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THE CROSSING OF THE RHINE NORTH
OF THE RUHR (OPERATION PLUNDER), 23 - 28
MARCH 1945
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)

Type of operation described: ARMY GROUP IN A RIVER
CROSSING

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CROSSING OF THE RHINE NORTH
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of the 21st Army Group consisting of the First Canadian Army, British Second Army, and Ninth American Army in its crossing of the Rhine River, north of the Industrial Ruhr Section, 23 - 28 March 1945, during the latter part of the European phase of World War II. It is written with the view of covering preparations prior to the crossings and the actions of the Assault Units.

To properly orient the reader it is sufficient to say that the Allied Armies had made their successful landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944, advanced through France, Belgium and Luxembourg, and were preparing to assault deep into Germany when the German Army struck in the Battle of the Ardennes. The initial Allied setback and subsequent victory in this operation is so well known that further elaboration is unnecessary.

Except for the mopping up phase, the Battle of the Ardennes was recorded in history by 16 January 1945. The next item on the agenda was the defeat of Germany by summer. The overall plan for this ultimate victory can best be stated in three distinct phases.

"First: the destruction of enemy forces west of the Rhine and closing up to that river.

Second: the seizure of bridgeheads over the Rhine from which to develop operations into Germany.

Third: the destruction of the remaining enemy east of the Rhine, and the advance into the heart of the Reich." (1)

In this monograph we are interested primarily in phase II but an understanding of the events leading up to this phase is necessary to properly develop the subject matter.

By 8 February 1945, the allied forces occupied a general line as shown on Map A. (See Map A)

(1) A-10, p. 67.

Allied forces fighting in Western Europe under General Eisenhower at this time were 21st Army Group on the left consisting of Canadian First Army, British Second Army and American Ninth Army; 12th Army Group in the center composed of American First and Third Armies; 6th Army Group on the right including American Seventh Army and French First Army.

The Allies continued to push forward complying with Phase I listed above encountering fierce opposition and by 12 March 1945 occupied a line generally on the West Bank of the Rhine with the exception that two unexpected crossings had been made by 12th Army Group. One of these was at Remagen and the other southwest of Coblenz. The ability to make these two crossings were indeed a surprise to everyone, including the Supreme Commander himself. (See Map A)

A thorough study of the Rhine crossing had been made for many months and it was decided by the Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower, that the crossing would be made with the main effort in the 21st Army Group Zone, north of the rich Ruhr section. The surprise bridgeheads previously established did not alter this prior decision. They had stolen some of Plunder's thunder however. A frontal attack against the Ruhr proper had been considered but only long enough to drop it like a "hot potato" and to decide that such an attack would be suicide and costly both as to men and materiel, with very little chance for success. (2)

21ST ARMY GROUP MISSION AND PLAN

The 21st Army Group mission as outlined was "to cross the Rhine north of the Ruhr and secure a firm bridgehead with the view to developing operations, isolate the Ruhr and to penetrate deeper into Germany." To accomplish this mission, 21st Army Group consisting of First Canadian Army, British Second Army and Ninth American Army formulated the plan to cross the Rhine with the British Second Army on the left and Ninth American Army on the right. First Canadian Army situated on the extreme left had

(2) A-10, p. 77.

as its mission mainly one of holding the line already established until Emmerich was captured at which time 2d Canadian Corps would revert to control of Canadian First Army. The main crossings for British Second Army were to be at Wesel, Xanten and Rees, with the mission of securing the general line Haltern-Borken-Bocholt and Anholt. To assist the British Second Army in the capture of Wesel, XVIII Airborne Corps under operational control of British Second Army was to drop in area north of Wesel, assist the British Second Army and then secure a bridgehead north of the River Lippe. (See Map B) This air drop was to take place after the ground troops had jumped off. The use of airborne troops after employment of ground troops was indeed an innovation in their employment. It was planned thusly because of the predominance of Allied air superiority and to permit the massed firing of artillery on this area prior to the infantry river assault. So important was the airborne phase of this operation that 21st Army Group Commander had agreed to delay Operation Plunder for a period of at least five days if weather conditions were unfavorable.

