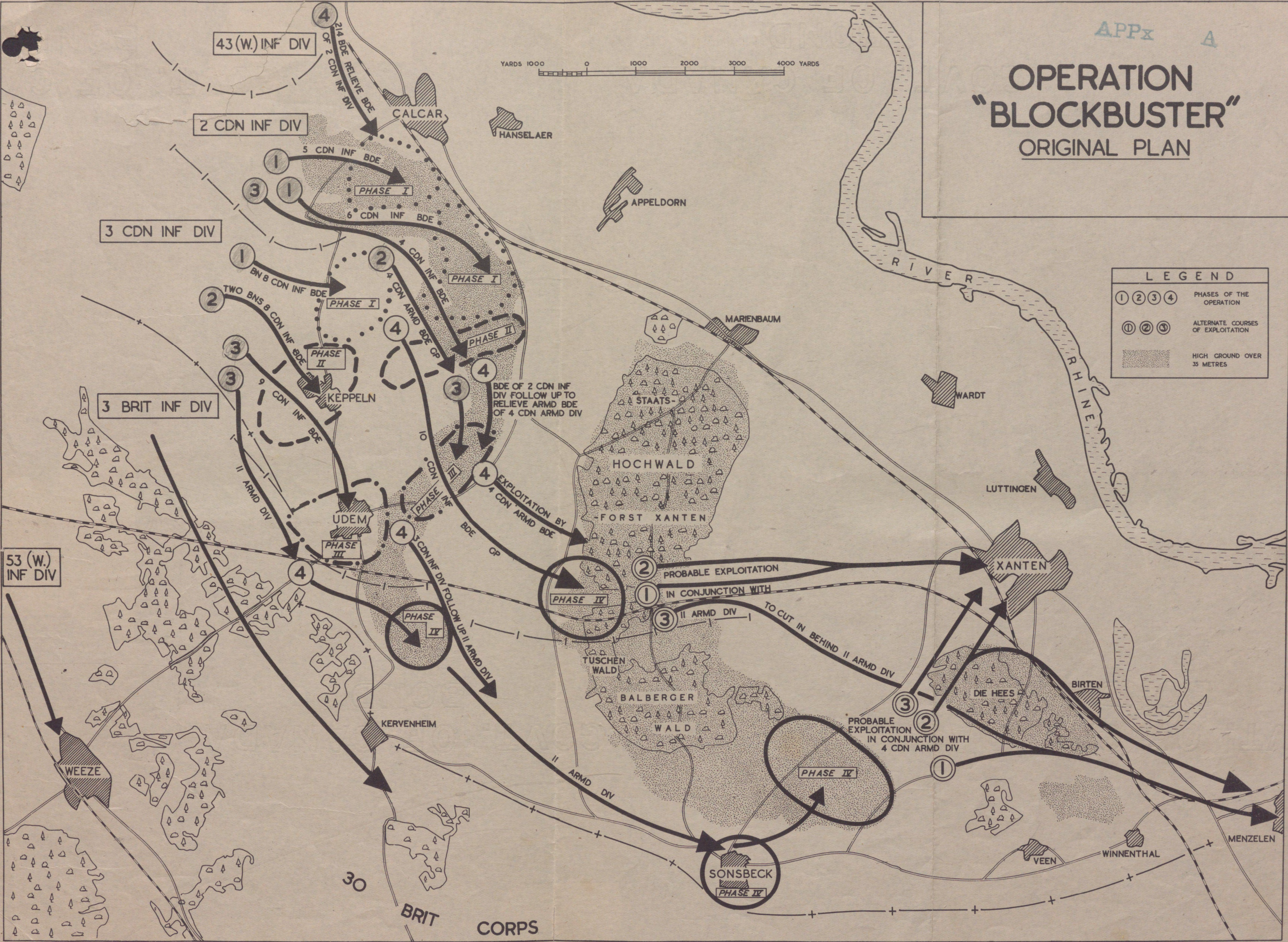
- ATTACK
- MOVE TO PASS THROUGH
- HIGH GROUND OVER 35 METRES



OPERATION "BLOCKBUSTER" ORIGINAL PLAN

YARDS 1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 YARDS

LEGEND				
① ② ③ ④	PHASES OF THE OPERATION			
① ② ③	ALTERNATE COURSES OF EXPLOITATION			
	HIGH GROUND OVER 35 METRES			



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by CRW for DHist NDHQ
Date: SEP 18 1986

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

HISTORICAL OFFICERS REPORT

NO 186

Operation "BLOCKBUSTER": The Canadian Offensive
West of the Rhine, 26 Feb - 23 Mar 45.