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Directorate of History  
National Defence Headquarters  
Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0K2

July 1986

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R E P O R T NO. 152  
HISTORICAL SECTION  
CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

DECLASSIFIED  
Authority: DHD 3-3  
by Doc SEP for GHQ/NOHQ  
Date: 9 1988

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THE CONCLUDING PHASE:

THE ADVANCE INTO NORTH-WEST GERMANY AND THE FINAL  
LIBERATION OF THE NETHERLANDS, 23 MAR - 5 MAY 45.

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21 MAR 1946

- AEF: 45/1 Cdn Corps/C/F. Draft outline of Ops of 1 Cdn Corps in Clearing of Western Holland, April 1945;  
Brief Historical Outline of the Occupation of North-West Holland by 1 Cdn Corps.
- AEF: 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/F: 2 Cdn Corps, Weekly Summaries of Cdn Ops and Activities, March-May 1945.
- AEF: 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F: 2 Cdn Inf Div, Weekly and Monthly Summaries of Ops, March-May 1945.
- AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F: 3 Cdn Inf Div, Weekly and Monthly Summaries of Ops, March-May 1945.
- AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F: Memorandum of Interview with G.S.O. 1, 4 Cdn Armd Div, 23 May 45;  
4 Cdn Armd Div, Weekly Summaries of Ops, April 1945.
- AEF: 45/5 Cdn Armd Div/C/F: History of Operations, 5 Cdn Armd Div, North-West Europe.

Miscellaneous Documents in Custody  
of Historical Section, C.M.H.Q.

- G.O.C.-in-C. file 1-0, Directives from C.-in-C., 21 Army Group.
- G.O.C.-in-C. file 1-0-7/16, Operations "AMHERST" and "KEYSTONE".
- Censorship Report for period 16-31 Mar 45, Cdn Army Overseas, 21 Army Group.
- Relief for the Netherlands - a Monograph prepared by Hist Sec, G-5 Division, SHAEF: 60 Histories, Monographs and Sketches, SHAEF/G-5/INFO/4800, June 1945.

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1. The following narrative continues the series of preliminary reports dealing with the operations of First Canadian Army in North-West Europe. It describes the last phase of the campaign from the assault crossing of the RHINE (Operation "PLUNDER") by Second British Army on the night 23/24 March (9 Cdn Inf Bde being under command) to the signing of the instrument of surrender by plenipotentiaries of the German High Command at Field Marshal Montgomery's Tactical Headquarters on 4 May and the coming into effect of the cease-fire order at 0800 hours on the following day. It must be understood that, like its predecessors in the series of preliminary reports, this one has no pretence to finality and is in fact merely an outline based upon examination of the most obvious sources.
  
2. The conclusion of Operations "BLOCKBUSTER" and "GRENADE" on 10 Mar left the Supreme Commander in a position to enter upon the decisive stage of the war on the Western front. The winter offensive had now given the Allied Armies control of the whole of the west bank of the RHINE from the Dutch-German border to the bridgehead established by 12 U.S. Army Group at REMAGEN, some twelve miles south of BONN. It was thus possible to contemplate the launching of operations on a grand scale into trans-Rhenish Germany. So far as 21 Army Group was concerned, the assault across the river had been conceived by Field-Marshal Montgomery as an operation requiring to be under the control of one Army Commander rather than two in the northern part of the sector (Hist Sec File AEF;45/First Cdn Army/C/E: General Crerar's Despatch to the Minister of National Defence, 5 Apr 45, para 7), although farther to the south he proposed to mount a co-ordinated assault with Ninth U.S. Army near RHEINBERG. With the attainment of his objectives on the left bank, therefore, the C.-in-C. was able to regroup his forces and give Lt-General Dempsey the necessary frontage and the responsibility of forcing a crossing in the area of XANTEN and REES. In brief, his intention was to establish a bridgehead, isolate the RUHR from the rest of Germany in conjunction with First U.S. Army, and break into the North German plain.

PLANS AND PREPARATIONS FOR THE RHINE CROSSING

3. As outlined in General Crerar's despatch,  
...the C-in-C's plan was to cross the Rhine with two armies on a front to include Rheinberg and Rees, the Ninth US Army being on the right and the Second British

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

(Hist Sec file AEF:45/First Cdn Army/C/E: General Crerar's Despatch to the Minister of National Defence, 29 May 45, para 3.)

4. Ninth U.S. and Second British Armies were to secure a bridgehead over the RHINE within the area bounded by the towns of DUISBURG, BOTTROP, DORSTEN, BORKEN, AALTEN, DOETINCHEM and PANNERDEN. In this phase General Crerar had two main tasks: firstly, "to hold the river line from Emmerich to the sea, the security of the bridgehead over the Waal at Nijmegen and of the islands on the north side of the Scheldt Estuary being primary requirements"; secondly, "to make all preparations for bridging the Rhine at Emmerich and for taking command of our lodgement to the north and northwest of that place when so ordered". (*Ibid.*, para 5.)
5. The second phase was intended to carry the Army Group's broader penetration into an area bordered by HAMM, MÜNSTER, RHEINE, ALMELO, DEVENTER, APELDOORN, OTTERLOO and RENKUM. The Canadian boundary with Second British Army would then include EMMERICH, DOETINCHEM, RUURLO, BORCULO and BORNE, and the direction of General Crerar's operations would be to the north. (G.O.C.-in-C. file 1-O, Directive M 559, from C.-in-C., 21 Army Group, 9 Mar. copy in custody of Historical Section, C.M.H.Q.)
6. The implications of this northward thrust from the EMMERICH bridgehead were that with 2 Canadian Corps General Crerar would carry the defences of the IJSSEL, prepared by the enemy to withstand an assault westwards, by taking them in the rear from the east. After capturing ZUTPHEN and DEVENTER, he would seize APELDOORN and the intervening high ground towards ARNHEM. He would take ARNHEM itself by an assault crossing over the NEDER RIJN with 1 Cdn Corps while the enemy was already engaged with 2 Cdn Corps farther north. His engineers would then be prepared to bridge the river at ARNHEM and open up communications from NIJMEGEN through that town to the northeast as soon as the progress of 2 Cdn Corps made this possible. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 1, Directive, 10 Mar.) "A secure flank facing west and running northwards from the Neder Rijn about Renkum would be formed. When these communications had been established, the axis of First Canadian Army's operations would then be turned towards the northeast". (General Crerar's Despatch, para 7.)

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

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

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

8. On 23 Mar, immediately prior to the opening of the Army Group's spring offensive, 2 Cdn Corps held the river front on General Crerar's right flank between the CLEVE-EMMERICH road and MILLINGEN with elements of 2 Cdn Inf Div. 3 Cdn Inf Div and 4 Cdn Armd Div were at this time in rest. (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/F: 2 Cdn Corps Weekly Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities, 18-24 Mar.) In the centre, 49 (W.R.) Inf Div had passed at noon on 15 Mar to the command of 1 Cdn Corps, which then assumed responsibility for the NIJMEGEN sector between 2 Cdn and 1 Brit Corps. "Thus", wrote General Crerar, "for the first time the two Canadian Corps were operationally committed under my command and an historic consummation had been realized" (General Crerar's Despatch, para 4). On the left, the line of the MAAS westwards to the sea was held by 1 Brit Corps, with 1 Pol Armd Div, 4 Commando Bde, 116 Royal Marine Bde and Royal Netherlands Bde under command. 1 Cdn Inf Div and 5 Cdn Armd Div, lately arrived from the Italian theatre of operations, remained in Army reserve to be employed as the situation indicated. (Ibid.)

9. General Crerar had agreed with Lt-General Sir Miles Dempsey "that the 2nd Canadian Corps would be placed under his operational command shortly before the operation to cross the Rhine was launched. At the appropriate time the Canadian formations were to be passed over the Rees bridges by the Second British Army, and would be used to extend the bridgehead to the northwest, towards Doetinchem and Elten, and to secure Emmerich as a centre of communications". When the river had been bridged at this point, 2 Cdn Corps would revert to General Crerar's command. (Ibid., para 5.)

10. As for the enemy, having got the remnants of his forces back across the river in comparatively good order after Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", he was making frantic preparations to meet the coming storm. A heavy concentration of guns had been assembled under cover of the woods on the dominating feature of HOCH ELTEN from which the low-lying river country could be overlooked for several miles up-stream. Along the front west of EMMERICH our observers had spotted some 160 cannon (W.D., Hist Offr, H.Q. First Cdn Army, 18 Mar, based on First Cdn Army Int Summary, 18 Mar). Battered though his troops might be, and hurriedly and urgently reinforced from his depleted depots and training establishments, the enemy sought anxiously to deploy the wasted strength of his formations to the best advantage along this last great water barrier in the west. His dispositions facing 21 Army Group along the Rhine were thus appreciated by our Intelligence:

...The First Parachute Army held the line of the river to include Emmerich and Krefeld, with the 2nd Parachute Corps (the 6th, 8th and 7th Parachute Divisions) from Emmerich to Xanten, the 86th Corps (the 84th and 180th Infantry Divisions) from Xanten to exclude Dinslaken, and the 63rd Corps (Division Hamburg, the 2nd Parachute Division and miscellaneous Volkssturm and other units) from Dinslaken to Krefeld. In Army Reserve the 47th Panzer Corps (the 116th Panzer and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions) lay up in the Bocholt - Aalten area. The deployment of the paratroops on the northern flank, with the armoured reserve just behind them, indicated the area of greatest enemy apprehension ... (Ibid., 23 Mar).

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

12. This feeling of confidence was strengthened by Field-Marshal Montgomery's personal message on the eve of the assault across the RHINE. Beginning with a review of the immense losses which had thus far been inflicted on the enemy, he closed with a ringing statement of his intentions.

1. On the 7th February I told you we were going into the ring for the final and last round; there would be no time limit: we would continue fighting until our opponent was knocked out. The

last round is going very well on both sides of the ring -- and overhead.

2. In the WEST, the enemy has lost the Rhineland, and with it the flower of at least four armies -- the Parachute Army, Fifth Panzer Army, Fifteenth Army, and Seventh Army; the First Army, further to the south, is now being added to the list.

In the Rhineland battles, the enemy has lost about 150,000 prisoners, and there are many more to come; his total casualties amount to about 250,000 since 8th February.

