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REPORT NO. 155

HISTORICAL SECTION

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

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Authority: DHD 3-3
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Date: **SEP 9 1986**

Operation "Veritable": The Winter Offensive between the Maas and the Rhine, 8 - 25 Feb 45 (Preliminary Report).

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Operation "Veritable": The Winter Offensive between the
Maas and the Rhine, 8 - 25 Feb 45 (Preliminary Report).

Reference Maps: G.S.G.S. 4336, N.E. France and Belgium,
1/100,000, Sheet 4; G.S.G.S. 2541,
Holland, 1/100,000, Sheet 5; G.S.G.S.
4416, Central Europe, 1/100,000, Sheets
P. 1 and Q. 1.

1. The present report traces the planning of Operation "Veritable" from its inception during the autumn of 1944 and describes the actual course of the fighting through the Reichswald Forest in February 1945. Like earlier preliminary reports, this one has no claim to be exhaustive; it is merely an account to serve purposes of immediate reference and to afford a basis for more detailed study later. Subsequent operations through the Hochwald to the Rhine opposite Wesel will be the subject of a further report. For obvious reasons the part played by Canadian formations is told in somewhat greater detail than is the case with others.

THE C.-IN-C.'S INTENTIONS, AUTUMN 1944

2. Field-Marshal Montgomery, C.-in-C. 21 Army Group, had already begun to implement his further intentions for the Army Group while the operations to open Antwerp were in progress (Report No. 154). As he explained the situation in retrospect,

I was busy considering re-grouping for the next major battle which would precede the capture of the Ruhr. I had hoped to launch an offensive some time in the late autumn to clear the area between the Meuse and the Rhine, but it was necessary first to clean up the considerable enemy forces which remained West of the Meuse, particularly in the Venlo area. We were not strong enough to do this and at the same time undertake a major thrust between the rivers.

These operations enabled us to economize forces by basing the front on the Meuse obstacle, and ensured a friendly western flank for the battle to follow. The weather was often appalling, and the fighting took place in difficult country against a very tenacious enemy. But by early December the Second British Army was lined up along the river Meuse as far South as Maeseyck, whence the front crossed the river to the area of Geilenkirchen and joined the Ninth U.S. Army.

To facilitate the Second Army operations, I transferred the responsibility for the Nijmegen bridgehead to the Canadian Army on completion of the Scheldt operations.

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This re-grouping had a further object: the First Canadian Army was required to plan the battle of the Rhineland which was to be launched from the Nijmegen area; the Second British Army was to plan the subsequent assault across the Rhine.

(Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, Vol. XC, No. 560, Nov 45: 21st (British) Army Group in the Campaign in North-West Europe, 1944-45).

3. As General Crerar has written:

In view of the commitments about to be undertaken by the Second British Army, complementary to the attack intended by the 12th U.S. Army Group, and of the existing administrative restrictions, it did not appear that First Canadian Army would presently be called upon for any large-scale offensive operations.

In accordance with the instructions of the C.-in-C., however, the possibilities of such operations south-eastwards from the Nijmegen bridgehead between the Maas and the Rhine, or alternatively northwards across the Neder Rijn towards Apeldoorn were being examined and plans made to enable them to be mounted at short notice, and when additional formations were made available.

(AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/E: Gen Crerar's Despatch to Minister of National Defence, 31 Jan 45).

4. On 28 Nov General Crerar reported to the C.-in-C. that he had made a study of the proposed operation between the rivers (referring to it by the code-name "Valediction"), and that a general plan had been prepared. He intimated, however, that he did not consider that it was practicable to initiate any such operation at that time, pointing out that it would now be more difficult and costly than under the conditions which faced Lt-General Dempsey in the previous October. "Weather, ground and communication conditions and the organization of enemy defences", he said, "have since developed to our disadvantage." (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., Nov 44). The Field-Marshal proved to be much more immediately concerned, however, about driving the enemy off the eastern end of the "island" between Nijmegen and Arnhem. The drive southeast was not then a pressing matter.

There is no intention (he wrote) of launching this operation now, and I have never expressed any wish to do so. All I want you to do is to examine it and put the planners on to thinking it out. It will not be launched till the spring, i.e., March or later.

(Ibid., Montgomery to Crerar, 30 Nov 44).

CHANGE OF PLAN, DECEMBER 1944

5. In the following week there was a sudden change of plan due, possibly, to the fact that an enemy attack on the sensitive eastern end of the "island" had been repulsed, and that a large part of this area was now eliminated as a battle-field by enemy flooding, which precluded any operations northward across the Neder Rijn. At any rate on 6 Dec 44

the C.-in-C. arrived at General Crerar's Headquarters to discuss operations for breaking through the strong enemy positions southeast of Nijmegen which it had now been decided should be undertaken at the beginning of the new year. The reasons for this decision are given by General Crerar in a despatch to the Minister of National Defence.

It was now the considered conclusion of higher command that the enemy be allowed no respite, but rather that he must be denied the time to build up his defences and the size and strength of his tactical and strategical reserves. This meant that neither winter weather, nor bad going-conditions, must be allowed to check our offensive operations, no matter what the difficulties and despite discomfort. Secondly, the selected objective for such operations must be of a decisive character. This pointed very definitely to the Ruhr. Thirdly, our operations must be so designed as to force the enemy to engage in mobile warfare in which he would be at a disadvantage owing to the shortage of petrol, mechanical transport and tanks. This requirement indicated the suitability of the area lying between the Rhine and the Meuse. The task required that we should break out from our limited deployment area east of Nijmegen (which was clear of the major water obstacles), and then driving south-east and south, with the Meuse on our right and the Rhine on our left, to join up, opposite the Ruhr, with a northerly thrust by the 12th U.S. Army Group then facing Cologne.

(AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/E, 31 Jan 45).

In order that I might have ample forces at my disposal, it was agreed that the Headquarters of the 30th British Corps, and Corps Troops, three additional British infantry divisions, one armoured division, four independent tank and armoured brigades and four army artillery groups would come under my command. As the GOC 30th British Corps had previously studied this operation in Oct and as, with a view to future regrouping I was required to employ that Corps on my right, Lt-General Horrocks was to be given the responsibility of launching the attack. Also, in order to avoid congestion and complications in the forward assembly area, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, then in position, was to be placed under Lt-General Horrocks for the first phase. (1)... The C-in-C decided, further, that all the resources for air support available to the 21st Army Group, including those of Bomber Command and the U.S. Army Air Force, should be made available. General planning and

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- (1) Another reason for the employment of 3 Cdn Inf Div appears to have been an intimation from Lt-Gen Simonds that to leave the Canadians out of so important, and perhaps decisive, a battle would be a bitter disappointment to the troops. "Gen Crerar saw Monty the following day and as a result 3 Cdn Div was included in the 30 Corps attacking divs." (AEF 45/2 Cdn Corps/K/F: Brig N.E. Rodger's Personal Diary, 10-13 Dec 44).

detailed studies thereafter proceeded with speed. The Headquarters of the 30th British Corps came under my command on 13 Dec and a considerable process of regrouping was set in motion.

(Ibid.).

THE OPERATION POSTPONED

6. By an ironical coincidence, however, on the day when the Field-Marshal issued a formal directive on the lines already indicated verbally to his Army Commanders, von Rundstedt opened his great counter-offensive in the Ardennes. As General Crerar records:

While these activities were proceeding, enemy attacks, beginning on 16 Dec and rapidly revealing themselves as a major offensive, were launched against the front held by the 12th U.S. Army Group in the sector east of the Ardennes between the Cologne plain and the Lorraine gap. At 5 P.M. on 19 Dec the C-in-C informed me by telephone that the enemy's penetration of the First U.S. Army's front was deep and potentially serious. With that in mind, he had decided to make immediate re-dispositions in the 21st Army Group in order to secure his right flank. The Headquarters of the 30th British Corps was to move that night to Hasselt, coming under the command of Lt-General Dempsey at whose Tactical Headquarters Lt-General Horrocks was to report at once.

(Ibid.).

7. This is not the place to discuss the Ardennes offensive or its repercussions on First Cdn Army. (This is done in considerable detail in General Crerar's Despatch of 31 Jan 45.) Operation "Veritable" was not forgotten, however, as appears from the General's notes on a conference held at H.Q. 21 Army Group on 20 Dec.

The C-in-C intimated that it was possible that the situation confronting the Allied Armies would improve materially within the next few days. If such turned out to be the case and 30 Brit Corps was not required for counter-offensive purposes on the right flank, then it was quite probable that HQ 30 Corps and several divisions would be returned to First Cdn Army, in order to proceed with speed on Operation "Veritable". With that in view, the work of improving the communications in First Cdn Army area, leading to the Nijmegen salient, would vigorously proceed.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, Dec 44: Appx 4).

8. At a further conference during the following week the Field-Marshal again referred to the resumption of plans for "Veritable". General Crerar's notes of the meeting indicate that:

...from the point of view of the future mounting of Operation "Veritable", by First Canadian Army, he wished to keep HQ 30 Brit Corps, Corps Troops and the several British Divisions, earmarked for that Operation, uncommitted to any active, exhausting operations. "Veritable" would be mounted just as soon as the Boche became thoroughly involved in the counter-offensive which
/would

would shortly be launched by First US and Third US Armies. He would expect "Veritable" to be launched a fortnight after the date when 30 Brit Corps and the several Brit Divisions comprising it, became available to move to First Cdn Army area...

As stated previously, he expected the enemy to make "nasty faces" and indulge in diversionary "jabs", along the front 12 and 8 Corps of Second Brit Army, and against sector held by First Cdn Army. He did not anticipate any serious attacks along such frontages, unless major thrust northwards of Five and Six Pz Armies showed promising results. He did not expect any such results. As soon, therefore, as 12 and 21 Army Group's counter-offensives developed favourably, it was his intention to transfer 30 Brit Corps, and the several Brit formations previously planned to be under its command, to Cdn Army and launch Operation "Veritable" as speedily and forcefully as possible. Although Comd Second Brit Army would temporarily have responsibilities on right (30 Corps) as well as on left (12 and 8 Corps) of First and Ninth US Armies, as 30 Corps would be in a protective, rather than in an active, operational role, this inconvenience could be temporarily accepted.

(Ibid.: Appx 6, 28 Dec 44).

9. On 31 Dec in a directive to his Corps Commanders regarding the steps to be taken to meet an expected German attack across the lower Maas, General Crerar reminded them that it was "most important, also, to solve such problems without dangerously compromising our ability later to launch Operation "Veritable"". (Ibid.: Appx 7).

10. The situation early in January is described at length by General Crerar in his despatch of 5 Apr 45:

The Allied armies in the west at the beginning of 1945 were deployed in three groups - the 6th, comprising the First French and Seventh US Armies, the attenuated 12th, with, for the time being, only the Third US Army under command, and an enlarged 21st Army Group composed of the First and Ninth US, the Second British and First Canadian Armies. The front now held by Field Marshal Montgomery extended some 300 miles from the line Givet - Cologne northwards to Nijmegen and thence along the Rivers Waal and Maas to the sea. The general situation was one of continuing uncertainty in the face of von Rundstedt's great counter-offensive in the south and the preparation which the enemy had been making for a thrust with some four divisions against my northern sector from his positions across the Maas and on the islands of Schouwen and Overflakkee. The outlook over the west as a whole was further affected by an attack launched by the enemy with seven divisions along a twenty-mile front in the relatively quiet sector of the Saar held by the Seventh US Army.

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As a temporary measure during this operational 'alert' on the northern flank of First Canadian Army, I assumed responsibility on 3 Jan for consolidating the defences of Walcheren and the two Bevelands, an arrangement which the C-in-C regarded as being greatly desirable in order that the whole northern sector of the 21st Army Group should be under unified command. The garrison was composed of the 4th Commando Brigade with the Royal Netherlands Brigade and certain anti-aircraft units under command. The Army boundary was changed accordingly, and the direction of the defence of the islands and peninsula assumed by the 1st British Corps. From Venlo on the Meuse to Westkapelle on the sea-coast of Walcheren the front under my command stretched for 175 miles.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, Apr 45: Appx "B").

11. But the prospects of reverting from such purely defensive dispositions began almost immediately to improve. General Crerar writes:

It soon began to appear that the enemy's offensive intentions north of the Maas might have undergone substantial change. Reports of troop movements and air photographs showing the evacuation of gun sites indicated a withdrawal from the Land van Altena. I was drawn to the conclusion that while the enemy might still be intending to mount a large-scale raid with, perhaps, a brigade group, from the island of Schouwen, he was either limiting or abandoning his intended effort directed across the Maas through Breda to Antwerp. In view of the possible recurrence of such threats from over the rivers, the tactical policy then agreed upon with the RAF was to disrupt the enemy's communications between his forward assembly areas and the country north of the Waal. Thus if General Student, the C-in-C, Army Group 'H', decided to deploy his troops offensively at some later stage, his intentions would be revealed by evidence of a renewed concern to improve his roads and repair his bridges. Meanwhile, active patrolling and small local actions characterized the exchanges during the first week of January.

(Ibid.).

12. General Crerar's appreciation that the enemy was thinning out his forces across the Maas, induced him to take advantage of the opportunity to regroup his own formations during the ensuing week. Accordingly, 4 Cdn Armd Div took up position on the right flank of 1 Brit Corps, with 1 Pol Armd Div on a comparatively narrow front in the centre, 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt on the left and 62 A.Tk Regt facing the sea. 4 Cdn Inf Bde Gp reverted from Army reserve to 2 Cdn Inf Div. (Ibid.).