(3)

XVI Corps of Ninth Army was to cross the Rhine in the vicinity of Rheinberg, protect the right flank of 21st Army Group, and secure the use of Wesel and Dorsten. XIII Corps and XIX Corps were to hold the line and cross later. (See Map B) (4)

Extracts of 21st Army Group Plan to accomplish the above are quoted as follows:

"Second Army will: upon establishing its right Corps along the general line of the railway between Dorsten and Borken allow elements of Ninth U. S. Army to pass through and to assume responsibility for the area south of the road Wesel-Brunen-Raesfeld-Herden (all inclusive to Ninth U. S. Army). NOTE. XVIII U. S. Airborne Corps, with 6th British Airborne Division and 17th U. S. Airborne Division attached, under operational

(3) A-8, p. 11; (4) A-6, p. 226; A-1, p. 252.

control Second British Army, will accomplish an airborne assault (Operation Varsity) . . . 17th U. S. Airborne Division will pass to Ninth U. S. Army command as early as practicable for employment in a holding role on the Army south flank. Ninth U. S. Army will: assault across the Rhine River in the vicinity of Rheinberg and secure that portion of the initial Army Group bridgehead within its zone. Protect the right flank of 21st Army Group. Hold the west bank of the Rhine River from the bridgehead area south to Worringen (exclusive) with the minimum force necessary to effect absolute security. Retain one corps of three infantry and one armored divisions in reserve, prepared to pass through the right corps of Second British Army and advance to the general line: Hamm (inclusive)-Munster (inclusive), with its right flank along the Lippe River from the vicinity of Dorsten to the east. Assume command of the 17th U. S. Airborne Division when released by Second British Army and employ it in a holding role along the Army right flank. Be prepared to employ remaining available forces to augment the attack on the line Hamm-Munster, and to deepen the penetration into Germany." (5)

ENEMY SITUATION

The Germans had made the serious mistake of defending west of the Rhine instead of initially taking refuge of the natural barrier which nature had provided. They had been beaten severely and now were in no position to make a determined stand east of the Rhine. Von Runstedt had been relieved as Commander-in-Chief in the west and Kesselring replaced him. Army Group H under Blaskowitz comprised the bulk of enemy forces facing 21st Army Group. "The sector near Krefeld to just west of Emmerich was the responsibility of First Parachute Army, while further west Twenty-Fifth Army was disposed across northwest Holland to the sea.

(5) A-6, p. 228.

In the line between Cologne and Essen there were four infantry divisions along the river opposite Ninth American Army; between Essen and Emmerich there were four parachute divisions and three infantry divisions. In reserve 47 Panzer Corps was in the area some fifteen miles northeast of Emmerich, with 116 Panzer and 15 Panzer Grenadier Divisions. Although Wesel and Rees had perimeter defenses and an antitank ditch, the enemy defenses in the main were only such as had been prepared in the short period since the end of the Rhineland battle. They had little depth and were mainly simple earthworks." (6)

Approximately one thousand German artillery pieces of all types were in the vicinity of XVIII Airborne Corps zone. Enemy air activity had been reduced considerably. (7) It was estimated that early in March the Germans had a total strength of 1,700 aircraft which could be used in the west. Of these, approximately six hundred fifty were engaged in the strategic defense of their homeland and in the bombing of England. The estimated capabilities and limitations of the remainder of the planes were disseminated to all echelons concerned. (8)

THE TERRAIN

The Rhine is indeed a well known river. Many books have been written and tales told about it. Now the Allies were preparing to cross it in the biggest amphibious operation and military barrier since Normandy. Originating as a result of the melting snow of the Swiss Alps it flows for approximately one hundred miles to the west along the German-Swiss border to Basel. There it turns north and splits France and Germany for the same distance, and from then on to the German-Holland border at Emmerich. In Holland the Rhine divides into two tributaries and runs into the North Sea. Principal cities along the Rhine important to this operation are Rheinberg, Xanten, Rees, Wesel and Emmerich. No place along the Rhine even in low tide is fordable. It must be ferried or bridged. It varies in

(6) A-1, p. 251; (7) A-14, p. 1; (8) A-8, p. 7;

width from 700 to 1200 feet but in some places is as wide as two thousand feet. The current from Rheinberg to Rees at the time of the crossing was from three and one-half to five knots per hour. The river bottom was found to be rather firm and of sufficient hardness to properly support bridge piling. In this area the Rhine is enclosed within dykes. We call them levees. The main levee was approximately sixty feet across at the base and ten to sixteen feet high. At the time of the crossing the river had subsided somewhat, but there was always that fear that the Germans might cut the levees and by artificial means inundate the area.