3. In the EAST, the enemy has lost all POMERANIA east of the ODER, an area as large as the Rhineland; and three more German armies have been routed. The Russian armies are within about 35 miles of BERLIN.
4. Overhead, the Allied Air Forces are pounding Germany day and night. It will be interesting to see how much longer the Germans can stand it.
5. The enemy has in fact been driven into a corner, and he cannot escape.

Events are moving rapidly.

The complete and decisive defeat of the Germans is certain; there is no possibility of doubt on this matter.

6. 21 ARMY GROUP WILL NOW CROSS THE RHINE.

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

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

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



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

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

#### THE ASSAULT AND THE FIGHTING ON THE EAST BANK

13. Very heavy air attacks preceded the opening of Operation "PLUNDER". On the evening of 23 Mar, after an intensive artillery preparation, the assault waves of 30 Corps (51 (H) Inf Div) set out across the Rhine in L.V.Ts. First resistance on the far bank was light and the outskirts of REES were reached before morning. Throughout the night new assaults were launched in succession: 12 Corps crossed at WESEL and XANTEN, and 16 U.S. Corps near RHEINBERG. Troops of 18 U.S. Airborne Corps began their drop shortly before 1000 hours on the morning of 24 Mar; DIERSFORDT Wood and HAMMINKELN were captured and bridges were seized over the River IJSEL. (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket IV: Notes on the Operations of 21 Army Group, 6 Jun 44 - 5 May 45.) 1 Cdn Para Bn, as part of 6 Airborne Div, participated in this phase of the assault. The dropping zone selected lay along the northern fringe of DIERSFORDT Wood. Owing to the high speed of the aircraft there was considerable dispersion in the jump, and the zone itself was found to be under heavy fire. Among the first casualties was the commanding officer, Lt-Colonel J.A. Nicklin, whose body, two days later, was found hanging in a tree. Nonetheless the battalion quickly concentrated and before mid-day had cleared its objectives on the western edge of the wood and captured a large number of prisoners. In the afternoon contact was made with reconnaissance elements of 15 (S) Inf Div. Three days later the advance began which was to carry 6 Airborne Div to the Baltic Sea. (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, March 1945.)
14. The Canadian component of 30 Corps also played its part in the early fighting on the east bank. The assembly of 9 Cdn Inf Bde for its task of enlarging the original bridgehead towards the northwest was carried out smoothly on 24 Mar. Under the command of 51 (H) Inf Div the brigade at once commenced its advance and was soon engaged in very heavy fighting at BIENEN. On the second day (25 Mar) 9 Cdn Inf Bde passed under command of 43 Inf Div. MILLINGEN was captured in conjunction with 130 Inf Bde on 26 Mar. (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, March 1945.) On the following day 3 Cdn Inf Div assumed command of the left sector of 30 Corps' bridgehead and the advance went on to EMMERICH on the bank of the RHINE northwest of REES (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 1, Daily Log, 28 Mar, serial 18).
15. The establishment of the bridgehead proceeded extremely well during the days following the assault. Only on the left was opposition found to be severe; in REES enemy parachute troops held out against 30 Corps until 26 Mar.

The C.-in-C. was quick to seize upon the large possibilities now being laid open by the successful course which the operation was taking. The situation is thus described by General Crerar:

On 27 Mar I conferred with Field Marshal Montgomery at his Tactical Headquarters near Venlo. He advised me that in view of the favourable situation which was developing in front of the two assaulting armies, he had decided to thrust them forward to the river Elbe. The consolidation of our positions across the Rhine was now proceeding satisfactorily and there appeared to be only weak enemy forces facing the Americans and the British right wing. He had ordered Lt-General Simpson, therefore, to advance in strength, with his right aimed at Magdeburg, and Lt-General Dempsey to thrust forward with his left towards Bremen and Hamburg. The C-in-C anticipated that a break-through might thus be developed by the two armies within forty-eight hours. The initial tasks of First Canadian Army were to continue according to his previous instructions, but when the general line between Almelo, Apeldoorn and Renkum had been secured, I should expect to move north and northeast with my left flank on the German coast and my right linking up with and somewhat echeloned behind Lt-General Dempsey's left.

It then seemed most probable that shortly after Lt-General Dempsey commenced his deep drive with the 8th and 12th British Corps, the 30th British Corps, comprising three infantry divisions, would come under my command in order to enable me to cover the right flank of the 2nd Canadian Corps in its thrust north to the Almelo - Deventer line and connect up with the British left. As the operations developed, however, this possibility did not take place.

The C-in-C went on to say that recent intelligence indicated that the enemy might be intending to evacuate the western Netherlands, a likelihood which would be increased as the 2nd Canadian Corps pursued its northward advance. On the other hand, if the enemy did not withdraw and for high political reasons it became necessary to carry out military operations against him in that part of the country, these would require to be conducted under my direction. Field Marshal

Montgomery hoped, and was inclined to believe, however, that such a diversion of forces would not be necessary as it would tend to detract from the effort to achieve the main object - which was the complete defeat of the main German armies in north-west Europe.

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

16. By 28 Mar the two assaulting armies had linked north of the River LIPPE. Ninth U.S. Army's sector included GLADBECK, GAHLEN and DORSTEN; in the British sector, 12 Corps, advancing to the northeast, had reached BORKEN and RHEDE, and 30 Corps, against sterner opposition, had secured the line HALDERN-ISSELEBURG-ANHOLT. (Notes on the Operations of 21 Army Group, as above.)
17. On the same day (28 Mar) 3 Cdn Inf Div passed to the command of 2 Cdn Corps, which now became responsible for the sector west of NETTERDEN. (Daily Log, G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, 28 Mar, serial 51.) The industrial centre of EMMERICH, which lay in ruins as the result of heavy bombing attacks, was cleared by 7 Cdn Inf Bde on 30 Mar after several days of heavy fighting (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, March 1945). Thereafter resistance dwindled and the HOCH ELTEN feature was captured by 8 Cdn Inf Bde against only light opposition (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/CAF, Docket I: 3 Cdn Inf Div, Monthly Consolidated Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities, March 1945). With the capture of EMMERICH and HOCH ELTEN, the initial task of 2 Cdn Corps in Operation "PLUNDER" came to an end.
18. By the end of the month the battle of the Rhine had been won. The encirclement of the Ruhr, that great manoeuvre envisaged by the C-in-C in September 1944, was almost completed. The Ninth US Army, with patrols into Munster and Hamm, was driving on to link up with the First US Army in Paderborn. Meanwhile, Lt-General Dempsey's forces had crossed the Ems at Greven and Mesum and were nearing Rheine, thus spoiling any chances which the 2nd Parachute Corps might have had of falling back to the line of the river. On the left flank, the 2nd Canadian Corps was attacking Terborg and along the east bank of the Rhine northwest of Emmerich had gained the summit of Hoch Elten from which the German guns had dominated the crossing-places farther up the river. Our stubborn adversary, the First Parachute Army, was split in two: the 2nd Parachute Corps, reeling backwards on the north, had lost contact with the 86th Corps in the south.

(General Crerar's Despatch, para 13.)

19. It was at this time that the enemy's efforts with V-weapons were brought to an end. As the Allied forces drove deeper into Germany the maintenance of his launching sites in western Holland became increasingly difficult. The advance of 2 Cdn Corps to the north, moreover, now threatened to cut the few remaining routes along which supplies must pass. The last rocket was fired against the United Kingdom on 27 Mar and the last flying bomb on 30 Mar. (Report No. 137.)

#### THE NORTHWARD ADVANCE OF 2 CDN CORPS

20. On the evening of 1 Apr, thirty-two hours after the order to begin work had been given to the Chief Engineer, the sappers opened a bridge across the Rhine at BMMERICH (W.D., Hist Offr, H.Q. First Cdn Army, 1 Apr). The rapid completion of the work made it possible for 2 Cdn Corps to return to General Crerar's command at midnight on the same day, since with his own communications now established across the river he could maintain and fight the Corps in its northward advance. (General Crerar's Despatch, para 14)
21. In a directive dated 2 Apr, General Crerar confirmed the tactical directions given to his two Corps Commanders during recent meetings. When Lt-General Simonds had secured the line of country between ALMELO and DEVENTER, the rate of his advance to clear the northeast Netherlands was to be governed by his success in forcing a crossing of the IJSSEL and in opening the important road and railway communication between NIJMEGEN, ARNHEM and ZUTPHEN and thence into north-western Germany. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, April 1945: Appx 1, Directive to 1 and 2 Cdn Corps, 2 Apr.) In preparation for the advance by 2 Cdn Corps to the north and northeast, 2 Cdn Inf Div had taken its place in the bridgehead by 30 Mar to be directed on TERBORG (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket I: 2 Cdn Inf Div, Monthly Consolidated Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities, March 1945).
22. Events were moving with dramatic rapidity. By 3 Apr forward elements of Lt-General Simpson's forces, driving eastwards towards HANOVER and the ELBE, had penetrated to the WESER southeast of MINDEN (Notes on the Operations of 21 Army Gp). On the same day Ninth U.S. Army reverted to 12 Army Group, which was to clear up the area of the RUHR and then turn to the southeast, directed on LEIPZIG and DRESDE. Ninth U.S. Army had been ordered by General Bradley, however, to protect Second British Army's right flank as far as HANOVER and for this purpose to establish its own left flank firmly on the DER DEISTER hills to the southwest of the city. Lt-General Dempsey would thus be enabled to secure the line of the WESER to include MINDEN and BREMEN. He would then advance his right flank to the rivers ALLER and LEINE. Holding firmly on to BREMEN, he was to force bridgeheads over the three rivers preparatory to making a further advance to reach and cross the ELBE. His left boundary with General Crerar took in the line of communications through HENGLO, NORDHORN, LINGEN, HASELUNNE, BREMEN and HAMBURG. (Directive M 567, from C.-in-C., 21 Army Group, 5 Apr.)

23.

In view of these developments Field-Marshal Montgomery visited General Crerar's Headquarters on 5 Apr to discuss the future course of his operations as they were affected by the turn of events. The outcome of the conference is thus set forth by General Crerar in his Despatch:

In priority, the tasks set for the Canadian Army were to open the route between Arnhem and Zutphen, to clear the northeast Netherlands, then northwest Germany to the line of the Weser, to be prepared to take over Bremen from the Second British Army and, advancing eastward to the Elbe, to protect the left flank of the Second British Army and clear the Cuxhaven peninsula. Our penetration into the western Netherlands was also to be maintained.