13. Events on the eastern front now also began to have a powerful effect on Allied calculations in the west. The Russians were bringing their successful Balkan campaign to a climax in the capture of Budapest, and farther to the north their great winter offensive was about to break in irresistible

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fury upon the enemy in Poland. Four weeks after this amazing onslaught was let loose, the Soviet Armies were lining the River Oder almost three hundred miles beyond their start-line in front of Warsaw and less than forty from Berlin. (W.O. Weekly Int Review, Jan-Feb 45). The terrific strain extended remotely into Holland. As the G.O.C.-in-C. records:

Almost immediately I received a report that the 711th Infantry Division, which had been deployed across the Maas during the enemy's recent concentration against my northern sector, had been identified by the Russian General Staff in Hungary. This was the first time the Germans had found it necessary to withdraw a division away from the west since 6 Jun 44. In the Ardennes the enemy salient, under continuous pressure, had already begun steadily to shrink. The offensive by First Canadian Army could now rapidly be remounted, for I had made it clear, a month previously, that I considered the operation to be only temporarily postponed, and the necessary preparations had gone on, therefore, without interruption.

(Gen Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45).

PREPARATIONS RESUMED, JANUARY 1945

14. Such was the background to the resumption of planning and preparing for Operation "Veritable". The General thus described the subsequent developments:

On 16 Jan I attended a conference with the C-in-C, 21st Army Group, at his Tactical Headquarters. The Field Marshal said that he appreciated that von Rundstedt, basing himself on the Siegfried Line from the Swiss frontier to Arnhem and thence along the rivers to the sea, might again strike out offensively on the frontage held by the now weakened US Armies which would require time to be built up again to offensive requirements. It was quite essential, however, that we recover the initiative, and it was therefore necessary to decide upon a potentially decisive Allied operation and then to allot enough forces to carry it through successfully. He had already represented his views on these matters to the Supreme Commander and that morning had been informed by telephone of their acceptance. The essential of the Field Marshal's strategic plan was to get Allied forces in strength across the River Rhine, north of the Ruhr. To achieve this purpose fully adequate resources must needs be allotted, specifically for the 21st Army Group, in which he desired to retain the Ninth US Army. It followed that the intention, objective and available resources for an attack by First Canadian Army south-eastwards from the frontage between the rivers east of Nijmegen remained generally as agreed upon early in December. There was a change, however, in his subsequent plan for the crossing of the Rhine. He had now come to the conclusion that the river crossings required to be handled by one army commander instead of two, a condition imposed by limitations of equipment for bridging and boating and in the supply of amphibians. He had therefore decided that when I had secured my objectives, he would regroup to give the necessary frontage of the Rhine and the responsibility of forcing crossings

to Lt-General Dempsey.

The C-in-C confirmed the arrangement whereby Headquarters, 30th British Corps and Corps Troops, the infantry divisions and the bulk of the remaining formations previously allotted to me for this operation were to be placed at my disposal, the concentration and assembly of these forces as from 18 Jan to be carried out in accordance with my orders. The C-in-C stressed the importance of concealing our intentions from the enemy until the last moment. The target date was tentatively set for 10 Feb, on the assumption that the Ninth US Army would have taken over the line south and southeast of Roermond from the Second British Army by 1 Feb.

While the C-in-C realized the handicap of the 1st British Corps' very extended frontage, he felt it necessary to leave with me the continued responsibility for the security of the Beveland and the Walcheren islands, and to assist in this, the command of the 4th Commando Brigade. In addition, he proposed to transfer the 1st Commando Brigade to me from Lt-General Dempsey at a later stage. My right boundary was to be restored to the line of the road between Boxmeer and Beek.

On returning to my headquarters I took the necessary steps immediately to implement these instructions, which Field Marshal Montgomery carried a stage further with the issue of a directive on 21 Jan.

(Ibid.).

THE C.-IN-C.'s DIRECTIVE OF 21 JAN

15. This directive cancelled the previous one issued on 16 Dec 44, although much of it was word for word the same. It went into considerable detail running to six folio pages and bore the unmistakable stamp of the Field-Marshal's vigorous style. In the opening paragraphs he thus summed up the general situation:

The enemy has suffered a tactical defeat in the Ardennes, with severe losses in men and material.

12 Army Group is continuing offensive operations in the Ardennes in order to take advantage of the enemy's present unfavourable situation, to inflict further losses on him, and to seize any opportunity to breach the Siegfried Line. These operations are going to be continued so long as they continue to pay a good dividend; thereafter it is the intention to pass to the defensive in the Ardennes, to re-group, and to attack further to the north on the right flank of 21 Army Group.

The enemy is at present fighting a defensive campaign on all fronts; his situation is such that he cannot stage major offensive operations. Furthermore, at all costs he has to prevent the war from entering on a mobile phase; he has not the transport or the petrol that would be necessary for mobile operations, nor could his tanks compete with ours in the mobile battle.

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The enemy is in a bad way; he has had a tremendous battering and has lost heavily in men and equipment. On no account can we relax, or have a "stand still", in the winter months; it is vital that we keep going, so as not to allow him time to recover and so as to wear down his strength still further. There will be difficulties caused by mud, cold, lack of air support during periods of bad weather, and so on. But we must continue to fight the enemy hard during the winter months.

The main objective of the Allies on the western front is the Ruhr; if we can cut it off from the rest of Germany the enemy capacity to continue the struggle must gradually peter out.

A further, and very important, object of our operations must be to force mobile war on the Germans. We will therefore continue throughout the winter to conduct such operations as will:

- (a) gain intermediate objectives towards the Ruhr.
- (b) place us in a good jumping-off position for a mobile campaign in the Spring.
- (c) wear down the enemy's strength at a greater rate than our own.

The first stage in carrying out this policy must be to close up to the line of the Rhine.

The immediate objective is the line of the Rhine north of Düsseldorf. Thereafter our hold on the west bank of the river will be extended southwards to Bonn, and beyond. When the opportune moment arrives the Allied Armies will cross the Rhine in strength north of the Ruhr and at such other places as may be ordered by the Supreme Allied Commander.

(G.O.C.-in-C. file 1-0: Directive M. 548, from C.-in-C., 21 Army Gp, 21 Jan 45).

16. The C.-in-C.'s intention was "to destroy all enemy in the area west of the Rhine from the present forward positions south of Nijmegen as far south as the general line Jülich - Düsseldorf, as a preliminary to crossing the Rhine and engaging the enemy in mobile war to the north of the Ruhr". For these operations 21 Army Group was to consist of First Cdn, Second Brit and Ninth U.S. Armies. The outline plan was for:

Canadian Army to attack south-eastwards with its left on the Rhine (Operation "Veritable").

Ninth Army to attack north-eastwards with its right on the general line Jülich - Düsseldorf (Operation "Grenade").

Second Army to hold in the centre and to cross the Meuse in the Venlo area when ordered.

The operations of Ninth U.S. Army were to be supported by the left wing of 12 Army Group. It may be noted that the

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original plan did not provide for Operation "Grenade", nor for the inclusion of Ninth U.S. Army in 21 Army Group, although 12 Army Group was to have made a concurrent thrust toward the Rhine farther to the south.

(Ibid.).

17. The initial grouping as laid down by this directive shows an impressive aggregation of strength under General Crerar's command.

Canadian Army

H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps
H.Q. 1 Corps
H.Q. 30 Corps

2 Cdn Div
3 Cdn Div
15 Div
43 Div
49 Div
51 Div
53 Div
Gds Armd Div
4 Cdn Armd Div
7 Armd Div * (2)
Polish Armd Div

6 Gds Armd Bde
8 Armd Bde
33 Armd Bde
34 Armd Bde
2 Cdn Armd Bde

4 S.S. Bde
R. Netherlands Bde
116 R. Marine Inf Bde
117 R. Marine Inf Bde

Second Army

H.Q. 8 Corps
H.Q. 12 Corps

3 Div)
52 Div)
11 Armd Div) * (2)
6 Airborne Div)

4 Armd Bde
1 Commando Bde
115 Inf Bde
Royals

Five AGRAs were also assigned to 30 Corps for the operation. 79 Armd Div was held in Army Group reserve, but most of its resources in assault equipment were made available. (Ibid.).

18. First Cdn Army's "strong offensive" south-eastwards between the rivers was to be carried "as far south as the general line Xanten-Geldern". (In the previous directive it had been the line Orsoy-Venlo). The target date was now 8 Feb. (Ibid.).

* (2) 7 Armd Div was later cancelled owing to commitments elsewhere (see para 25 below). 33 Bde also appears to have been dropped from subsequent orders of battle for "Veritable". On the other hand 3 and 52 Inf and 11 Armd Divs later came under command First Canadian Army after the operations had begun.

19. The directive continued as follows:

Dry or hard ground would be the most suitable conditions for the operation. If these conditions exist, then the basis of the operation will be speed and violence. The aim will be to pass armoured columns through to disrupt and disorganize enemy resistance in rear and to achieve the object in the quickest possible time.

If the ground is wet and muddy, then a slower and more methodical progress may be forced on us.

Two alternative plans will therefore be necessary.

30 Corps was to be kept on General Crerar's right flank in order to simplify the business of regrouping for subsequent operations in which all Canadian formations were to be kept under his command. (Ibid.).

20. While he was to plan to cross the Rhine at Emmerich, it was considered that this might not be possible until Second Brit Army had crossed at Rees farther south. Moreover, he was to bear in mind that eventually it would be necessary to establish road and rail communication across the Neder Rijn at Arnhem, a task likely to fall to him later. He still remained responsible for keeping the Nijmegen bridgehead secure, holding defensively the general line of the Waal and Maas westwards from Nijmegen and for the security of North and South Beveland and Walcheren. (Ibid.).

21. Ninth U.S. Army, comprising four corps (one liable for service with Second Brit Army -- a contingency cancelled later on), was to prepare for Operation "Grenade" which was to begin as soon as possible after 15 Feb. Starting from the line of the Roer between Julich and Roermond, the Americans were to launch a strong attack towards the Rhine with their right flank on the general line Jülich-Neuss. (Ibid.).

22. Second Brit Army was "to hold a firm front facing east of the line of the Meuse" and "to assist the attacks of Canadian and Ninth Armies by every means possible". They were to establish bridgeheads across the Meuse and prepare "in due course, and when ordered, to force the crossing of the Rhine at Rheinberg, Xanten and Rees". (Ibid.).

COMPLICATIONS AND DEVELOPMENTS

23. On 23 Jan the C.-in-C. held another conference with his Army Commanders to discuss several complicating factors that had arisen. General Crerar summarizes the conference as follows:

The Field Marshal said that Lt-General Simpson's projected counterpart of my south-eastward thrust could not be initiated until the Ninth US Army had been brought up to the agreed strength of twelve US Divisions, of which two were to be allotted to the Second British Army for a subsequent operation across the Meuse on my right flank at Venlo. He had the impression, moreover, that the Supreme Commander was thinking of placing a higher

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priority on an intended operation by the First US Army along the axis Euskirchen-Bonn. If this operation were to go very well and the enemy situation showed signs of further deterioration, then the operation by First Canadian Army might be ordered to go in independently of the converging attack by the Ninth US Army. I could be assured, however, that unless such favourable situation promised to obtain, the assault by the Canadian Army would not be launched without the assistance afforded by the Ninth US Army to the south. Should the concentration of the additional divisions required by Lt-General Simpson and their subsequent regrouping and deployment be protracted, it might be necessary to postpone the offensive as a whole.

(Gen Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45).

24. On 1 Feb, in a telephone conversation with the Acting Chief of Staff at H.Q. 21 Army Group, General Crerar was informed of further developments in the Allied plan for the winter offensive (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, Feb 45: Appx 1), information which Field-Marshal Montgomery enlarged upon at a conference held at his tactical headquarters on 4 Feb.

The C-in-C opened his remarks by stating that SHAEF had now decided that Operation "Veritable" by First Cdn Army and Operation "Grenade" by Ninth US Army were to be carried out as first priority tasks. The only exception to this situation would be the operations about to be undertaken by the First US Army, to capture the dam controlling the River Roer. Apart from the operations so mentioned, the remainder of the Allied Armies were to follow an "aggressively defensive" tactical policy.

However, in the circumstances in which the US Armies found themselves, it was very difficult to regroup, quickly. As a result, "Grenade" Operation would not be as "full blooded" as he would have wished...

As a result of the difficulties experienced by SHAEF, he had now been compelled to accept a total of ten US Divisions, all for Ninth US Army. In the circumstances, no US Divisions could be spared for Lt-General Dempsey, and in consequence, Operation "Ventilate" (proposed attack across the River Maas by Second Brit Army) would either not take place, or would be carried out in a somewhat tentative way ...

(Ibid.: Appx 3, Notes on Conference, 4 Feb 45).

General Crerar was also warned that 7 Armd Div would no longer be in his order of battle. On the other hand, 3 Brit Inf and 11 Brit Armd Divs of Second Brit Army were to be "available for reinforcement, or replacement, if the situation warranted". (Ibid.: Appx 1).

25. It may be added that the Field-Marshal took this occasion to make an announcement of great interest to the Canadian Army, and summarized in General Crerar's notes:

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The C-in-C stated that he would then refer to certain conversations he had had in the UK and the information which he was about to give required to be kept on a high "Top Secret" level. The Chiefs of Staff Committee had reached the decision, yesterday, that forces in 15 Army Group were to be reduced and, as a first result, 1 Cdn Corps was to come from the Mediterranean to NW Europe and join up with First Cdn Army. 1 Cdn Corps would commence its movement in March and it was hoped to complete transfer in April. There was also the hope that three Brit Divisions would follow 1 Cdn Corps. It was understood that all Canadian troops would come under command First Cdn Army and he hoped that I would do what I could to ensure that every Canadian now in 15 Army Group was moved to this theatre.