(9) (See Map A)

PREPARATION FOR THE CROSSING

Actual initial planning for the crossing took place at a meeting in Brussels on 18 October 1944 at which time General Eisenhower, General Bradley and Marshal Montgomery were present. This was to be a huge operation. The width, depth and flow of the Rhine caused deep concern. Because of this, it was decided to use naval craft and naval personnel to assist in the crossing to assure success. Vast quantities of supplies, including rations, ammunition, special bridge and ferry materials were needed. These supplies had been planned for and requisitioned months before.

British Second Army opened its road head about 8 March 1945. Most of the equipment used had to be transported by highway although some was moved by rail. By 23 March British Second Army had received 60,000 tons of ammunition and 30,000 tons of engineer supplies. In addition, various other types of supplies amounted to 28,000 tons, plus the usual daily stocks used. The British gathered all available amphibious vehicles. Units of the Royal Navy with their craft were brought over from Belgium and Holland to add their support to the undertaking. Units which were to participate were pulled out of the line and given rehearsals along the

(9) A-11, p. 42; A-12, p. 5; A-1, p. 250.

Maas River in an area similar to their planned Rhine crossing site. Not one detail which could possibly be foreseen was overlooked. (10)

On the Ninth American Army front similar planning and detailed preparation was being made. During the initial planning stage the Ninth Army Engineers were expecting a crossing with two corps in the assault echelon. Subsequent changes in the operational plans caused a revision of this estimate. Having planned for the larger operation, no great difficulty was encountered in reducing the frontage. Since the Ninth Army Commander had no definite information as to which corps would be used in the crossing, XVI Corps was directed on 19 February 1945 to prepare detailed plans for the crossing which could be used by them or by any other corps which might be assigned the mission. This was an excellent example of prior planning. If XVI Corps was used, its plan would already be made. If another corps was employed, an enormous amount of planning would already have been accomplished and the newly assigned corps would not have to start from scratch. (11)

Prior to this, Ninth Army planners were worried about the effectiveness of the craft to be used in the swift current of the Rhine. To test this equipment prior to use, a board was established to test certain equipment, namely: DUKWs, LVT2s, LVT4s (Alligators), M29s and M29Cs (Weasels). The results indicated that this equipment would perform satisfactorily, and that the DUKWs and LVTs performed well without the use of cableways if the current was no stronger than anticipated.

Naval Detachment 122.5.3, with 24 LCVPs reported to Ninth Army in November 1944. These were supplemented by 24 LCM3s. Tests were conducted to determine the possibility of overland travel and the loading and unloading of these amphibious craft. Certain modifications were necessary but on the whole, it was found that they could be satisfactorily used. Every piece of equipment to be used was tested where there was any doubt as to its successful performance. (12)

(10) A-1, p. 249; (11) A-13, p. 5; (12) A-13, p. 8.

To illustrate the magnitude of this operation with reference to special equipment needed by XVI Corps alone, the following major items of equipment peculiar to a river crossing are listed below:

<u>Equipment</u>	<u>1153 Engr. C. Gp.</u>	<u>1148th Engr. C. Gp.</u>
Storm boats	160	80
55-HP outboard motors	200	100
M2 assault boats	260	214
22-HP outboard motors	140	100
LVTs	65	35
LCMs	9	9
LCVPs	9	9
Power utility boats	12	12
M2 treadway bridge units	2	2
M1 treadway bridge units	2	0
Seamules	6	6
Class 40 Bailey rafts	12	12
Lifbelts	7,500	5,000
25-ton pontoon bridge units	10	0
DD tanks	15	0

Vast quantities of other types of supplies were also needed. (13) To portray the detailed planning exercised by Ninth Army and the engineers, a detailed map of crossing sites for XVI Corps is included herein.

(See Map C)

Ninth Army organized a stream crossing school to be run by the 1143d Engineer Combat Group to train engineer troops in all types of engineer construction and operations anticipated during this crossing. (14)

Equipment was secured from any source available. If it could not be issued and could be made, then this was accomplished. A gigantic logistical problem faced Ninth Army prior to the attack. During the period

(13) A-13, p. 12; (14) A-13, p. 12.