In the course of his operations northeastwards to clear the coastal belt of Germany, including all naval establishments, as far as the river Weser, Lt-General Simonds was to direct one armoured division on the axis between Almelo, Neuenhaus, Meppen, Sogel, Friesoythe and Oldenburg, in order to afford the necessary measure of security to Lt-General Dempsey's left flank. It followed that I should be responsible for establishing a central control in the west and northeast Netherlands as soon as these districts were cleared, for which purpose Headquarters, Netherlands District, was to maintain close liaison with my Headquarters and to provide Civil Affairs detachments for deployment under my command to ensure continuity when Netherlands District eventually took over from First Canadian Army.

(General Crerar's Despatch, paras 19 and 20; see also W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, April 1945: Appx 2, Directive, 7 Apr.)

24.

General Crerar explains the implications of his commitment in the Netherlands in the following terms:

I appreciated that the Germans could not now withdraw their forces from the western Netherlands where they appeared to have chosen to fight a separate battle, standing first along the Ijssel and then on the Grebbe and New Water lines farther to the west. For such a contest the Commander of the Twenty-Fifth Army would have the combined resources of the troops still remaining in the country as a garrison,

and the formations now falling back across the river as a result of my offensive to the north. It was to be assumed that his total forces would number about 100,000 men. Not all of his formations were experienced in battle, nor at full strength, but with the varied water obstacles which they were evidently prepared to exploit without regard to the further devastation by flooding of large areas of the country at this stage of the war, they were capable of putting up a strong defence. At the same time, I held only a low priority on the special resources necessary to carry my operations westward to the North Sea.

While I still thought it possible that the enemy might try to delay my northern advance on Groningen, I did not expect this part of the Netherlands to be heavily defended, with the exception of the coastal areas opposite the naval base of Emden.

(General Crerar's Despatch, paras 21 and 22.)

25.

The progress being made in this direction by 2 Cdn Corps during the first week of April showed very swift development on the right, diminishing progressively towards the west where the enemy's strength was greater. Here Lt-General Simonds' left flank was being secured by an offensive operation by 1 Cdn Corps to clear the "island" between NIJMEGEN and ARNHEM. On 2 Apr. 49 (W.R.) Inf Div attacked towards the PANNERDENSCH Canal against slight resistance; on the following day elements of the division crossed the canal unopposed and cleared the southeast bank of the IJSSEL opposite ARNHEM. Here contact was made with 3 Cdn Inf Div advancing north on ZUTPHEN. On the left of the "island" sector, 5 Cdn Armd Div secured the line of the NEDER RIJN as far west as RANDWIJK. (Hist Sec File AEF: 45/1 Cdn Corps/C/F: Draft Outline of Ops of 1 Cdn Corps in clearing of Western Holland, April 1945.)

26.

On Lt-General Simonds' right flank, 4 Cdn Armd Div, concentrated in the bridgehead during 1 and 2 Apr, was at once employed to great effect. The TWENTE Canal, beyond which the enemy had hurriedly withdrawn, was forced at DELDEN during the night 3/4 Apr. From this point progress was rapid. The important centre of ALMELO fell on 5 Apr, crossings were gained over the OVERIJSSELSCH Canal, and on the same day columns of 4 Cdn Armd Bde swept north to NORDEN, NEUENHAUS and COEVORDEN, while forward elements penetrated to the outskirts of MEPPEN. (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F: Memorandum of Interview with G.S.O.1, 23 May 45.) Being now required to direct 4 Cdn Armd Div on OLDENBURG, in order to secure the left flank of Second British Army (as indicated in para 23), Lt-General Simonds ordered the division's main force to be shifted towards the east. The advance was accordingly pressed forward in the new direction and by 8 Apr

a successful assault crossing of the River EMS and the DORTMUND-EMS Canal had been made at MEPPEN. (Ibid.) To enable Lt-General Simonds to maintain the momentum of his drive to the northeast 1 Polish Armoured Division was now placed under his command (General Crerar's Despatch, para 24).

The TWENTE Canal had also been crossed northeast of ZUTPHEN on 3 Apr by 2 Cdn Inf Div, advancing on a central axis through TERBORG and DOETINCHEM. While 6 Cdn Inf Bde tested the defences of ZUTPHEN (later left to 3 Cdn Inf Div alone), the crossing-place was consolidated and 5 Cdn Inf Bde moved on from it to capture LAREN. By 7 Apr, 6 Cdn Inf Bde had secured a firm bridgehead over the SCHIPBEEK Canal in the face of heavy machine-gun and mortar fire, and two days later HOLTEN and RIJSSEN fell to 5 Cdn Inf Bde. (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F. Docket I: 2 Cdn Inf Div, Weekly Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities, 1-7 Apr and 8-14 Apr 45.)

On General Simonds' left flank 3 Cdn Inf Div moved on northwestwards from the STOKKAMMER BOSCH towards the River IJSSEL, fighting against rearguards supported by self-propelled guns. Along the east bank of the IJSSEL it was found necessary to contain local centres of resistance while the main body advanced northwards in conformity with 2 Cdn Inf Div on its right. After several days of fighting against elements of 6 Para Div, ZUTPHEN was taken by 8 Cdn Inf Bde on 8 Apr. Meanwhile 7 Cdn Inf Bde had crossed the TWENTE Canal and was advancing on DEVENTER. By this time 4 Cdn Armd Div had crossed the EMS at MEPPEN, over sixty miles to the northeast. (3 Cdn Inf Div, Weekly Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities, 1-7 Apr 45.)

During the night 7/8 Apr the northward advance of 2 Cdn Corps was given added impetus by the dropping of French paratroops of the Special Air Services behind the enemy's lines (General Crerar's Despatch, para 24). Their object was to seize certain bridges and airfields in order to prevent their destruction by the enemy, and, at the same time, to create confusion in his rear areas, assist in arousing the forces of the Dutch 'Resistance', obtain information and to do everything else possible to help the advancing divisions forward (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, April 1945: Appx 16; Hist Sec file AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/C/F, Docket IV: H.Q. No 38 Group R.A.F., Report on Operations "AMHERST" and "KEYSTONE"; Brigadier Calvert's Report on Operation "AMHERST" by 2 and 3 R.C.P. in N.E. Holland; G.O.C.-in-C. file 1-O-7/16, Operations "AMHERST" and "KEYSTONE"). On 9 Apr it was reported that the paratroops had captured WESTERBORK and that patrols of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt had made contact with them (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, April 1945: Appx 34, Phantom Sitreps, 0900 hours, 9 Apr).

Once across the DORTMUND-EMS Canal at MEPPEN 4 Cdn Armd Div advanced for some twelve miles along its east bank, meeting no more serious resistance than road blocks and mines. At LATHEN 4 Cdn Armd Bde turned to the east, entered SÖGEL without opposition, and rapidly moved on northeastwards towards OLDENBURG on a broad sweeping front, engaging in numerous sharp skirmishes with the enemy's rearguards. At the base of the divisional advance 10 Cdn Inf Bde

had cleared the enemy from WIERDEN, to the west of ALMELO. (G.S.O. 1, 4 Cdn Armd Div, as cited above.) By 11 Apr, 4 Cdn Armd Bde had cleared WERLTE and was patrolling to VREES and LINDERN; 10 Cdn Inf Bde was approaching BÖRGER (W.D., G Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, April 1945: Appx 40, Sitrep, 1940 hours, 11 Apr).

Before the pressure exerted by 4 Cdn Armd Div the enemy was being forced to give ground rapidly and, to quote General Crerar,

...was now falling back on Friesoythe and the line of the Küsten canal, beyond which, on the left, the defensible low-lying ground of the Sater, Ober, Ledinger and Rheider lands extended towards Leer and the mouth of the Ems. In this marshy and confined region, offering only limited accessibility along inadequate roads off which the deployment of fighting vehicles and artillery was difficult, if not impossible, the 2nd Parachute Corps was prepared to cover the East Frisian naval bases along the lines of the canal and the Leda river. On the right towards Oldenburg the approaches across the Vehne-Moor offered similar disadvantages for an assault northward across the Küsten canal...  
General Crerar's Despatch, para 29).

On the left a similar armoured drive by 1 Pol Armd Div, in the direction of LEER at the mouth of the EMS, was making good progress, and by 11 Apr leading elements had occupied EMMEN (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, April 1945: Appx 40, Sitrep, 1940 hours, 11 Apr).

While on the right the armour thus continued its pressure towards OLDENBURG and EMDEN, on the Polish left 2 Cdn Inf Div pushed north through OMMEN towards GRONINGEN against steadily decreasing resistance. By 11 Apr the forward elements of the division were already north of HOOGEVEEN, and in the vicinity of SPIER contact had been established with the French S.A.S. troops (2 Cdn Inf Div, Weekly Summary of Ops, 8-14 Apr).

On Lt-General Simonds' left flank, the advance of 3 Cdn Inf Div along the east bank of the IJSSEL began also to be accelerated, although here progress was still retarded by the necessity of guarding the river line against enemy infiltration from the west. While 8 Cdn Inf Bde provided a firm base around ZUTPHEN, 7 Cdn Inf Bde closed on the defences of DEVENTER. The capture of the town after a stubborn defence on 10 Apr marked the end of co-ordinated enemy resistance in this sector. On the following day 9 Cdn Inf Bde drew near to ZWOLLE and the OVERIJSSELSCH Canal. (3 Cdn Inf Div, Monthly Consolidated Summary of Ops, 1-30 Apr.)

#### THE COMMENCEMENT OF OPERATIONS IN THE WESTERN NETHERLANDS

The elimination of the enemy along the east bank of the IJSSEL prepared the way for Lt-General Simonds to



undertake the preliminary assault in the battle for the western Netherlands. At 1630 hours on 11 Apr he attacked across the river with 1 Cdn Inf Div which General Crerar had placed under his command for the immediate purpose of establishing a bridgehead. Against light resistance, but in the face of troublesome artillery and mortar fire, a lodgement was made on the west bank at WILP, three miles south of DEVENTER. The initial gains being soon extended, the road from APELDOORN to DEVENTER was cut, and by midnight on 12 Apr the leading infantry were already half-way to APELDOORN. On the following day 1 Cdn Inf Div reverted to the command of Lt-General Foulkes, who thus became responsible for the conduct of our operations west of the IJSSEL and north of the NEDER RIJN. (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/1 Cdn Corps/C/F: Draft Outline of Ops of 1 Cdn Corps in Clearing of Western Holland, April 1945.)

