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Operation "BLOCKBUSTER": The Canadian
Offensive West of the Rhine, 26 Feb -
23 Mar 45 (Preliminary Report)

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HISTORICAL SECTION

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Operation "BLOCKBUSTER": The Canadian
Offensive West of the Rhine, 26 Feb -
23 Mar 45 (Preliminary Report)

Reference Maps: G.S.G.S. 4414, Germany 1/25000, 4202-4,
4302-5, 4402-5.

1. The present report describes the planning and execution of the operation by 2 Cdn Corps during late February and early March 1945 to break through the strong German defences west of the Rhine in the Hochwald area. It forms a sequel to Report No. 155 (Operation "VERITABLE": The Winter Offensive between the Maas and the Rhine, 8 - 25 Feb 45).

2. Operation "VERITABLE" had not progressed as favourably as had been previously hoped. Bad weather and stiff resistance had hampered the offensive, which, as such, was virtually concluded with the final objectives yet to be reached. The momentum had been kept up almost to the second phase of the original plan before it became obvious that the strong "lay back" defences which blocked the way to the Rhine were, in turn, covered by a series of well sited positions to the west. A separate operation was clearly necessary and General Crerar decided to launch it with all speed (Report No. 155, para 97). Thus, on or about 19 Feb, in keeping with the G.O.C.-in-C's intention to transfer the weight of First Canadian Army's effort to the left, Lt-Gen G.G. Simonds began to plan the new attack. The operation was to be known as "BLOCKBUSTER" and H Hour was set at 0430 hours 26 Feb (AEF 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/F: Weekly Summary of Ops and Activities, 2 Cdn Corps, 18 - 24 Feb 45, para 2).

OBJECT AND PROBLEMS

3. The object of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" was to seize the high ground south of Calcar and Udem and then to exploit through the enemy's positions towards Xanten and Wesel (AEF 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/I, Docket II: Serial 2, Op "BLOCKBUSTER" Outline Plan). Taking meaning from these words, it was, in fact, Phases II and III of Operation "VERITABLE", i.e., "The breaching of the enemy's second defensive system east and south-east of the Reichswald and the capture of the localities Weeze - Udem - Calcar and the securing of the communications between them;" to be followed by "The Breakthrough of the Hochwald lay back defence lines and the advance to secure the general line Geldern - Xanten", as originally outlined by General Crerar in his operational directive of 25 Jan 45 (G.O.C.-in-C., 1-0-4/1: Operational Directive to Lt-Gen G.G. Simonds and Lt-Gen B.G. Horrocks, 25 Jan 45).

4. Of all the problems which faced Lt-Gen Simonds in his planning, one stood out. In order to carry out his part of the operation as laid down by the G.O.C.-in-C., he must have a route through which the momentum of the attack

could be fully maintained to its successful conclusion. The choice of these routes was limited, the first being in the north - the Moyland - Calcar - Xanten road. This route, however, was, according to intelligence and air photographs, too cratered and would therefore require too much time to develop. Apart from this, deployment, especially to the left of the road, was limited because of flooding. Finally, to the enemy this route would be the obvious one to choose. The second choice was the line of the railway from Goch to Xanten. This was reported to be a well-founded embankment, free of mines, and so far as air reconnaissance could show, untouched by demolition. The third and last route was the Goch - Kervenheim - Sonsbeck road, a good road, but in the 30 Corps area for the general plan and therefore liable to become too congested; further, from the direction of Udem the approaches were too narrow and unfit for heavy traffic. Lt-Gen Simonds, appreciating the relative value of each route decided to use the line of the railway, from which his Engineers would rip up the track and improve the road bed to the required standard as the attack moved forward.

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

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

When the ridge south of Calcar and east of Udem was captured it would be possible to strike again to the east, capture the Hochwald position, and at the same time secure the proposed maintenance route through which General Simonds intended to accomplish the high level object of the operation. (AEF 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/F, Docket III: Memo of Interview with Lt-Gen G.G. Simonds by Maj P.A. Mayer, 17 Dec 46)

GENERAL SITUATION

6. Meanwhile, as 2 Cdn Corps planned and regrouped itself for the coming offensive, on 23 Feb, Ninth U.S. Army to the south launched its long delayed operation "GRENADE" and swept

across the Roer River between Roermond and Julich. By the afternoon of 24 Feb 22 battalions had crossed the water barrier and some 11 bridges of various types were established over the river. The build-up on this front proceeded at a fast pace and by 26 Feb the line Oberembt (F1363) - Opherten (0868) - Holzweiler (0673) - Venrath (0477) and Erkelenz (0177) had been reached by XIX and XIII U.S. Corps, while XVI U.S. Corps, the left flank formation, had seized Gladbach (9376). So far 5800 prisoners had been taken in this operation, which had originally been scheduled to coincide with the offensive by First Canadian Army 13 days earlier. Yet, as General Crerar stated later:

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

(AEF 45/21 Army Gp/C/F,
Docket III: "Operation
Veritable", 8 Feb - 10 Mar 45,
paras 111, 112)

7. In the area between 2 Cdn Corps and the Ninth Army's offensive, 30 Brit Corps, under Lt-Gen Horrocks, was thrusting south and east from its zig-zag line beyond the battered town of Goch. While on the extreme right in positions bordering the Maas River 52 (L.) Div attempted to advance eastwards across the front held by 32 Gds Bde, 51 (H.) Div struck south-westwards from Goch to link up with them, at the same time keeping pace with 53 (W.) Div who were attacking Weeze. On the left of 53 (W.) Div, 15 (S.) Div made steady but small gains towards the road joining Cleve and Udem. Other forces from Gds Armd Div filled in the gap between 13 (S.) Div and 9 Cdn Inf Bde some 3000 yards north-west of Keppeln. The task of capturing Weeze, however, was not easy. The initial assault by 160 Bde which began at 0600 hours 24 Feb met extremely strong opposition, although by nightfall Houenhof (9241) and Host (9340) were clear and a foothold had been obtained in Rottum (9339). Finally, in view of the heavy counter-attacks and large losses in tanks, it became clear that there was little chance of breaking through from the north, and 53 (W.) Div was ordered to contain the objective. Lt-Gen Horrocks now ordered 53 (W.) Div not to try to enter the town until the local situation had eased off, for the time was ripe for Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" to commence and artillery of 30 Brit Corps would not be available, the attack by 2 Cdn Corps having priority in regards fire support. And so the drive on Weeze was halted temporarily some 2000 yards short of the town. (Ibid, paras 107, 108).

8. As D Day for "BLOCKBUSTER" approached, the enemy's situation began to clear itself. On 24 Feb the most significant feature was the resistance to our attacks at Weeze and the continued absence of whatever remained of 116 Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div. This, with the increased activity and gun strength sited in the Hochwald and south of it might well mean that forces had been collected to hold the Hochwald hinge, which was now as vital to the enemy's line on our front as the Caen hinge had been six months ago in Normandy. The German reaction to 53 (W.) Div's progress towards Weeze now offered excellent

opportunity for the Canadian attacks between Calcar and Udem. If the enemy should counter-attack or reinforce Weeze from the east, the right flank of his forces so employed would be vulnerable to any thrust south from Udem. On the other hand, if he did not take such action he risked the quick loss of Weeze and subsequent exposure to our exploitation southwards towards the rapidly advancing Ninth U.S. Army. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 239, 24 Feb 45, para 6). However, by 0600 hours 25 Feb the enemy seemed to have once again balanced himself by hurriedly gathering any such odd units as were available, for his ranks in the many once proud formations were sadly depleted and suffering from the bitter encounters of the past two weeks. The bulk of 6 Para Div remained in the Calcar region, and elements of 346 Div and the Pz Lehr Div lurked in attendance with 116 Pz Div north of Marienbaum. It was suspected that 84 Div would be responsible for the actual "lay back" defences in the Hochwald, while 15 Pz Gr Div and odd units of 8 Para Div guarded the south-western approaches to Xanten. The area of Weeze, which 53 (W.) Div was at present containing, was held by 7 Para Div with some assortments from 2 Para Div. At Afferden, 52 (L.) Div was confronted by 180 Div, together with some members of 190 Div, the bulk of which remained presumably, in reserve near Geldern. (4/Sum C.I.G.S./2/6, C.I.G.S. Summary No. 265, Map "A", 25 Feb 45)

9. The ground over which the Canadian Army was to advance beyond the line of Moyland, Calcar, Udem and Weeze was of a varied nature. Directly east of Moyland a long flat plain stretches to the south-east following the west bank of the River Rhine to Xanten. The first ridge which would be encountered began south of Calcar, continues in the shape of a drawn bow to the eastern outskirts of Udem, then crosses the railway to the Gochfort feature (9939) north of Kervenheim (9938). Between Kervenheim and Weeze lie well watered farmlands bound in by the Muhlen Fleuth and the Niers Rivers. Forestation is plentiful and especially thick south of Weeze whence the Canadian line turned in a northerly direction across the low-lying fields towards Siebengewald and on to the east bank of the Maas River near Afferden. East of the Calcar - Udem escarpment there exists an arable valley which starts from the Hoheley south of Appeldorn (0447) and winds thinly to the south through Udemerbruch and on again towards the areas north of Winnekendonk and Kapellen. Beyond to the east lies the vast greenness of the Hochwald Forest covering the quickly rising ridge which takes shape south of Marienbaum and stretches south-west to the line of the railway, where a small gap separates it from the lesser Balbergerwald. From here the high ground continues and turns slightly east to end north-east of Sonsbeck (0635). From the line of the large forests towards Veen and Winnenthal on to the banks of the Rhine, innumerable farms dot the landscape, which is almost unbroken in its regular plain by such minor high features as the water-bound wood between the gap on the Hochwald feature on Xanten, the Staats Forst Xanten west of Birten (1328), the Birkenkamp south of Winnenthal (1335) and the large wood north of Veen (1135). The section of land to the south, which includes such towns as Wallach (1933), Alpon (1531) and Bonninghardt (1231), begins east of Kapellen with a series of large forest areas. As these extend eastwards the vegetation gradually thins out and the ground becomes open and liable to flooding. It was against this choice background that the Hochwald "lay back" defence line had been placed.

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

THE REGROUPING AND PLAN

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

30 Brit Corps (Lt-Gen B.G. Horrocks)

Gds Armd Div
6 Gds Armd Bde
8 Armd Bde
34 Armd Bde
3 Brit Div
15 (S.) Inf Div (who came into army reserve on relief by 3 Brit Div on 26 Feb)
51 (H.) Inf Div
52 (L.) Inf Div
53 (W.) Inf Div

2 Cdn Corps (Lt-Gen G.G. Simonds)

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

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

12. "BLOCKBUSTER" was to be carried out in four phases. In the first phase, 2 Cdn Inf Div would attack at H Hour with two regiments of 2 Cdn Armd Bde travelling at tank speed and would seize the high ground and escarpment south

of Calcar. The main weight of the assault was to be carried out by 6 Cdn Inf Bde with a supporting attack by 5 Cdn Inf Bde in order to broaden the base. At the same time, on the right, one battalion of 8 Cdn Inf Bde with one armoured squadron moving at infantry pace would position itself astride the road Calcar - Udem in the area of square 9845. At the conclusion of this phase it was appreciated that 4 Cdn Inf Bde would be pinched out. The second phase would commence with the two remaining battalions of 8 Cdn Inf Bde attacking on the right to capture the line of the road from the junction south-west of Sportpl to inclusive Keppeln (9844). Coinciding with this attack, 4 Cdn Armd Div's armoured brigade battle group, consisting of two infantry battalions and two armoured regiments, would then push south between 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs to establish themselves in the line exclusive Keppeln to the road near Husmannshof.

13. Phase III would then be put into operation at a time to be decided by divisional commanders concerned. 3 Cdn Inf Div was to pass 9 Cdn Inf Bde through to assault Udem. 4 Cdn Armd Div would strike south again to seize the high ground directly north-east of Udem, while 4 Cdn Inf Bde cut in behind 6 Cdn Inf Bde's area to take over the ground vacated by 4 Cdn Armd Div's battle group. 11 Armd Div would now come into the battle picture west of Udem by moving forward, conforming with 9 Cdn Inf Bde's progress and would be in readiness to commit itself to the fourth phase. The last phase called for 11 Armd Div to by-pass Udem to the south-west and advance on the axis Udem - Sonsbeck (0535) and the high ground immediately north-east of Sonsbeck, leaving a firm base on the Gochfort feature (0040 - 0039). 3 Cdn Inf Div would then follow up the advance of 11 Armd Div by leap-frogging brigades by battalions along the line of the River Grosse Ley, the object being eventually to relieve 11 Armd Div at Sonsbeck. Simultaneously, the infantry brigade battle group from 4 Cdn Armd Div would go forward over the ridge east of Udem and seize positions astride the railway line (0340 - 0440) in the region of the gap between the Hochwald and Balbergerwald. At this time 2 Cdn Inf Div, while retaining one brigade on the hills south of Calcar and one on 4 Bde's objective for Phase II would pass its third brigade through to relieve the elements of 4 Armd Div holding the high ground east of Udem, who would exploit eastwards across the valley. On the northern flank, which 43 (W.) Div was to protect, 214 Inf Bde was to relieve one of 2 Cdn Inf Div's brigades on the Calcar feature on the afternoon of D Day.

14. No firm forecast was possible regarding exploitation, but three alternatives were suggested. The first would have 4 Cdn Armd Div directed on Xanten, and 11 Armd Div on Menzelen (1626) and the Wesel crossing places; a second possibility was that both armoured formations could be thrown forward to Xanten, with 11 Armd Div then turning south-east towards Menzelen; lastly, if 4 Cdn Armd Div was held up after the fourth phase, 11 Armd Div would be directed towards Xanten while the Canadian armour cut across its rear and struck for Menzelen as opportunity offered.

15. While Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" was being carried out, the Ninth U.S. Army was to continue its drive from the south and 30 Corps would exert every means to advance southwards to make contact with the American formations. 30 Corps' attack was to be in the form of a subsidiary operation. 53 (W.) Div would attempt on 24 Feb to capture Veeze and the high ground to the south-east. On 26 Feb 3 Brit Div would

advance on Kervenheim and Winnekendonk, and if the progress presented a favourable opportunity, Gds Armd Div might be pushed through.

16. A gigantic artillery programme was to back up the operation. For the first phase a barrage of twelve field regiments, six medium and three heavy regiments, moving at tank pace, would be fired, while the effort by 3 Cdn Inf Div would go in behind a similar shoot from seven field regiments and two medium at infantry pace. During the second and third phases, six field regiments, four medium and one 4.5 regiment was to provide the bombardment for the advance of 4 Cdn Armd Div and concentrations would be available on call if any enemy were still active between 2 Cdn Inf Div's forward positions and 4 Cdn Armd Div's start line. For 3 Cdn Inf Div, the barrage would consist of nine field regiments and six heavy batteries at infantry pace with extra concentrations on call should the enemy's guns at Udem interfere. For the further advance of the armoured divisions in Phase IV, each division was to have the support of three field regiments and five medium regiments. The counter-battery resources throughout the attack comprised twelve medium regiments, two 155mm batteries, one H.A.A. regiment and six batteries of 7.2-in howitzers. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, February 1945: Appx BB-JJ, No. 114: Op "BLOCKBUSTER": Outline Plan, paras 1 - 4, 24 Feb 45)

17. The proposed air plan in direct support of the operation consisted of 24 specified targets in the path of the advance. Eighteen of these were for fighter bombers; the remainder for medium bombers. They covered German strong-points and forward communication lines and were fitted into a programme which provided for the delivery of timed attacks and the furnishing of aerial support on call. (AEF 45/2 Cdn Corps/S/H, Docket II: Trace of Proposed Air Plan of "BLOCKBUSTER")

18. Up until 26 Feb our air forces had so far been faced with bad weather conditions. No flying had been possible on 23 Feb. On 24 Feb, medium and heavy bombers of No. 2 Group, R.A.F., attacked Rheinberg with 43 aircraft while an additional 45 planes rained down their loads on Rees. On that day Eighth U.S.A.A.F. also sent out 70 aircraft to destroy the brigade at Wesel, but without success. 25 Feb was again a day of small air effort, and close support was almost impossible, though a few pre-arranged targets were successfully dealt with, and an enemy counter-attack which was seen to be forming up north of Weeze was completely smashed by rocket-firing Typhoons. Hence it became the object of honest prayer on all levels that the weather would clear for the 2 Cdn Corps operation. (AEF 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Operation "VERITABLE", paras 113, 114)

19. By the evening of 25 Feb, the considerable regrouping which the plan entailed had been accomplished. The two Canadian divisions had changed over, putting 3 Cdn Inf Div on the right and 2 Cdn Inf Div on the left, each with one brigade up. 4 Cdn Armd Div had already moved into the area of Cleeve, and 11 Armd Div was moving towards the north-eastern edge of the Reichswald Forest. On a lower level "A" and "B" Sqns of 10 Cdn Armd Regt were withdrawn to refit, and "C" Sqn took over the counter-attack role with 4 Cdn Inf Bde who held the forward positions of 2 Cdn Inf Div. 27 Cdn Armd Regt now reverted to brigade command from 3 Cdn Inf Div and 6 Cdn Armd Regt went under command that division with one squadron forward with 9 Cdn Inf Bde. (AEF 45/2 Cdn Armd Bde/

C/F: Report on Ops by 2 Cdn Armd Bde, Op "BLOCKBUSTER", para 2). Everything was now ready for the battle. At the southern extremity bordering the Maas River near Afferden (8038), 52 (L.) Div faced south and west across the river to positions held by the British Second Army. 156, 155 and 157 Bdes lined the river in that order from the area of Zwarte Heide (8041) to Rempeld (8238). The Lowlanders' line ran north from here along the edge of the Broedersbosch Woods towards Heikemp (8340), thence eastwards in a backward curve towards Vrij (8541) and Schanz (8641) where 32 Gds Armd Bde held its ground. Further to the west, 51 (H.) Div controlled the areas of Boeckelt (8842), Gaesdonk (8840) and Hulm (9040) with outposts running south to Boyenhof (8839). East of Hulm the positions of 53 (W.) Div slung down in a steady arch towards Weeze and took in the village of Rottum (9239). From this hamlet the forward line went north-eastwards past the Schl Kalbeck woods (9442), through which 3 Brit Div was preparing to advance. North of 3 Brit Div in the Halvenboom sector, 5 Gds Bde held positions which linked them with 9 Cdn Inf Bde whose own front extended from Oldbershof (9647) to Ebben (9746). In this area 9 Cdn Inf Bde's left flank linked with 4 Cdn Inf Bde, whose positions presented a strong front in a northerly direction to the woods north-east of Moyland. Here 129 Bde of 43 Div took up the responsibility of an area which included Huisberden (9655) and Warbeyen (9557). It was from this line that First Canadian Army would leap forward on the morning of 26 Feb 45. (4/Summ C.I.G.S./2/6, No. 265, 25 Feb 45, Map "A", and No. 266, Map "A", 26 Feb 45)

20. In accordance with the Corps Commander's plans, 2 Cdn Inf Div now sub-divided and co-ordinated its own efforts, which included the seizing of the high ground south of Calcar by 6 and 5 Cdn Inf Bdes in the first phase, the passing through of 4 Cdn Inf Bde to the objective gained by 4 Cdn Armd Div in Phase II and the follow-up in the fourth phase by 5 Cdn Inf Bde (upon relief by 43 Div) to a firm base in the area of Nachtigall (0342) with the later object of relieving 4 Cdn Armd Div in the gap between the Hochwald and the Balbergerwald (0040). From the start of the operation Calg Highrs and one squadron of 10 Cdn Armd Regt was to form the divisional reserve and hold themselves in readiness in the area north of Molk (9649). In its present position 4 Cdn Inf Bde would form a firm base through which the main assault would be launched, while 43 (W.) Div, whose main task was to protect the left flank of 2 Cdn Inf Div, was to be ready to relieve the brigades of 2 Cdn Div as the battle progressed.