(Ibid.).

THE PLAN

26. Meanwhile, on 25 Jan General Crerar had issued a directive for Operation "Veritable", informing his Corps Commanders of the situation and its requirements as they then appeared. His plan had not materially changed since it was first conceived in December.

It is necessary to assume (he wrote) that the enemy will strongly man and fight his several lines of organized defences in the operational area given above. On the basis of this assumption the operation, as a whole, will comprise several phases and, after each phase is completed, it will be necessary to move up the artillery and supporting weapons and commence the next phase with co-ordinated and heavy fire support, and with controlled movement. Operation "Veritable" will, therefore, be basically planned on the following principal phases, and objectives.

- Phase 1 The clearing of the Reichswald and the securing of the line Gennep-Asperden-Cleve.
- Phase 2 The breaching of the enemy's second defensive system East and South East of the Reichswald, the capture of the localities Weeze-Udem-Calcar-Emmerich and the securing of the communications between them.
- Phase 3 The "break-through" of the Hochwald "lay-back" defence lines and the advance to secure the general line Geldern-Xanten.

The initiation of the offensive and completion of its first phase was to be the responsibility of 30 Brit Corps under command of Lt-General B.G. Horrocks. However, should the enemy's resistance crumble, 30 Brit Corps was to lose no opportunity, however, of fully exploiting any favourable situation irrespective of the plan as laid down. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, Jan 45: Appx 3).

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27. The grouping for the first phase was to be as follows:

<u>1 Brit Corps</u>	<u>2 Cdn Corps</u>	<u>30 Brit Corps</u>
1 Pol Armd Div	49 (W.R.) Div	2 Cdn Div
4 Cdn Armd Div	2 Cdn Armd Bde	3 Cdn Div
4 Cdo Bde (i.e., S.S.)	18 Cdn Armd C.	15 (S.) Div
R. Netherlands Bde	Regt	43 Div
11 H. (Armd C.)		51 (H.) Div
		53 (W.) Div
		Gds Armd Div
		6 Gds Armd Bde
		8 & 34 Armd Bdes
		Resources 79 Armd Div
		Five AGRAs

On the completion of Phase 1, the operation was to be developed on a front of two corps - 30 Brit Corps on the right and 2 Cdn Corps on the left with the Wyler-Cleve-Calcar-Xanten road inclusive to the latter. The exact timing of this was to be a matter for future decision. The Canadian Corps was also responsible for the security of the Nijmegen bridgehead. (Ibid.).

28. Prior to the commencement of the second phase, 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs, certain elements of 79 Armd Div and A.G.R.A. resources were to be transferred to 2 Cdn Corps. About mid-February, 4 Cdn Armd Div was to be replaced by one or two miscellaneous brigades and to be taken into Army reserve where it would be available for possible employment in the later stages of "Veritable". (Ibid.; AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/I: Notes on G.O.C.-in-C.'s Conference, 24 Jan 45).

29. The principal responsibility of 1 Brit Corps was to implement and maintain the cover plan. This was designed to suggest that First Cdn Army, with 30 Corps under command, was intending to initiate operations in the direction of Utrecht before 20 Feb. It was hoped that the initial large-scale movement and concentration of reinforcing formations from Second Brit Army would sustain this conception. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, Jan 45: Appx 2, Address by Gen Crerar to Senior Officers, 22 Jan 45). It may here be noted that it was intended eventually to set up an "H.Q. Holland District" to take over the Royal Netherlands, Royal Marine and Commando Brigades south of the Maas and responsibility for the river line, thus releasing H.Q. 1 Brit Corps for further operations. (Notes on G.O.C.-in-C.'s Conference, 24 Jan 45).

30. At the C.-in-C.'s conference on 4 Feb General Crerar again outlined his plan and enlarged on it as follows:

In Phase 1 - of the "break-in" attack against the very strong Reichswald defences - Lt-Gen Horrocks will employ 15 (S), 51 (H) and 53 (W) Divisions, 3 Cdn Div and a portion of 2 Cdn Div. Each division will have strong armoured support. This assault, weather permitting, will receive maximum assistance from the air. It is the intention to retain the greatest practicable element of surprise and definite and detailed steps have been taken to that end. The programme of fire support decided

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upon by Lt-Gen Horrocks, (and so, positive indications of time and place of attack) will not be revealed until "D" Day, and a few hours before the attack goes in. On the other hand, from D-3 onwards, it will be increasingly difficult to conceal from the enemy the necessary forward assembly, in the Nijmegen area, of the large assaulting force. While, therefore, it would be otherwise desirable to delay "D" Day until weather conditions promised full air support, if this situation does not obtain on 8 Feb, the attack will go in, anyway, and with fire support from ground weapons only. One thing that must not be allowed is time and opportunity for the enemy fully to prepare his defensive arrangements and every day and hour that passes after forward assembly commences, increases this risk.

If weather is suitable, the air support which will be afforded this operation will be on a maximum scale. In direct support of the assaulting divisions, will be the Second Tactical Air Force with a potential of 1,000 fighters, or fighter-bombers, 100 medium day, and 90 medium night bombers. 84 Group, R.A.F. - which is that portion of the Second Tactical Air Force operationally and directly linked to First Cdn Army, will provide the "close-in" support. Bomber Command will attack targets in the immediate battle area with up to 1,000 heavy bombers and support is also expected from the medium bombers of Ninth and the heavy bombers of Eighth US Army Air Forces.

Ground fire support will be provided by over 1,200 guns, of which more than one third are mediums, heavies and super-heavies. The resources of 79 Armd Div will be fully utilized, including "Crocodiles" (flame throwers), "Flails" (mine destroyers) and Armoured Personnel Carriers - such as first were utilized by the Canadian Army South of Caen, last August. The Canadian Rocket Projector Battery will also be employed.

As I intimated, I cannot forecast, with any degree of reliability, the time which will be taken to complete "Veritable", after it is launched. If everything broke in our favour, weather, ground, air support, enemy dispositions and reactions - I would not be surprised if armour of 30 Corps reached the Geldern-Xanten line in a few days. On the other hand, if conditions are against us, I see three "set-piece" operations, one for each Phase, and the battle may well last three weeks...

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, Feb 45: Appx 3).

It may be added that the total number of tanks available was over 3,400 including reserves. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, Mar 45: Appx 144).

31. The air plan listed some eighty targets ranging from the road and rail bridges across the Rhine

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at Wesel to the enemy front line positions. The towns of Cleve and Goch, key points northeast and southeast of the Reichswald, were to be totally destroyed, as were all buildings housing enemy troops in Weeze, Udem, Calcar, Kranenburg and several other smaller places. Numerous bridges, railway lines and junctions, fuel and ammunition dumps, telephone communications and enemy headquarters were listed with precise instructions as to how they were to be destroyed, whether by high explosive or by fire, and how much cratering was permissible in each case. Before the actual assault the air force was to destroy and demoralize enemy troops in their open defence positions. During the actual battle, whenever possible, there was to be both daily prearranged support and impromptu support where required. (AEF 45/First Cdn Army/S/H: Air Plan for Op "Veritable", 6 Feb 45; AEF 45/30 Corps/C/I: 30 Corps Op Instr 47, 3 Feb 45: Appx "C"). The extent of the air support was finally settled within the week before the operation began. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, Mar 45: Appx 146, Notes of Conference re Pre-planned Air Support 25 Jan 45 and Notes of Conversation between G.O.C.-in-C. and A/C. of S., 21 Army Gp, 2 Feb 45).

32. The artillery fire plan was on a similar scale, for the resources under the command of C.C.R.A. 30 Corps for the opening of the operation included seven divisional artilleries, 2 Cdn and 3, 4, 5 and 9 Brit AGRAs, elements of two anti-aircraft brigades used in a ground role and the 1st Canadian Rocket Unit. The outline plan consisted of the following:

- (a) a five hour period of artillery preparation including a deceptive smoke screen along the entire front;
- (b) a standing barrage containing both smoke and H.E., lasting for about an hour to enable the infantry to form up on the start line;
- (c) the thickening of the barrage for half an hour reaching its climax at 1030 hours when it was to start moving forward.

(AEF 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/RCA/C/D: Account by Brig F.D. Lace, C.R.A., 2 Cdn Inf Div, 13 Feb 45).

TOPOGRAPHY OF THE BATTLE AREA

33. The topography of the area of intended operations presented some unusual difficulties. A study of the map will show that forty to fifty miles southeast of Nijmegen, at Duisburg, and at Venlo, the Rhine and Maas flow in a northerly direction some twenty miles apart. Gradually they approach and begin to swing to the west so that at Mook (E. 7251) the Maas, now turning due west, is only six miles south of Nijmegen on the main channel of the Rhine, which here becomes the Waal. Immediately west of Nijmegen the two rivers are connected by the Maas-Waal Canal, while farther south a smaller stream, called the Niers, runs parallel to them through the intervening plain. The front line followed the

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course of the Maas as far north as Cuijk (E.7249) and thence ran northeast and north close to the German frontier to meet the Waal some three miles east of Nijmegen. It will be appreciated that to reach the forward assembly areas all formations except 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs had to cross the Maas, and in many cases, the Maas-Waal Canal as well. Some had to pass through the built-up area of Nijmegen and all had to wheel through more than ninety degrees to line up opposite the enemy's defensive positions. (Maps 1/100,000: Holland, sheet 5, Germany, sheets P.1 and Q.1; AEF 45/21 Army Gp/C/F: 21 Army Gp Report on Operation "Veritable"; AEF 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/L/F: 2 Cdn Inf Div Int Report No. 1, Op "Veritable", 2 Feb 45; AEF 45/30 Corps/L/F: Op "Veritable" Planning Int Dossier, No. 4, 29 Jan 45).

34. Both the Maas and the Rhine run through low plains which were inundated during December. By January most of the floods had receded but the ground was left mucky and covered with scattered pools. Further obstacles were abandoned channels, ditches, marsh and backwaters. The most outstanding geographical feature is the Reichswald, a large diamond-shaped forest some nine miles from east to west, and five miles from north to south, lying between the town of Cleve and the German-Dutch frontier. There are some clearings and a few farms in the forest. The Materborn ridge, some 200 to 250 feet above sea level, extends from Cleve in a south-westerly direction along the northern edge of the forest, commanding a flat and featureless countryside. The trees are mostly pine of fairly recent growth, planted four to seven feet apart and divided into blocks by narrow rides. Southeast, the Hochwald and Balberger Wald lie to the west of Xanten. The rest of the country between the rivers is low and gently undulating with a number of small woods. Movement over cultivation was interrupted only by occasional tree-lined fields, rises in ground, and small ditches along the fields. The rolling nature of the country and frequent coppices made covered approaches possible, but in the predominantly wooded areas movement off the roads was difficult. An abundance of cover among the trees was limited only by the season of the year. In such country the view was often obstructed even from the eminences which themselves were nearly all wooded. During the long quiescent period prior to 8 Feb, the Canadian outposts were on relatively high ground overlooking much of this future field of battle and with the like advantage of being also largely wooded, and affording excellent cover for even the larger formations involved. (Ibid.).

35. Two main roads run southeast from Nijmegen, one along the east bank of the Maas through Gennep to Venlo, the other across the German frontier north of the Reichswald to Cleve where it divides. The northern branch continues to Calcar and Xanten and thence southeast towards the Ruhr; the other runs southwards to Goch and on through Weeze and Kvelaer to Geldern. Other roads from Cleve run northeast to Emmerich on the Rhine, southeast to Udem and southwest through the Reichswald to Gennep. Fortunately most of the civilians had been evacuated from the considerable number of small towns scattered about this corner of Germany. (Ibid.).

/During

36. During January the weather had been cold with considerable snow and ice but early in February a thaw set in. It was realized that any prolonged operation after severe frost was likely to churn up the ground very badly. Further, it was clear that the Rhine could be flooded by blowing the winter dykes, although complete breaching was considered impracticable. In addition, it had to be borne in mind that if the Americans did not succeed in capturing the Roer dams before they were destroyed, their failure might have far-reaching effects. All these hazards had to be taken into consideration in the planning and the risks accepted. (Ibid.).

THE ENEMY'S DEFENCES

37. The German defensive system presented three main features:

- (a) The construction of three principal lines of defence, namely, the forward line, the Siegfried Line and the Hochwald "lay back".
- (b) The apparent sub-division of the area enclosed by the principal lines of defence into self-contained defensive "boxes".
- (c) The transformation of towns and villages into strong points.

(Ibid., the 21 Army Gp Report contains a diagrammatic map illustrating these three lines of defences; for details see Defence Overprints of Holland 1:25,000, sheets 6 S.W., 12 N.W., 12 S.W. and Eastern Holland, 4102, 4202, 4302, 4103, 4203 and 4303, dated 19 Jan - 6 Feb 45).

38. During the winter the enemy's forward line comprised a double series of strong outposts to the main Siegfried defences. North of the Nijmegen-Cleve road they were only weakly held, but in the area south from Wyler (E.7558), a frontier village four miles southeast of Nijmegen and immediately west of the Reichswald, the enemy was in greater strength. Most of his positions were in woods and houses, and all roads running at right angles to the front were held in considerable depth, especially the Wyler-Kranenburg and the Mook-Gennep-Hekkens roads, along which anti-tank ditches, road-blocks, anti-tank guns and diggings had been observed. (Ibid.).