35.

The original proposals for the capture of ARNHEM involved an attack from the southwest across the NEDER RIJN. This plan had to be revised, mainly because it was appreciated that the roads across the "island" between the rivers to the north of NIJMEGEN were only likely to bear the weight of heavy traffic at the cost of intensive effort on the part of the sappers. It was decided, therefore, to attack across the upper IJSSEL from the southeast, where the approaches were more favourable. Accordingly, under cover of a smoke-screen, 49 (W.R.) Inf Div was relieved on the "island" by Westmr R. (Mot) with some Belgian troops under command, and shifted to the east of the PANNERDENSCH Canal. On the evening of 12 Apr the smoke began to lift, targets in the ARNHEM area were engaged by air, and 49 (W.R.) Div, supported by armoured equipment from 79 Armd Div, crossed the river near the railway bridge southeast of the town. The infantry closed in, and after fighting from house to house, had the place cleared by noon on 14 Apr. (Ibid.)

36.

The possibilities in this part of the Netherlands, however, were limited by the extent and requirements of the great advances being made elsewhere along the front of 21 Army Group. The facts were given to General Crerar at his Headquarters on 12 Apr by the C.-in-C. (G.O.C.-in-C. file 1-O: Notes on C.-in-C.'s Conference with Comd, First Cdn Army, 12 Apr, copy in possession of Historical Section, C.M.H.Q.)

...The Second British Army, continuing its advance to the Elbe, was developing two main thrusts along the axes between Ulzen and Domitz, Soltau and Luneburg. On Lt-General Dempsey's left the 30th British Corps was to drive on with all possible speed to capture Bremen. Should this object not have been achieved before the arrival of First Canadian Army in that area, it was possible that the completion of this task might then devolve upon me. In such circumstances, it was expected that one, or possibly two, British infantry divisions in the vicinity would come under my command. Operations to clear the west Netherlands, except in so far as they were necessary to complete the primary task of the 1st Canadian Corps and the securing of the left flank of the Corps area to the west of the Ijssel and south of the Zuider Zee, would only proceed to the extent that they

were within the scope of the limited resources which Lt-General Foulkes had available to him. For as soon as it could be released without detriment to the completion of the operations intended to give us the route through Arnhem and Zutphen, the 5th Canadian Armoured Division was to relieve the formations of the 2nd Canadian Corps, then in the process of clearing the north-east Netherlands, and would come directly under command of First Canadian Army. Lt-General Simonds would then keep the weight of his forces on the right and be prepared for a possible assault on Bremen. After the capture of the city, it was intended that the 2nd Canadian Corps would clear the enemy from the Wilhelmshaven - Emden peninsula before thrusting beyond the Weser to dominate the estuary of the Elbe below Hamburg, cutting off the enemy's escape route to the sea and closing the Cuxhaven peninsula.

(General Crerar's Despatch, para 28; see also W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, April 1945: Appx 3, Directive, 13 Apr.)

#### THE BRIDGEHEAD OVER THE KÜSTEN CANAL AND THE FALL OF GRONINGEN

37. To attain these further objectives it was first necessary to carry the enemy's line of defence along the KÜSTEN Canal before OLDENBURG. The advance of 4 Cdn Armd Div on that city was complicated by the presence of the peat bogs lying to the southwest. Major-General Vokes appreciated that he must force the canal at FRIESOYTHE and approach OLDENBURG from the northwest, across the only suitable "tank country" in this region. At FRIESOYTHE, which served the enemy as an outpost to the line of the canal, vigorous resistance enforced a halt, but the town was successfully attacked and captured on 14 Apr. After several days spent in clearing the area to the south, a bridgehead was established by 10 Cdn Inf Bde over the KÜSTEN Canal at EDEWECHTERDAMM during the night 16/17 Apr. The enemy's reaction was violent, and the expansion of the bridgehead was made more difficult by the inferior state of the roads. Not until 25 Apr was it possible for 4 Cdn Armd Bde to attack in the direction of BAD ZWISCHENAHN. (G.S.O. 1, 4 Cdn Armd Div, as above.)
38. A parallel armoured thrust was being developed against the western extremity of the German line. 10 Pol Armd Bde, crossing the EMS at HAREN, moved north along the east bank towards PAPENBURG. After several fruitless attempts to force the canal, the Poles gained a bridgehead on 19 Apr. The western flank of the enemy's defences covering the approach to East Friesland was thus threatened. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, April 1945: Appx 1, Sitreps 12-19 Apr; General Crerar's Despatch, para 32.)
39. Farther to the west, the Army's operations in the northeast Netherlands during this period came close to a triumphant conclusion. In their northward advance 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs found the provinces of Groningen and Friesland virtually clear. On the right 3 Pol Inf Bde advanced towards

the DOLLART Inlet. Columns of 2 Cdn Inf Div, pressing northwards through WESTERBORK and ASSEN, reached the southern outskirts of GRONINGEN on the morning of 14 Apr. (2 Cdn Inf Div, Weekly Summary of Ops, 8-14 Apr.) More than fifty miles to the southwest, ZWOLLE fell without opposition to 3 Cdn Inf Div on the same day. The exposed flank along the IJSSEL having now been secured by 1 Cdn Inf Div's attack across that river, forward elements of 3 Cdn Inf Div crossed the OVERIJSSELSCH Canal and reached STEENWIJK. (3 Cdn Inf Div, Monthly Consolidated Summary of Ops, 1-13 Apr.) On the right of 2 Cdn Inf Div, at WAGENBORG, five miles south of APPINGEDAM, contact was established with the Poles on 15 Apr (W.D., Hist Offr, H.Q. First Cdn Army, 15 Apr) and 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt, sweeping the open country about LEEUWARDEN on the left, reached the North Sea at ZOUTKAMP and SCHOOR. A brief resurgence of German resistance in GRONINGEN came to an end when the town fell to 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes on 16 Apr. (2 Cdn Inf Div, Weekly Summary of Ops, 15-21 Apr.) After the surrender "... only isolated pockets of resistance remained at various places along the coast, the most stubborn of these, according to expectations, occurring in the area of Delfzijl and along the adjacent shore of the Dollart Inlet opposite Emden" (General Crerar's Despatch, para 30).

#### THE THRUST TO THE IJSSELMEER

40.

While the liberation of the Dutch in this part of their country could not be long delayed, Lt-General Foulkes' incursions into the western Netherlands beyond the rivers were more strenuously opposed. Col-General Blaskowitz, the General Officer Commanding the Twenty-Fifth German Army and the various subordinate formations of the enemy's beleaguered garrison, was under orders to dispute our passage to the last. (W.D., G.S. (Int), H.Q. First Cdn Army, May 1945: Appx 5, First Cdn Army Intelligence Periodical No. 1). Nevertheless, the effort to thrust his forces back from the line of communications running northeast through ARNHEM was pursued with good success. On the night of 15/16 Apr 1 and 3 Cdn Inf Bdes fought their way to the east bank of the canal at APELDOORN where it passes through the suburbs and to the south of the town itself. On the Division's left 2 Cdn Inf Bde cleared southwards and on 16 Apr linked up at DIEREN with elements of 49 (W.R.) Inf Div which pushed out from the bridgehead at ARNHEM to cross the high ground north of the road to ZUTPHEN. (Draft Outline of Ops of 1 Cdn Corps, as cited above.)

41.

The possibilities of these encouraging developments were to be exploited by a swift attack north and northwestwards from ARNHEM with 5 Cdn Armd Div directed on the IJSSELMEER at NIJKERK with the object of cutting off the enemy's forces opposed to Major-General Foster (*ibid.*). On the morning of 15 Apr 5 Cdn Armd Bde began to advance northwards through the woods above ARNHEM and across the sandy heath-land beyond and that night occupied OTTERLOO. On the following morning the armour turned westward in the direction of LUNTEREN and on the same day (16 Apr), by-passing BARNEVELD, cut the APELDOORN-AMERSFOORT railway. On the right VOORTHUIZEN was captured, our tanks being thus astride the main way of escape for the enemy troops holding APELDOORN from which they were thus forced to

withdraw on 17 Apr. So rapid was our advance that on the night of 16/17 Apr a rabble of the defenders, attempting to break through the exposed right flank of 5 Cdn Armd Div, threatened to overrun Major-General Hoffmeister's Headquarters at OTTERLOO and the nearby gun positions of 17 Fd Regt R.C.A. A vigorous local defence by all units in the area drove off the enemy with many casualties and brought in a couple of hundred prisoners. (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/5 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II: History of Operations, 5 Cdn Armd Div, North-West Europe.)

42. During the same night our troops at VOORTHUIZEN beat off an attack by elements of 6 Para Div trying to get through to the west. Although the enemy held on grimly to PUTTEN and the road thence to NIJKERK, the only escape route to landward still open to the discomfited enemy, 5 Cdn Armd Regt reached the IJSSELMEER at noon on 17 Apr. (Draft Outline of Ops of 1 Cdn Corps, as above.) By this time 11 Cdn Inf Bde was moving up towards the coast to clear the woods of scattered fugitives. "Taken at a sudden disadvantage by the speed of our armoured thrust to the north, the Germans had lost over 7,000 prisoners, including a large part of the 346th and 361st Infantry Divisions" (General Crerar's Despatch, as above).

43. To the south on Lt-General Foulkes' left flank further gains by 49 (W.R.) Inf Div along the NEDER RIJN westward from ARNHEM, established the line by dusk on 18 Apr through RENKUM and EDE whence it ran through BARNEVELD to the small port of HARDERWIJK. The enemy troops caught in the area between the lower IJSSEL and the coast were rounded up, and our patrols began to test the defences of the GREBBE Line, in the easily flooded country watered by the EEM, LUNTERSCHÉ BEEK and GREBBE streams and centred on the important railway junction of AMERSFOORT (Outline of Ops of 1 Cdn Corps, as above; Cdn Army Int Sum No 280, 6 Apr). 1 Cdn Corps had completed its task: the line of communications through ARNHEM and ZUTPHEN had been secured and could now be developed to maintain the final stages of the advance of 2 Cdn Corps into northwestern Germany.