21. The divisional reconnaissance unit's plan was formed to coincide with the phases already mentioned. In the first phase, one squadron of 8 Cdn Recce Regt was to probe forward on the axis Moyland - Calcar, in order to open the proposed "EMERALD" Route should the enemy withdraw from Calcar under pressure of the assault. Two further tasks were assigned - to take place during the next three phases. The first of these would be to proceed from Calcar to Xanten in concert with the operation, but not to become heavily committed. The second task was to provide flank protection along the axis of Delsan Hof (0244) - Schmachdarm (0343) for 5 Cdn Inf Bde as soon as this formation moved forward to follow up 4 Cdn Armd Div. Furthermore, if the situation permitted, reconnaissance would be carried out up the valley towards Kehrum (0346). 2 Cdn Inf Div R.C.E. would open up the divisional axis known as "ONYX" Route and develop "EMERALD" Route towards Calcar and through it if the town fell.

22. For its main attack on the high ground south of Calcar 6 Cdn Inf Bde was to have under command one company of 10 Cdn Fd Amb, and would have in support 27 Cdn Armd Regt and two squadrons of 10 Cdn Armd Regt together with flails, crocodiles, kangaroos and machine-gun and anti-tank units. (W.D., G. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, February 1945: Appx 114, 2 Cdn Inf Div, Op Instr "BLOCKBUSTER", 24 Feb 45). In its supporting attack to clear the woods south-east of Calcar (9849) and the position astride the Goch - Calcar road in that area, 5 Cdn Inf Bde (less Calg Highrs) would have under command one company of 18 Cdn Fd Amb and in support one squadron of 6 Cdn Armd Regt, an anti-tank battery and a machine-gun company.

23. The intention of 3 Cdn Inf Div as governed by Lt-Gen Simonds' plan, was to attack and destroy all the enemy in the area of Keppeln and Udem preparatory to following up 11 Brit Armd Div. The first phase was an attack by one battalion of 8 Cdn Inf Bde (C.O.R. of C.) to clear the area of Lookerhof (9845) - Steeg (9845) - Wemmershof (9946). This would complete Phase I of the Corps plan in conjunction with the attacks by 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes towards Calcar. Thereupon the remaining two battalions of 8 Cdn Inf Bde would press the advance southwards to carry out Phase II and clear Sportpl (9743), Bomshof (9844) and Keppeln (9844). On completion of this phase, a second brigade group (9 Cdn Inf Bde) would pass through to capture Udem. For Phases I and II 8 Cdn Inf Bde would have under command and in support, two squadrons of 6 Cdn Armd Regt, machine-gun sub-units of C.H. of O. (M.G.), and two anti-tank batteries.

24. During Phase III 9 Cdn Inf Bde would have available an armoured regiment from 2 Cdn Armd Bde, as well as anti-tank and machine-gun support. 7 Cdn Recce Regt was to remain in divisional reserve at H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, while 7 Cdn Inf Bde Gp was allotted tasks with a view to further operations after Phase III. The first of these was to hold the high ground east of Udem; the second was that of protecting the southern flank of 11 Armd Div from Udem to Sonsbeck along the line of the River Grosse Ley. In rear of the advance, but closely following up as the objectives were gained, 3 Cdn Inf Div R.C.E. was to maintain and develop the brigade axis and such routes as operations permitted. (Ibid, 3 Cdn Inf Div, Op Instr "BLOCKBUSTER", 24 Feb 45)

25. For its role in Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", 4 Cdn Armd Div was split up into two main forces, "TIGER" Group and "LION" Group. "TIGER" Group consisted of 4 Cdn Armd Bde in full, together with Line & Welld R. A. & S.H. of C., an anti-tank battery and a squadron of ^{new} tanks, supported by crocodiles, A.V.R.Es. and Ram throwers. "LION" Group would be built around 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt and Alg R., with a similar allotment of supporting assault armour. The operation for the armoured division was broken up into phases relative to the Corps plan. Moving up during Phase I "TIGER" Group would carry out Phases II and III of the Corps intention with "LION" Group in reserve, while the latter group was to be responsible for Phase IV. "TIGER" Group, which was to be in turn split up into five separate forces, would go into action as soon as 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs had completed the first phase. They were to pass through and occupy the general line of high ground running west of Todtenhugel (0045), leaving infantry groups at key points until elements of 2 Cdn Inf Div were able to occupy them during the follow-up. As soon as the infantry division relieved 4 Cdn Armd Div on its first

objective the latter would then pass on to the south-east, to occupy the hills north and east of Udem, as 3 Cdn Inf Div invested the town. On completion of Phase III "LION" Group would lunge forward to seize the gap between the Hochwald and the Balbergerwald. Finally, as the infantry units of "TIGER" Group became available, they would pass to command of "LION" Group to enable the latter to strike out south-east and east. "TIGER" Group would then also advance eastwards to strengthen the Hochwald position (AEF 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F: G.S. Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", Special Report 2CC/1).

26. 11 Brit Armd Div, which would be working its way up gradually on the right of 3 Cdn Inf Div during the first two phases, was to pass to the south-west of Udem as soon as the attack on the town started. The intention for this formation was to seize the high ground north of Sonsbeck and Sonsbeck village and then to be prepared to exploit eastwards to Xanten (1141) or to the Rhine at Wesel (2140). Its role was to be carried out in three phases under two groupings centred respectively about 4 Armd Bde and 159 Inf Bde. At the onset 4 Armd Bde would pass through south of Udem and establish themselves on the high ground about Gochfortzberg (0039). From this firm position armoured patrols would be sent forward to the line of the road Krebbershof (0238) - Udemerbruch (0240). The second phase involved the seizing of the high ground north of Sonsbeck by either brigade and the breaching of the defence line running south and south-east from Udemerbruch. At this time, while whichever brigade was free would go on to capture Sonsbeck, a battalion of 3 Cdn Inf Div which would at this stage be moving up in the rear of the armour and taking over firm bases and right flank protection, would relieve the armoured brigade on the high ground Gochfortzberg (0039). On completion of the third phase, 11 Armd Div would exploit wherever possible. The divisional reconnaissance regiment (Inns of Court) were to remain concentrated near 11 Armd Div H.Q. until called forward. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, February 1945: Appx HH, 11 Armd Div, O.O. No. 17, 24 Feb 45)

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

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

214 Inf Bde would relieve 5 Cdn Inf Bde on its forward objective on the Corps Commanders' order and

130 Inf Bde was to remain in reserve.

It was probable that as the advance progressed 129 and 214 Bdes of 43 (W.) Div would have the task of clearing the town of Calcar and the ground between the Rhine and the Hochwald feature. 130 Bde, which had suffered so heavily during "VERITABLE" would be used solely to hold the northern flank and to take over captured ground. (Ibid: Appx II, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", O.988, 24 Feb 45, Appx "A", para 6)

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

1. In view of the determined enemy resistance 24/25 Feb, North of WEEZE, and consequent inability of 53 (W) Inf Div firmly to secure that town before Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" by 2 Canadian Corps commences, it will be necessary to reconsider the draft basic plan outlined to you in my memorandum of yesterday - in particular the proposals contained in para 5. The importance of 30 Corps clearing the WELL - WEEZE road at an early date, in order that the WANSSUM - WELL bridge may be constructed, entails this reconsideration. On the above basis, the following Army plan will be discussed at our meeting this afternoon.
2. If possible, 2 Canadian Corps will complete "BLOCKBUSTER" as planned, and firmly secure the general line KERVENHEIM - SONSBECK - XANTEN. It will then clean up all enemy remaining between this line and the RHINE (see para 4 of yesterday's memo).
3. If by D Plus 1 it is obvious that to complete "BLOCKBUSTER" a considerable regrouping, and a further deliberate attack, is required, then a "partial" "BLOCKBUSTER" will terminate the operation - i.e., the completion of Phase III and the securing of the high ground East of the CALCAR - UDEM road.
4. Throughout either "complete" or "partial" "BLOCKBUSTER", the principal responsibility of 30 Corps will be to secure the right (southern and western) flank of 2 Canadian Corps against enemy intervention, by keeping its left shoulder well up and to exploit any favourable situations (see para 3 of yesterday's memo).
5. In either of the alternative results given in paras 2 and 3 above, the weight of the Canadian Army effort will then be transferred to 30 Corps - which, as a Canadian Army first priority, will then proceed to secure the WELL - WEEZE road, and eliminate any enemy remaining to the north of it.

(Operational Directive to
Lt-Gen G.G. Simonds and
Lt-Gen B.G. Horrocks,
25 Feb 45: op cit)

"BLOCKBUSTER" GOES IN

29. Despite the bad weather and the difficulties encountered during the forming-up on the night of 25/26 Feb, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" commenced on time. At 0345 hours, the guns began to pour out their concentrations, blasting everything in the path of the advance, and at 0430 hours, under the beams of four searchlights which provided artificial moonlight, 2 Cdn Inf Div went forward, 5 Bde on the left, 6 Bde on the right. 6 Bde crossed the start line with "A" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt followed by Camerons of C. in three columns of kangaroos on the right flank. In the centre "A" and "B" Sgns 10 Cdn Armd Regt with "C" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt under command, ferried Fus M.R. towards their objective, while on the left S. Sask R. with "B" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt attacked in two columns in each of which a troop of tanks led the kangaroo-borne infantry. (AEF 45/6 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I: Appx 'A', 6 Cdn Inf Bde Confirming Order Op "BLOCKBUSTER", 24 Feb 45)

30. On the northern flank, 5 Cdn Inf Bde supported by "B" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt advanced with R. de Mais on the left and R.H.C. on the right (AEF 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D: Memo of Interview No. 2, C/D/8, Op "BLOCKBUSTER"). To the south Q.O.R. of C., who were to carry out 2 Cdn Inf Div's role in the first phase, joined forces with "C" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt and also moved forward. On the 6 Bde sector, the centre column of Fus M.R. was the first to reach the objective. This was accomplished with only light infantry losses; but the tanks were not so fortunate - one hit a mine and ten others bogged down in the mire caused by the heavy rains of the previous night. The remaining armour, however, forged ahead in staggered lines within the groups, so that each tank made its own track. (AEF 45/2 Cdn Armd Bde/C/F: Report on Ops by 2 Cdn Armd Bde, Op "BLOCKBUSTER", para 23, 26 Feb 45). To the left S. Sask R. and "B" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt found the going more difficult. The two columns advanced steadily behind the barrage and encountered heavy machine gun and Bazooka fire. Happily, no tanks were hit though a number were completely bogged down in the deep mud. The rest, however, accompanied the infantry on to the objective.

31. Camerons of C. and "A" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt also experienced difficulties. Mines along the Calcar - Udem road and the soft terrain delayed the force, and after waiting some time for the Flails to clear a path the column moved forward again, only to find itself unable to advance when a tank becoming bogged in a crater blocked the way. During this period of waiting the enemy mortared and shelled the area incessantly and it became obvious that the axis of advance must be changed. At 0600 hours, therefore, having re-formed quickly, the column swung north on the route previously used by Fus M.R. By this time the immediate artillery support had ended and tanks and infantry met considerable enemy fire as they moved on to their objective. The tanks responded nobly to the challenge and succeeded in neutralizing the opposition while Camerons of C. fought their way forward. It was at about this time that the gallant commander of the Camerons, Lt-Col E.P. Thompson, D.S.O., was killed and his Intelligence Officer wounded by a direct hit on the kangaroo in which they were riding. Meanwhile, though 5 Cdn Inf Bde had been fighting hard, by 0745 hours the enemy was still active in their area. The supporting tanks were urged to push on, in spite of the fact that the enemy still held the ground through which they were to pass and the squadron's strength was down to 12 tanks. A direct assault with tanks leading and supported by twelve field and eight medium guns therefore went in at 0800 hours, and though mines and the soft ground reduced the speed of the advance, by 0830 hours the objective was seized. (AEF 45/2 Cdn Armd Bde/C/F, Docket II: Report on Op "BLOCKBUSTER", para 27)

32. Further to the south the soggy ground compelled Q.O.R. of C. to cross the start line without armoured support; yet despite the determined enemy resistance the infantry managed to throw the Germans out of many of his strong-points, and gain some ground. As the first light of day appeared the tanks were able to advance to help the hard-pressed infantry, until at 1100 hours the armour was recalled to assist the N. Shore R. (Ibid, para 29). In the meantime "A" and "B" Sqns 10 Cdn Armd Regt had been pulled away from Fus M.R., leaving "C" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt to hold the newly won ground. "A" and "B" Sqns 10 Cdn Armd Regt then concentrated as one squadron,

of which one troop was eventually sent to R. de Mais of 5 Cdn Inf Bde as a counter-attack force. (W.D., Fus M.R., 27 Cdn Arm'd Regt, 26 Feb 45). It was during O.O.R. of C's action early that morning that B.46495 Sgt Aubrey Cosens won the Victoria Cross. The citation covering this glorious achievement read as follows:

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

Sergeant Cosen's platoon, with two tanks in support, attacked enemy strongpoints in three farm buildings, but were twice beaten back by fanatical enemy resistance and then fiercely counter-attacked, during which time the platoon suffered heavy casualties and the platoon commander was killed.

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

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

Single-handed he then entered the second and third buildings and personally killed or captured all the occupants, although under intense machine gun and small arms fire.

Just after the successful reduction of these important enemy strongpoints, Sergeant Cosens was shot through the head by an enemy sniper and died almost instantly.