39. The main Siegfried defences ran south from Kranenburg (E.8056), a village two miles beyond Wyler, through the Reichswald to Hekkens (E.8244), a road junction south of the forest, then east and south to Goch. This line continued south from Goch, circling slightly west of Weeze. Numerous anti-tank ditches zig-zagged across the whole territory from Goch south to the Maas, one of them dug round to the north of Goch itself. Northeast from Kranenburg a similar ditch extended towards the Rhine. During the winter another line had been constructed east of the Reichswald between Cleve and Goch, thus making the forest a self-contained centre of resistance. There were also continuous lines of trenches and weapon-pits along the eastern bank of the Maas. (Ibid.).

40. The only concrete constructions to be found in this sector were shelters and infantry pillboxes, some seventy of which had been mapped by our intelligence. Eight large casemates of the original Siegfried Line defences had also been observed, although they were believed to contain only machine-guns. (Ibid.).

41. The third main line had been very recently constructed, from the Rhine opposite Rees along the undulating ground south to Geldern (A.0225), roughly ten kilometres east of the Reichswald, and along the western side of the Hochwald and Balberger Forests. It consisted of two and sometimes three lines of continuous trenches and, except in front of the Hochwald, of an anti-tank ditch between the trenches. There was also an almost unbroken belt of wire in front of each trench line and a mine-field in the sector between the Hochwald and the Rhine. (Ibid.).

42. The whole system was designed to convert the entire area into a "defence net", built up into a series of self-contained boxes. Most of the towns and villages such as Cleve, Goch, Weeze, Kevelaer, Udem and Calcar had also been transformed into strong points defended by elaborate trench works and anti-tank ditches. A close study of the defence overprints revealed a tremendous number of trenches, weapon-pits, machine-gun and anti-aircraft posts, wire fences and mines. Yet this very elaborate and formidable system lacked sufficient personnel to keep it fully manned. (Ibid.).

THE ENEMY'S ORDER OF BATTLE

43. As for the enemy's order of battle,

A review of the enemy situation on 3 Feb showed that the whole front of First Cdn Army was opposed by tps of Army Group H under General Student. * (3) To the North was Twenty-Fifth Army. South and West of the Rhine along the Maas was First Para Army consisting of 84, 180, 190 and 606 zbv divs.

The Reichswald sector, which may be taken to extend from the bend in the Rhine near Erlekom 7863 to Middelaar, appeared to be controlled by 84 Inf Div. This Div was caught in the Falaise pocket and destroyed, and was reformed in Sep... It now consisted of two regts, each of two bns, and was thought to include Battle Group Katzmann of probably three bns, and also to have under command 2 Para Regt (three bns) which ordinarily belonged to 2 Para Div.

* (3) As appeared afterwards, Student was recalled to Berlin at the end of January and the Army Group taken over by Genoberst Blaskowitz (AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket III: Special Interrogation Report Generaloberst Student).

There was evidence also, of two police bns in the sector, identified North of the Nijmegen-Cleve road.

It was estimated that there was a total of eight bns manning the forward line of defences, with five bns in reserve, or possibly in "lay back" positions. They were likely to be up to strength and despite German reverses on other fronts, their morale was considered high...

Including HAA, the maximum estimated number of guns capable of firing on the "Veritable" area was 114 ...

At the time when "Veritable" was about to open the enemy had nine divs holding the 101 (sic) mile sector from Nijmegen to Düren F.14^{*(4)} On the other hand, he had some 45 odd divs along the 250 mile stretch from Düren to Strasbourg.

(21 Army Gp Report).

44. 7 Para Div proved to be in immediate reserve as anticipated. Further, it was expected that the enemy would reinforce the Reichswald sector from the Cologne area and that by the end of the first week after the assault had gone in, he would have brought up three infantry and three or four panzer grenadier divisions. (Ibid.; and Gen Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45). It was also noticed a few days prior to D-Day that some reorganization was taking place in the Reichswald. (First Cdn Army Int Summary, 4 Feb 45). Part of the enemy's reserve had to be kept to guard against an American offensive to the south, while the demands from the Russian front were inexorable.

In the middle of Dec the Germans had possessed reserves in the form of 5 and 6 Pz Armies. At the end of Jan the situation was that 5 Pz was endeavouring to recover from the severe handling it had received in the Ardennes battle, while 6 Pz had been switched to the Eastern front to meet the Russian offensive which had opened on 12 Jan.

(21 Army Gp Report).

THE ENEMY'S DEFECTIVE APPRECIATION OF OUR INTENTIONS

45. By extensive camouflage and by confining most troop movements to the hours of darkness the greatest care was taken to conceal the Allied preparations from the enemy. The state of his preparedness for the attack is discussed in the Army Commander's despatch as follows:

/... Until

* (4) The actual distance between Nijmegen and Düren is over 150 miles.

... Until 6 Feb it was fairly clear that the enemy had no specific knowledge of my intentions in the Reichswald. On that day, however, I had to assume that his aircraft, flying over the Army area on tactical reconnaissance, had observed the unavoidable signs of our enterprise, especially in the district between Grave and Nijmegen, where the many hundreds of vehicles and tanks, many of them impossible to conceal as the only hard standings were roads and streets, could hardly have escaped the vigilance of the camera. General Student^{x(5)} must have now had a shrewd suspicion that I was going to attack in the Reichswald sector. He could not rule out an attack north of the Maas, but his reconnaissance was so widespread as to give him an accurate comparative view of activity along the whole of our front. But in surveying the enemy's problems and possibilities, I decided that there was little he could do to improve his situation as it then stood. Most of von Rundstedt's available forces were required either to remain in the south to meet the American threat from Roermond to the Ardennes, or to move to the east to fight the Russians.

(Gen Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45).

46. As revealed by later interrogations, however, the enemy's appreciation was confused. From the time when the front in the Reichswald became stabilized, it was obvious that an attack must come shortly on the northern part of the line. But General Schlemm, Commander of the First Parachute Army, had known nothing of our plans for an offensive to be launched early in January, nor had anyone been aware that preparations were already well advanced for an attack through the Forest when the German offensive in the Ardennes caused them to be postponed. When it was realized that the Ardennes had not succeeded in preventing the Allies from being able to undertake a winter campaign, frequent discussions took place as to the locale of the new assault.

Schlemm claims that Blaskowitz at Army Group and Rundstedt, the C-in-C West, believed the next big Allied move would be an American offensive launched from Roermond together with a British attack across the river at Venlo. This was opposed to Schlemm's personal view who expected the big blow to come south through the Reichswald as it eventually did. He advanced this view to his seniors but was constantly assured that there was no evidence of large concentrations in the Nijmegen E 77 area. The worst that could be expected there was a holding attack launched by two or three Canadian Divisions, he was told. (Special Interrogation Report Gen Alfred Schlemm).

As a result Blaskowitz sited his reserves (including 47 Panzer Corps) in readiness for attacks from Roermond and Venlo. According to Schlemm, von Rundstedt deduced from an analysis of the intensified Allied air bombardment that

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x(5) See footnote to para 44.

an assault would be coming from the region of Venlo between 6 and 12 Feb. On the other hand, Schlemm avers that he expected the attack where it came, but could not convince the higher command that the signs of movement through Nijmegen were not merely a blind. Deep patrolling had failed to reveal the presence of any formations in the vicinity other than Canadian, and it was not until the battle was a day old that Schlemm was able to prove his suspicions with the news that four British divisions had been identified in the Forest. "We were wrong", admitted Army Group, "You may have 7 Para Division". (Ibid.).

THE CONCENTRATION

47. In thus keeping the enemy in the dark as to the force and direction of our aggressive intentions we were fortunate, for the transference of all the British formations of 30 Corps to their assembly areas west of the Reichswald had itself been a major operation of war, very difficult to conceal from the enemy's intelligence. Before coming under Canadian command, these British divisions were from fifty to a hundred miles south of Nijmegen, between Roermond and Liège on the upper Meuse, and still farther south in the Ardennes, where several of them had been engaged in the fighting. Until late in January, 43 Inf Div and other British formations were taking part in an operation by 12 Brit Corps to reduce the enemy salient on the left bank of the Roer. To move these great bodies of troops northwards to their very restricted assembly area, accessible only by two bridges across the Maas, in the short time available and with due secrecy, required the most careful planning. They were withdrawn during the latter part of January to concentrate about Louvain, between Antwerp and Boxtel and northeast of Eindhoven. Thence, starting on 5 Feb, they all moved northeast along two main routes, one through Tilburg crossing the Maas at Grave, the other through Eindhoven crossing the river at Mook, to the forward assembly areas near Nijmegen. (21 Army Gp Report, paras 37 and 38 and Diagram 6; AEF 45/First Cdn Army/Q/I: Provost Move Schedules 17 and 22 Jan 45 and First Cdn Army Instrs on Assembly for "Veritable", 1 Feb 45).

48. These considerable movements, which strained Army and Corps provost resources to the utmost, were further complicated by the terrible state of the roads. The situation has been thus described:

... During Jan the roads had been universally ice-bound. Just prior to the time when movement was to reach its peak, from 3 Feb onwards, came the thaw with all its attendant troubles. Many roads deteriorated rapidly and eventually ruts developed to a depth of 18 inches to 2 feet, and others collapsed completely at various points. Diversions were extremely difficult to improvise as the surrounding country in most places became water logged. The very carefully planned forward movement from staging areas to concentration areas and onwards across the R. Maas had to be recast

/daily

daily in the light of existing road conditions. That final assembly was completed by the right time in spite of these abnormal and most difficult conditions says much for the high standard of staff work of the traffic staffs, and the super-human efforts of the traffic control personnel and the RE concerned with road maintenance...

First Canadian Army controlled all roads South and West of the line Eindhoven-'s Hertogenbosch and 2 Cdn and 30 Brit Corps those to the North and East of that line. There was a very close liaison maintained between the three APMs concerned. Five CMP Traffic Control Coys, two Army Provost Coys, and some twenty officers and three hundred ORs of a LAA Regt, R.A., altogether some 1,600 men, were utilized in the over-all traffic control plan. In spite of all the numerous difficulties final concentration was completed to time-table.

(21 Army Gp Report, paras 39 and 42; see also AEF 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/F: Summary of Ops, 28 Jan - 4 Feb 45).

49. Fortunately, for the first time since the landing in Normandy, an adequate railway system was available which greatly eased the supply situation. Although the railway bridge across the Maas at Ravenstein connecting the line to Nijmegen was not opened until 8 Feb, there were numerous railheads immediately south of the river. As a result, during the last eight days it was possible to dump 10,000 tons of supplies, fuel, ammunition, ordnance, engineer and miscellaneous stores, each day. Most of the railheads could actually have handled a considerably greater tonnage than they did. (*Ibid.*). In all some 446 freight trains arrived at 15 different railheads of which one, Haps (3045), was only three miles from the front. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, Feb 45: Appx 144, Statistics, Op "Veritable").

50. Statistics serving to illustrate the size and scope of the staff and service problems involved were given by General Crerar at a press conference on the eve of the battle:

1880 tons of bridge equipment have been used in the construction of the five military bridges which have been thrown across the R. Maas, and lead into the forward assembly area. The Ravenstein "high level" pontoon bridge - known as the Quebec Bridge, is the longest Bailey bridge yet constructed - 1280 ft long.

British and Canadian "Sappers" in the past few weeks have constructed, widened and improved approximately 100 miles of road. For this purpose about 20,000 tons of stone, 20,000 logs and 30,000 pickets have been used.

To move troops and their fighting equipment and supplies into position prior to "D" Day will involve 35,000 vehicles travelling an average 130 miles each and using approximately 1,300,000 gallons of petrol.

In order to ensure that convoys reach their appointed destinations, approximately 10,000 route signs were

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erected, and 1,000 troops have been employed on traffic control duties.

Demands have entailed the production of over 500,000 air photographs and 15,000 enlargements. Over 800,000 special maps, requiring over 30 tons of paper, have been produced.

If the ammunition allotments for the operation, which consists of 350 types, were stacked side by side and five feet high, it would line a road for 30 miles. The total ammunition tonnage, provided for the supporting artillery from "D" Day, to D plus 3, would be the equivalent in weight to the bomb-drop of 25,000 medium bombers.

1,100 tons of smoke materials, exclusive of artillery, will be used in the ground plan, which will produce what is believed will be the longest smoke screen in the history of this war. At the conclusion of Phase 1, a 20-mile smoke screen should be in operation.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., Feb 45: Appx 3a; for further statistics see W.D., G.Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army: Appx 144).

51. For the troops standing to their arms, and for all who guided and supported them in an endless variety of function and responsibility, Field Marshal Montgomery wrote his personal message. He told them that the operations of the Allies on all fronts had now brought the German war to its final stage. He compared the battle to a boxing match:

And so we embark (he said) on the final round, in close co-operation with our American allies on our right and with complete confidence in the successful outcome of the onslaught being delivered by our Russian allies on the other side of the ring.

Somewhat curious rules, you may say. But the whole match has been most curious; the Germans began this all-out contest and they must not complain when in the last round they are hit from several directions at the same time.

Into the ring, then, let us go. And do not let us relax till the knock-out blow has been delivered.

Good luck to you all - and God bless you.

(W.D., G.Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, Feb 45: Appx 28).