#### THE FIGHTING IN EAST FRIESLAND

44. With our affairs standing to such advantage in both Gelderland and the northern provinces, it was possible by regrouping our forces to improve our prospects of coming to an early conclusion with the enemy in Germany. On 17 Apr Field-Marshal Montgomery informed General Crerar that the Canadian Army would not capture BREMEN, but that this task would be left to Lt-General Dempsey (G.O.C.-in-C. file 1-O, Message from C.-in-C., 17 Apr). The situation is described by General Crerar as follows.

On my right flank substantial advances were being made by the forces of Lt-General Dempsey along the whole of their front. The enemy was being forced to withdraw his salient in front of Cloppenburg, the Elbe had been reached and advanced elements were within eight miles of Harburg. In view of the existing situation, the C-in-C decided that the Second British Army

would now capture and hold Bremen irrespective of the arrival of Canadian elements in the area. It followed that I would not now be required to take over the city until I had completed the task of clearing northwest Germany up to the line of the Weser. It was still the intention, however, that I would then assume responsibility for Bremen and develop operations to clear the Cuxhaven peninsula. In the meantime, Lt-General Simonds was to continue to give protection to the left flank of the Second British Army up to the Weser and to overrun the coastal lands to the north.

(General Crerar's Despatch, para 33.)

45.

In order to improve the situation for Second British Army in its assault on Bremen, the C.-in-C. directed that 2 Cdn Inf Div be transferred to Lt-General Simonds' right flank over towards OLDENBURG (*ibid.*, para 35; W.D., Hist Ofc, H.Q. First Cdn Army, 20 Apr). Several days were required for this lengthy move, the brigades travelling eastwards in succession to their new area during the period from 18 to 21 Apr (2 Cdn Inf Div, Monthly Consolidated Summary of Ops, 1-30 Apr). Stronger forces could also be brought to bear against the enemy's line of defence across the WILHELMSHAVEN-EMDEN peninsula, where our pressure had hitherto been sustained by the two armoured divisions only. The advent of 5 Cdn Armd Div into the northern Netherlands (see para 36) would release 3 Cdn Inf Div for the task of destroying the enemy still resisting west of the EMS. The resultant relief of 3 Pol Inf Bde would enable Major-General Maczek to concentrate his forces on the right bank of the EMS for his armoured thrust through the fen country on PAPENBURG and the River LEDA. When 3 Cdn Inf Div had completed its tasks west of the EMS, Major-General Keebler would be prepared to take the port of LEER by an assault across the EMS and the LEDA. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 21 Apr.)

46.

The tasks of First Cdn Army were to be limited still further. In a message to General Crerar dated 19 Apr, Field-Marshal Montgomery explained that the allotment of an American Corps to 21 Army Group would enable the pace of our operations to be quickened considerably. In the light of this development it would no longer be necessary for First Cdn Army to cross the WESER and clear the CUXHAVEN Peninsula (G.O.C.-in-C. file 1-0, Message from C.-in-C., 19 Apr). Instead General Crerar was to assume the alternative responsibility of clearing the islands at the eastern end of the Frisian group (*ibid.*, Directive M 574 from C.-in-C., 22 Apr).

47.

"If the scope of my operations in Germany was thus to be limited," General Crerar writes,

...it was to undergo further extension in the Netherlands. Persistent reports had been received that the enemy was evacuating the Bommelerwaard, the Land van Altena and the Biesbosch. During the night 22/23 Apr and the following day, patrols had crossed over into this country between the Maas and the Waal, and generally confirmed the information received from other sources concerning the enemy's intentions. I considered it to be

desirable, therefore, that our forces should patrol aggressively up to the line of the Waal, and in order that this should be done as part of a co-ordinated plan of operations against the enemy north of that river, Headquarters Netherlands District, came under my command at midnight on 23 Apr. The enemy's ability to establish himself temporarily on the Grebbe line, however, encouraged him to retain his hold on the Bommelerwaard and the line of the Maas, and the positions established by the Royal Netherlands Brigade at Hedel were attacked by elements of the 361st Infantry Division. The enemy was repulsed, but as it was not my intention to become involved with only limited resources in the unfavourable terrain between the rivers, the Netherlands troops, and those of the 116th Royal Marine Brigade which had taken possession of Alem Island, were withdrawn. (General Crerar's Despatch, para 37.)

Meanwhile 1 Cdn Corps made further slight advances westward, aggressive patrolling by 1 Can Inf Div and 49 (W.R.) Inf Div into the flooded lands bringing our front forward by 27 Apr to a line from SPAKENBURG on the IJSSELMEER to WAGENINGEN on the NEDER RIJN (Draft Outline of Ops of 1 Cdn Corps, as above).

Although on all fronts the enemy still strove bitterly to halt the converging assaults of the Allied Armies upon his diminishing fortress, his situation had become hopeless. The elimination of the German forces trapped in the RUHR was finally brought to completion on 18 Apr with an estimated total of over 300,000 prisoners. To the south First French Army reached the Swiss frontier near Lake Constance on 21 Apr. In Italy BOLOGNA had fallen and within a few days both Eighth and Fifth Armies stood along the River PO and were about to break out across the plain towards the Alps. Seventh U.S. Army had cleared UL and Third Army was approaching the border of Austria. The Reich itself was cut in two on 25 Apr when First U.S. Army made contact with Russian forces in the vicinity of TORGAU; on the same day the Russians completed the encirclement of the capital. (War Office Weekly Intelligence Review, Nos. 89-90, copies in custody of Historical Section, C.M.H.)

On the Canadian Army front in East Friesland, the still resistant enemy fell back slowly upon LEER and the line of the LEDA River into the WILHELMSHAVEN-EMDEN peninsula.

The country into which we had carried our advance lent itself to defensive fighting in much the same way as did that of the Breskens bridgehead in an earlier phase of the campaign. The enemy was able to block the approaches to his positions through the surrounding peat bogs with barriers and mines and to cover these with concentrated fire. Notwithstanding the collapse of the German armies elsewhere on the western front, the 2nd Parachute Corps was still maintaining good control. In part the troops available to defend this territory and the ports lying on the sea coast

were composed of naval units. These nautical elements showed more spirit than dexterity in their unaccustomed role as infantry. But in the bitter struggle being waged between the lower reaches of the Weser and the Ems the parachutists still fought with their accustomed fanaticism and skill at arms.

(General Crerar's Despatch, para 34; see also W.D., G.S. (Int), H.Q. First Cdn Army, April 1945: Appx 10, Int Sum No. 294.)

Counter-attacks by 7 Para Div against 4 Cdn Armd Div's bridgehead over the KÜSTEN Canal were hurled back; it was estimated that during the week 22-28 Apr the enemy's losses in this sector numbered nearly 2,000 (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F: 4 Cdn Armd Div, Weekly Summary of Ops, 22-28 Apr). On the left, the Poles, against lighter opposition, seized PAPENBURG on 21 Apr, and advancing with difficulty across the marshlands, established a bridgehead over the LEDA on 26 Apr (General Crerar's Despatch, paras 35 and 41). At the eastern end of this front, 2 Cdn Inf Div, directed against the line of the WESER below BREMEN, conducted a steady advance for six days to cut the road from DELMENHORST to OLDENBURG on 26 Apr (2 Cdn Inf Div, Monthly Consolidated Summary of Ops, 1-30 Apr). On this date news was received from Second British Army that the capture of BREMEN was imminent.

50.

West of the EMS, meanwhile, 3 Cdn Inf Div continued its task of reducing the remaining enemy strongholds on the left bank of the estuary. By 28 Apr the Division had completed the clearance of the Rheider Land and the southern shore of the DOLLART Inlet (3 Cdn Inf Div, Monthly Consolidated Summary of Ops, 1-30 Apr). The DELFZIJL "pocket", now compressed into a shallow strip along the coast, was left to be contained and assaulted by 5 Cdn Armd Div, which assumed responsibility for the northeast Netherlands (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/5 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II: History of Operations 5 Cdn Armd Div, North-West Europe).

51.

General Crerar could now devote his full attention to 2 Cdn Corps' front between the WESER and the EMS. Of this sector he says:

It was now apparent that with Bremen about to fall to the Second British Army, and the eastern and western flanks of the German positions across the base of the Emden - Wilhelmshaven peninsula caving in, the enemy was faced with the necessity of falling back closer to the ports. As Oldenburg was too far east to act as a focal point in a line defending Emden, the intermediate centres of Leer and Bad Zwischenahn took on a corresponding importance in my plan of operations. Where the enemy withdrew, he left many demolitions, craters, obstacles, scattered rear-guards and prisoners. From the latter a clearer view of the enemy's chain of command was obtained by my Intelligence. Between the Weser and the Ems the First Parachute Army had two corps. East of Oldenburg the front was thought to be held by the 86th Corps with the

471st and 490th Infantry Divisions, the town itself and the sector westwards to the coast by the 2nd Parachute Corps with the 8th, 7th and 21st Parachute Divisions and, it was presumed, Defence Command Emden.

(General Crerar's Despatch, para 42.)