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

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

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

33. By first light S. Sask R. had consolidated their position with "B" Sqn 27 Cdn Arm'd Regt who remained in the centre of the area, poised to meet any enemy threat. (AEF 45/2 Cdn Arm'd Bde/C/F, Docket II: Report on Op "BLOCKBUSTER", para 24; W.D., S. Sask R., 26 Feb 45). By 0830 hours all the objectives as previously defined for Phase I had been reached with the exception of one, that of

Q.O.R. of C., whose advance was slowed down by the fact that both N. Shore R. and R. de Chaud had already gone forward to begin the second phase. (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Feb 45). While 8 Cdn Inf Bde attempted to fight its way ahead and now that the objectives of 2 Cdn Div were sufficiently under control, "TIGER" Group of 4 Cdn Armd Div began to pass through. This they did amidst some confusion, for the advancing armour mistook the troops of 2 Cdn Inf Div for the enemy and fired on them. By 0915 hours, however, "TIGER" Group was on its start line ready to advance. As stated above (para 25) this force was broken down into five battle groups - "SNUFF", "GERRY", "JOCK", "SMITH" and "COLE" Forces. Each had as a nucleus approximately half an infantry battalion with one or more squadrons of tanks and supporting specialized assault equipment. The whole battle group was commanded by Brigadier R.W. Moncell, D.S.O., O.B.E. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 23 Feb 45)

34. "TIGER" Group formed up in the vicinity of the cross-roads east of Schroanenhof (9843) and crossed the start line at approximately 1015 hours. The movement was slow and difficult on the muddy ground but the ad hoc formations managed to work their way forward. By 1550 hours "GERRY" Force was firm in the area north of Neu Luisendorf (0045) with "COLE" Force approaching the hamlet of Spieflhof (0044). Both these groups had suffered considerable casualties in infantry and tanks from the mortar and shell fire. At the same time, "SMITH" Force, whose commander, Lt-Col H.A. Smith, D.S.O., M.C., had been badly wounded, was establishing strong-points to the north-east of Heibaureshof (9946). "JOCK" Force had reached Michelshof (9945) and was preparing to move on to Fallingshof (9944), while "SMITH" Force hung back in the vicinity of the crossroads south-east of Etchshof (0146) prior to taking on the next objective of the divisional phase. This new task, which involved the seizing of the high ground north-east of Udem, began at 1750 hours. (AEF 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II: G.S. Account Operation "BLOCKBUSTER"; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 26 Feb 45; and W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Feb 45)

35. In the meantime on the right and to the south, 3 Cdn Inf Div had gone ahead to complete its part of Phase I and Phase II of the Corps plan. Q.O.R. of C. after experiencing much hard fighting had by 1200 hours pressed on to capture Akerhof (9845). On their right, R. de Chaud and "B" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt, who had crossed the start line at 0830 hours, found that although their right flank was able to move forward, the heavy enemy fire from Keppeln on the left completely stopped all movement on that side. N. Shore R. was at this time itself attacking Keppeln, but the infantry moving over 2000 yards of open ground were hotly engaged from the area of Hollen (9744), which was one of R. de Chaud's objectives. During the uncomfortable delay caused by this situation, N. Shore R. regrouped quickly with "C" Sqn 6 Cdn Armd Regt, who had been removed from under command Q.O.R. of C. to help thrust home the attack (see para 32). The new effort went in at 1415 hours, and the daring infantry and tank assault across the open terrain was costly. Keppeln fell, however, and its capture gave some relief to the R. de Chaud who were now able to move on to take Hollen (9744), Sportpl (9743) and Bomshof (9844). Q.O.R. of C., taking full advantage of the pressure being exerted on the enemy by its two sister regiments, went on, seizing Steeg and Wimmershof, so that by 1800 hours, all of 8 Cdn Inf Bde's objectives for Phase I and II had been consolidated. (AEF 45/8 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II: Memo 6, Accounts of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" by Lt-Col S.M. Lett, D.S.O., O.C. Q.O.R. of C.,

16 Mar 45; Memo 7 & 8 by O.Cs. R. de Chaud, N. Shore R.,
16 Mar 45 and Special Report No. 2)

THE ATTACK ON UDEM AND THE BREACHING
OF THE HOCHWALD DEFENCES (27 FEB - 1 MAR)

36. It now remained for "TIGER" Group of 4 Cdn Armd Div to complete its counterpart of the operation. This was done by last light 26 Feb. "COLE" Force relieved "GERRY" Force who were positioned on the left in the area of Neu Luisendorf (0045); "JOCK" Force advanced south to Fallingshof (9944); "SMITH" Force moved up to a position on the high feature east of Kirsell (0843) to dominate the eastern and southern approaches. At this time it was planned that either 7 or 9 Cdn Inf Bdes would take over "SMITH" Force objective as the ground was quite unsuitable for tanks. "SMITH" Force consolidated and began to probe towards Kirsell, repulsing several small counter-attacks. 2300 hours 26 Feb saw "TIGER" Group firm on all its objectives (W.D., H.C. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 26 Feb 45; W.D., 21 Cdn Armd Regt, 26 Feb 45; W.Ds., 22 and 28 Cdn Armd Regts, Lake Sup R. (Not), Linc & Welld R., A. & S.H. of C., 26 Feb 45). Meanwhile, as "TIGER" Group consolidated and "LION" Group moved forward for its attack on the Hochwald feature, 9 Cdn Inf Bde, which had passed through 8 Cdn Inf Bde to the south at 2130 hours, was attacking Udem. S.D. & G. Highrs advanced on the town from the right down the Hollen - Udem road, securing the anti-tank ditch before the road across it could be demolished. The enemy resistance was determined and every foot of ground was bitterly contested. On the left H.L.I. of C., moving south from Keppeln, ran into mines and equally stiff opposition but gained a foothold in the northern sector of the town. The situation was sufficiently favourable to allow Nth N.S. Highrs to go forward at 0430 hours to their objective, the line of the railroad south of Udem (9841) (AEF 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Docket II: Special Report No. 2, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER"; Report by Hist Offr, 3 Cdn Inf Div, para 10; W.D., H.C. 9 Cdn Inf Bde; and W.Ds., S.D. & G. Highrs, Nth N.S. Highrs and H.L.I. of C., 26 Feb 45).

37. By first light 27 Feb 45, the situation in the area occupied by "TIGER" Group had undergone a change. 4 Cdn Inf Bde had advanced and taken over the bulk of 4 Cdn Armd Bde's sector at Todtenhugel with R.H.L.I., holding the area Neu Luisendorf (0045), Essex Scot R. the area of Fallingshof (9944) and R. Regt C. in reserve directly to the north. (W.D., H.C. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Feb 45). "TIGER" Group's various forces now concentrated north of 4 Cdn Inf Bde's positions (AEF 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II: Special Report 200/1, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", para 5). Both Alg R. and 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt of "LION" Group were well forward, the latter having reached Kirsell and found it clear, while the former moved forward on foot preparatory to pushing on to the east of the village (Ibid). In the far north the operation had developed favourably. 129 Bde of 43 (W.) Div relieved 5 Cdn Inf Bde and by midnight 26/27 Feb 5 Cdn Inf Bde was concentrated north and north-west of Schroanerhof (9847) (R.H.C. 9843, R. de Mais 9748, Calg Highrs 9648). Here the units were fed and rested prior to passing through 4 Cdn Inf Bde on a new attack. (W.D., H.C. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Feb 45; AEF 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D; Memo of Interview No. 2 CD/8, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", para 11). 6 Cdn Inf Bde, who had captured some 450 prisoners of war in their initial assault, remained throughout the night in well dug positions on the high ground south of Calcar and, apart from heavy mortar and

gun fire, experiencing little of interest (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Feb 45). In the role of left flank protection 43 (W.) Div was probing east and south, with 129 Bde in its new positions maintaining contact with S. Sask R. of 2 Cdn Inf Div.

38. To the right of 3 Cdn Inf Div, 11 Brit Armd Div had begun to move southwards towards the area of Stein (9741). Here at approximately 2100 hours heavy opposition was encountered in the form of anti-tank, mortar and machine gun fire, as well as considerable fire from 9 Cdn Inf Bde's objectives at Udem. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, February 1945: Ops Log, Appx 3, 26 Feb 45, Serial 76). The armoured division had made very little headway by dawn of 27 Feb. Enemy tanks and S.P. guns put up terrific volumes of fire to slow down the British columns. (*Ibid*, 27 Feb 45, Serials 14, 20 and 26). Fighting was still in progress in Udem when at 0515 hours Lt-Col R.A. Bradburn's battle group, consisting of Alg R. supported by 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt moved forward from Kirsell to the attack. The immediate objective was the high ground between the Hochwald and Balbergerwald; it lay just inside the last Siegfried line defences before the Rhine. A special plan of attack was drawn up. "A" and "B" Coys Alg R. each with under command one troop "B" Sqn 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt would move over the crest south of Pauls (0143) and would capture the first line of trenches and defence works which scarred the slope of the Hochwald feature west of the gap. Once this position was reached "C" and "D" Coys Alg R. would pass through to seize the second line, with one of them pushing forward to consolidate the gap itself. To coincide with this plan, a diversionary right hook was to be carried out by "A" Sqn 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt and the Alg R. carrier platoon. This force would move south from Grenenhof (0042), cross the railroad and proceed past Brochhof (0040) to the crossroads west of Kunderen (0340), where it would change direction to strike north, recross the railroad and be available in the vicinity of the Alg R. objectives, should "B" Sqn not be able to negotiate the ground across the valley. "C" Sqn of the reconnaissance regiment was to line the high ground east of Udem facing west, to support whichever course operations might take when daylight came. A fire plan of heavy concentrations on all known enemy positions preceded the attack and continued against rear defences once the action had started. It was 0515 hours when Lt-Col R.A. Bradburn, fearing that the protection of the gun fire would be wasted, ordered his troops forward (W.D., Alg R., 27 Feb 45).

39. The infantry moved on foot up the slope with the supporting tanks, while the shells from the guns of 2 Cdn Corps whined overhead. Wild small arms fire swept through the advancing platoons as they came down the eastern slope and even a tank which had been by-passed turned to engage the infantry from the rear as they reached the road north of Hauskalk (0041). The first group of buildings along the road was speedily overrun. The tanks, one by one, became deeply mired in the mud, but the infantry sensing that movement in the valley would become more costly as daylight approached, pressed on. The reserve elements of Alg R. now moved up and the opposition eased across the front until the wood bordering the road 500 yards south of Kehlmannskath (0241) was reached. Here, heavy enemy machine-gun fire put the left hand column to ground. During the next ten minutes while "B" Coy was pinned down by three well-hidden positions on the left, the right hand force under

Major R.B. Stock, was able to gain some ground in the face of vicious mortar and machine gun fire. To the rear a large body of enemy, supported by self-propelled guns, attempting to cut off the base of the attack was dispersed by automatic fire, P.I.A.Ts, and a captured enemy mortar, at a cost to him of some 48 dead and 91 prisoners. (W.D., Alg R., 27 Feb 45)

40. Meanwhile, as "A" Coy forged ahead into Hockshof (0240), "B" Coy passed through the shattered wood, crossed the road and reached the anti-tank ditch bordering the Siegfried Line. They quickly traversed the minefield beyond the ditch, fortunately without sustaining casualties, and passing through the knee-high wire which luckily the artillery had gapped in numerous places, finally reached the trenchworks, which were defined as the last of the German fixed positions before the Rhine. The few opponents were either killed or captured and consolidation began. Lt-Col Bradburn received the news of success at 0700 and 0715 hours from "A" and "B" Coys respectively and at once urged his reserve companies to push on. Enemy counter-attacks now began on the left and right, both heavily supported by mortar and shell fire and by some armour. One attack, coming in from the left was effectively beaten off by tank and small arms fire, but on the right Major Stock, already wounded, had more to do. The enemy seemed bent on driving the Canadians off and attacked repeatedly only to be pushed back by the heavy defensive fire called down by this gallant Company Commander. For his bravery in this action Major Stock was subsequently awarded the Distinguished Service Order. As soon as the fresh companies had passed through, the enemy, having got the range, began systematically to plaster every yard of the newly-won ground, but Lt-Col R.A. Bradburn's men, well seasoned and full of the zest of battle, dug in and could not be budged. (W.D., Alg R., 27 Feb 45)

41. But disaster had befallen the right hook by "A" Sqn 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt and the carrier platoon of the Alg R. This force, having skirted to the south of Udem, passed the rail crossing south of the town and almost immediately ran into German armour. Within a few minutes the first three tanks became casualties, and the rest, one by one, were subjected to fire from all sides. The majority of the carriers met a similar fate and after some tense moments Major MacDougall, the force commander, and the remnants gathered as many of the wounded as possible and worked their way back. While the area of the Hochwald Gap was now undergoing some of the heaviest enemy shelling experienced, the remaining units of 10 Cdn Inf Bde moved up to participate in the attack, Linc & Welld R. and A. & S. H. of C. having reverted to command at 0500 hours. (W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, Linc & Welld R., A. & S.H. of C., Alg R., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 26, 27 Feb 45)

42. In the north 5 Cdn Inf Bde was advancing on Schmachdarm in the western edge of the forest (0343). The initial attack across the valley resulted in the capture of many prisoners and by 1000 hours Brigadier McGill's spearhead of Calg Highrs had reached the outskirts of Schmachdarm, while R. de Mais filled in the rear with R.H.C. slightly to the west and south in the area of Paulshof. These points were now consolidated pending a new thrust into the forest beyond. (AEF 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I: Interview No. 2 CD/8 "BLOCKBUSTER", paras 12 and 13). The battle of Udem to the west was not yet over. Nth N.S. Highrs had a stiff battle between the town and the railway

to the south, and both H.L.I. of C., and S.D. & G. Highrs were sternly opposed as they fought their way ahead. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, February 1945: Ops Log, Appx 3, 27 Feb 45, Serial 27). 8 Cdn Inf Bde remained in reserve in their positions with the exception of Q.O.R. of C., who were now ordered to move through Kirsell to relieve "SMITH" Force of 4 Cdn Armd Bde's "TIGER" Group on the high ridge to the west of the village. (W.Ds., Q.O.R. of C. and 21 Cdn Armd Regt, 27 Feb 45). 7 Cdn Inf Bde had by this time moved up, prior to concentrating between Udem and Keppeln (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 27 Feb 45, Serial 81; and W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Feb 45).

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

44. Throughout 27 Feb, the opposition had stiffened to slow down our advance and bad weather generally had deprived the troops of close air support, although later that day Marionbaum and Sonsbeck were visited by 62 medium bombers. (AEF 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Op "VERITABLE", paras 117, 122). The entire situation now centred on the Hochwald Forest where elements of 4 Cdn Armd Div were being severely shelled, and on the afternoon of 27 Feb, Brigadier Jefferson, commanding 10 Cdn Inf Bde, decided to pass Line & Well R. and A. & S.H. of C. through the Gap. At the same time Q.O.R. of C. of 8 Cdn Inf Bde relieved "SMITH" Force (21 Cdn Armd Regt and Lake Sup R. (Mot)) on the Pauls feature, thus freeing it for further employment to the east, and 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt reverted to command 4 Cdn Armd Div, a welcome addition to the troops involved. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Feb 45, W.D., Q.O.R. of C., 27 Feb 45 and W.D., 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 27 Feb 45). That evening, as Line & Well R. and A. & S.H. of C. prepared to move up to the area of the gap, Maj-Gen C. Vokes, G.O.C. 4 Cdn Armd Div, accented his intentions for 27 - 28 Feb 45. 10 Cdn Inf Bde was to seize and hold the ridge between the two forests and 4 Cdn Armd Bde was to then move one battle group on to 10 Cdn Inf Bde's objective, in order to push

further along the axis of the railway towards Xanten. Another battle group, consisting of 22 Cdn Armd Regt and Lake Sup R. (Mot) was to push ahead at first light on 28 Feb and take the woods north-east and east of Herstiges (0541) (0640) (0740) (AET 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", para 7).

45. To the north there was little change. 6 Cdn Inf Bde was relieved by 214 Bde of 43 (W.) Inf Div and concentrated near Kirsell (0043), preparatory to advancing past the prospective objective of 5 Cdn Inf Bde in the Hochwald Forest. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Feb 45). 43 (W.) Inf Div made substantial gains, exploiting to the full; 5 Wilts entered Calcar almost unopposed in the early evening of 27 Feb and 43 Recce Regt grasped an opening which resulted in one squadron being passed through to Hanselaer. By the morning of 28 Feb the 43 reconnaissance squadrons were operating boldly well forward of Calcar and Honnépel. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, February 1945; Ops Log, Appx 3, 27 Feb 45, Serials 101, 103; and 28 Feb 45, Serial 8).

46. The front remained fairly static until the morning of 28 Feb. In 2 Cdn Inf Div's sector 5 Cdn Inf Bde launched R.H.C. into the forest while Calg Highrs held the western edges, but movement was difficult and the fighting stiff and costly. After a hard struggle which lasted until 1800 hours 28 Feb, three of the four R.H.C. companies were pulled back, the fourth remaining with Calg Highrs to hold the wooded bridgehead. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Feb 45, and W.Ds., Calg Highrs and R.H.C., 28 Feb 45). North of 5 Cdn Inf Bde Maj-Gen Matthews had ordered 4 Cdn Inf Bde to reach out into the Hochwald Forest, and by 1900 hours R. Regt C. was on its objective along the western fringe, south of Neuschbauershof (0344) with Essex Scot R. passing through to occupy part of the wooded areas beyond. (W.Ds., H.Q., 4 Cdn Inf Bde, R. Regt C., Essex Scot and R.H.L.I., 28 Feb 45). By the time that 4 Cdn Inf Bde entered the forest the fury of enemy reaction against 4 Cdn Armd Div had increased one hundred fold. Alg R., which had undergone a period of severe shelling, was still holding the line of trenches west of the gap when at approximately 0400 hours A. & S.H. of C., supported by tanks of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt and 22 Cdn Armd Regt, passed through. In a short space of time A. & S.H. of C. became heavily committed and suffered many casualties. At 0600 hours Lt-Col R.C. Coleman of the Linc & Welld R., led his men up the slope so that they in turn could advance eastwards. All these efforts, however, were sternly opposed by the enemy, who persisted in mortaring and shelling the area unmercifully. The Linc & Welld R. were unfortunate in being in a portion of the wood into which the enemy poured every possible form of missile. These burst in the treetops and killed or wounded dozens of the infantry unprotected below. (W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, A. & S.H. of C., Linc & Welld R., 28 Feb 45). Later that morning one company of Alg R. crossed the railway tracks to clear the area of Udemerbruch and 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt sent up armoured support to the eastern side of the gap where for the rest of the day A. & S.H. of C. and Linc & Welld R. clung to their positions. (Ibid, and W.D., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 28 Feb 45). At 2230 hours a new effort to advance by tanks of 22 and 28 Cdn Armd Regts failed, as the enemy guns took such heavy toll that movement became virtually impossible. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 28 Feb 45). The ground troops were now urged to hold all along the line until 6 Cdn Inf Bde arrived to relieve them the next morning.