General Crerar likewise had his own words of encouragement for the hundreds of thousands of soldiers now under his command:

Six months ago, almost to a day, history was made by formations of this Army in their Southward drive which broke the "Caen hinge" and closed the "Falaise pocket". The same, and other formations shall again record great achievements in the days ahead by breaking through the "Reichswald pivot" and turning this key sector of the Siegfried Line.

The operations which we are about to undertake are of the greatest possible importance. Indeed, the result of them can lead to speedy and complete Allied victory. The assault will be launched in great strength and with most powerful fire support. Whatever the difficulties of ground and weather, the forward thrust through the enemy and his defences will be pressed without respite. He must be given no time or opportunity to collect his thoughts or his resources. The opportunity is at hand. Let us see to it that it is firmly seized and decisively exploited.

(Ibid.).

THE OFFENSIVE BEGINS

52. On 8 Feb the offensive opened. Most of the prearranged air plan was effectively carried out and during the preceding night the troops waiting for H-hour could see the flashes of the bombs and the fires they raised as some nine hundred heavy bombers dropped their loads on the towns of Cleve, Goch, Weeze, Udem and Calcar. The air support continued throughout the first day, for the weather was good for that time of the year. There was some cloud but the supporting aircraft were able to operate through it, thanks to a new device called the Mobile Radar Control Post, which was used with great success. Only one enemy aircraft was seen. (AEF 45/30 Corps/S/F: Air Notes 228 and 229, 8 and 9 Feb 45).

53. The preliminary artillery bombardment began at 0500 hours. Targets included enemy forward positions, headquarters and communications with a minimum of six tons directed on each target. The success of the assault was later attributed largely to this fire support. According to prisoners it had great effect on their morale, the intensity being such that crews were unable to man their guns until the barrage had ceased; communications were totally disrupted. The Germans had "the impression of overwhelming force opposed to them, which, in their isolated state, with no communications, it was useless to resist". On the other hand, prisoners generally agreed that casualties from the bombardment were not high, on a rough average only five per cent. Equipment suffered more than personnel. (First Cdn Army Int Summary, 11 Feb 45). Counter-battery fire seems to have prevented very much enemy shelling during the attack. During the day well over half a million rounds were fired without a single case being reported of a round falling short. (Ibid.; 21 Army Gp Report, paras 153-174).

54. The diapason was augmented by the firing of thirteen "land mattresses" - the saturation of targets by batteries of the newly created 1st Canadian Rocket Unit which took part in major operations for the first time. The grouping of miscellaneous weapons like medium machine-guns, light anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns for the purposes of co-ordinated fire was another device employed, and in this battle these "pepper pots" were organized by 2 Cdn Inf Div on the left and by 51 (H) Div on the right. In addition to the 4.2-inch mortars and

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the medium machine-guns of the support battalions of all the divisions, the resources of two armoured regiments, approximately two light anti-aircraft regiments and two batteries of 17-pounder anti-tank guns were also utilized. Since these miscellaneous weapons were fired continuously throughout the day, the ammunition expenditure was tremendous. The group organized by 2 Cdn Inf Div artillery alone fired 1,300,000 rounds of medium machine-gun ammunition, 69,000 40-millimetre shells, 14,000 4.2-inch mortar bombs and 12,000 17-pounder shells. This great weight of metal was hurled against the enemy by 156 guns (including 24 tank guns) 48 4.2-inch mortars and 96 medium machine-guns. (Ibid.; Account by Brig Lace; AEF 45/30 Corps/C/I: Op Instr 45, "Pepper Pot", 27 Jan 45; 21 Army Gp Report, para 52).

55. Some idea of the effect of this tremendous onslaught may be gained from quoting a description by an Historical Officer who watched the opening of the battle from an observation post on high ground about a mile north of Groesbeek:

The weather promised to be fair, and the sight of the airbursts and tracer in the sky, against the yellow light of the rising sun was very impressive. There was continuous roll of heavy gunfire that was punctuated by staccato bursts of MG fire from all sides.... At 0740 hrs, almost a complete silence descended on the entire front for a period of a full ten minutes ... to enable the Flash Spotters and Sound Rangers to locate active enemy btys not previously known.

A few birds were still flying across the sky in a bewildered manner, as the artillery took up their theme again, and the tempo accelerated as the full weight of 1,000 guns was brought to bear against the enemy. Beyond the occasional airburst, and the odd round over a wide area, there was little reply from the enemy and, at this stage, the spectator was left with the impression that hostile positions were being simply smothered.

The gaunt trunks and torn branches of trees, ruined farm buildings, and the smoke and cordite fumes that swept across the area all contributed to the strangely fascinating panorama of war.

As H-hr approached, if anything, the noise increased and a new note was added by the sound of armour moving forward and planes passing overhead. The combined effect produced a vivid picture of a war of machines -- a war of calculated and terrible efficiency.

A wounded soldier, with face covered by a field dressing, was directed to a nearby R.A.P. as pockets of smoke began to fill the contours in the ground. The historical officer and war artist were compelled to shout at each other in order to make themselves heard above the noise. Carriers rattled by, with red cross flags prominently displayed, and a tp of "Cromwell" tanks that had been camouflaged with straw against the walls of a demolished barn added their guttural roar to the din of battle.

/"Churchill"

"Churchill" and "Sherman" tanks began to move east along the draw in square 7556, through the scattered debris of gliders that remained from the airborne attack of the previous September.

At 0950 hrs the barrage, which represented the climax of the preliminary bombardment, was observed to be beginning. Capt Hunter and Capt Pepper proceeded down the draw to observe the armour and specialized assault equipment moving forward. Besides the orthodox types of tanks, there were "Flails", "Crocodiles", A.Vs.R.E., all with their fluorescent panels (for identification from the air) glowing like red hot plates against the dull background. A tank officer enquired anxiously about minefields, but could not be satisfied. The armour lurched forward with all vehicles stripped for action - one tank still had a frying pan dangling from the back of the turret. An Air O.P. flew slowly overhead, and smoke shells continued to drop a short distance in front, as the deafening noise increased. Some enemy rounds dropped about 300 yards distant and personnel took cover, but the armoured advance went on without hesitation. There was an air of urgency and tense expectation evident everywhere as H-Hr approached.

(W.D., 2 Cdn Fd Hist Sec, 8 Feb 45: Appx 1, Diary of 2 Div Det).

56. The infantry attack which went in at 1030 hours was unique in that four divisions moved forward simultaneously on a six-mile front between the Nijmegen-Kranenburg-Cleve road and the River Maas near Mook. Prior to the attack this whole area was held by 2 Cdn Inf Div, while 3 Cdn Inf Div occupied the northern end of the front between the Nijmegen-Cleve road and the River Waal. On the previous day, these two divisions had come under command of 30 Corps which at the same time took over responsibility for the whole front east of Nijmegen. 15 (Scottish), 53 (Welsh) and 51 (Highland) Divisions had moved into the area immediately behind 2 Cdn Inf Div's front line which, in order to deceive the enemy, the Canadians continued to occupy with two brigades. When the attack opened, the British divisions simply passed through. 2 Cdn Inf Div's task was to clear a small triangle of territory south of the Nijmegen-Cleve road in the vicinity of Wyler, considered to be a corner stone in the enemy's first line, and to open two roads for the use of 15 (S) Div which would take over the sector, the Canadian division then going into reserve. (21 Army Gp Report, paras 64-65; AEF 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/I and C/F: Op Instr No. 12, 3 Feb 45, and Weekly Summary of Ops, 4-10 Feb 45; AEF 45/30 Corps/C/G: Map showing dispositions).

57. The assault went well all along the front, but made better progress on the left than on the right where opposition was stiffer. The infantry succeeded in following the artillery barrage very closely, to the surprise and consternation of the enemy. (21 Army Gp Report, para 65; First Cdn Army Int Summary, 11 Feb). 2 Cdn Inf Div, attacking with R. de Mais and Calg Highrs of 5 Cdn Inf Bde, supported by flails and A.Vs.R.E. from 79 Armd Div, encountered fairly light opposition and was the first to report its objectives reached. (AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/H, Docket V: Liaison Officers' Reports, 30 Corps, 8 Feb). Keeping right up to

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the line of the barrage, the two battalions attacked across country to cut the highway southeast of Wyler, thus surprising the enemy who, it appeared, had expected the main thrust along the obvious route along the road from Nijmegen through Bergendal (7459). With the help of grenades the first localities were cleaned out very quickly, but Schumines caused some casualties to the attackers. Den Heuvel (7756) and Hochstrasze (7956) southwest and southeast of Wyler were captured by R. de Mais, while Calg Highrs reached the Wyler-Kranenburg road and turned northwest to take Wyler itself from the rear. There was some delay but after stiff fighting, supported by artillery and 4.2-inch mortar fire, the village was finally reported cleared by 1830 hours. The sappers, working for some time without infantry protection, were delayed by thickly sown minefields, but had the roads in the area open by 2100 hours. All objectives had been seized and 315 prisoners taken at the cost of some 85 casualties. (Ibid.; AEF 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D: Account of Op "Veritable" by Brig W.J. Megill).

58. Meanwhile 15 (S) Inf Div, whose task was to break through the Siegfried Line north of the Forest, attacked with two brigades up on a very narrow front south of 5 Cdn Inf Bde and north of Groesbeek. According to 21 Army Group Report:

The attack of 15 (S) Inf Div went well throughout the day. Enemy opposition was not strong and our own casualties were light. The main obstacles to the advance were mines of all types and the ground. Flails cleared a gap through the minefield at 773553 on the Southern axis, but on the Northern axis were unable to operate owing to the soft ground. Here, however, the gun tanks found their own gap. By 1700 hours, Kranenburg and about 200 PW, were in our hands, and one bn had reached the Kranenburg-Hekkens road near Frasselt 8154.

(21 Army Gp Report, para 65; AEF 45/30Corps/C/I: Op Instr No. 47 - "Veritable" - 3 Feb 45).

59. 53 (W) Inf Div attacked with one brigade up on an even narrower front through Groesbeek to clear the ridge running through the northern part of the Reichswald. Entering the forest they secured their first objectives, the high ground south and southwest of Frasselt. Mines and the soggy nature of the terrain were the chief obstacles to the advance. "Though the Churchill gun tanks and bridge-layers managed to keep well up with the leading inf, the Flails and Crocodiles were immediately bogged down after crossing the start line, added to which, the Div axis from the vicinity of Groesbeek to the forest, soon showed signs of giving way." (Ibid.; L.O. Reports, 30 Corps, 8 Feb).

60. 51 (H) Div advanced on a one-brigade front on the right end of the line with the intention of clearing the western tip of the Reichswald and opening a route from Mook and Gennep to Goch. The Highlanders met stiff resistance, but by the afternoon had captured their first objective, the high ground (7952) in the southwestern corner of the Reichswald, and were swinging on to the Mook-Gennep road to the southeast. Mines and machine-gun fire were encountered but there was little enemy shelling; by

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evening the division had taken 150 prisoners and were still pushing forward. (Ibid.).

61. 3 Cdn Inf Div's role was somewhat different from that of the other divisions. Its H-Hour was not until the evening, six and a half hours later than the others, its front between the Nijmegen-Cleve highway and the river was considerably wider, and the ground over which it had to advance was practically covered with water. Earlier in the winter the Germans had breached the dyke between the Waal and these low fields and now a sudden rise in the level of the river had flooded the whole area. So high had the water risen that the Quer Dam, which ran northeast from the highway about a mile and a half above Wyler and which had been greatly weakened by digging, gave way and allowed the flood to extend as far east as the Siegfried defences. Thus the efficacy of the enemy anti-tank ditches, wire and mines were largely lost, the Canadians being able to float over them in their amphibians; of which 114 Buffaloes and 50 Weasels from 79 Armd Div were on hand. As the flooding came only a few days before the battle opened, it was necessary to make many extensive last-minute changes in the plans which had been made for operating with tanks on a hard surface. (AEF 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F and C/I: Report on Op "Veritable" by Hist Offr, and Op Order and amendment of 3 Feb 45).

62. The Division's task was to occupy the low-lying country up to the line of the railway running northeast from Cleve to Griethausen. The attack was made on a two-brigade front with 7 Cdn Inf Bde on the right and 8 Cdn Inf Bde on the left. The former brigade secured the Quer Dam with little opposition and by 2000 hours, Regina Rif had advanced as far as Zyfflich (7859) north of Wyler and taken 100 prisoners at the cost of a few casualties. 1 C. Scot R. took over the lead about midnight and attacked towards Niel (8160) in Buffaloes. The town was taken by morning despite opposition in which the battalion commander was wounded. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, in the face of rather more opposition, occupied the Zampol Dyke, which extended northeast from the Quer Dam, and entered the villages of Zampol (8062) and Leuth (8061), immediately southeast of the bend in the river. The advance was difficult and in places troops had to wade through water three feet deep. (Ibid.; AEF 45/7 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D: Report on Op "Veritable").

63. A notable feature of the division's advance was the tremendous smoke screen laid by four smoke companies under Army command. Since the sector was dominated by high ground on the other side of the Rhine, a continuous smoke screen was laid along the south bank. By the end of the operation a continuous line of smoke belched from some 85,000 generators which had been laid for a distance of 30,000 yards. 400,000 gallons of fog oil and 40,000 gallons of derv were used to produce the screen which was considered "a contributing factor in the success of the operation. Formations were more than satisfied." (AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/F: Report on Smoke Screens).