52. On 28 Apr, 3 Brit Inf Div was placed under Lt-General Simonds' command to relieve 2 Cdn Inf Div from its task of clearing the area west of BREMEN northwards to the WESER (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, April 1945: Appx 5, 2 Cdn Corps Intention for 29 Apr). Major-General Matthews could now direct all three of his brigades on OLDENBURG. This advance was carried forward during the last days of April against only the slightest of resistance. (2 Cdn Inf Div, Weekly Summary of Ops, 29 Apr - 5 May).
53. In the centre of the Corps sector, 4 Cdn Armd Bde expanded the bridgehead over the KÜSTEN Canal and began to advance toward Lake ZWISCHENAHN. In this region opposition remained stubborn and the state of the ground prevented our troops from moving across country. They reached the lake itself on 29 Apr, and on the following day invested the town of BAD ZWISCHENAHN which thereupon capitulated. During this period the Division had been heavily reinforced in infantry, armour and fire power. (1) These additional forces operated on the flanks of the main northward advance. Having encircled Lake ZWISCHENAHN on 1 May, 4 Cdn Armd Div was directed on VAREL near the JADE Inlet. (G.S.O. 1, 4 Cdn Armd Div, as above.)
54. Farther to the west the Poles had cleared the soggy land between the KÜSTEN Canal and the LEDA and by 30 Apr were patrolling northwards from the bridgehead towards STICKHAUSEN (Sitreps, 2 Cdn Corps, 26-30 Apr). On the extreme left, 3 Cdn Inf Div, relieved from its commitments along the DOLLART Inlet, launched an assault against LEER on 28 Apr. This was carried out by 9 Cdn Inf Bde by three simultaneous thrusts across the LEDA and the EMS. A firm bridgehead was formed and the town fell on 29 Apr (3 Cdn Inf Div, Monthly Consolidated Summary of Ops, 1-30 Apr). Seizing his opportunity, Lt-General Simonds directed that a battle group of 1 Polish Armd Div be passed through the newly-won bridgehead to exploit northeastwards in the direction of WILHELMSHAVEN, while 3 Cdn Inf Div continued to the north against AURICH and EMDEN (2 Cdn Corps, Weekly Summary of Ops, 29 Apr - 5 May).

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- (1) Additions to the normal order of battle included a self-propelled artillery regiment, a medium regiment, 1 Cdn Rocket Bty, 2 Cdn H.A.A. Regt, a battery of 7.2-inch guns, 2 Cdn Armd Bde Force (H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, 6 Cdn Armd Regt, 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 1 Belgian and 1 British S.A.S. Regiments), 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt and 27 Royal Marine Bn (G.S.O. 1, 4 Cdn Armd Div, as above).



TRUCE IN THE WESTERN NETHERLANDS

55. In the western Netherlands, beyond the activity of patrols, no further offensive action was taken against the enemy. Everywhere else the German military position was collapsing and the will of the garrison of "Fortress Holland" to hold out in so isolated and hopeless a situation depended only on the precarious existence of the central authority of the Reich. That the local command was willing to accept the inevitable when the time came, meanwhile preserving a posture of defence, was made known to Allied Intelligence through the agency of the Dutch Forces of the Interior. A representative of the Dutch Commander, infiltrated into enemy territory, had succeeded in entering into conference with Hitler's representative, the Reichskommissar, Dr Seyss-Inquart, with the object of finding some basis of agreement between the German forces and the Allies. (W.D., Chief of Staff and G Plans, First Cdn Army, May 1945: Appx 5, Serial 1, SFO/46, 16 Apr 45, Memorandum on Negotiations between Dutch Forces of the Interior and SEYSS-INQUART in AMSTERDAM.)

56. The Dutch Government had long been most anxiously concerned about the fate of the inhabitants of the western provinces. There two-fifths of a population of over 9,000,000, largely concentrated in the great cities like AMSTERDAM, ROTTERDAM, and THE HAGUE, still lay under German domination. These people were normally supplied with food from the surpluses of the eastern parts of the country from which they were now cut off. The general strike on the Dutch railways beginning in September 1944, the resultant refusal by the Germans to move supplies themselves, the subsequent flooding of some 500,000 to 800,000 acres of arable land, together with the Wehrmacht's own inroads upon existing resources had produced a situation of acute shortage. As early as the beginning of Oct 44 "it was evident to SHAEF that the food relief problem in Western Holland would be the most critical one yet faced in North-Western Europe".

57. In these unhappy circumstances, political, military and humane considerations were all involved. The urgency of rescue or sustenance, objects of continuous effort on the part of the Dutch cabinet and the Queen, had been drawn to the personal attention of the heads of the governments of Great Britain and the United States, and referred also to the Supreme Commander. (Relief for the Netherlands - a Monograph prepared by Hist Sec, G-5 Division, SHAEF: 60 Histories, Monographs and Sketches, SHAEF/G-5/INFO/4800, Jun 45, page 1, et passim). Before the end of October 1944 General Eisenhower, "on the grounds of humanity", had already accepted proposals to grant safe-conduct for three neutral vessels, bearing supplies, to enter Dutch waters, a plan in which the Germans concurred. The arrival of the ships was delayed, the relief inadequate, and by the end of March 1945 conditions in the heavily-populated areas north of the rivers had still further deteriorated.

...Adults had received no milk since January; children under three and nursing mothers no more than three-quarters of a litre per week. No fats, no sugar, no vegetables were to be had. Complete lack of coal had almost entirely stopped the

production of gas, electricity and steam. Without gas, no cooking or heat was possible. Without electricity, the sewage system had broken down and sanitary conditions were critical. Deaths from tuberculosis, diphtheria, diarrhoea and enteritis had tripled.

(*Ibid.*, page 39).

As has been seen, it had not proved possible to attempt to relieve the Dutch of their privations by further offensive operations westward. A cable sent from SHAEF on 27 Mar to the Combined Chiefs of Staff informed them that "so long as the enemy continues cohesive resistance in Western Holland it is militarily inadvisable to undertake operations West of Utrecht" (*ibid.*). The fact was emphasized that such an operation would not only interfere with our major effort against the enemy in Germany, but would in itself cause great suffering to the civil population (*ibid.*). The Dutch government was thus forced to turn to the alternative of sending in supplies, if necessary by dropping them from the air, while the enemy still remained in occupation. It was to this end that the Reichskommissar was approached through the agency of the Forces of the Interior.

58.

Before the conversations began, the Dutch emissary made it clear that they would not in any way prejudice the principle of unconditional surrender. Seyss-Inquart replied with candour. He said that he had been ordered to hold out under all circumstances, and, if necessary, to cause such demolitions and inundations as would bring utter disaster to the western provinces and probably render them for years uninhabitable. He suggested that if the Allies were to bring their advance to a stop short of the GREBBE LINE, it would be unnecessary for him to have such harsh recourse, while at the same time he would save face with BERLIN. He intimated further his willingness to relax the stern measures hitherto enforced against the civilian population, and to render any assistance needed for opening the port of ROTTERDAM in order to afford entry to barges bringing in supplies of food and coal. It was admitted that the food available in the occupied territory could barely last three weeks. "In the eyes of the German government, however, this would not be an excuse to surrender or to withdraw the order for the demolitions and inundations as laid down by this government". Nevertheless, both parties to these negotiations felt that some agreement could, and indeed must be reached in order to avoid widespread starvation and disease. (W.D., Chief of Staff and "G" Plans, First Cdn Army, May 1945; as above.)

59.

Being apprised of Seyss-Inquart's reception of these proposals, the Dutch Prime Minister, Dr. Gerbrandy, then on the Continent, returned to England to confer with his cabinet, and thereafter the matter "was taken up at the highest governmental levels in San Francisco", although it was recognized that the immediate decision lay with SHAEF. Here again humanitarian considerations prevailed, and on 23 Apr General Eisenhower cabled the following message to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the British Chiefs of Staff:

...The situation is so bad that something must be done to arrange for the introduction of food into Holland by free dropping and by every other possible means even though the best we can do may be a small contribution in comparison with the widespread destitution which now exists.

(SHAEF Monograph, page 40).

The Supreme Commander proposed to send a "very strongly worded message" to Col-General Blaskowitz ordering him, under threat of treating him and each responsible member of his command as violators of the laws of war, to cease opening the dykes and to be ready to assist in distributing the food to the starving people for whose welfare he was held to be answerable.

60. In order to implement the plan to drop food from the air SHAEF requested Bomber Command and the Eighth U.S. Air Force to have 200 aircraft ready. On the same day (23 Apr) Brigadier C.C. Mann, General Crerar's Chief of Staff, conferred with the Deputy Director of Military Government and other senior staff officers to determine the approximate tonnages which First Cdn Army could begin to move at short notice by road and rail into occupied territory. The Canadians were also called upon to make arrangements for a conference to be held with the enemy on 28 Apr. On that day a truce came into effect, our troops being ordered not to fire on the enemy unless they were attacked. The meeting, held in the school house at ACHTERVELD, a village just within our lines about five miles from AMERSFOORT, was attended on our part by representatives from SHAEF and the Netherlands authorities (Prince Bernhard and his Chief of Staff), 21 Army Group, First Cdn Army, Netherlands District and the U.S.S.R. (watching the interests of the Soviet Government). Preliminary talks with delegates of the Reichskommissar were concluded satisfactorily and it was arranged for a further discussion to take place two days later. (W.D., Chief of Staff and "G" Plans, May 1945: Appx 5, First Cdn Army Negotiations with German Authorities in Western Holland; W.Ds., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps and H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, 28 Apr 45.)
61. The delivery of supplies by air was to have taken place for the first time on 28 Apr, but owing to bad weather had to be postponed until the following day. On that occasion, 239 aircraft took part and 510 long tons, comprising 550,000 rations, were dropped into the western provinces. Thereafter, the operation was to continue very effectively until the Germans capitulated. (SHAEF Monograph, page 41.)
62. The second conference met in ACHTERVELD on 30 Apr, the Allied delegation being led by Lt-General W. Bedell-Smith, Chief of Staff to General Eisenhower. Dr Seyss-Inquart brought a group of experts, composed of high-ranking officers of the three services and the Dutch Director General of Food. The villagers, in a state of high excitement, gathered in the street to watch these portentous comings and goings, convinced that they held a promise of release from danger, hunger and oppression. (First Cdn Army Intelligence Summary No. 308, Appendix D: Food for the Dutch, 4 May 45.)
63. When agreement had been reached on the general arrangements for taking the food in, the conference divided into sub-committees which dispersed to the classrooms to consider the details. It fell to the lot of Lt-General Foulkes to discuss with Lt-General Plocher, commander of 6 Para Div, the conditions under which the convoys carrying food might pass freely through the lines. Their conversations made no progress, however, since Plocher's command covered only a part of the front, nor had he been empowered to enter into any agreement on behalf of Col-General Blaskowitz, the

Army Commander. Ultimately, another meeting was arranged for the next day, on the understanding that Col-General Blaskowitz would either be present himself or would send an officer with full authority to act on his behalf. In the meantime, the truce was to continue. The naval and air force delegates with Seyss-Inquart were fortunately more definite in negotiation, and in full conference the work of the sub-committees was co-ordinated without further difficulty. (Ibid.)