47. During the past day events to the west in the sectors controlled by 3 Cdn Inf Div and 11 Armd Div had gone well. 7 Cdn Inf Bde had already stepped in to follow up 11 Armd Div and was now positioned south of the railroad astride the Udem - Kervenheim road (W.D., 7 Cdn Inf Bde, W.Ds., Regina Rif, R. Wpg Rif, 1 C. Scot R., 27 Feb 45). 11 Armd Div, like its Canadian counterpart, was also having difficulties. 159 Inf Bde Gp, whom General Roberts had ordered to push on during the previous night towards the Schleiffen line and Sonsbeck, moved around the southern slopes of Gochfortzberg, but found the terrain there equally boggy and treacherous. The main obstacle in the path of the advance had been a small stream, with banks so soft that it had been necessary to establish a regular infantry bridgehead. By midday 28 Feb, a few tanks had crossed, but the first efforts to thrust forward met with disastrously heavy artillery and anti-tank fire. In the late evening 1 Herefords, recently relieved by 7 Cdn Inf Bde, passed through with 15/19 H., and a mile beyond the forward positions of 159 Bde Gp they encountered the first Schleiffen defences. (Taurus Pursuant, "A History of 11 Armd Div", pages 84, 85)

48. By 0900 hours 1 Mar 45, the situation on the fronts held by 30 Corps and Ninth U.S. Army had improved steadily. 156 (L.) Bde with 32 Gds Bde under command had completely taken over from 51 (H.) Inf Div the area between Siebengewald and Hulm with a view to exploiting to the south. The Lowland patrols soon entered Groote Forst (8639) to find it clear of the enemy, and the Cameronians established a strong-point in the wood south of Boyenhof (8739). 160 Bde of 53 (W.) Inf Div complied with the corps intention of the day (AEF 45/30 Brit Corps/C/I, Docket III(b): Fol 49, Intention 30 Corps Task, 28 Feb 45) and relieved 8 Bde of 3 Brit Div in the area of the Kampshof bridgehead (9539), meanwhile keeping up the pressure against Weeze. On the shortened sector now held by 3 Brit Div, 1 Suffolks completed the clearance of the wood north-east of Kampshof (9539), while 185 Bde attacking south through 9 Bde at 1400 hours 28 Feb made sufficient progress in the direction of Kervenheim to allow the assault on the town to go in at 0900 hours 1 Mar. (AEF 45/30 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III: Sitreps, P.A. to G.O.C.-in-C., Nos 120, 121, 28 Feb 45). Meanwhile, Gds Armd Div remained in position and had nothing of interest to report. 51 (H.) Div now concentrated for rest in the areas of Nijmegen, Goch and Kessel (AEF 45/30 Brit Corps/C/I, Docket II: Fol 39, 30 Corps Tasks of 28 Feb 45) of Ninth U.S. Army; after being held up temporarily on the railway line from Munchen-Gladbach to Elsen, XIX U.S. Corps had lunged out and advanced eight miles to reach the line Steinhausen, Glehn and Hemmerden. To the south and west of Munchen-Gladbach XIII U.S. Corps had penetrated as far as Hardt, while on the left XVI U.S. Corps were steadily gaining ground through the Biegerwald north of Birgellen (8980). In comparison, progress on First Canadian Army front was limited by the increasing enemy resistance to the consolidation of previous gains. Apart from a little expansion of the gap between the Hochwald and Balbergerwald Forests by 2 Cdn Corps and the establishment of bridgeheads over the Muhlen - Fleuth stream which ran east from Weeze by 30 Corps, few changes had occurred. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.C. First Cdn Army, March 1945, Appx 2, Folio 61, G.O. III, Ops Summary 255B, 272400 - 282400 Feb 45)

THE ENEMY SITUATION, 1 MAR 45

49. The enemy had now been able to stabilize his line and in spite of our rapid advances during the period 0400 hours 26 Feb to 1200 hours 28 Feb, he had succeeded by hard fighting in keeping his ground losses to a minimum. Though 2 Cdn Corps had managed to pry him out of the gap between the two forests, no progress had been made into the country beyond. The enemy strength lay in his mortars and rocket projectors. 86 Werfer Regt had already been identified and interrogation of prisoners pointed to the fact that at least 54 projectors of the 15cm and 24cm varieties were probably still in operation. The enemy's artillery fire, which had been surprisingly heavy and accurate, was supplemented by railway guns operating from the east bank of the Rhine. A few tanks and self-propelled guns, presumably from 16 Pz Regt, still remained west of the river.

50. The German infantry were identified as 116 Recce Pz Unit in the gap, 60 Pz Gr Regt in the Hochwald and 156 Pz Gr in the Balbergerwald, all of 116 Pz Div. There was also evidence in the gap of 7 Para Regt of 2 Para Div. Further to the north 6 Para Div held from the northern end of the Hochwald to the Rhine; 15 Pz Gr Div was reported to be coming into the Hochwald area; the front from west of Balbergerwald to the railroad in Weeze was entrusted to 8 Para Div. West of the Niers River, 7 Para Div still held the right, two battalions of 190 Div defended the centre, while 180 Div blocked the left. (First Cdn Army Int Sum No. 242, 27 Feb 45; No. 243, 28 Feb 45)

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

By the beginning of March the winter offensive, entrusted to First Cdn Army, to destroy the enemy west of the Rhine and prepare the way for an envelopment of the Ruhr, was well advanced. The spectacular successes gained within the brief space of 7 days by 9 U.S. Army brought the concluding stages well in sight...

...Lt-General Simpson's troops were now only some 17 miles from the enemy's position opposite our own lines, and by thus encroaching upon his rearguard area, threatened his way of escape.

(General Crerar's Dispatch,
5 Apr 45)

The enemy was now quite obviously fully sensitive to the threat looming up from the rapid American advance to the north, and it was clear that he must go east of the Rhine. The debatable question was how would he do it. His hold on Munchen-Gladbach had been broken and although the bridgehead protecting the Rhine crossings remained, they did not in themselves protect the rear of the troops

opposing First Canadian Army. Already it was evident that the German left wing was retreating. The Wesel bridge and the ferries on each side of it were in full use, and it was appreciated that his determination not to give ground to First Canadian Army was in effect part of his programme for the protection of this exodus (First Cdn Army Int Sum No. 244, 1 Mar 45).

A V.C. FOR THE ESSEX

52. The third and fourth phase of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" continued with renewed vigour. At first light 1 Mar 45 6 Cdn Inf Bde relieved 10 Cdn Inf Bde in the Gap. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945, Appx 3, Ops Log, 1 Mar 45, Serial 23). While Line & Veld R. and the greater part of A. & S.H. of C. concentrated to the rear, Alq R., who already had elements south of the railway tracks, was ordered to link up with 11 Armd Div. This project, however, was abandoned and the regiment moved back to come under command 4 Cdn Armd Bde and concentrated in the crowded gun area south-east of Kirsell, preparatory to moving through the Gap to relieve Lake Sup R. (Mot). (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 1 and 2 Mar 45; W.D., Lake Sup R. (Mot), 1 Mar 45). Pending a new attempt by 4 Cdn Armd Bde to break out to the east, 6 Cdn Inf Bde held the Hochwald Gap with orders to exploit to the south (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Mar 45). The rest of 2 Cdn Inf Div persisted in their efforts to move forward in the northern parts of the forest. The enemy pressure in front of 5 Cdn Inf Bde eased considerably during the night 28 Feb/1 Mar, and by skilful endeavour patrols had penetrated by last light as far as the Gap itself, just east of the S. Sask R. positions (AEF 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I, Memorandum of Interview No. 2 CD/8, Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", Account given by Brig W.J. McGill, D.S.O., to Hist Offr 2 Cdn Inf Div, 24 Mar 45).

53. On the left of 5 Cdn Inf Bde, Brigadier F.N. Cabellu, commanding 4 Cdn Inf Bde, having launched the Essex Scot R. at 0745 hours, ordered R.H.L.I. to pass through. The attack met with terrible casualties, hand to hand fighting raged everywhere, but the men of the Essex Scot R., gallantly led by Major Fred Tilston, reached its objective. For his part in this action Major Tilston was subsequently awarded that coveted decoration, the Victoria Cross. His bravery, which appointed him to the exclusive hall of never to be forgotten heroes of Canada was quoted to the world in this citation:

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

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

In pressing on to the second line of enemy defences on the edge of the woods he was severely wounded in the hip and fell to the ground. Nevertheless he rejoined his men as they reached their objective. In vicious hand-to-hand fighting two German Company Headquarters were overrun and many casualties were inflicted on the fanatical defenders. When the enemy counter-attacked, Major Tilston inspired his company - now reduced to one quarter of its original strength - to hold firm against great odds. The heroic Company Commander repeatedly crossed the bullet swept ground to the Company on his right flank to carry grenades, rifle and Bren ammunition to his troops, making at least six such hazardous trips.

On his last trip he was wounded for the third time, this time in the leg. He was found in a shell crater beside the road. Although very seriously wounded and barely conscious, he would not submit to medical attention until he had given complete instructions as to the defence plan, had emphasized the absolute necessity of holding the position, and had ordered his one remaining officer to take over.

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

(Ibid)

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

54. The northern flank on which 43 (V.) Div was operating showed no sign of breaking open. Appeldorn (0447) and Ner Mornter (0650) were both reported strongly held (W.D., G.S., H.C. 2 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 1, Ops Log, 1 Mar 45, Serial 7). The divisional reconnaissance squadrons roamed far and wide probing each possible line of advance. To the south of the railroad 3 Cdn Inf Div had joined 11 Armd Div in the drive to the west. 8 Bde sent R. de Chaud to attack the Tuschen Wald. This wooded area which separates the Hochwald and Balbergerwald west of Kunderenhof (0340), was entered at 1845 hours from the road just south of the railway, but the going was slow and as darkness fell the enemy drove back the Canadian infantry with overwhelming concentrations of artillery and mortar fire. The operation was then postponed until daylight (W.D., R. de Chaud, 1 Mar 45). On the same day both N. Shore R. and Q.O.R. of C. moved down to concentration areas between Gochfort (0039) and the railway. Here the two regiments awaited the developments to the south (W.D., N. Shore R., Q.O.R. of C., 1 Mar 45; AEF 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Docket II: Memos Nos. 6 and 8). The remaining elements of 3 Cdn Div were widely scattered, 9 Cdn Inf Bde remained in Udem (W.D., H.C. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Mar 45) and 7 Cdn Inf Bde, whose task was to protect the right flank of 11 Armd Div, moved C. Scot R. and R. Wpg Rif to take up new positions in that role. By 2000 hours 1 C. Scot R. held the south-westerly slopes of the Gochfort feature (1039), with R. Wpg Rif to the south and east of the stream near Hunerpasshof (0038) (W.Ds., H.C. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 C. Scot R. and R. Wpg Rif, 1 Mar 45).

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

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

56. Meanwhile, 30 Corps had not decreased its pressure in the south-west. 185 Bde of 3 Brit Div fought for Kervenheim throughout the day and by midnight, though enemy strong-points in the castle and cemetery grounds were still holding out, the major part of the town was under British control. 8 and 9 Brit Bdes were strung out to the north-west and preparing to pass through the objective (AEF 45/30 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III, Folios 118 and 119, Sitreps of 1 Mar 45). 53 (W.) Div maintained its offensive operations against Weeze with 71 Bde while 158 Bde hammered away at the woods (9637) east of the town. 160 Bde rested in reserve. To the west of Weeze 53 (W.) Div's reconnaissance troops prodded the enemy's lines, and further on 52 (L.) Div had met with some local successes. 156 Bde captured Ober Helsum (9039), Nieder Helsum (9038) and Heerivan (8638). On the extreme right flank the Lowland armoured cars, striking down the railroad from Afferden (8038) towards Langstraat (8333), reached the concrete works north of Heukelom (8237), where they were stopped by the enemy in some strength. (Ibid)

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

EXPLOITATION BY 2 CDN CORPS, 2, 3 MAR

58. The early morning of 2 Mar saw the entire front flare up with activity as each division struck out. In the far north 129 Bde of 43 (W.) Div moved down to the right to occupy

the area east of Todtenhugel and north of Delsenhof (0244) and relieve elements of 4 Cdn Inf Bde. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945, Appx 2, Sitrep 020600 hours, 2 Mar 45). 214 Bde reached Spierhof (0346) and found Kehrum unoccupied, but the armoured cars bumped into stern resistance on the approaches to Ner Mormter (06500651). At this time it was not certain whether Appeldorn or Marienbaum were clear. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945, Ops Log, 2 Mar, Serial 20, 3 Mar, Serials 4, 10 and 15)

59. On 2 Cdn Inf Div's front the 4 Bde attack went in at 0630 hours. The R.H.L.I. advance, heavily supported, met little resistance and by 1000 hours all objectives had been secured. Brigadier Cabeldu now instructed R. Regt of C. to be ready to push on through (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Mar 45). 5 Bde, whose advance patrols had already journeyed southwards to the Gap, held its ground with orders to relieve 6 Bde as soon as the latter commenced clearing the southern part of the forest (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Mar 45). But in the Gap itself there was being enacted a scene of bitter encounter which would rarely be equalled. While 6 Bde stood astride the space between the two forests and two companies of Alq R. dug in on the eastern slope, a battle group consisting of Lake Sup R. (Mot) and one company of Alq R. lunged eastwards supported by the tanks of 21 Cdn Armd Regt. The objective, the wood east of Herstges (0540), was reached by 0715 hours and 4 Cdn Armd Div pushed infantry along the axis of the railway to reinforce the line of advance. By this time, however, it was broad daylight and the enemy equally strong on both sides of the railway track drove the Canadians back with very heavy losses. Of the force involved in the dawn attack only a few members of Lake Sup R. (Mot) returned. The Alq R. company was almost wiped out. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 21 Cdn Armd Regt, Lake Sup R. (Mot), Alq R., 2 Mar 45)

60. Meanwhile 6 Cdn Inf Bde's plan to pass Camerons of C. through the Fus M.R. had taken shape. Camerons of C. advanced at 1030 hours, but no speed could be attained against the strong opposition, and the Highlanders were eventually forced to dig in and hold about 500 yards short of their objective, which was the south-eastern edge of the Hochwald Forest. Consequently, neither S. Sask R. nor Fus M.R., who were to follow up to the north, were able to move (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Mar 45). The effort by 3 Cdn Inf Div to clear the Tuschen Wald, which had begun at 0730 hours, met with better fortune. R. de Chaud of 8 Cdn Inf Bde, supported by tanks of 6 Cdn Armd Regt, completed its task by 1400 hours, at which time Q.O.R. of C. and N. Shore R. passed through and advanced steadily against scattered but fairly stiff opposition. By 2200 hours 2 Mar half of the original objectives had been seized. The brigade held for the night in the western edge of the Tuschen Wald. (W.Ds., Q.O.R. of C., R. de Chaud, N. Shore R., 2 Mar 45: AEF 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Docket II, Memos Nos 6, 7 and 8, Memoranda of Interviews with O.Cs. Q.O.R. of C., R. de Chaud, N. Shore R., 16 Mar 45). 9 Cdn Inf Bde was now preparing to move from Udem into the more active battle area. (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde). 7 Cdn Inf Bde rested in its consolidated positions with the exception of 1 C. Scot R. who shifted further to the south-east later that night to relieve a portion of 11 Armd Div in the area of the crossroads north-east of Mausbruch (0136) (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde).

61. The tasks performed by 2 Cdn Armd Bde for the first two days in March had been of a wide and varying nature. 6 Cdn Armd Regt, having relieved 10 Cdn Armd Regt on 1 Mar, came under command of 3 Cdn Inf Div at Udem and operated with 8 Bde during the Balbergerwald fighting. 27 Cdn Armd Regt was providing armoured support for 2 Cdn Inf Div, but its squadrons rejoined their headquarters near Hartmanshof (0244) on the night of 2 Mar. 10 Cdn Armd Regt was now refitted and waiting for further employment near Schroanenhof (9847). (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, March 1945: Appx I, Sitreps for period up to 030800, and W.Ds., 10, 27 and 6 Cdn Armd Regts, 1 and 2 Mar 45)

62. The attack by 11 Armd Div to the south was resumed again at 0300 hours 2 Mar with 4 Armd Bde Gp thrusting southwards between the two lines of trenches which constituted that part of the Schlieffen defences. The operation had gone exceedingly well, and as the light of day appeared, the ridge on the western side of the forest was taken. It was during the consolidation that the enemy seemed to revive and counter-attacked fiercely, only to be driven off with heavy losses. 4 Armd Bde's second battle group then passed through to clear the end of the line south of Neuenbautershof (0338). The German positions put up a terrific fight, especially on the right flank, where the approaches to Sonsbeck were well cratered and covered by numerous strong-points. In spite of the determined resistance, by dawn on 3 Mar the 4 Armd Bde Gp had overcome many obstacles and reached Kellervaldshof, where they awaited relief by 159 Bde Gp, who were to press on towards Sonsbeck.

63. Whereas the advance by 2 Cdn Corps had been bitterly opposed, 30 Corps swept southwards without much interference. On the extreme right 1 Commando Bde had entered Langstraat (8333). 156 (L.) Bde, having occupied Petruchem (8736) and Hasenhof (8836) cleared the wooded sector west of Steeg (9237). 71 Bde of 53 (W.) Div combed the town of Weeze while 158 Bde passed through the patrol into Kavelaer. 3 Brit Div, attacking to the south-east from the woods above Ratzenhof (9639) took Winnekendonk without opposition, while its reconnaissance elements fanned out towards Schravelen (9733) (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945, Appx 9: "Highlight of Ops" up to 030730 (2 Mar 45)). The Ninth U.S. Army was now advancing with unprecedented rapidity. So far 17,473 prisoners of war had passed into the cages. XIX Corps took Neuss and Mappelen on 3 Mar and reached the River Rhine east of Krefeld, which XIII Corps invested. Elsewhere on the XIII Corps front the troops did not gain much ground, but XVI Corps on the left seized Nieukerk (0518) and raced on northwards towards 30 Brit Corps. (Ibid: Sitrep, Ops Summary 012400 - 022400)

64. An Army Intelligence Summary for 2 Mar summed up the enemy's plight:

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

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

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

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

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

(First Cdn Army Int Summary
No. 254, 2 Mar 45)

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

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

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

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

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

1. (a) Adv on axis HEES - WEMB - TWISTEDEN -
WALBECK - GELDERN
- (b) Continue clearance rd AFFERDEN - WELL
- (c) Clear tps and tpt WEST of rd GOCH - WEEZE -
KEVELAER by 031030A
2. 53 (W) Inf Div
 - (a) 71 (W) Inf Bde concs area GOCH
 - (b) 8 Brit Armd Bde with one inf bn to capture
KEVELAER, and exploit to GELDERN
3. Gds Armd Div

To adv at 1030 hrs to capture KEPELLEN and
ISSUM.
4. 3 Brit Inf Div to exploit to KAPPELLEN and be
prepared to follow behind Gds Armd Div where
latter have passed through.