64. By midnight 8/9 Feb, the five assault divisions had all entered Germany, carried their objectives, taken over 1,200 prisoners and destroyed or decimated five of the eight enemy battalions engaged. Allied casualties had been light but the effect of flooding was serious for the water level on the left flank had risen eighteen inches during

the day and the Nijmegen-Cleve highway on its dyke was in jeopardy. (21 Army Gp Report, para 66). Discussing the enemy reaction, General Crerar points out that the resistance offered by their dazed and shaken troops "proved to be a lesser handicap than the appalling conditions of the ground". It was evident, he adds, that while the Germans had appreciated that concentrations for an attack had been taking place, they "had failed to anticipate at least its timing. A considerable measure of tactical surprise had been achieved." (Gen Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BATTLE

65. On the following day the rain started. 2 Cdn Inf Div having completed its task, the four divisions now left in the battle continued to advance against light opposition, but the going through the water-logged fields and narrow rides of the forest was heavy and progress limited. It became increasingly apparent that the main problems of the operation would be those of deployment and supply. (Personal Diary, Major W.E.C. Harrison, Hist Offr, First Cdn Army, Feb 45).

66. On the left flank, 3 Cdn Inf Div continued its amphibious operations, with 8 Cdn Inf Bde entering Millingen (8364) and reaching the bank of the Rhine and 7 Cdn Inf Bde occupying Mehr (8458) a few miles northwest of Kranenburg. The rising flood, however, caused further difficulties, for the brigades already on their objectives were now virtually cut off and for the greater part, only able to maintain their positions by keeping to the tops of the dykes. (Report of Hist Offr, 3 Cdn Inf Div).

67. Farther south 15 (S) Div advanced to pierce the Siegfried Line between Kranenburg and Nutterden, which village having been occupied and 250 prisoners taken, elements of the division advanced into the Forest to take the Materborn feature on the southwestern outskirts of Cleve. Patrols of 15 Recce Regt, however, were held up by stubborn enemy resistance and prevented from entering the town. (Ibid.; L.O. Reports, 30 Corps, 9 Feb 45; 21 Army Gp Report, paras 68-71).

68. Meanwhile, 53 (W) Div had made good progress into the Reichswald and occupied the high ground southwest of Materborn. But the divisional axis gave way completely and had to be closed for repair, all the divisional traffic being diverted to the already over-burdened axis of 15 (S) Div. The problem was further complicated by flooding on the highway from Nijmegen to Cleve. (Ibid.).

69. On the right flank 51 (H) Div met somewhat stiffer resistance, but occupied some high ground (7550) immediately west of the Reichswald, made progress along the southern fringe of the forest, to a point (827507) about a mile north of Hekkens, and cut the Mook-Gennep road (at 764489) to the south. Total prisoners on the Corps' front for the day were 2,500 as against 500 casualties of our own. (Ibid.).

70. Weather curtailed the air support for the second day's operations. Good use was made of the available hours, however, and several successful sorties were made against enemy communications north and east of the Rhine. The headquarters of 1 Para Army (A.1363) was among the targets successfully engaged. Closer to the front the villages of Till (E.9752), Calcar (A.0099) and Moyland (E.9652) were

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attacked through heavy cloud but no results were observed. Only three enemy aircraft were sighted in the air throughout the day. (First Cdn Army Int Summary, 9 Feb 45).

71. The enemy was in an unhappy situation. All but one of the battalions of 84 Div Group were either decimated or fully committed in action. As expected, 7 Para Div began to appear during the day, while aerial reconnaissance indicated that further reserves were being brought up from the south and the west.

Once the battle was joined, it became obvious that the control of First Para Army no longer rested solely with Schlemm. Berlin had taken an interest in the matter, and Schlemm merely became a receptacle for the passing of orders. The Reichswald battle from that time on was to become for Schlemm a nightmare of excuses, ontreaties and explanations. His first indication that he did not have a free hand came with the order that under no circumstances was any land between the Maas and the Rhine to be given up without the permission of Rundstedt, who would first ask Hitler. This prohibition on his freedom of movement considerably restricted Schlemm's plans. He realized that if the Allies once captured the west bank of the Rhine, his complete army would be trapped. His own plan was to build a series of lines facing north, between the Maas and the Rhine, and retire slowly from position to position exacting as heavy a price as possible for every loss of ground. These tactics were not permitted, however, and 86 Corps was ordered to stand where it was and not yield an inch. As a result the British troops broke through vital positions time after time, forcing Schlemm to make a hasty adjustment to the new situation. In addition a detailed explanation for each withdrawal had to be sent back.

(Special Interrogation Report: Gen Alfred Schlemm).

72. The third day's operations generally were rather disappointing owing to the very bad condition of the going, now aggravated by more rain and strong winds, and to stiffening opposition around Cleve. On the right 51 (H) Div, continuing to advance against fairly heavy resistance, occupied Ottersum (788465) and Zelderheide (813472) on the road between the strongly defended positions of Hekkens and Gennep. Patrols closed the gap between the Highlanders and 53 (W) Div which spent the day 'mopping up' on the high ground in the western part of the Forest. 15 (S) Div continued to meet strong resistance at Cleve and were only able to start clearing the town by midnight 10/11 Feb. Earlier in the day reconnaissance elements reached the Cleve-Goch road, only to be held up by enemy self-propelled guns (at 899534). (21 Army Gp Report, paras 72-74; L.O. Reports, 30 Corps, 10 Feb).

73. During the night 9/10 Feb, elements of 43 Inf Div, which had been concentrated at Nijmegen, began to pass through 15 (S) Div south of Cleve with the intention of capturing Goch, Udem and Weeze. They were held up, however, by confused and bitter fighting. In the lead, 129 Inf Bde Gp, within a mile southwest of Cleve, ran into heavy opposition, and, being forced into leaguer with all-round

protection, fought all day and through the following night. The situation was frequently tense. The second (214 Inf) brigade group and the divisional reconnaissance regiment, attempting to get out of the forest farther to the south, were pulled up in front of the village of Materborn, which the enemy held in strength. Owing to the appalling condition of the trackways and the frightful congestion of the traffic of two divisions, the third of the Wessex brigades (130 Inf Bde) was ordered to remain in Nijmegen. Seldom has a major battle been waged under such difficulties. (Ibid.).

74. Finally on the watery left flank, where the flood was still rising, 9 Cdn Inf Bde took the lead, the forward battalions being carried in Buffaloes. Considerable opposition was met from a system of trenches and fortified houses at Rindern (8858) less than two miles north of Cleve, where S.D. & G. Highrs were counter-attacked by paratroops. On the left, H.L.I. of C. ran into opposition at Duffelward (8760). By the end of the day the brigade held a line some 500 yards short of the Spoy Canal. (Ibid.; Report of Hist Offr, 3 Cdn Inf Div).

75. Advantage was taken of a short spell of fine weather to continue air activity against enemy targets immediately behind the fighting front, while on the other side of the Rhine numerous attacks were made on enemy communications. Only three enemy aircraft were seen in the Army area during the day. (First Cdn Army Int Summary, 10 Feb).

THE ATTACK SLOWS DOWN

76. The tempo of the attack slowed down during the next four days (11-14 Feb), but despite continuing bad weather the first phase of the operation was almost completed. Following a successful night crossing of the Niers, 51 (H) Div took the enemy's defences in the rear and captured Gennep early on 11 Feb. The Highlanders then advanced several miles along the highway to the south. On the same day the division also finally captured Hekkens after heavy fighting, and, operating in the southern part of the forest, crossed the Hekkens-Cleve road (reaching 849486). On 12 Feb, patrols reached the Niers opposite Kessel (8446) southwest of Hekkens and next day made contact in the forest with 53 (W) Div. On the night 13/14 Feb a fairly heavy counter-attack south of Gennep failed to make any penetration, and next day the Highlanders were in Hommersum (8244) on the frontier three miles southeast of Gennep, and succeeded in crossing the Niers in the vicinity of Kessel. (21 Army Gp Report, paras 77 and 80-84; L.O. Reports, 30 Corps, 11-13 Feb; AEF 45/ First Cdn Army/C/H: Army Sitrep 131730, and /C/G: Army Traces for 11-14 Feb).

77. In the face of extremely difficult conditions and sporadic but sometimes fierce opposition, 53 (W) Div succeeded in clearing most of the enemy remaining in the forest and reached the eastern fringe (905502) on 12 Feb. Northeast of the forest 43 Div began their drive south and southeast from Cleve towards Goch and Udem. Materborn was finally taken on the afternoon of 11 Feb in a set-piece attack with heavy fighting, and the village of Hau (9152) entered that night. One battalion reached the railway west of Bedburg (9352) early on the following morning and by

/afternoon

afternoon that place was also taken. The divisional reconnaissance regiment penetrating south of Hau (to 910509) were within half a mile of the forward troops of 53 (W) Div on 12 Feb. That afternoon the two divisions were counter-attacked by tanks and infantry from four battalions of 15 Pz Gren and 116 Pz Divs. These attacks, the main enemy effort to date, were repulsed with fairly heavy losses to both sides. By the evening of 13 Feb elements of 43 Div were in the vicinity of the northeast corner of Forst Cleve on the road to Udem. During the day enemy troops on their right flank in the Forest were successfully attacked by an air and artillery bombardment. On the following day the division was strongly but unsuccessfully counter-attacked and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. (Ibid.).

78. Meanwhile, 15 (S) Div completed the clearing of Cleve on 11 Feb, following a half-hearted counter-attack which involved the surrender of 179 dejected paratroopers, including five officers. The Scots handed over the town to the Canadians on the following day and sent a brigade group southeast towards Calcar. Progress was slow but by 13 Feb they were firmly established in Hasselt (9453) three miles beyond Cleve. (Ibid.; and First Cdn Army Int Summary, 11 Feb).

79. On the left, by 11 Feb, 3 Cdn Inf Div reached the Spoy Canal, with patrols on the Cleve-Griethausen railway, the final objective of Phase I. 9 Cdn Inf Bde captured Griethausen (9159) just northeast of Cleve. On 14 Feb, under cover of a smoke screen and artillery fire, elements crossed the Alter Rhein in Buffaloes and seized control of the ferry crossing at Hurendeich (9659) opposite Emmerich. At the same time 7 Cdn Recce Regt occupied Huisberden (9655) several miles to the south without opposition. 8 Cdn Inf Bde guarded the south bank of the Rhine. By the morning of 14 Feb the clearance of the Reichswald was reported complete. (Ibid.; Report of Hist Offr, 3 Cdn Ind Div; AEF 45/9 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D: Report on Operation "Veritable").

80. Despite the broken weather, the Tactical Air Force kept up its support with vigour and variety. Though air activity was initially impossible on 12 Feb, on the other days considerable success was achieved in attacks against enemy transport on road and rail. The towns of Kevelaer (9632), Sonsbeck (0535) and Hassum (8543) were all attacked to create "choke points" in the enemy's communications immediately behind the battlefront. "Winkling" was revived, and enemy positions were under constant fire from this form of controlled air attack. (First Cdn Army Int Summary, 12 and 13 Feb). The climax came on 14 Feb, the first fine day in the last six, compared by observers to those great days of the previous year when the Germans were caught in the Trun gap. In an area of not more than three hundred square miles there were over eight hundred fighter-bomber attacks. Between the rivers from Emmerich in the north to Krefeld in the south, through the hours of daylight a continuous stream of aircraft left nothing of the enemy safe upon the ground. (Ibid., 14 Feb 45).

81. While 84 Group concentrated on the battle area, 83 Group flew nearly nine hundred sorties over the nearer and farther approaches of the German system of communications. Of locomotives the two Groups claimed to have destroyed 25 and to have damaged 122, of railway wagons 79 and 601, of motor

/vehicles

vehicles 134 and 274. The destruction of the Wesel road bridge made it necessary for the enemy to go still farther south in order to cross the river. His retaliation in the air was almost negligible. (Ibid., 14-15 Feb 45).

82. Meanwhile, on his front along the Roer the enemy succeeded in holding up the offensive by Ninth US Army by destroying the flood gate of the Schammenauel dam. It appeared not to be his intention to demolish the dams completely nor to allow an uncontrollable tide to sweep down the Roer Valley, but rather to conserve and maintain the flood level over a comparatively long period of time. The effects of this action soon made themselves felt on the front of First Canadian Army. By thus limiting his immediate risks to the south, von Rundstedt was able for the time being to concentrate upon the operations developing on his north-eastern flank.

(Gen. Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr 45).

83. That General Schlemm's apprehensions were justified was now painfully apparent to the German high command:

With the increase of pressure from the forces under Canadian Army resulting in the piercing of the Siegfried Line, and the capture of Cleve E 95 and Gennep E 74, it was obvious that further reserves were needed. On the 10 Feb 16 Para Regt of 6 Para Div, which apparently had been one of Schlemm's reserves since early February, had been thrown in in front of Cleve but had not succeeded in preventing the loss of the town. The realization that all of 30 British Corps was now against them convinced Army Group this was not merely a holding action. As a result Schlemm was given 47 Panzer Corps, with its two armoured divisions, on the 12 Feb 45. This Corps took over from the Niers River to the Rhine and their first task was to recapture Cleve. Schlemm says he gave this order with his tongue in his cheek realizing that von Lutwitz with the forces available would be hardly likely to succeed in pulling this off. Chiefly the attack was designed to provide more time for the building of defenses south of the Reichswald which were soon to be most urgently needed. 86 Corps, responsible for the remainder of the Army front to the Maas, was merely to hold their positions and prevent an encirclement directed south-east. Permission was given to Straube of 86 Corps to fall back from time to time as the circumstances warranted. These withdrawals, of course, could only take place with the consent of higher authority. Schlemm was not happy about Straube whom he described as "langweilig" (a bore). He was anxious to get 2 Para Corps up into the battle, particularly because he valued the ability of its commander, Eugen Meindl, but this was not permitted at this stage.