64. It was agreed to open the road from WAGENINGEN to a dump behind the enemy's lines at RHENEN on the NEDER RIJN from 0700 hours on 2 May. At that time H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps would become responsible for sending in 1000 tons of food a day from an advanced stock pile already set up at EDE. The work of distribution was to be undertaken by the Dutch civil authorities whom the Allies were to provide with 200 lorries and the necessary petrol for the purpose of ensuring as rapid a dispersal as possible throughout the country. (W.D., C. of S. and "G" Plans, May 1945: Appx 5, Serial 8, Notes taken by Chief of Staff, First Cdn Army, at the Second Meeting of Allied Representatives with German Representatives in Regard to the Feeding of the Dutch in Western Holland, Monday, 30 April 1945, paras 25-28; W.D., S. & T. Branch, Rear H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 1-2 May 45).
65. At the subsequent meeting on 1 May Lt-General Foulkes and Lt-General Reichelt, Chief of Staff to Col-General Blaskowitz, agreed upon a corridor to be established between the opposing forces from the railway line through ARNHEM and UTRECHT south to the WAAL at OCHTEN. Pending a further communication from the German C.-in-C., Lt-General Foulkes undertook to carry out no offensive operations along the whole of the front between the IJSSELMEER and WALCHEREN. (W.D., C. of S. and "G" Plans, May 1945: Appx 5, Serial 9, Meeting between Lt-General C. Foulkes, Comd 1 Cdn Corps, and Lt-General Reichelt, Chief of Staff to Col-General Blaskowitz, 1 May 45.)
66. While in the western Netherlands all fighting had thus come to an end, on Lt-General Simonds' front the enemy had no such opportunity for avoiding the last futile gestures of resistance. On 1 May, as 2 Cdn Corps pressed forward methodically through mines and road blocks, the harassed defenders were being crowded back against the North Sea. Only in the area of Lake ZWISCHENAHN was close contact with the enemy still being maintained. A particular tribute to the tenacity shown here by 4 Cdn Armd Div was paid afterwards by Col-General Student, formerly Commander of Army Group "H". He said that the division "had given him as much trouble as any other formation he had come up against in his long military career" (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/L/F: Special Interrogation Report, Col-General Student). On the eastern flank, 3 Brit Inf Div was sweeping up to the line of the WESER northwest of BREMEN, and on the far left, seventy miles to the west, 5 Cdn Armd Div successfully attacked and captured the port of DELFZIJL (History of Operations, 5 Cdn Armd Div, North-West Europe, as cited above). The fall of BAD ZWISCHENAHN had rendered OLDENBURG untenable, and virtually no opposition was offered to the advance of 2 Cdn Inf Div on the city, which surrendered on 3 May (2 Cdn Inf Div, Weekly Summary of Ops, 29 Apr - 5 May). A similar unwillingness on the part of the enemy to stand firm was reported by

1 Pol Armd and 3 Cdn Inf Divs (2 Cdn Corps, Weekly Summary of Ops, 29 Apr - 5 May). By mid-day on 4 May forward elements of 8 Cdn Inf Bde were in the outskirts of AURICH (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, May 1945: Appx 1, 2 Cdn Corps Sitrep 1200 hours, 4 May).

67. Such withdrawals and surrenders as were taking place in this remote, northwestern region of Germany were happening also on the largest scale from one end of the Reich to the other; everywhere the enemy's forces were involved in spectacular collapse. On 2 May the capital fell to the Russians and in Italy Army Group "C" surrendered to Field-Marshal Alexander. Two days later Seventh U.S. Army had linked up with Fifth Army by way of the BRENNER; Third U.S. Army had reached BERCHTESGADEN and SALZBURG; Second British Army, having carried the line of the ELBE, had established contact with the Soviet forces at GRABOW, and reached the Baltic at LÜBECK and WISMAR. (War Office Weekly Intelligence Review, Nos. 89 - 91, as above.)

#### THE GERMAN SURRENDER

68. It came as no surprise, therefore, when at 1255 hours on 4 May General Crerar received a communication by telephone from the Chief of Staff, 21 Army Group, informing him of the negotiations then being conducted between Field-Marshal Montgomery and the representative of Grand Admiral Doenitz concerning the unconditional surrender of the remaining German forces in Northwest Europe (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, 4 May). In the light of this development, the C.-in-C. agreed with General Crerar on the advisability of not pressing the demands for the delivery of JEVER to the Poles and AURICH to 3 Cdn Inf Div, and Lt-General Simonds was therefore directed to withhold direct assault against these towns (*ibid.*; General Crerar's Despatch, para 44). In the evening General Crerar was informed that the B.P.C. had just broadcast a special announcement, issued by Supreme Allied Headquarters, that the end had come. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, 4 May). A few minutes later official word to this effect was communicated by a message from 21 Army Group.

All offensive ops will cease from receipt this signal. Orders will be given to all tps to cease fire 0800 hrs tomorrow Saturday 5 May. Full terms of local German surrender arranged today for 21 Army Gp front. Emphasize these provisions apply solely to 21 Army Gp fronts and are for the moment excl of Dunkirk....

(W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, May 1945: Appx 12.)

69. This was followed by a second message containing a digest of the instrument of surrender signed by the C.-in-C. and German representatives.

The German Comd agrees to the surrender of all German armed forces in Holland, in N.W. Germany incl the Frisian Islands and Heligoland and all other islands, in Schleswig-Holstein, and in Denmark to the

C-in-C 21 Army Gp. These forces to lay down their arms and to surrender unconditionally.

All hostilities on land, on sea or in the air by German forces in the above areas to cease at 0800 hrs E.B.S.T. Saturday 5 May 1945.

The German Comd to carry out at once and without argument or comment all further orders that will be issued by the Allied Powers on any subject.

Disobedience of orders or failure to comply with them will be regarded as a breach of these surrender terms and will be dealt with by the Allied Powers in accordance with the accepted laws and usages of war.

This instrument of surrender is independent of, without prejudice to and will be superseded by, any general instrument of surrender imposed by or on behalf of the Allied Powers and applicable to Germany and the German armed forces as a whole....

(Ibid., Message GO 412A, from 21 Army Group.)

70.

General Crerar at once communicated these facts to the formations under his command, and issued the following message to be read to all ranks.

From Sicily to the River SENIO, from the beaches of DIEPPE to those of Normandy, and thence through Northern France, Belgium, Holland and Northwest Germany, the Canadians and their Allied comrades in this Army have carried out their responsibilities in the high traditions which they inherited. The official order that offensive operations of all troops of First Cdn Army will cease forthwith and that all fire will cease from 0800 hours tomorrow, Saturday, 5 May, has been issued. Crushing and complete victory over the German enemy has been secured. In rejoicing at this supreme accomplishment, we shall remember the friends who have paid the full price for the belief they also held that no sacrifice in the interests of the principles for which we fought could be too great.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, May 1945: Appx "D".)

71.

On 5 May, Brigadier J.A. Roberts, Commanding 8 Cdn Inf Bde, met the German commander of the WILHELMSHAVEN-EMDEN area, General der Infanterie Straube (formerly commanding 86 Corps), and escorted him to BAD ZWISCHENAHN where Lt-General Simonds was to accept his surrender (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 May). The newly formed Armee Abteilung Straube had assumed command of the sector between the WESER and the EMS, including the Frisian Islands, about 2 May. Such was the enemy's disorganization that the precise order of battle was unknown even to the German staff. (W.D., G.S., 2 Cdn Corps, May 1945: Appx 3, 2 Cdn Corps Int Bulletin No. 2, 11 May.) A diarist gives the following account of the meeting.

...With all divisional comds and Brigadiers of

Corps HQ present, the Corps Comd dealt with Gen STRAUBE by first reading the terms of the surrender to 21 Army Gp and then going through in detail the orders which Gen STRAUBE was to carry out in the area opposite 2 Cdn Corps ....At the conclusion of the meeting a champagne toast was drunk by the allied officers present.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 5 May.)

72. The orders given to General Straube (as issued by H.Q. First Cdn Army) required him to ensure that no unauthorized movement of his troops took place, and to submit a detailed order of battle of his command. All enemy personnel were to be disarmed and all war material dumped and guarded. The German Commander was, moreover, to be responsible for the maintenance of his own troops. (Hist Sec file AEF: 45/1 Cdn Corps/C/F: Brief Historical Outline of the Occupation of North-West Holland by 1 Cdn Corps, Appx "A".)

73. A like ceremony was enacted in 1 Cdn Corps' sector at WAGENINGEN, where on the same day Lt-General Foulkes accepted the surrender of the German forces in the western Netherlands from Col-General Blaskowitz. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1945: Appx 43, 1 Cdn Corps Post Mortem No. 5.)

74. Following the local surrenders to Lt-General Simonds and Lt-General Foulkes, on 6 May General Crerar sent a directive to Col-General Blaskowitz concerning the surrender of all his existing command and defining his responsibilities and chain of command. This reads in part:

- 1 By virtue of the powers vested in me, I authorize Lt-Gen Charles Foulkes, General Officer Commanding 1 Canadian Corps, to accept your surrender and signature on behalf of your present command. Your area of responsibility extends to the NETHERLANDS and that part of GERMANY lying WEST of the River WESER, including the FRISIAN Islands as far EAST as inclusive ALTE MELUM and WANGEROOGE, and NORTH of the general line DELMENHORST - CLOPPENBURG - NORDHORN - LINGEN...
- 2 The General Officer Commanding 2 Canadian Corps has already accepted the surrender of all the German forces within that portion of GERMANY lying within your area of responsibility as defined in paragraph 1 above.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, May 1945: Appx "E".)

This directive was given to Col-General Blaskowitz on the same day at a meeting held by Lt-General Foulkes (W.Ds., Chief of Staff and "G" Plans, and G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps. 6 May).

75. The surrender to Field-Marshal Montgomery soon appeared as one in a dramatic succession. On 5 May Nineteenth German Army, and on the following day the whole of German Army Group "G", ceased resistance to 6 Army Group. At RHEIMS on 7 May the war in Europe came to an end when all German

land, sea and air forces were unconditionally surrendered to the Allied Expeditionary Forces and the Soviet High Command. The instrument was signed in BERLIN shortly after midnight on 8/9 May. (W.O.W.I.R. No. 91, as above.)