The intentions for 2 Cdn Corps were:

1. 11 Brit Armd Div - to continue adv on SONSBECK
2. 3 Cdn Inf Div
 - (a) To clear BALBERGERWALD SOUTH of rly.
 - (b) With 7 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes to attack
from BALBERGERWALD and capture spur to
09 easting.
3. 4 Cdn Armd Div - to prepare to adv on axis
LABBECK 0539 - VEEN 1135.
4. 2 Cdn Inf Div
 - (a) To clear HOCHWALD forest.
 - (b) To regroup for subsequent adv to XANTEN
axis of rly.
5. 43 Brit Inf Div
 - (a) To continue sweep on LEFT flank.
 - (b) To take over to MARIENBAUM from 2 Cdn
Inf Div.

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

67. By the morning of 3 Mar, the situation north of the
railroad began to show signs of loosening. 43 (W.) Div on
the left made steady gains throughout the day and by mid-
night 3/4 Mar 214 Bde had reached the outskirts of
Marienbaum by way of Kehrum and had shortly afterwards
pushed elements into Vynen (0945). (W.D., G.S., H.Q.
2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 4 Mar 45,

Serials 6, 15, 20). In the area of the Hochwald Gap, 4 Cdn Armd Bde, under severe pressure since the previous night, handed over to 5 Cdn Inf Bde, and retired to concentrate between Udem and the south-western tip of the forest. Here at 1500 hours, Maj-Gen C. Vokes issued fresh orders. 4 Cdn Armd Bde with under command Alq R. would reorganize into two battle groups and be ready to move south of the railway as from 0600 hours 4 Mar. A 10 Cdn Inf Bde battle group, consisting of Line & Welld R. with 28 Cdn Armd Regt, would precede 4 Cdn Armd Bde in the same direction at 0200 hours. (AEF 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II: Special Report 2CC/1, G.S. account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", 16 Mar 45)

68. As soon as 5 Cdn Inf Bde had relieved Alq R. in the Gap, 6 Cdn Inf Bde resumed its advance to the north-east. Camerons of C. quickly seized the south-eastern fringe of the woods to allow S. Sask R. to pass through, and although movement was difficult and confined in the forest, S. Sask R. reached its objectives by 1200 hours. Two hours later Fus M.R. followed up and cleared the eastern part of the forest as far north as Point 136 (0542). The brigade now firmed up for the night and patrolled north and east to contact any remaining opposition. (W.Ds., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, S. Sask R., Camerons of C., and Fus M.R., 3 Mar 45). In the northern half of the Hochwald 4 Cdn Inf Bde made good progress. By nightfall all three regiments were firm and in complete control of the north-western section with Essex Scot R. north of Schmachdarm, R.H.L.I. opposite Neuchbaureshof and Olbershof (0344) and R. Regt C. well forward to the north-east with roving patrols in the vicinity of Godenhof (0445) and Horte Veen (0545). (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, R. Regt C., R.H.L.I. and Essex Scot R., 3 Mar 45)

69. The day's efforts by 3 Cdn Inf Div south of the railway met with only limited success. 8 Cdn Inf Bde at first light returned to its task of clearing the eastern portion of the Balbergerwald, using the north to south ryde through the forest as a start line. After a strongly contested fight through the woods N. Shore R. was by evening on its objectives, having captured Pauhof (0539) and Rosenthalshof (0638). Q.O.R. of C. was not so fortunate; its tanks could not move through the mined areas and were forced to support the infantry from stationary positions, a hard problem among the many trees. Confused fighting developed and darkness found them pinned down, still at the start line, resisting a series of fierce counter-attacks and under very heavy fire. (W.Ds., Q.O.R. of C., and N. Shore R., 3 Mar 45; AEF 45/8 Cdn Inf Bde/C/G, Docket II, Memos 6, 7 and 8, Accounts of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" by O.Cs. Q.O.R. of C., N. Shore R. and R. de Chaud, 3 Mar 45). The remaining unit of 8 Cdn Inf Bde, R. de Chaud, working between the area of the main attack and the railroad, mopped up the few enemy who held out in the open ground east of the Tuschen Wald.

70. Meanwhile, both 7 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes, though comparatively inactive operationally, were regrouping. Regina Rif of 7 Cdn Inf Bde had already shifted to the western fringe of the Balbergerwald where it came under command 8 Cdn Inf Bde. (W.D., Regina Rif, 3 Mar 45). 7 Cdn Recce Regt relieved 1 C. Scot R. in the area of Schreibershof (0237). (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, and units, 3 Mar 45). On the evening of 3 Mar the three battalions of 9 Cdn Inf Bde, fresh from their lengthy

concentration at Udem, marched into the Balbergerwald, filling in the open spaces between the bogged 8 Cdn Inf Bde attack and the Regina Rif. (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 3 Mar 45). In contrast to the difficulties being encountered by 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs, on the narrow front south of the Balbergerwald, 11 Brit Armd Div was almost continually out of contact with the enemy, and now that the defensive belt south-west and west of the forest was clear the general advance changed its tune to one of extensive patrolling (Taurus Pursuant, page 85).

71. The general situation across 30 Corps' front had developed according to the promises shown earlier in the day. Rapid advances were carried out all along the sector and by the morning of 4 Mar 52 (L.) Div had elements of one Commando brigade in Well, while to the east 155 and 156 (L.) Bdes were in complete control of the road from Wemb (9133) to Klein Kevelaer (9330). Further eastwards, 53 (W.) Div was fast approaching Geldern from the north-west. 158 Bde was within two miles of the town with 71 and 160 Bdes firm along the axis back to Kevelaer and Weeze. 3 Brit Div had already launched 185 Bde against Kapellen while 9 and 8 Bdes remained concentrated in the areas of Winnekendonk and Hervenheim respectively. The new advance by Gds Armd Div was also under way, though this operation was held up temporarily by bad road conditions along the Goch - Weeze highway (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 12, 4 Mar 45, "Highlights of Ops" up to 040730 hours, and Ibid, Folio 55, Ops Summary 022400 - 032400 hours 30 Brit Corps).

72. From the south the tempo of the American advance towards First Canadian Army mounted steadily. XIX Corps cleared Neuss and claimed yet another portion of the west bank of the Rhine near Dusseldorf. XIII Corps, though still fighting in Krefeld, passed some of its armour to the north to reach Moers and capture Kempen, and XVI Corps, which was in the process of attacking Geldern and Savelen, drove on to within three miles of Rheinberg. With all this Allied pressure it was confidently expected that the enemy's line would not hold much longer. His predicament was defined by Canadian Intelligence as follows:

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

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

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

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

(First Cdn Armd Int
Summary No. 246, 3 Mar 45)

FINAL CLEARING OF THE WOODED AREAS, 4 MAR

73. The proposed course of the battle was clearly outlined in First Canadian Army's intentions for 4 Mar. 11 Brit Armd Div was to be prepared to advance after first light on the axis Udem - Sonsbeck - Bonninghardt. Three tasks were assigned to 3 Cdn Inf Div. 8 Cdn Inf Bde would first complete the clearing of Balberger Wood, whereupon 9 Bde would pass on to capture the Hammerbruch feature north-east of Sonsbeck. Once these two tasks were finished 3 Cdn Inf Div would open the route south through Sonsbeck and finally reorganize to face north-east towards Birten and Xanten. 4 Cdn Armd Div would be ready to advance on orders from the 2 Cdn Corps Commander on the axis Labbeck - Veen, passing through 3 Div. The clearance of the Hochwald would be left to 2 Cdn Inf Div, which would then regroup to advance along the railway from Udem to Xanten. 43 (W.) Inf Div would continue its attack on Xanten through Kehrum. At the same time as General Crerar issued these instructions, General Horrocks ordered 52 (L.) Inf Div to concentrate as soon as Walback (9622) was reached, 53 (W.) Inf Div to capture Issum and 3 Brit Inf Div to clear Kapellen. Gds Armd Div was to pass through Kapellen and press on to seize its objective about Bonninghardt (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 12, 4 Mar 45, "Highlights of Ops" up to 040730, and W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 5, folio 4, "Intentions 2 Cdn Corps, 4 Mar 45").

74. Throughout 4 Mar, while the Canadian formations completed the clearing of the wooded areas, 43 (W.) Div made good progress. By nightfall 214 Bde was in touch with 2 Cdn Inf Div, having cleared the wood east of Kehrum and pressed on towards Wickermanshof (0943) and Wardt. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 4 Mar 45: Serial 15). 2 Cdn Inf Div's attacks in the Forest between the two railway tracks leading to Xanten also met with considerable success. The northern part was completely cleared by 4 Cdn Inf Bde during the morning and patrols were sent to the south-east to contact 6 Bde who were advancing rapidly up the right side of the Forest (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes, 4 Mar 45). Apparently the enemy had withdrawn; Camerons of C., attacking eastwards across the front held by Fus M.R., met little opposition, and in the late afternoon established contact with R. Regt C. and R.H.L.I. (Ibid). In evidence of the intensity of the past battle the enemy's dead and abandoned equipment lay everywhere (Ibid). The northernmost sector was now taken over by 8 Cdn Recce Regt and R. Regt C., who maintained contact with 43 Div on the left flank (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Mar 45). In the meantime, as 5 Bde was out of touch with the enemy, Brigadier McGill shifted his reserve battalions southward in readiness for a new push. Calg Highrs moved down from the west edge of the Hochwald to occupy the woods astride the railway, bringing the Rhine closer by some 2000 yards. Since this objective was gained without fighting, at 2130 hours Calg Highrs pressed on, for the plan now was to push R. de Meis past them at 0330 hours to occupy the high ground in the region of Birken Kampshof (0841). (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Mar 45)

75. Meanwhile, in the 3 Cdn Inf Div sector, 8 Cdn Inf Bde had finally accomplished its task of clearing the Balbergerwald. (W.D., Q.O.R. of C., 4 Mar 45). From the eastern fringe a reconnaissance group of 4 Cdn Armd Div consisting of troops of A. & S.H. of C. and 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt struck out to

advance south and capture Labbeck (0639). (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Mar 45). The attack by 9 Cdn Inf Bde on the Hammerbruch spur went in at 1900 hours. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 4 Mar 45, Serial 46). S.D. & G. Highrs passed through Q.O.R. of C. and advanced against heavy opposition, but by 2300 hours had completed the first phase. Both H.L.I. of C. and Nth N.S. Highrs now moved up to carry on the assault. (Ibid, 5 Mar 45, Serial 17). 4 Cdn Armd Div had little share in the day's events. The operation against Labbeck and consequent exploitation towards Hanshof met only slight opposition, and the armoured cars of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt were ordered by Maj-Gen Vokes to see what lay to the south-east. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 4 Mar 45)

THE ENEMY'S LINE IS SHORTENED

76. Though the narrow front held by 11 Armd Div brought no local change, the news from the 30 Corps sector showed a definite promise of success. The front between XVI U.S. Corps and 52 (L.) Div and 53 (W.) Div was fast being closed out, for by the morning of 5 Mar, 1 Cdo Bde had made contact with the Americans in Talbeck (9623) and the Lowlanders, free of commitment, had begun to concentrate south and west of Geldern. 53 (W.) Div, having cleared Geldern with 35 U.S. Inf Div, turned north-east, leaving 158 Bde in the town, and moved along the axis of Geldern - Issum - Alpon with the American forces on its right. Issum was taken without trouble, but progress from here on was slowed by cratering. The advance against Kapellen by 3 Brit Inf Div was also successful. 185 Bde was firm on the objective by 1200 hours, and the divisional reconnaissance unit probed south of the town to contact Gds Armd Div who, in their turn, had seized Hamb but were held up to the north by bad roads and scattered opposition. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 4 Mar 45, Serial 51 and 5 Mar 45, Serial 12)

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

78. Amid all this good news from the American front, marked improvements occurred in the areas of 30 Brit and 2 Cdn Corps during 5 Mar. The pressure was kept up fully all along the front. The 9 Cdn Inf Bde assaulted objectives in the area of the small woods north-east of Sonsbeck and the wooded hills south of the Sonsbeck - Xanten road (AEF 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Docket II: Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", Special Report No. 2, paras 11 - 14). In the Balbergerwald 7 Cdn Inf Bde waited in concentration, for Regina Rif had been detailed the job of capturing Sonsbeck as soon as 9 Cdn

Inf Bde succeeded in its latest effort. The success by 43 Div in the far north reduced 2 Cdn Inf Div's opportunities on this day and as a result 4 Cdn Inf Bde remained in the northern part of the Hochwald to refit and rest. Advanced elements of 5 Cdn Inf Bde met heavy fire in the region of Birkenhampshof and could make no definite gains. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Mar 45). Between the railway and the forest, 6 Cdn Inf Bde put a new plan into operation. S. Sask R. advanced eastwards towards Roschhof (0942) where they formed a strong position 1000 yards north of R. de Mais. From here infantry and reconnaissance patrols went to contact the enemy south towards Xanten and north to meet 214 Bde of 43 Div who had reached the line of Wickermanshof (0943) and Wardt. (W.Ds., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Mar 45, W.D. G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 5 Mar 45, Serials 34, 35, 48, 52, 55, and 6 Mar 45, Serial 2)

79. Maj-Gen C. Vokes' division, at present concentrated east of Udem, eagerly awaited its chance to move into the battle. The A. & S.H. of C. battle group, now operating against stiffened opposition in the area south of Haneshof, reported a good deal of enemy armour, some of which was doubtlessly being forced into this sector by 3 Cdn Inf Div's drive south of Balbergerwald. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 5 Mar 45; and W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Mar 45). The major part of 11 Armd Div was also concentrated, though forward elements of 159 Bde Gp edged ahead gradually to conform with the pressure being exerted by 3 Cdn Inf Div, and encountered opposition near the crossroads west of Sonsbeck. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 5 Mar 45, Serial 40). The entire effort of 30 Corps had now changed direction. On the far western flank 52 (L.) Div rested and 1 Cdo Bde reverted to command of Second Army. Along the parallel flank of XVI U.S. Corps, 53 (W.) Inf Div passed 158 Bde through 71 Bde at Issum in a thrust towards Alpon. Directly to the north Gds Armd Div attacked north-east from Hamb, to capture Metxetath, where some hundred of the enemy surrendered, while 185 Bde of 3 Div prepared to clear the wooded area of Winkelscher Busch. The advance continued with unceasing pressure against varying opposition all across the front. (AEF 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Operation "VERITABLE", page 40, paras 125 - 128)

80. During the hours of darkness, 7 Cdn Inf Bde attacked Sonsbeck and entered the town against moderate resistance. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 11, 14, 16, 17). By 0800 hours 6 Mar the 2 Cdn Corps line provided a satisfying picture. In the far north from Wardt to Wickermanshof 214 Bde of 43 Div together with 43 Recce Regt were persisting in an all-out effort to reach Xanten. Slightly to the south, the line ran past Roschhof (0942) and Schlaymann (0842), to the large wood astride the railway north-east of Labbeck. This wood was occupied by Calg Highrs. South of this point, around the community of Labbeck 10 Cdn Inf Bde and armoured cars of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt were still attempting to thrust past Haneshof (0639) across the front held by N. Shore R. of 8 Cdn Inf Bde. The line continued south across the Hammerbruch feature, which 9 Cdn Inf Bde was gradually clearing, to form a salient extending as far as the main Xanten - Sonsbeck road from Furth (0828) to the wood north of Kirvitt (0736). Further along Sonsbeck had fallen to 7 Cdn Inf Bde during the night and was now in the hands of Regina Rif R., who were patrolling south to establish contact

with 3 Brit Div. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 2 - 7; W.D. G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, March 1945: Appx 56, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serial 4). 4 Cdn Armd Div had also gone over to the offensive. Three battle groups of 10 Cdn Inf Bde supported by 28 Cdn Armd Regt were advancing south towards Veen (4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 18, 21). 4 Cdn Armd Bde remained in the vicinity of Udemerbruch, prepared to join the battle as soon as the opportunity offered itself. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 6 Mar 45)

81. 11 Armd Div still held its ground west of Sonsbeck, but patrolled to keep touch with 3 Cdn Inf Div on its left, and into the so far unclaimed area south of the town towards which 3 Brit Div was advancing, clearing the Winkelscher Busch en route. The rest of 30 Corps was moving steadily forward. Eastwards of Hamb Gds Armd Div pressed on in the direction of Bonninghardt, while along the southern flank 53 (W.) Div was working its way along the main road to Albon with 160 Bde in the lead (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 22, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 9 and 17). The American Ninth Army's push to the north-east, which had already taken in most of the Rhine's left bank from Dusseldorf to Homberg, continued with heavy fighting by XVI Corps in Rheinberg (Ibid, Appx 22, Ops Log "Copy", 6 Mar 45, Serial 1).