In addition to 16 Para Regt, 7 Para Div, 15 Panzer Grenadier Division and 116 Panzer Division as reinforcements, Schlemm had also committed 655 Anti-tank Battalion with about 25 equipments of 7.5 cm or 8.8 cm calibre, two of his reserve parachute battalions

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called Hutz and Krahs, and two battalions of 346 Inf Div. These latter had come from Western Holland, and although Schlemm tried to get the complete division this force was all that was allotted to him. About the 13 Feb, 84 Inf Div which had received an intensive pummelling, was pulled out of the line for four days to be rested and reorganized and given some 700 reinforcements that Schlemm had been sent...

(Special Interrogation Report: Gen Alfred Schlemm).

ENTRY OF 2 CDN CORPS

84. With the forces under General Crerar's command standing well ahead of the first phase line, Gennep-Asperden-Cleve, on their right and left flanks, the time had come to bring 2 Cdn Corps into the battle. In the view of Lt-General Simonds the best possibility for its employment would have been in a surprise crossing of the Rhine west of Arnhem where the Germans were now very weak. Following an amphibious crossing of the river the Corps would then work up the right bank parallel to 30 Corps. But the Army Commander ruled out the plan, indicating that the main effort of the Army Group must be to clear the country between the rivers south of Cleve. (AEF 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/I: Appreciation by Corps Commander, 14 Feb; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 13 Feb). It had been necessary to hold the Corps in reserve in the early stages owing to the congested approaches, and the difficulty of anticipating the pace of our advance. It had not been thought possible to fight both Corps until Goch had been cleared, and the route from Gennep opened for the use of 30 Corps. The advance had progressed more slowly than had been hoped; 9 Feb had been forecast as the best possible date for the completion of Phase I, and now Goch still lay in the hands of the enemy. But on 14 Feb the Army Commander decided to hand the left sector over to Lt-General Simonds who assumed responsibility on the following day with 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs. It was intended that he should project his operations from Cleve towards Udem and Calcar, but owing to the flooded condition of the roads in the northern sector, 30 Corps' supply routes had to be used jointly by both Corps with resultant delay. (W.D., G. Ops, First Cdn Army, Feb 45: Appx 93: Appreciation of Take-over by 2 Cdn Corps 1 Feb; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 15 Feb; and Gen Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr).

85. The road originally opened by 2 Cdn Inf Div from Nijmegen to Cleve now being impassable owing to the flooding between Wyler and Kranenburg, a ferry service with nine ferries was organized to carry priority traffic across water sometimes between eight and ten feet in depth. Great care had to be taken in navigation to avoid hedges, fence posts and other underwater obstructions. (AEF 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/RCE/C/D: C.R.E. Account, 8 Feb to 12 Mar).

86. At the same time 52 (L) Div came under command of 30 Corps from Second Brit Army, took over the right sector of 51 (H) Div's front, and was directed towards Weeze (9337) while 51 (H) Div, following the capture of Asperden (16 Feb), was to attack Goch, if required, from the northeast. 53 (W) Div was ordered into reserve while 43 Div was to capture the

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high ground dominating Goch from the north. 15 (S) Div, which was fighting towards Moyland (9651) more than half way from Cleve to Calcar, was ordered to form a firm base for the operations of 2 Cdn Corps. The division was then to advance south through 43 Div and capture Goch. 3 Cdn Inf Div was to initiate these operations on 16 Feb, but on the following day it was to side-step on the Cleve-Udem axis, while 2 Cdn Inf Div was to carry on the attack towards Calcar. (AEF 45/30 Corps/C/I: Draft of 30 Corps Op Instr 48, 15 Feb 45).

87. After taking over the flank of the Maas, 52 (L) Div advanced several miles down the Gennep-Venlo highway and captured the village of Afferden (8038) during the night 16/17 Feb. Conditions here were similar to those facing the "Water Rats" of 3 Cdn Div along the Rhine, but since, unlike the Canadians, the Lowland Division was not equipped with amphibians, further advance for the time being was impossible. To the north 32 Gds Bde, recently under command of 51 (H) Div from Gds Armd Div, captured several villages south of the Niers and some four miles east of Goch on 16 and 17 Feb. Meanwhile, the engineers of 51 (H) Div, who had been slowed up by heavy shelling, mortaring and fog, completed a bridge across the Niers at Kessel by 1100 hours on 16 Feb. Work was also progressing on the still more important task of bridging the Maas at Gennep. It was hoped to have this crossing open for traffic by 18 Feb, but the speed and height of the river at that time delayed its use a further two days. Owing to the flood conditions along the banks this bridge reached the tremendous length of over four thousand feet. (21 Army Gp Report, paras 91, 92 and 176; Army Traces, 15-17 Feb; L.O. Reports, 30 Corps, 16-17 Feb).

88. Beyond the Reichswald the enemy continued to put up a more tenacious opposition. Southeast of the forest 53 (W) Div finally captured the site of the strongly defended Asper Bridge (888466) on 16 Feb after two days' and three nights' hard fighting. To the northeast of the forest, on the Cleve-Calcar axis, 15 (S) Div was temporarily withdrawn to rest on 15 Feb, leaving one brigade under command of 3 Cdn Inf Div in the Moyland Wood. (Ibid.).

89. In the centre and to the east of the Reichswald 43 Div continued to make slow but steady progress. On 14 Feb the division beat off strong counter-attacks intended to recapture the Eselsberg feature (9351) southeast of Bedburg and on the following two days 130 Inf Bde, advancing still farther to the south, was heavily opposed while attacking high ground of tactical importance east of the Forest of Cleve. This objective was eventually occupied, and in the afternoon of 16 Feb 214 Inf Bde passed through to fight bitterly for further objectives and to take more than 1,000 prisoners. On 17 Feb the brigade continued its advance and captured an escarpment less than two miles northeast of Goch, still **forcely** opposed. The enemy now withdrew from the Forest of Cleve which was completely outflanked. During the advance a carefully coordinated fire plan had prevented the Germans there from causing trouble.

This advance from North to South by 43 Inf Div had very considerable effect on the final outcome of the "Veritable" operation. They had advanced against sustained and heavy opposition some 10 miles with both

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flanks largely open to the enemy. They had successfully rolled up the German lay-back position and secured vital high ground necessary as a preliminary to the assault on the Goch bastion. They captured some 2,300 prisoners during this operation.

(21 Army Gp Report, para 91).

90. When 3 Cdn Inf Div reverted to the command of 2 Cdn Corps at midday on 15 Feb, its three brigades were widely dispersed. The bulk of 8 Cdn Inf Bde was guarding the Rhenish flank, with a reserve held back at Nijmegen; 9 Cdn Inf Bde were along the Kalflach Canal south of Emmerich and in the villages of Kellen and Griethausen - keeping above water as best they could; 7 Cdn Inf Bde were concentrated at Cleve where they had taken over from 15 (S) Div. 46 (S) Bde, temporarily under command of 3 Cdn Inf Div, was engaged in clearing Moyland Wood. This was a long narrow strip of woodland, composed mostly of trees too small to prevent the use of tanks, and covering an escarpment which ran for several miles south of and parallel to the Cleve-Calcar road, and about half way between the two towns. By 16 Feb the Scottish Brigade had won the north-western half, but further progress was prevented by continuous counter-attacks launched by two German battalions which were defending the area most strenuously. (Report of Hist Offr, 3 Cdn Inf Div; AEF 45/7 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D: Memorandum of Interviews). 7 Cdn Inf Bde was ordered to support this operation by attacking south of the wood early the same afternoon. Ensuing actions fought out in the course of three successive days failed to dislodge the defenders. "Resistance from the enemy never slackened. Counter-attacks, mortar, artillery fire and snipers prevented any further forward movement." (Ibid.).

91. Meanwhile, 2 Cdn Inf Div was moving up from Nijmegen, and since large-scale movement was impossible along the northern route, it was necessary to bring the division round by the Mook-Gennep-Hekkens road and through the Reichswald in order to reach an assembly area south and east of Cleve. That this meant crossing the supply lines of all the formations under command of 30 Corps at a time when most of them were heavily engaged north and west of Goch, is indicative of the difficulties involved. (AEF 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F: Weekly Summaries of Ops, 11-17 and 18-24 Feb).

92. On 19 Feb a three-way shuffle began. 2 Cdn Inf Div directed 4 Cdn Inf Bde to pass through 7 Cdn Inf Bde which was still fighting in a north-easterly direction towards Moyland, and to attack southeast towards the Goch-Calcar road. To the northwest, 5 Cdn Inf Bde began to relieve 46 (S) Bde in the Moyland Wood and along the Cleve-Calcar road. 6 Cdn Inf Bde remained in reserve near Bedburg (9352). (Ibid.; L.O. Reports, 2 Cdn Corps, 18-19 Feb; AEF 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/I: Intentions, 17-20 Feb). 7 Cdn Inf Bde remained in the Moyland Wood area while 9 Cdn Inf Bde was brought south to relieve 130 Inf Bde of 43 Inf Div on the Cleve-Udem road. Thus four brigades from 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs were completely interlocked. 130 Inf Bde was to cross over from west of Cleve to the water-logged left flank, between 20 and 22 Feb in order to enable 8 Cdn Inf Bde to replace 6 Cdn Inf Bde in the Bedburg area. The inter-corps boundary was changed to run along the northern edge of the Reichswald, through Materborn across the Cleve-Goch road near Hau and then southeast, leaving the Cleve-Bedburg-Udem road entirely to 2 Cdn Corps. (Ibid.; Army Trace, 19 Feb).

93. 4 Cdn Inf Bde's fight for the Goch-Calcar road was one of the most intense local actions of the whole operation. The final objectives were a few hundred yards from the road and several miles southwest of Calcar. The attack was to be made with R.H.L.I. on the left and Essex Scot on the right advancing in Kangaroos and supported by 10 Cdn Armd Regt and Tor Scot R. (M.G.). A barrage was fired by guns of ten field and six medium regiments lifting at tank pace, while the remaining guns and the 4.2-inch mortars of Tor Scot R. (M.G.) engaged known enemy positions on the high ground to the left and immediately in front of the attacking troops.

94. The attack went in at noon on 19 Feb and began well. Rain the previous night had further softened the already soggy ground, however, and some of the tanks and Kangaroos soon bogged down. (AEF 45/4 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D: Account by Brig. F.N. Cabeldu, "The Struggle for the Goch-Calcar Road."). By 1530 hours, despite the mud and the enemy's strong anti-tank defences, both battalions had battled through positions held by fresh paratroops backed up by elements of Panzer Lehr Division to within two hundred yards of their objective. (Ibid.). The enemy then began a series of furious counter-attacks which isolated and over-ran the forward companies and penetrated as far as the headquarters of both Essex Scot and R.H.L.I. (Ibid.; 2 Cdn Inf Div, Summary of Ops, 18-24 Feb). During the ensuing night the brigade was reinforced by Camerons of C. and the Corps Commander instructed the brigadier to "crack hard with artillery and everything that can be brought to bear" to put the enemy out again. A counter-attack by R. Regt C. supported by guns and tanks succeeded in restoring the situation.

95. The success of 4 Cdn Inf Bde in crossing the Calcar-Goch road greatly improved the position of 7 Cdn Inf Bde which was still struggling in the Moyland Wood, and on 21 Feb a final attempt was made to drive the enemy out. The divisional artillery, 4.2-inch mortars, anti-tank guns, and machine-guns saturated the enemy positions and 84 Group, R A.F., made use of the fair weather after a week of fog and rain to attack machine-gun and mortar positions, and seal off approach and escape routes. R. Wpg Rif, supported by tanks and flame throwers, attacked at 1000 hours, reached their objectives but suffered heavily from German artillery and mortar fire, their supporting tanks being frustrated by mines. Thereupon the enemy counter-attacked and only after a great loss of men was the position held and consolidated. It had taken a week's hard fighting to clear the Moyland Woods and open the way to Calcar. (Ibid.).

96. During the battle the grouping of the brigades in 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs was most involved but on 22 Feb they were shifted to bring the two divisions alongside one another, each on a brigade front. 130 Inf Bde of 43 Div relieved 8 Cdn Inf Bde and on 24 Feb 129 Inf Bde took over from 5 Cdn Inf Bde. (2 Cdn Inf Div Summary of Ops, 18-24 Feb; Report of Hist Offr, 3 Cdn Inf Div).

97. 3 Cdn Inf Div was brought together again on 22 Feb when 8 Cdn Inf Bde arrived in the vicinity of Bedburg after being relieved by 43 Div. (Report of Hist Offr, 3 Cdn Inf Div). Operation "Veritable" was now virtually concluded on 2 Cdn Corps' front but the final objectives had not yet been reached. It was decided, about 19 Feb, to plan and launch a separate operation (to be known as "Blockbuster")

to coincide with the third phase of the original plan.

THE CAPTURE OF GOCH

98. While the Canadians had been fighting towards Calcar, the British were fully engaged in the battle for Goch, a bulwark defended by elements of three divisions as well as a normal garrison. Two anti-tank ditches forming part of the defence works were reinforced by the obstacle of the Niers. To take the town, 30 Corps attacked with elements of two divisions supported by two more. (21 Army Gp Report, para 98).