#### CONCLUSION

76. Reviewing the campaign as a whole, General Crerar gives an approximation of the number of enemy prisoners captured by First Cdn Army:

Excluding the considerable German forces in the occupied Netherlands and on the German coast-line between the estuaries of the Ems and Weser, of which more than 185,000 remained to be taken under my control as capitulated troops, the number of prisoners taken during this period was over 50,000. The total number captured since 23 Jul thus exceeded 190,000. In ten months of continuous fighting, always on the left and vital flank of the allied armies and over the most difficult military country, First Canadian Army had encountered and defeated no fewer than fifty-nine divisions of the German Wehrmacht. These divisions had ranged from the fanatical SS and tenacious Paratroopers to the mediocre "Training" formations and others drawn from the German navy and air force. But throughout the campaign we had always been opposed by the best forces available to the German High Command.

(General Crerar's Despatch, para 46.)

77. Canadian battle casualties during the period from 12 Mar to 5 May 45 were 368 officers and 5,147 other ranks. From 23 Jul 44, the date on which First Cdn Army assumed an operational command in the north-west theatre, to the cessation of hostilities, the losses sustained were 33,111 all ranks. From 6 Jun 44 the total of Canadian casualties was 42,535 all ranks, killed, wounded and missing. (*Ibid.*, para 48; see also Hist Sec file AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/P/H: Memo from Stats Sec, Adm H.Q. First Cdn Army, to Hist Offr, First Cdn Army, 19 May.)

78. In this last phase, the Army's operations from the Rhine to the Weser, the North Sea and the Ijsselmeer, differed considerably in their nature from such heavy and deliberate actions as those which had carried our winter offensive through the Reichswald. Movement was swifter, the end more clearly in view. Our formations were more divergent and variously employed. There was width and depth to the battlefield, the offensive covering distances greater than a hundred and fifty miles north and south, and from east to west. Whereas our forces had previously been concentrated for the main onslaught against the enemy between the rivers southeast from NIJMEGEN on a front scarcely twenty miles across, they were here spread out over great tracts of territory. Once the crossing of the Rhine had been effected by Second British Army, there developed a running fight carried on between lines and centres of resistance hurriedly



improvised by enemy forces a large proportion of whom only the most agile and ingenious staff work was able to bring and hold together. After the Rhine, no barrier of any comparable importance remained in our path, although the numerous minor waterways of this part of Europe, the IJSSEL and the KÜSTEN canal being among the more formidable, presented tactical hindrances only overcome as the result of the most determined contest by our troops, for the enemy never fell into such a state of disorganization as to be unable or unwilling to defend himself. On the contrary, the paratroops fought well and bitterly to the end. That their defeat had become only a matter of time was in itself sufficient testimony to the devotion and bravery of all ranks engaged under General Crerar's command in those last angry battles across stream and bog, the outcome of which was to press the Germans always closer to the sea. Happily the casualties sustained were proportionally fewer than in other more closely fought phases of the campaign.

79. With the arrival of 1st Canadian Corps from the Mediterranean the Army had become predominantly Canadian in composition, but it still comprised certain British and Allied formations and units, among which the 49th (West Riding) Division had been under command for nearly six months, and the 1st Polish Armoured Division from the early days in Normandy. This honourable and valiant association, so easy and natural as between the nations of the British Commonwealth, had thus been proven no less effective where troops of other nationalities were involved. That the Army under his command made an international entity was a circumstance which General Crerar was apt to remark upon as having a wider significance for the future.
80. Again the support of the R.A.F. provided the ground troops both with continuous and accurate information on the movement and observable intentions of the enemy and with a weapon which on many a notable occasion they were able to bring to bear with most satisfying results. The intimate association between General Crerar's Headquarters and the Headquarters of Air Vice-Marshal E.C. Huddleston, C.B., C.B.E., the Air Officer Commanding the 84th Tactical Group, remained as one of the distinguishing physical characteristics of both until the close co-operation between the two services issued in the defeat of the enemy.
81. This narrative has been written under the direction of Lt-Col W.E.C. Harrison, O.B.E., General List, of the Historical Section of the General Staff at C.M.H.Q. Major J.R. Martin, General List, and Capt J.L. Field, R.C.A., were associated with him in the work.

*for W.E.C. Harrison Lt Col*  
(C.P. Stacey) Colonel,  
Director Historical Section.

APPENDIX "A"

SOURCES

Report No. 137, Historical Section, C.M.H.Q.

War Diaries

G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, March-May 1945.  
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G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, April-May 1945.  
G.S. Int, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March-May 1945.  
G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, April-May 1945.  
S. & T. Branch, Rear H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, May 1945.  
G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, April-May 1945.  
G.S., H.Q. 1 Cdn Inf Div, April 1945.  
G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945.  
H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, March 1945.  
H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, May 1945.  
H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, March 1945.  
1 Cdn Para Bn, March 1945.  
Hist Offr, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March-April 1945.  
2 Cdn Fd Hist Sec, March 1945.

Documents in files of Historical Section, C.M.H.Q.

AEF: 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket IV: Notes on the Operations of 21 Army Group, 6 Jun 44 - 5 May 45.  
AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/C/E: General Crerar's Despatch to the Minister of National Defence, 5 Apr 45;  
General Crerar's Despatch, 29 May 45.  
AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/C/F, Docket IV: H.Q. No. 38 Group R.A.F., Report on Operations "AMHERST" and "KEYSTONE";  
Brigadier Calvert's Report on Operation "AMHERST";  
Report on Operation "AMHERST" by 2 and 3 R.C.P. in N.E. Holland.  
AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/L/F: Special Interrogations Report, Col-General Student.  
AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/P/H: Memo from Stats Sec, Adm H.Q. First Cdn Army, to Hist Offr, First Cdn Army, 19 May 45.

APPENDIX "B"

REFERENCE MAPS

G.S.G.S. 2541, HOLLAND, 1:100,000.

Sheets 1A,  
2A,  
1, 2,  
3, 4, 5.

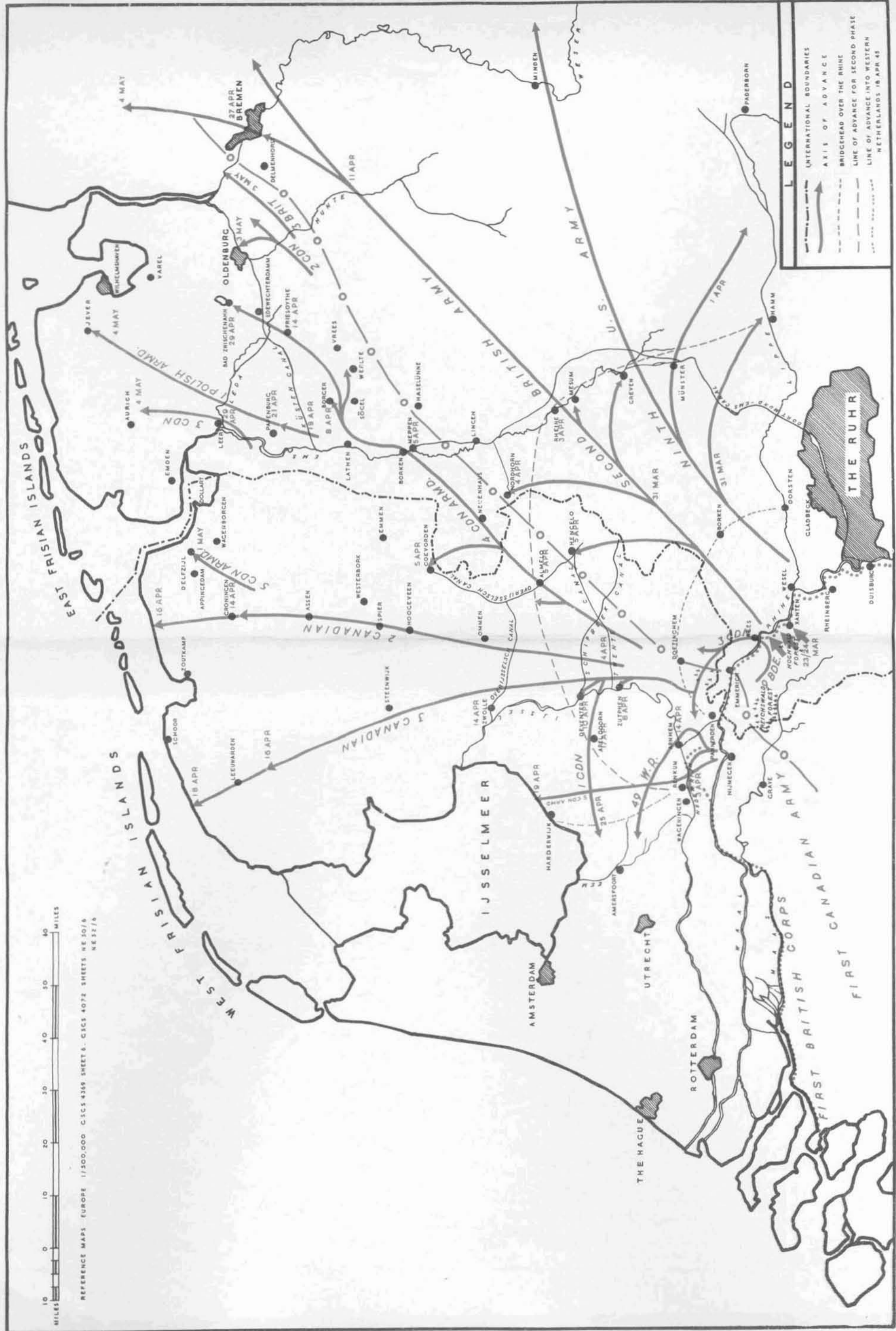
G.S.G.S. 4416, GERMANY, 1:100,000.

Sheets L1, L2, L3,  
M1, M2, M3,  
N1, N2,  
P1,  
Q1.

# OPERATIONS FIRST CDN ARMY 23 MAR — 5 MAY 45



REFERENCE MAPS EUROPE 1:500,000 C.S.G. 4369 SHEET 6. C.S.G. 4072 SHEETS NE 50/6 NE 51/6



### LEGEND

- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES
- AXIS OF ADVANCE
- BRIDGEHEAD OVER THE RHINE
- LINE OF ADVANCE FOR SECOND PHASE
- LINE OF ADVANCE INTO WESTERN NETHERLANDS 16 APR 45