82. In spite of the determined resistance, the infantry steadily slogged its way forward. On the left, as 43 (W.) Div felt its way towards Luttingen (1142) and Xanten from the north, 2 Cdn Inf Div sent 3 Cdn Inf Bde forward with the north-western outskirts of Xanten as the objective. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 28, 24, 26). Camerons of C., however, met extremely heavy opposition and were forced temporarily to withdraw. The Commander of 2 Cdn Corps now decided to assault Xanten with 43 (W.) Div and 4 and 5 Cdn Inf Bdes. 6 Cdn Inf Bde was ordered to form a firm base as part of this plan and to carry out a relief of 5 Bde, which had not moved from its positions astride and north of the railway. Apart from the capture of the town by 4 Bde and the plan to seize the high ground between Xanten and the Rhine with 5 Bde assisted by 43 (W.) Div on the left, an alternate plan called for intensive patrolling forward to determine whether the enemy was pulling back. If this were found to be the case, one battalion of 4 or 5 Bde would be passed through with all speed to occupy the vacated position. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 6 Mar 45; and W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, March 1945: Ops Log, Appx "B", "Notes of Comds Conference", 6 Mar 45). R.H.L.I. and Essex Scot were picked by Brigadier Cabeldu for the assault on the town proper, after which R. Regt C. would pass through (W.D., H.Q. and units, 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 6 Mar 45).

83. At the same time, south of the railway both 4 Cdn Armd and 3 Cdn Inf Divs were engaged in bitter fighting. One small battle group of 10 Cdn Inf Bde after a hard time got past the village of Haneshof (0638) and reached Beckmanshof (0738). Of two other larger groups driving south to cut the Sonsbeck - Veen road, the first, following the main road found its route blocked by craters. These stopped the armour, but the infantry went forward on foot seeking contact. The last group, swinging south past the eastern outskirts of Sonsbeck, turned to thrust eastwards but it too found its line of advance blocked at many points. By nightfall, although they reached the village of Veen, the troops came under such heavy fire that Brigadier J.C. Jefferson decided to plan a special attack for the following morning with A. & S.H. of C. going in along the main road,

supported by elements of Alq R. on the left. A mixed force of 28 Cdn Armd Regt and Line & Wellld R. was to stand by to pass through. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 22, 25, 27, 32, 41, 43, 47, 49; and W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 6 Mar 45)

84. Meanwhile, the positions of 3 Cdn Inf Div had improved considerably. On the Hammerbruch feature, 9 Bde, against very stiff opposition, took Weiherkamp (0736) and Holtges (0836), and reached the road binding in the eastern side of the Hill feature between Burenhof (0837) and Furth (0738). (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 39, 40). By the evening of 6 Mar patrols of Regina Rif had contacted 3 Brit Div at the road junction south of Sonsbeck (Ibid, Serial 50). This contact made the line solid and pinched out 11 Brit Armd Div. The division was now ordered to revert to command First Canadian Army and to move back out of the battle (Ibid, Appx 5, Folio 6, "Intention 2 Cdn Corps", 7 Mar 45). In the same order Lt-Gen Simonds instructed 4 Cdn Armd Div to continue the advance through Veon on Menzelen (1636). 3 Cdn Inf Div was to probe towards Xanten Forest; 2 Cdn and 43 (W.) Divs were to contain Xanten until the assault proper began (Ibid).

85. The advance to the east by 30 Corps on 6 Mar had also progressed favourably. 3 Brit Div completed the clearing of Winkelscher Busch without trouble, and on 6 Mar resumed their advance to the north-east (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serial 46). The drive by Gds Armd Div on Bonninghardt was entirely successful, and the town was captured after a steady advance against moderate opposition (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 22, Army Ops Log, 7 Mar 45, Serial 2). On the road to Alpon, however, the enemy put up a stiffer fight, and gains were slow in comparison to the effort by the divisional reconnaissance regiment through the Die Leucht Woods to the south of the highway; the armoured cars roamed freely through the evergreens and by 1800 hours had reached the eastern and southern fringes to capture an enemy petrol dump and to contact XVI U.S. Corps just east of Padenhof (1526). (Ibid, Appx 22, Ops Log, 6 Mar 45, Serials 27, 48 and 57). The infantry battalions were by this time being sorely pressed. After capturing that position of Die Leucht Woods south of Alpon, 160 Inf Bde were heavily counter-attacked (Ibid, Serial 93), but these efforts on the part of the enemy served no purpose and the British line remained unbroken. At 2145 hours that same evening, it was announced that 52 (L.) Div would rejoin the battle and relieve 53 (W.) Div who, after its gallant work of the past ten days, was to concentrate and rest near Geldern (Ibid, Serial 115). (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 7 Mar 45, Serial 1)

86. On the Ninth Army front, rapid advances were forcing the enemy back towards Wesel and congesting his bridgehead. XVI Corps cleared Rheinberg and in conjunction with 53 (W.) Div was now facing the railway line from Alpon to Rheinberg and patrolling strongly towards Millingen (1830). XIII Corps cleared Homberg and the area of the loop in the river. While resistance against XIII Corps was definitely crumbling, the enemy refused to give ground before Ossenber and Millingen. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 22, Folio 40, Sitrep 070900A, Ninth U.S. Army: Folio 51, Ops Summary dated Mar 071305)

87. The change on the front that day (6 Mar) had consisted chiefly in a shifting of our front line to the eastern edge of the Bonninghardt Woods. Sonsbeck and the village of Bonninghardt were found clear and it was presumed that Veen would probably also be free of enemy when it was entered. The enemy's reaction had been in the form of a well-organized demolition and mining plan and coordinated defensive artillery fire. His withdrawal was continuing skilfully and without heavy expense to himself. That Xanten was essential to him was plain for he had counter-attacked to hold it. There had been no major alteration in the troops he used except that Para Lehr Regt was now confirmed to be in the area of Veen in 8 Para Div's sector. The enemy's actions had shown his intention to withdraw when pressed but to stand his ground if permitted. He seemed to have withdrawn no major formations and to have accepted losses in his existing forces. Many of his units were much under strength and were constantly being reinforced. Elsewhere his whole position west of the Rhine was in a state of dissolution. His recent newspaper pronouncements had made clear how important the Rhine and the Ruhr were to his heart and mind. If the river could therefore be crossed before he pulled himself together and built up his western shield again, the Allied armies could take decisive advantage of the blow that the loss of the left bank would deal him (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 249, 6 Mar 45, para 6).

88. During the entire first week of March the weather had been a serious opponent to the Allies. As a result, the air support during the latter phases of operations by First Canadian Army had been small. Though medium and heavy bombers had been up on 5 and 6 Mar, close support had been of negligible quantity. The Wesel bridges received two high priority attacks on 5 Mar when 41 aircraft of 2 Gp R.A.F. dropped 164 thousand-pound bombs on the target of the railway bridge whilst another formation of 48 aircraft unloaded 183 bombs aimed at the road bridge. As both attacks were unsuccessful, 39 Mosquitoes of R.A.F. Bomber Command dropped 41 tons of H.E. on troop concentrations the following day. This was followed on the evening of 6 Mar and morning of 7 Mar by 82 heavies who attacked the bridge again with 463 tons of H.E. Direct support of the ground operations was extremely restricted. (AEF 45/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III, Operation "VERITABLE", paras 136 - 138)

89. The next twelve hours, on 7 Mar, provided little of interest. Lt-Gen Horrocks, G.O.C. 30 Corps, ordered 53 Div to hold its ground, keep close contact with U.S. 35 Div of XVI U.S. Corps and to withdraw to Corps reserve on relief by 52 (L.) Div. Gds Armd Div and 3 Brit Inf Div were also instructed to maintain their present positions, pending the take-over on the right flank by 52 (L.) Div. The situation was generally quiet, but in reply to an urgent request by Lt-Gen Simonds that pressure be kept up, B.G.S. 30 Corps stated that 52 (L.) Div would attack astride the Wesel road as soon as possible. (AEF 45/30 Brit Corps/C/I, Docket IIIB: Folios 39 and 40, Messages 062215A and 080015A, March 1945). In the vicinity of Veen, the 10 Cdn Inf Bde attack during the early hours of 7 Mar had proved unsuccessful. The leading troops got to within 500 yards of the village but were driven back by a hail of fire. It was decided to launch a two battalion attack later in the day. (AEF 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II: G.S. Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER", Special Report No. 2CC/1: A short History of 10 Cdn Inf Bde; and W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 7 Mar 45, Serial 32). On the 3 Cdn Inf Div sector patrols were the only activity, but to the north and along

the railroad, 2 Cdn Inf Div was busy regrouping for its assault on Xanten. (W.D., H.Q. 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes, Fus M.R., R. de Mais, R.H.C., 7 Mar 45). On the far left 43 (W.) Div probed forward and waited for the order that would start them towards Xanten from the north.

THE ATTACKS ON VEEN AND XANTEN

90. The plan against Xanten called for attacks by 4 and 5 Cdn Inf Bdes and 129 Bde of 43 (W.) Div. 4 Cdn Inf Bde was to move through 6 Cdn Inf Bde and capture the western side of the town, 129 Bde was to advance south through Nieder (1041) and Luttingen to seize the area of Beek (1240) and the town proper. Once this had been accomplished 5 Cdn Inf Bde would pass on to secure the high ground beyond as far as Birten. Exploitation would then be carried out south and east of the bend in the Alter Rhein. (AET 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I: Account of Op 'BLOCKBUSTER' by Brigadier W.J. McGill, Appx "B", 24 Mar 45). The attack was to be supported by elements of 27 Cdn Armd Regt who were now concentrated in rear of 6 Cdn Inf Bde. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, March 1945: Appx 1, Sitrep for period up to 071630A, dated 081030A Mar 45). 10 Cdn Armd Regt still remained south of Calcar in reserve, while 6 Cdn Armd Regt kept their positions at the south-eastern end of Balbergerwald, in support of 3 Cdn Inf Div. (Ibid)

91. While 2 Cdn Inf Div made final preparations for its attack on Xanten, 3 Cdn Inf Div's positions stayed unchanged. To the south, however, the troops of 4 Cdn Armd Div resumed their attack on Veen. The A. & S.H. of C. attack having been broken up, Linc & Wellld R. and Alg R., who reverted to command 10 Cdn Inf Bde that morning, went forward supported by 28 Cdn Armd Regt at 1600 hours. The infantry move began under a heavy smoke screen while the artillery blasted the objective with high explosives. The attack was developed in three thrusts: from the left through Oimannshof (1036); from the south-west along the axis of Boomenhof (0934) - Holtershof (1036) - Veen; and in an outflanking movement to the right to cut off Veen from the south-east. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Mar 45; W.Ds., Linc & Wellld R., Alg R., 28 Cdn Armd Regt, 7 Mar 45). The two frontal attacks made little progress against the murderous small arms fire and continuous shelling and mortaring. But the right hook had better luck; opposition was light and prisoners numerous so that by midnight this force had consolidated the crossroads at Dornemannshof (1235) some 1300 yards south-east of the village. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Mar 45). During the darkness the enemy's reaction reached a peak of ferocity and the advance slowed down against the increased resistance. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 8 Mar 45, Serials 7, 10). As soon as it was light enough, each column began to probe forward again, but the enemy, by skilful use of his rockets, mortars and anti-tank guns added to the already numerous casualties in tanks and personnel. Furthermore, the manoeuvre of armour was most difficult on the soggy ground. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Mar 45)

92. Enemy resistance in the Veen area continued throughout 8 Mar. The infantry were kept under withering fire all day; the armour, its manoeuvre restricted by soft ground and mine fields were battered by numerous anti-tank guns. Approaching

the town from the west and north-west Alq R. were unable to make progress, and the thrust from the south-east was being held. During the day 4 Cdn Armd Bde prepared to join the battle once more. In a right flanking movement 22 Cdn Armd Regt drove past Sonsbeck to the area of the crossroads north of Bonninghardt and from Die Schanx (1234) engaged the woods south of Winnenthal. (W.D., 22 Cdn Armd Regt, 8 Mar 45). 21 Cdn Armd Regt had a similar task on the left, where the tanks harassed the Latzen Busch north-west of Veen. (W.Ds., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, and Units, 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Mar 45). The fight for Veen continued long into the night.

93. In the early hours of 9 Mar a fresh plan involving the use of both brigades of 4 Cdn Armd Div was put into effect with the object of clearing Veen and Winnenthal and of linking up with 2 Cdn Inf Div. The latter task was detailed to a battle group consisting of one company Alq R. and one squadron 22 Cdn Armd Regt. The major intention, however, was to push one force of Line & Welld R. infantry and 28 Cdn Armd Regt's tanks through to the high ground east of Winnenthal while Lake Sup R. (Mot) and tanks of 21 Cdn Armd Regt captured the woods south of the town. At the same time Alq R. was to team up with one squadron of 22 Cdn Armd Regt and to be directed on to the junction point north of Winnenthal to meet 2 Cdn Inf Div. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 9 Mar 45). 22 Cdn Armd Regt would then take over the area allowing Lake Sup R. (Mot) to push on to the next objective, the town of Winnenthal itself (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 9 Mar 45).

94. The new plan got quickly under way. The infantry of 10 Cdn Inf Bde supported by flame-throwers made good progress against the heavily defended positions in Veen, and by 1130 hours were well into the town. Lake Sup R. (Mot) were relieved on their first objectives and proceeded to assault Winnenthal. Stiff opposition was met, the enemy holding tenaciously to every building, but flame-throwers gradually turned the tide and as darkness descended upon the battle area, Winnenthal was clear with the exception of the monastery on the east side of the town. Here, according to a prisoner, were 250 fanatical paratroopers, well-armed with automatic weapons, who intended to hold out to the last man. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 9 Mar 45). While Lake Sup R. (Mot) continued to exert pressure against the remaining resistance in Winnenthal, Line & Welld R. reached the high ground west of the town, meeting considerable opposition. However, Veen was now isolated and written off operationally. (Ibid: and W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 9 Mar 45)

95. In the meantime, on 8 Mar, to the south of Veen 52 (L.) Div relieved 53(W.) Div on the approaches to Alpon, with orders to attack the town as soon as possible. Gds Armd Div with 8 Brit Inf Bde under command, made only small advances, while 3 Brit Div remained static in the area of Winkelscher Busch. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 27, Sitrep up to 080900, Folio 29). On the far right of the battle ground, the troops of XVI U.S. Corps were still hammering at Ossenbergl and the line of Millingen - Huck, where the enemy was putting up a tremendous effort to stop the advance. (Ibid). The highlight of the day, however, came from the First U.S. Army sector, where 9 U.S. Armd Div announced that they had captured a railway bridge intact over the Rhine at Remagen in the vicinity of Epernay (F6520). This vital opportunity was quickly used

to advantage, and by the morning of 8 Mar one motor battalion and several tanks were across the river fighting bitterly to maintain the new bridgehead. (Ibid). The importance of this event is well defined by First Canadian Army Intelligence in its daily summary:

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

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

96. Regarding the enemy's intention the report continued:

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

A PW from 16 Para Regiment's HQ captured 5 March 45 spoke of a GOC's order "who crosses the RHINE gets shot." It is quite evident that the enemy has a plan and a very good one for his withdrawal, but whether it is on a 'time' or 'ground' basis is a different matter...

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

(Ibid)

97. 8 Mar was a day of momentous event all across the front. At 0540 hours, while troops of 4 Cdn Armd Div were still attempting to take the village of Veen, both 2 Cdn Inf Div, supported by 27 Cdn Armd Regt, and 43 (W.) Div went forward to the attack on Xanten. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 8 Mar 45, Serials 11, 12). 4 Cdn Inf Bde broke out of the S. Sask R. positions to lead the way with the left Essex Scot, on the right R.H.L.I. Simultaneously 129 Bde of 43 (W.) Div launched its two forward battalions along the Marienbaum - Xanten road. By 0700 hours Essex Scot reported that part of the objective in the wide fork of the two main roads leading into the town from the north-west and south-west, as taken, but R.H.L.I., held up by large road craters, were under heavy fire. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Mar 45). By midday Essex Scot, assisted by crocodiles, announced that the objective was being consolidated. Since the progress of R.H.L.I. was still held up, R. Regt C. was launched into the battle in the hope that their attack might relieve

pressure on the right. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, 8 Mar 45, Serials 21 - 25). The battle continued against fierce resistance all afternoon as R. Regt C., aided by Wasp flame-throwers, pressed on, and troops of 129 Bde fought their way into the built-up section of the town. At 1815 hours Brigadier Cabeldu decided that either R.H.L.I. must be reinforced or that the attack by 5 Cdn Inf Bde must go in to ease the pressure. As darkness descended, Fus M.R. came up on the right to relieve elements of R.H.L.I. while R. Regt C. left column contacted 129 Bde of 43 (W.) Div in the town. 5 Cdn Inf Bde was preparing to pass through. (W.Ds., H.Qs. 4 and 5 Cdn Inf Bdes, 8 Mar 45)

98. At 2245 hours 5 Cdn Inf Bde, with under command S. Sask R., began their attack. The use of the latter unit had been urgently requested by Brigadier W.J. Megill, D.S.O., who considered that in order to carry out his part of the operation successfully, he must have troops tight against Xanten Forest to protect his right flank. R. de Mais, travelling down the main Calcar - Xanten road in kangaroos and supported by tanks of 27 Cdn Armd Regt and flails, went first, and, by 0030 hours 9 Mar, captured the wooded and hilly feature just south of Beek (1239) against light opposition, collecting 118 prisoners. The R.H.C., who had marched eastwards from Birkenkampshof (0841), passed through to the Furstenberg feature (1239) and reported all objectives by 0415 hours. At this point the Comd 5 Cdn Inf Bde ordered S. Sask R. forward in its role of flank protection to the area of Dasshof (1139). Once this move was completed, Calg Highrs advanced to secure the south-eastern tip of the Staats Forst Xanten opposite Birten. At 0930 hours R. de Mais passed through R.H.C. with the object of crossing the canal south of Birten. This effort ran into considerable trouble as the enemy put down a terrific mortar bombardment followed by a counter-attack which was flung back with much loss to the enemy in prisoners and killed. A flaming assault against Birten Wood by crocodiles, with the help of tanks and the regimental Wasps of the R. de Mais, yielded some 200 prisoners. The units of 5 Cdn Inf Bde were now relieved by 6 Bde and were directed to cross the Canal south of Birten and secure a bridgehead, all as part of a brand new brigade plan "to bounce" a crossing of the Rhine. (AEF 45/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I, Account of Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" by Brigadier W.J. Megill, Comd 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 24 Mar 45, Memo of Interview No. 2 CD/8)

99. This startling plan called for a dash by R.H.C. to Ginderich (1738) in kangaroos; a drive by Calg Highrs, similarly transported, to cross the Wesel bridge followed by R.H.C.; and the occupying of pontoons on the west bank of the river by R. de Mais. 4 Cdn Inf Bde were to follow up 5 Bde on the projected crossing. With this bold object in view, units of 5 Bde returned to Xanten at approximately 1600 hours to prepare for the attack (W.Ds., H.Q. 4, 5 & 6 Cdn Inf Bdes, 9 Mar 45). An extra formation was added to 2 Cdn Inf Div, when 7 Cdn Inf Bde came under command at 1315 hours. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, March 1945: Appx 1, Ops Log, 9 Mar 45, Serial 1167). The brigade occupied positions on the left of the railway line two miles north-east of Labbeck. (Ibid, Serials 1183, 1191)

100. The past two days had seen many important changes in the sector occupied by 30 Brit Corps. At 1800 hours 8 Mar H.Q. 30 Corps had passed to command Second British Army, while its troops all came under Lt-Gen Simonds' command. 52 (L.) Div, having completed the relief of 53 (W.) Div, attacked towards Alpon with 156 (L.) Bde and entered the

town, subsequently continuing the advance to the north-east. 32 Gds Bde of Gds Armd Div swung its weight against the triangle formed by the railways at Menzelen, while 8 Bde of 3 Brit Div waited slightly behind the armour to pass through as soon as 156 Bde took out an enemy strong-point at Haus Loo (1633). (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 30, 9 Mar 45, Folio 103, Highlights of Ops up to 090730A). On the Ninth U.S. Army front, XIX and XIII Corps, having closed up to the west bank of the Rhine, had nothing to report but XVI Corps, though still involved in stiff fighting for Ossenbergh and Huck, had captured Millingen. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 9 Mar 45, Serial 37). Surprisingly enough, further to the south, the American bridgehead across the Rhine was being securely held and up to 2200 hours 8 Mar 45 there was no sign of any enemy counter-attack in this area.