99. During the night 17/18 Feb, 214 Inf Bde of 43 Inf Div had succeeded in making six gaps in the anti-tank ditch to the northeast and in crossing the road to Calcar. Opposition to their further advance was fierce and under orders they did not attempt to capture the town. On the same night patrols of 53 (W) Div, advancing south along the east bank of the Niers reached a factory (910445) in the northern outskirts. On the afternoon of the following day, 18 Feb, 44 Inf Bde of 15 (S) Div, attacking from the northwest, reached the Niers and captured a bridge across it (at 904441). By midnight they also had entered the northern outskirts and despite heavy opposition from machine-gun emplacements, had erected a bridge across the anti-tank ditch (at 915443). At the same time 51 (H) Div made good progress in their sector and got a fascine bridge over another anti-tank ditch in the way of their advance (at 901444). Early the following morning, the forward brigades of 53 (W) Div moved south to clear up the northern outskirts of the town between the Niers and the railway, thus protecting 15 (S) Div's right flank.

100. During 19 Feb, 15 (S) Div cleaned up the northern part of the town and by nightfall were firmly established in the area north and east of the river. They had taken six hundred prisoners and made contact with 51 (H) Div at the one remaining bridge (904441). For the next three days, however, confused fighting continued in the southern half of the town and in the country to the south and west. Although the Highlanders had captured the garrison commander and his staff on the second day, the enemy fought a bitter house-to-house battle, supported strongly by artillery and mortars. 51 (H) Div finally stifled the opposition by the evening of 21 Feb. (Ibid.: para 99; L.O. Reports, 30 Corps, 18-22 Feb; First Cdn Army Sitreps, 18-22 Feb).

101. On the Maas sector 52 (L) Div slowly cleared the wooded area around Afferden but their attempts to break out to the south were foiled by the floods and by strong opposition. In the gap between 52 (L) Div and 51 (H) Div, 32 Gds Bde fought a hard action on 21 Feb in an effort to straighten out the line between Afferden and Goch, but very heavy shelling, mortaring, machine-gun fire and the bad state of the ground prevented most of the supporting armour from getting forward. The attacking troops were finally forced to withdraw. (21 Army Gp Report, para 100; L.O. Reports 18-22 Feb).

102. Following the capture of Goch, 53 (W) Div were withdrawn to rest and refit. Meanwhile, 43 Div had been working eastwards along the Goch-Calcar road where they linked

up on 20 Feb with 3 Cdn Inf Div. Relieved in this sector by 15 (S) Div, they returned to the Cleve area where they came under command of 2 Cdn Corps on 22 Feb and eventually took over the Corps' left flank. 15 (S) Div continued to advance south towards Weeze (9337) and southeast towards Udem (9842), towns respectively four and five miles south and east of Goch. (Ibid.).

103. The main drive towards Weeze, however, was entrusted to 53 (W) Div which advanced astride the highway running south from Goch. The attack was launched on 24 Feb supported by all available artillery, 8 Armd Bde and selections from the assault vehicles of 79 Armd Div. Though the enemy resisted strongly, by the afternoon the leading troops were about half a mile north of the town. The Germans then put in a succession of counter-attacks causing us heavy losses in tanks. The business of clearing the woods west of the town went on and some three hundred prisoners were taken, but since it was obvious that the main objective could not be carried without further heavy fighting and all the artillery of 30 Corps was required by 2 Corps for the forthcoming assault upon the defences of the Hochwald, our immediate designs on Weeze were put aside. (21 Army Gp Report, para 108).

104. Meanwhile 15 (S) Div which had been protecting the left flank of 53 (W) Div was relieved by 3 (Brit) Inf Div, and Gds Armd Div took over the northern part of the sector up to the Corps boundary. Towards the Maas, 51 (H) Div carried out some successful small-scale operations with the intention of linking up with 52 (L) Div on their right and 53 (W) Div on their left. (Ibid.: para 107).

THE OFFENSIVE OF NINTH U.S. ARMY OPENS

105. The most exciting news between the fall of Goch and the opening of our attack on the Hochwald came from Ninth U.S. Army which on 23 Feb began the long-deferred, converging offensive north-eastwards across the Roer. As the enemy had been forced to denude this front to meet the menace in the Reichswald, there was little opposition to the establishment of the bridgehead, which was prepared by an artillery bombardment lasting only forty-five minutes. This great event, which had so powerful a bearing on our fortunes in the hard battles between the rivers, was the occasion of the following personal message from the Commander of 30 Brit Corps to all the troops under his command.

You have now successfully completed the first part of your task. You have taken approximately 12,000 prisoners of war and killed large numbers of Germans. You have broken through the Siegfried Line and drawn on to yourselves the bulk of the German reserves in the West. A strong US offensive was launched over the Roer at 0330 hours this morning (23 Feb) against positions which, thanks to your efforts, are lightly held by the Germans. Our offensive has made the situation most favourable for our Allies and greatly increased their prospects of success. Thank you for what you have done so well. If we continue our efforts for a few more days the German front is bound to crack.

(Ibid.: para 111; Personal Diary, Maj W.E.C. Harrison, 23 Feb).

106. The unhappiness of the enemy's situation was thus appreciated by our Intelligence:

The arrival of even part of Panzer Lehr Division is the best indication yet received of the gravity of the enemy situation in the present battle. It is also a measure of the value attached to the high ground between Udem and Calcar...

Surprised by the timing and weight and success of our initial attack, the enemy has been bringing up literally every formation he could seize on. These have been flung into battle on arrival. Many of them have quickly wasted away. His assets have been the number of battalions he has felt free to commit, the desperate determination of many of his troops, his tenacity in maintaining a line and plugging any holes in it, his gradual increase in heavy weapons, the bad flying weather and his apparently satisfactory local administrative picture. His liabilities have been the lack of training of many of his troops and formations, the disorder of his channels of command, the wasting away of his battalions in vain or costly counter attacks, and his delay in delivering new formations to the front.

But the greatest adverse feature of his position is the weakness he is creating to the South. Cologne and Düsseldorf are greater prizes than Calcar and Udem, and the Ruhr of more value than the Hochwald. Opposite the Cologne plain, too, our potential force far exceeds what can be maintained by the waterways of the Reichswald.

(First Cdn Army Int Summary, 20 Feb).

107. Though air support during this period was still restricted by bad weather, the most was made of the occasional break in the clouds. On 16, 21 and 22 Feb many sorties were flown against battle targets, the towns immediately behind the front and the enemy's lines of communication on either side of the Rhine. Wesel and its railway bridge were especial targets of R.A.F. Bomber Command and VIII U.S. A.A.F., but despite two more heavy attacks the bridge still stood. Closer to the front Typhoons and Spitfires in support of 52 (L) Div made a spectacular attack on Kastel Blijenbeek, an ancient fort so strongly built that artillery fire had made little impression on it. Air attacks on two successive days were required before it was finally reduced. Only on 21 Feb was there any German Air Force activity. (Ibid., 15-23 Feb; 21 Army Gp Report, paras 103, 104 and 113).

CONCLUSION

108. Although "Veritable" was not completed as quickly as had been hoped, it was a successful operation as far as it went. The infantry divisions engaged, after more than a fortnight's hard and prolonged fighting, had performed by far the most important of their peculiar functions in battle, having attacked, penetrated and broken through an area of the enemy's main defence. The variables turned against the attackers from the start, the superiority of our resources, including our armour, being thereby reduced and the bonus of our air support curtailed; the enemy made good use of the

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consequent slowing up of the offensive. This had entailed much hard fighting and made great demands upon the stamina, fortitude and endurance of all ranks and of all arms. Losses were not light. Momentum was kept up, however, practically to the second phase-line of the original plan through Weeze, Udem, Calcar and Emmerich. But before this was reached, it had become obvious that a pause was necessary to mount a deliberate operation against the very strong rearward defences which blocked our way to the crossings over the Rhine.

109. Morale among the troops remained high.

A strong note of resolute effort was apparent throughout the mail and writers expressed satisfaction at being participants in "total and final war" against Nazi Germany. The spirit of troops was evident in the frequently-quoted slogan: "Conquerors not liberators".

Complete confidence was shown in the present offensive. The going was tough and conditions were sometimes said to be "almost impossible". Writers stated, however, that morale could not be higher. Signs of war strain were occasionally seen. Even here, troops were grimly determined to "see it through", and were convinced that they were dealing the "final K.O."

Writers occasionally stated that they were encountering good quality troops: for the most part enemy forces were felt to be much inferior to those met in Normandy. Several units referred to the capture of women in sniper's uniforms. The unsoldierly appearance of the Volkssturm was often mentioned. Little pity was expressed for German civilians. Many houses were said to be equipped with bomb-proof cellars and well stocked with food.

(21 Army Group Censorship Reports).

110. It may be added that the disposition of so considerable a force under the command of First Canadian Army was a further example of the flexibility inherent in the arrangements of the 21st Army Group and the Allied Expeditionary Force as a whole. As on previous occasions throughout the campaign, a vast scheme of regrouping was carried out and formations committed according to the tactical and strategic requirements of the situation, and with the maximum of efficiency, loyalty, and good will among all concerned.

(Gen. Crerar's Despatch, 5 Apr).

In itself this was a co-operative achievement of great historical importance.

With the exception of the minimum numbers of divisions required to hold the West bank of the River Meuse from Mook to the inter-army boundary with Ninth US Army near Roermond, all the fighting strength of the British Empire in

North West Europe was under General Crerar's command. In addition, there were the Poles and other Allied contingents. In all, the ration strength exceeded 470,000.

The flexibility, cohesion, and unity of the forces of the Empire was well and truly demonstrated in these arrangements, and speaks volumes for the advantages which accrue from the policy of uniformity in organization, training, and equipment throughout the Empire. That so great a force was placed under General Crerar's command, in circumstances of such vital importance, was a great tribute to him as a commander.

(AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/F, Docket II: Lecture by Brig. C.C. Mann).

111. General Crerar was fully alive to the implications of the trust imposed upon him, not excluding a fair apportionment of credit for the troops under his command according to the effort and the sacrifice of battle. To this end his remarks to the war correspondents on the eve of the assault were explicit:

... The requirements placed upon Army Headquarters and on its thousands of Army Troops had been heavy and the General believed that the results would indicate that the tasks allotted had been carried out with ability, and that the formations would fight with every conceivable circumstances in their favour and with every requisite of a sound plan completed in good time. If, by their own observations, the correspondents were to find this to be true, he trusted that they would give credit to the Canadian Army staff, services and troops, who individually and collectively had worked so hard, intelligently and effectively.

General Crerar then referred to one of the most interesting and significant features of the Army's history during the campaign so far, and which now had reached a notable climax. While in the past, owing to the absence of 1st Canadian Corps in Italy, the First Canadian Army had usually been only about one-half "Canadian" in its composition, in "Veritable", the Canadian proportion taking part in the initial phase would be nearer to one-quarter of the total strength. It followed as a matter of great importance that proper recognition to English, Scottish and Welsh formations, including the ubiquitous and unique 79th Armoured Division, to which we all owed so much, as well as the Canadian component, should be given within the limits imposed by security and censorship.

(Personal Diary, Maj W.E.C. Harrison, 7 Feb).

112. Unfortunately these limits, and those of the Press itself, were too restricted for General Crerar's careful briefing to take effect in the newspapers either in Britain or Canada. As the General had surmised, it was hardly to be expected that the public would be very well instructed in the technique of grouping formations, the tactical employment of corps and armies, nor in the functions of

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command. That the facts of the situation were rehearsed in detail twice daily at Canadian Army Headquarters by a senior staff officer for the benefit of war correspondents seated before a large-scale battle-map made no difference. In the United Kingdom there was considerable speculation as to what had happened to Second British Army and some disappointment that its soldiers did not appear to such advantage in the news as their kinsmen and allies from North America. As the case was expressed in an ill-informed leader in the Daily Telegraph of 6 Mar: /

There have been many occasions during the war when the part played by United Kingdom troops in great events has received less than its fair share of publicity, but in the present victorious assault on the Rhineland it is suffering something not far short of a total blackout. From the daily despatches it might be supposed that the only troops engaged in this campaign were Canadians and Americans ... but no mention of British troops occurs at all. Admiration is due in full measure for the exploits of the Canadians and Americans, but "First Canadian Army" has become a misleading title. This Army, as our Military Correspondent points out in these columns to-day, is composed as to 80 per cent of British and only as to 20 per cent of Canadian troops, but no official cognisance has been taken of this fact. To the world at large a phrase like "the Canadian First Army front" naturally conveys the impression that it is composed exclusively of Canadians.

As the operation was then four weeks old, the information given out to such "military" correspondents by General Crerar on 7 Feb and enlarged upon at the morning and evening press conferences throughout the fighting took an unconscionable time in reaching Fleet Street. That the heroism of the Reichswald was inaccurately reported is lamentable; resultant editorial petulance can be fully understood; but the statement that "no official cognisance" had been taken is untrue. A month later the situation was simplified for the reporters by the arrival of 1 Cdn Corps from Italy. For the closing phases of the campaign east of the Rhine and west of the Ijssel, First Cdn Army became for the first time predominantly "Canadian". Among the fighting men, however, these matters were better understood.

113. This report was prepared by Captain J.B. Conacher, R.C. Sigs, and edited by Lt-Colonel W.E.C. Harrison, O.B.E., General List.

for R.C. Harrison List
(C.P. Stacey) Colonel
Director Historical Section

APPENDIX "A"

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OPERATION "VERITABLE" FEBRUARY 1945

SCALE
MILES 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 MILES

SOURCES: AS INDICATED IN THE TEXT
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