101. The enemy's bridgehead, battered and dented by the advances of 2 Cdn Inf and 4 Cdn Armd Divs, shrunk further in the face of attacks by 52 (L.) Div and 32 Gds Armd Bde on 9 Mar. 156 (L.) Bde had cleared Alpon, and pressed on to assault the strong-point at Haus Loo. The first attack on this fort proved unsuccessful, but 155 (L.) Bde made a second attempt which brought about the fall of the fort and the adjacent wood. By 2400 hours 52 (L.) Div was well established some 2500 yards north-east of Alpon and patrolling forward, 32 Gds Armd Bde, on the left, having advanced approximately another 1500 yards, held a section of the Xanten - Rheinberg road from the main railway and road junction south-west of Menzelen south-eastwards along the highway to within 500 yards of the crossroads. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 34, Folio 38, Ops Summary, 082400 - 092400)

102. On the right flank, during 9 Mar, XVI U.S. Corps was brought under the control of First Canadian Army (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, 9, 10, 11 Mar 45), "for the purpose of co-ordinating and accelerating the clearance of the remaining enemy bridgeheads" (Lt-Gen H.D.G. Crerar's Dispatch, 5 Apr 45, para 46). In turn, Lt-Gen Simonds assumed operational control of the American Corps and held a conference with Maj-Gen Anderson, Comd XVI U.S. Corps, to co-ordinate the final phases of the battle (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 9 Mar 45). By 0900 hours 10 Mar one task force of 35 U.S. Inf Div having completed mopping up in Ossenbergh, Millingen and Huck, had captured Drupt (1732) and was at the gates of Wallach, some three miles south of Buderich. Another force was fighting in Borth against moderate opposition. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, Ops Log, 10 Mar 45, Serials 16, 27)

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

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

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

The heavy weight of guns used by the enemy during "VERITABLE" might now be spread out along the right bank of the Rhine where crossings were most feared and he might deploy his flak units against airborne landings. The containing of our bridgehead at Remagen continued to be the most imperative demand on the enemy in the west. We might therefore expect everything he could spare on the land or in the air to be used to delay and diminish our build-up, and to increase and hasten his. (Ibid)

"BLOCKBUSTER" IS COMPLETED

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

105. The morning of 10 Mar saw the end in sight of the operations for the Canadian divisions, as the enemy's sector opposite Wesel was chopped even smaller. On 2 Cdn Inf Div's front, Calg Highrs of 5 Cdn Inf Bde had pressed on south-east of Birten and had made contact with 52 (L.) Div attacking north of the Alpon - Wesel road on Menzelen. 2 Cdn Inf Div's task was now over and 27 Cdn Armd Regt was put once more under command 2 Armd Bde and ordered to concentrate. (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Mar 45; W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, March 1945: Appx 3, 10 Mar 45, Serial 40). Menzelen, Ginderich and Gest all fell on 10 Mar to 157 (L.) Bde, while on the right Buderich surrendered to XVI U.S. Corps (Ibid, Serials 46, 47). Back in the area north-west of Winnenthal contact was made between 2 Cdn Inf and 4 Cdn Armd Divs, and the opposition around the monastery soon crumbled as elements of 10 Cdn Inf Bde and 4 Cdn Armd Bde blasted the enemy out, capturing 100 prisoners. (Ibid, Serials 15, 39; W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 10 Mar 45)

* In an interview with the narrator at C.M.H.Q. on 8 Feb 47, General Simonds stated that he had no knowledge of this plan and expressed the belief that it may have been born of the moment by Comd 5 Cdn Inf Bde, to spur his troops on. (AEF 45/2 Cdn Corps/C/F, Docket III)

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

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

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

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

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

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First
Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx,
G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0-4/1,
10 Mar 45)

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

RIGHT - 2 Cdn Corps

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

CENTRE - 1 Cdn Corps

49 (W.R.) Div

LEFT - 1 Brit Corps

1 Pol Armd Div
4 Cdo Bde
116 R.M. Bde
Royal Netherlands Brigade

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

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

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First
Cdn Army, March 1945:
Appx 1, G.O.C.-in-C., 1-0-4/1,
10 Mar 45).

For the commencement of the new attack to cross the Rhine - code-named "PLUNDER" - 2 Cdn Corps would be placed under operational command of Second British Army. Formations of 2 Cdn Corps would be passed over the Rees bridges and would be used to extend the bridgehead area north-west, towards Doetinchem and Elten and to secure communications at Emmerich. The Rhine was to be bridged at Emmerich by First Canadian Army as early as possible and when this had been done 2 Cdn Corps would revert to General Crerar's command. While Ninth U.S. and Second British Armies were thus conducting the first phase of operations to secure a bridgehead across the Rhine the tasks of First Canadian Army were, to hold securely the line of the Rhine and the Maas from Emmerich to the sea, and to make all preparations for bridging the Rhine at Emmerich, and for taking command of the bridgehead to the north and north-west of that place when so ordered. (Ibid)

116. The second phase of the operations would involve the extension of the bridgehead eastwards and north-eastwards to the general line Hamm - Munster - Rheine - Almelo - Deventer - Apeldoorn - Otterloo - Kenkum. During this phase First Canadian Army, then including again 2 Cdn Corps, would operate northwards. It would be 2 Cdn Corps' task to thrust northwards from the Emmerich bridgehead against the Ijssel defences from the rear (i.e. from the east) to capture Deventer and Zutphen and seize Apeldoorn and the high ground between that place and Arnhem. 1 Cdn Corps was to plan to secure a bridgehead over the Neder Rijn, and capture Arnhem, at the same time that 2 Cdn Corps was developing its operations. First Cdn Army would then be prepared to bridge the river at Arnhem and open up communications from Nijmegen through Arnhem, and thence north-east. A secure flank would be formed, facing west running northwards from the Neder Rijn about Renkum, and having opened up these communications, First Canadian Army's axis of operations would be eastwards. The target date for the operation was given as 24 Mar. (Ibid)

117. The inclusion of 1 Cdn Corps in the plan constituted a happy event. The arrival of Lt-Gen Foulkes' First Corps from the Italian front meant that by far the greater part of First Canadian Army now would truly be Canadian. The decision to bring 1 Cdn Corps from the

Mediterranean front had been reached by the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 3 Feb 45. Naturally, until the Canadian Corps actually was launched into offensive operations, the whole matter was kept "Top Secret". (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, February 1945: Appx 3, Notes on Conference held by C.-in-C., 21 Army Group, 4 Feb 45). H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps actually opened at Wijchen (6158) at 0500 hours 13 Mar 45. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 49, Folio 16, Sitrep 140900, 14 Mar 45). At 1200 hours 15 Mar 49 (W.R.) Div and 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt came under command. (Ibid, 15 Mar 45, Appx 52, folio 20, Sitrep 150900, and W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 1 Cdn Corps, 15 Mar 45)

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

119. By 16 Mar, the enemy picture, which had suffered sadly through lack of contact since 11 Mar, began to clear once more; air photo sorties providing the means.

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

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

with the somewhat doubtful assistance of civilians and Volkssturm that is going on daily and in feverish haste.

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

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

120. Meanwhile, the Remagen bridgehead continued to expand, in spite of the enemy's attempts to dive-bomb it (Ibid, and 84 Group Intelligence Summary No. 218). On 17 Mar, however, the bridge, strained to the fullest extent by enemy shelling and the increasing loads of the American build-up across it, collapsed (Ibid, No. 260). Pontoon bridges were quickly erected, but on 18 Mar the enemy reverted to his previous form of trying to destroy the bridges by means of saboteurs, who in Martian-like dress, complete with oxygen equipment, swam out into the icy Rhine waters. This attack was not successful; the enemy was observed, badly shot up, and several prisoners were taken (Ibid, No. 261).

121. That same day Lt-Gen Simonds issued his outline plan for Operation "PLUNDER", exposing the role of 2 Cdn Corps - and in particular of 3 Cdn Inf Div in the first stages of the attack. 2 Cdn Corps would come under command Second Army at 1200 hours 20 Mar, at which time 3 Cdn Inf Div would be placed under command 30 Brit Corps, with 9 Cdn Inf Bde put under the control of 51 (H.) Div, who were to pass it over the Rhine. 43 (W.) Div was then to assume responsibility for 9 Bde until 7 and 8 Cdn Inf Bdes arrived on the east bank, at which time 9 Bde would revert to divisional command. When the corps commanders considered that communications had become adequate, 2 Cdn Corps would take over 3 Cdn Inf Div once more. While the entire artillery resources of 2 Cdn Corps (plus an A.G.R.A.) would support 3 Cdn Inf Div in its effort, a large programme of direct fire was also planned. For this, all available tanks of 4 Cdn Armd Bde, together with those of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt and one regiment of 2 Cdn Armd Bde, and all L.A.A. guns which could be spared, would take up fire positions in specially surveyed areas on the west bank of the river. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx "N", Appx 143, folio 25, Op "PLUNDER", Outline Plan, 18 Mar 45). The grand bombardment for the opening of the attack was to be enormous; 1338 guns of 25-pounder calibre and over, representative of almost every artillery formation in 21 Army Gp, were to be employed (AEF 45/21 Army Gp/CT, Docket IV: Notes on Ops of 21 Army Group, 1 Jun 44 - 3 May 45, para 190). A surprise of some weight lay in stock for the already battered enemy divisions on the eastern bank.

122. As the build-up continued, 1 Cdn Corps and 1 Brit Corps watching along the River Maas made a few minor changes in their dispositions. On the night of 21/22 Mar, 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt and elements of 2 Kensingtons relieved part of 8 Cdn Recce Regt (under 49 (V.R.) Div since 19 Mar) on the

extreme right of the Army sector. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, March 1945: Appx 68, folio 44, G.O. 103, Sitrep 478, 192400 to 201200). Simultaneously Westar R. (Mot) from 3 Cdn Armd Div took over from 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt in the area of Wamel. The armoured car formation now reverted to 2 Cdn Corps (Ibid, Appx 75, folio 13, G.O. 111, Sitrep No. 481, 211200 to 212400). Over on the sector of 1 Brit Corps 11 H. changed places with the newly arrived 1 H.C.R. the former unit moving to Heythieuzjan to come under command 12 Corps, for use by 7 Armd Div (Ibid, folio 50, Highlight of Ops up to 2207300). In 2 Cdn Corps there had been a major change of command. On 22 Mar, Maj-Gen D.C. Spry, D.S.O., left 3 Cdn Inf Div to take up new duties as Comd C.R.U. His place as G.O.C. 3 Cdn Inf Div was now taken by Maj-Gen R.H. Keebler, C.B.E., D.S.O. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, 21, 22 Mar 45; and W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 20 Mar 45).

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

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

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

TOP SECRET

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

Tac First Canadian Army

24 Feb 45

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

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

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

Sgd.

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

Copy to: Lt-Gen Sir John Crocker
KBE CB DSO MC (3)
Comd 1 Brit Corps

C of S (4)

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

Tac First Canadian Army

25 Feb 45

Copy No:.....

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

Lt-Gen B.G. Horrocks, CB, DSO, MC (2)
Comd 30 Corps

1. In view of the determined enemy resistance 24/25 Feb, North of WEEZE, and consequent inability of 53 (W) Inf Div firmly to secure that town before Operation "BLOCKBUSTER" by 2 Canadian Corps commences, it will be necessary to reconsider the draft basic plan outlined to you in my memorandum of yesterday - in particular the proposals contained in para 5. The importance of 30 Corps clearing the WELL - WEEZE road at an early date, in order that the WANSUM - WELL bridge may be constructed, entails this reconsideration. On the above basis, the following Army plan will be discussed at our meeting this afternoon.
2. If possible, 2 Canadian Corps will complete "BLOCKBUSTER" as planned, and firmly secure the general line KERVENHAIM - SONSBECK - XANTEN. It will then clean up all enemy remaining between this line and the R RHINE (see para 4 of yesterday's memo).
3. If by D plus 1 it is obvious that to complete "BLOCKBUSTER" a considerable regrouping, and a further deliberate attack, is required, then a "partial" "BLOCKBUSTER" will terminate the operation - i.e. the completion of Phase III and the securing of the high ground East of the CALCAR - UDEM road.
4. Throughout either "complete" or "partial" "BLOCKBUSTER", the principle responsibility of 30 Corps will be to secure the right (southern and western) flank of 2 Canadian Corps against enemy intervention, by keeping its left shoulder well up and to exploit any favourable situations (see para 3 of yesterday's memo).
5. In either of the alternative results given in paras 2 and 3 above, the weight of the Canadian Army effort will then be transferred to 30 Corps - which, as a Canadian Army first priority, will then proceed to secure the WELL - WEEZE road, and eliminate any enemy remaining to the North of it.

Sgd.

Copy to:-

Lt-Gen Sir John Crocker, KBE, CB, (H.D.G. Crerar) Gen
DSO, MC (3) GOC-in-C
Comd 1 Brit Corps First Canadian Army

Brig C.C. Mann, CBE, DSO, (4)
C of S, First Cdn Army

File (5 - 6)

War Diary (7 - 9)

COL G.S.

TOP SECRET

OP BLOCKBUSTERCORPS OUTLINE PLAN1 OBJECT

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

2 ENEMY

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

3 METHOD

(See trace given to Watch-keeper Main Army and GSO 2 Ops Tac Army).

Phase I

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

Phase II

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

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

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

Phase IV

- (a) While 3 Cdn Inf Div is fighting for UDEM, 11 Arm'd Div will by-pass UDEM to the SW and adv on axis UDEM - SONSBECK 0535 and high ground immediately NE of SONSBECK leaving a firm base on escarpment 0040 - 0039.

- (b) 3 Cdn Inf Div will follow the adv of 11 Armd Div by stepping up bns by bdes along the line of the R GROSSELEY with the object of eventually relieving 11 Armd Div of SONSBECK.
- (c) 4 Cdn Armd Div will adv (as ordered by Div Comd) to est a battle gp astride the rly line 0340 - 0440.
- (d) 2 Cdn Inf Div while retaining one bde on the high ground immediately SOUTH of CALCAR, and one as referred Phase III para (c), to pass the third bde through to relieve battle gp of 4 Cdn Armd Div on objective referred to in Phase III para (b).

EXPLOITATION

No forecast possible but alternatives as follows:-

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

4 SP

(a) Arty

Phase I

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

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

Phases II and III

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

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

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

Phase IV

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

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

(b) Air

As known to G (Air) First Cdn Army.

5 TIMINGS

- (a) D Day 26 Feb 45.
- (b) H Hr 0430 hrs.
- (c) Phase I H Hr.
 - Phase II - Corps Comds decision, earliest 0800 - latest 1000 hrs.
 - Phase III - Div Comds co-ord decision: probably early afternoon.
 - Phase IV - Div Comds decision: probably late afternoon or evening.

6 FORECAST OF OPS

- (a) Situation 1600 - 1700 hrs D Day.
 - (i) 11 Armd Div: leading battle gp approaching rly line 9641.
 - (ii) 3 Cdn Inf Div: one bde in UDEM, one bde area 9744, one bde area VERMALT 9746.
 - (iii) 4 Cdn Armd Div: leading battle gp advancing on HOCHWALD at approx 0142: second battle gp holding high ground area 0042 - 0043.
 - (iv) 2 Cdn Inf Div: one bde area TODTENHUGEL 0045; two bdes holding original objectives of Phase I.
- (b) Situation in forenoon of D plus 1.
 - (i) 11 Armd Div: leading battle gp in SONSBECK.
 - (ii) 3 Cdn Inf Div: leading bde on way to SONSBECK at approx 0237, one bde in UDEM, one bde area 9744.
 - (iii) 4 Cdn Armd Div: one battle gp astride rly line 0440.
 - (iv) 2 Cdn Inf Div: one bde advancing to relieve 4 Cdn Armd Div down road DELSENHOF 021452 - SCHMACHDARM 0342, one bde HUSMANNHOF 0245, one bde TODTENHUGEL 0045.

(Sgd) (A.F. Buchan) Maj
GSO II Liaison

241600A

CANADIAN CASUALTIES FROM 26 FEB - 23 MAR 45As compiled from C. & S. Stats First Cdn Army

	KILLED		WOUNDED		MISSING	
	Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs
2 Cdn Inf Div	23	283	77	1014	2	108
3 Cdn Inf Div	12	155	39	632	0	11
4 Cdn Armd Div	11	191	57	657	11	214
2 Cdn Armd Bde	3	15	11	42	1	13
Misc: Cdn Army Tps	0	5	0	30	0	0
1 Cdn Corps casualties as from 19 Mar 45 to 23 Mar 45 inclusive	1	4	0	17	0	4
GRAND TOTAL CDN TPS:	50	653	184	2392	14	350
GRAND TOTAL BRIT TPS:	52	608	200	2595	11	530

		KILLED		WOUNDED		MISSING	
		Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs
<u>2 Cdn Inf Div</u>							
Feb:	26	4	25	12	161	0	1
	27	0	19	9	101	0	10
	28	5	38	2	157	1	7
Mar:	1	0	9	7	44	0	11
	2	2	5	5	122	0	1
	3	1	8	1	41	0	0
	4	2	52	6	111	0	1
	5	0	16	2	57	0	2
	6	0	7	3	62	0	11
	7	0	5	1	12	0	0
	8	4	36	14	27	0	50
	9	3	37	10	62	0	2
	10	1	11	3	22	1	9
	11	0	1	0	9	0	3
	12	0	2	1	2	0	0
Total 12 Mar 45		22	271	76	990	2	108
Mar 13-23 Incl:		1	12	1	24	0	0
GRAND TOTAL:		23	283	77	1014	2	108

		KILLED		WOUNDED		MISSING	
		Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs
<u>3 Cdn Inf Div</u>							
Feb:	26	0	2	3	46	0	1
	27	6	75	10	153	0	0
	28	0	1	2	11	0	0
Mar:	1	1	13	8	77	0	0
	2	0	4	0	19	0	5
	3	2	1	2	33	0	0
	4	0	18	4	56	0	0
	5	2	10	1	14	0	0
	6	1	5	2	26	0	1
	7	0	7	5	127	0	0
	8	0	11	2	20	0	0
	9	0	2	0	30	0	4
	10	0	0	0	7	0	0
	11	0	0	0	2	0	0
	12	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total 12 Mar 45		12	149	39	622	0	11
Mar 13-23 Incl:		0	6	0	10	0	0
GRAND TOTAL:		12	155	39	632	0	11

	KILLED		WOUNDED		MISSING	
	Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs
<u>4 Cdn Armd Div</u>						
Feb: 26	0	30	4	65	0	1
27	2	17	14	62	2	14
28	0	14	4	78	1	9
Mar: 1	1	3	5	65	0	3
2	0	13	6	69	0	7
3	1	18	8	63	3	80
4	0	1	0	11	1	3
5	1	3	0	26	0	2
6	0	7	1	21	0	6
7	3	45	4	36	4	72
8	1	8	3	36	0	3
9	0	15	3	56	0	4
10	2	10	3	56	0	5
11	0	4	0	2	0	0
12	0	0	1	7	0	1
Total 12 Mar 45	11	188	56	653	11	210
Mar 13-23 Incl:	0	3	1	4	0	4
GRAND TOTAL:	11	191	57	657	11	214

	KILLED		WOUNDED		MISSING	
	Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs
<u>2 Cdn Armd Bde</u>						
Feb: 26	0	0	0	0	0	0
27	0	9	4	14	0	13
28	2	1	3	12	0	0
Mar: 1	0	1	0	0	0	0
2	0	3	1	5	0	0
3	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	1	1	0	5	0	0
6	0	0	0	2	0	0
7	0	0	1	0	0	0
8	0	0	0	3	1	0
9	0	0	1	0	0	0
10	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	0	0	1	0	0	0
12	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total 12 Mar 45	3	15	11	41	1	13
Mar 12-23 Incl:	0	0	0	1	0	0
GRAND TOTAL:	3	15	11	42	1	13

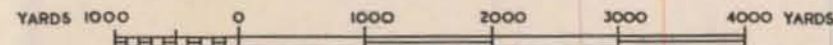
Total Brit Tps including 30 Corps, 1 Brit Corps & Brit Tps
under command 2 Cdn Corps and 1 Cdn Army and all Allied Tps.

(Excl: U.S. Forces)

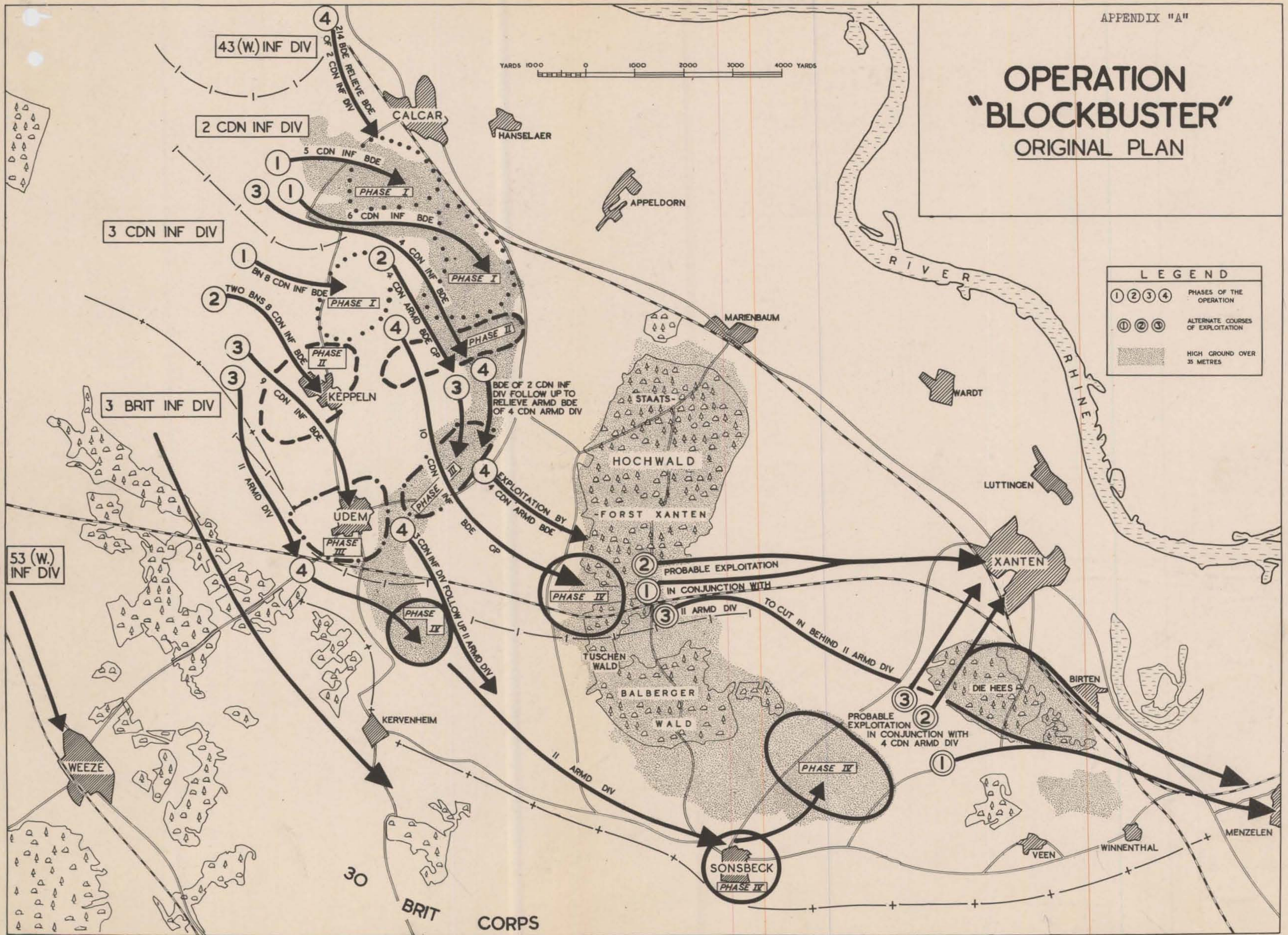
		KILLED		WOUNDED		MISSING	
		Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs	Offrs	ORs
<u>As above</u>							
Feb:	26	0	25	6	110	0	21
	27	8	60	28	402	2	94
	28	7	62	19	263	1	18
Mar:	1	10	46	27	314	1	29
	2	5	88	21	258	0	55
	3	8	52	21	242	3	52
	4	1	11	9	39	1	1
	5	0	27	9	167	0	33
	6	5	80	22	252	0	37
	7	1	31	4	86	1	42
	8	0	34	12	169	0	43
	9	1	18	4	46	0	2
	10	4	57	14	204	2	100
	11	0	9	0	15	0	1
	12	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total 12 Mar 45		50	600	196	2568	11	528
Mar 13-23 Incl:		2	8	4	27	0	2
GRAND TOTAL:		52	608	200	2595	11	530

(C.D., A. & Q., H.Q. First
 Cdn Army, February 1945,
 Appx 17, C. & S. Stats, 26 Feb -
 28 Feb 45 incl., and 1 Mar -
 23 Mar 45, incl.)

OPERATION "BLOCKBUSTER" ORIGINAL PLAN



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

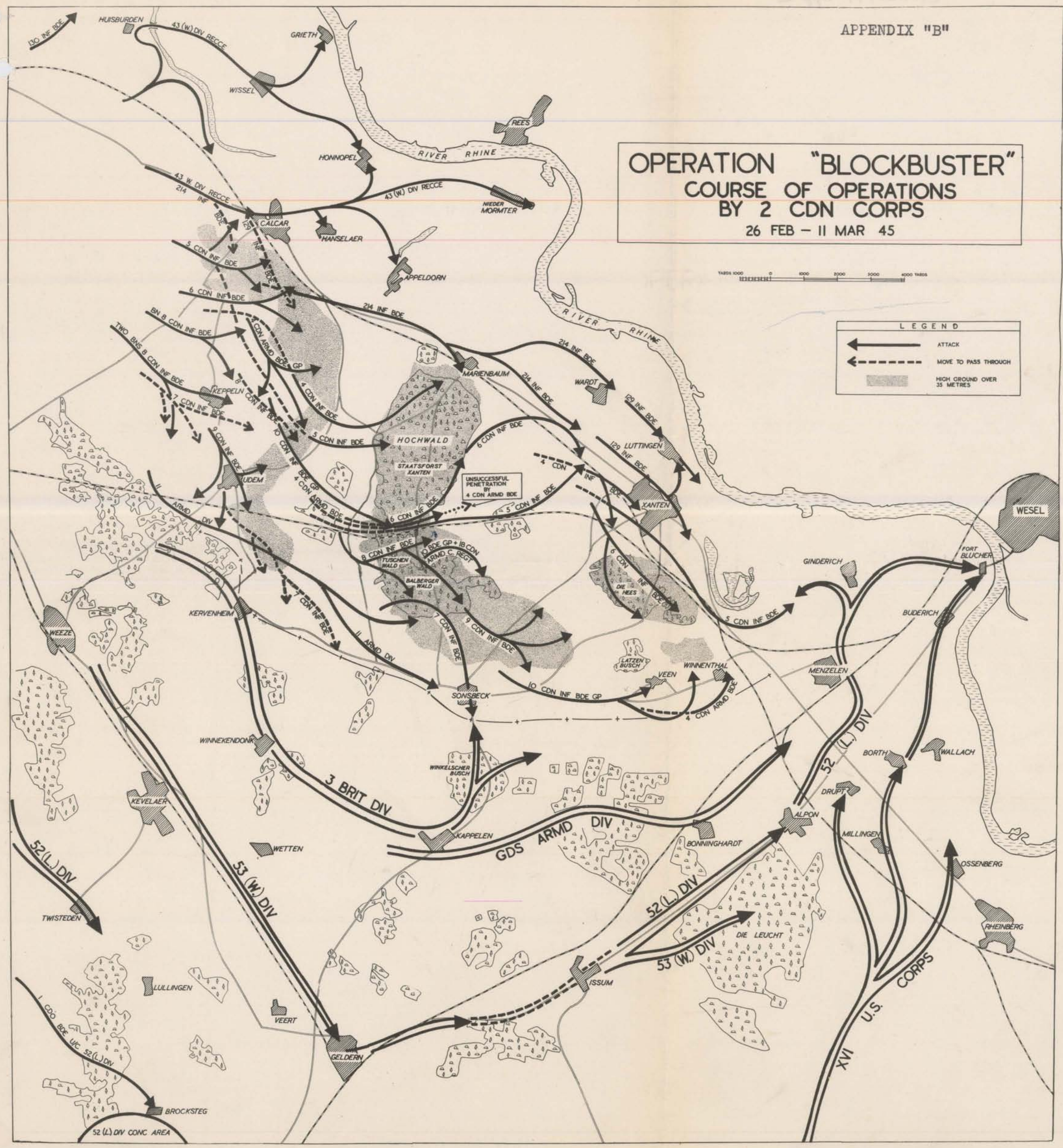


BRIT CORPS

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



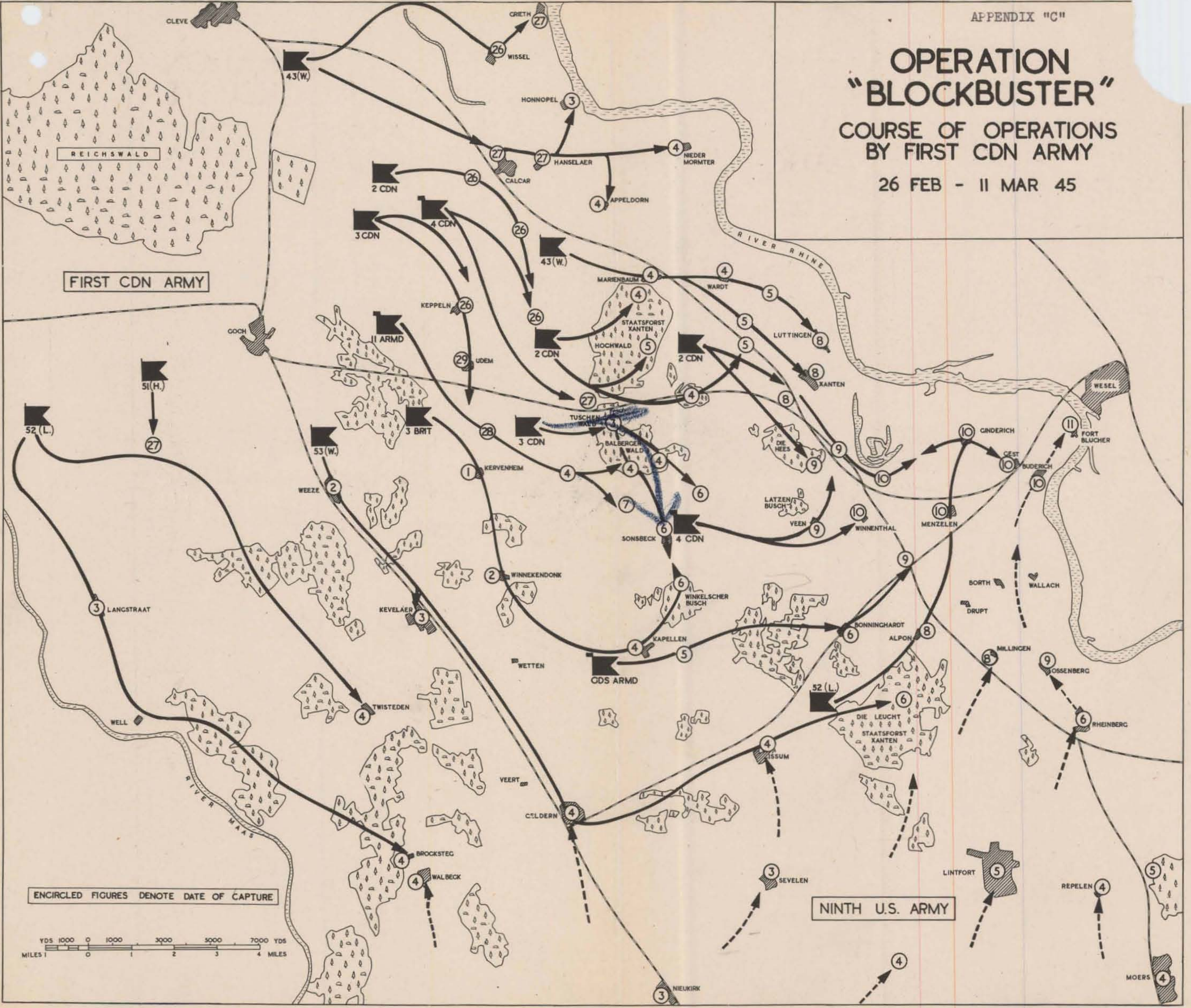
LEGEND	
	ATTACK
	MOVE TO PASS THROUGH
	HIGH GROUND OVER 35 METRES



OPERATION "BLOCKBUSTER"

COURSE OF OPERATIONS BY FIRST CDN ARMY

26 FEB - 11 MAR 45



ENCIRCLED FIGURES DENOTE DATE OF CAPTURE

YDS 1000 0 1000 3000 5000 7000 YDS
MILES 1 0 1 2 3 4 MILES

NINTH U.S. ARMY

FIRST CDN ARMY