4 - 24 March, 138,000 tons of supplies were moved close behind the front lines. An example of unusual supplies which Army engineers had to furnish were 2,000 bridge piling and 10,000,000 board feet of lumber. A minor point now but one of major importance at the time was the fact that many saw blades were broken in an attempt to cut the lumber because of the fact that shell fragments were embedded in the timber. A new use for the mine detector came into play to weed out logs with shell fragments in them. Sharp shell debris on roads was causing numerous punctures to damage our short rubber supply in tires. Engineers developed a special electromagnet mounted on trucks to clear roads of this hazard. (15)

When in early March, 1945, XVI Corps was definitely told that it would make the assault crossing, the 30th Division and the 79th Division were selected as corps assault troops. These two divisions were withdrawn from the lines and with the 1153d and 1148th Combat Engineer Groups of XVI Corps started amphibious training of ten days duration under conditions of both daylight and darkness. (16)

Every effort was made by the Corps Commander to effect coordination and teamwork with instructions as to the job each man was to perform being disseminated to each individual soldier. Orientation lectures were given down to and including assistant squad leaders to insure that no doubt existed as to the mission. Each branch of the service was oriented in a similar manner. Elaborate terrain tables were constructed giving every detail. (17)

In an effort to keep casualties to a minimum, a very elaborate deceptive plan was formulated. All shoulder patches and unit identifications on vehicles were removed. Temporary code names for CPs and route markers were assigned. Units moved from one area to another under cover of darkness and were in assembly areas prior to dawn each day. XIX Corps went through river crossing training on the Erft River and Erft Canal. When the 30th and 79th Divisions moved out of the Muese River (15) A-6, p. 221; (16) A-6, p. 214; (17) A-5, p. 37.

training area to their assembly areas, XIX Corps moved one division there to indicate that no movement of troops had been made from that area. Interrogation of prisoners of war later verified that these measures were effective in deceiving the Germans as to time, place and units which were to make the crossing, even though they knew a crossing was to be made. In this way, surprise was achieved even though the enemy knew what we were going to do. (18)

As an added measure of deception, XIII Corps was designated to perform Operation "Exploit." This operation was designed with the intention of leading the Germans to believe that an actual crossing would be made in the Dusseldorf-Urdingen bend area about 30 March 1945. (See Map B) Road construction and ferrying sites were built. Reconnaissance by infantry and cavalry units was carried out to indicate an assault. All civilians in the area were moved out. Decoy bridge parks and dummy installations of all types of engineer supplies and river crossing equipment were established. In other words, every phase of a river crossing supply build-up was put into effect but it actually was a decoy pure and simple. To illustrate that this effort was not in vain, the Germans actually strafed this area on D day plus 2 and moved some of their forces opposite this activity, when their employment in other areas would have been much more advantageous. (19)

As soon as possible after it became definitely known that XVIII Allied Airborne Corps was to perform in Operation Plunder, under the code name of Operation Varsity, General Brereton, Commanding General of the First Allied Airborne Army, prescribed a rugged training program for the British 6th Airborne Division, American 17th and 13th Airborne Division. The 13th Airborne Division was subsequently relieved from the operation because of insufficient airlift and for the purpose of reorganizing under a new TO & E. Training prescribed included loading, lashing and flights for all glider units. Practice and refresher jumps and one exercise for (18) A-9; A-6, pp. 216-217.

each Regimental Combat Team was set forth. The 17th Airborne Division was located in the Chalons, France area and the British 6th Airborne Division was in England. A complete CPX, Exercise "Token" was ordered and went off as planned on 16 March 1945. All serials for Operation Varsity participated in sample flights over similar distances and conditions insofar as practicable as those to be flown on D-Day. Staff work was coordinated and equipment given minute check for combat efficiency. Certain changes were made as a result of this CPX which proved very successful in the actual operation. (20)

Air force participation in the preparation of Operation Plunder was terrific. It was well planned and in accord with accepted Air Force doctrine. The initial phase of aerial preparation commenced on 21 February 1945 when heavy and medium bombers introduced the plan to isolate northwest Germany and the Ruhr Section from contact with the remainder of Germany. These attacks were made on communication centers, marshaling yards, bridges, railroads and roads. During this phase 22,000 pound bombs were used by the British for the first time. Within this area, fighter-bombers performed outstanding armed reconnaissance work. From 1 March to 20 March 1945, Second Tactical Air Force, RAF, and XIX Tactical Air Command, Ninth U. S. Army flew 3,966 sorties. Second TAF constantly harrassed enemy activity and movement. Tactical Air Command estimated losses to the Germans of 1,060 motor vehicles, 183 locomotives, 3,522 railroads cars and 338 rails cut or destroyed. (21)

On 21 - 23 March inclusive, aerial attacks were begun against towns and communication centers nearer the actual operation. Huge quantities of high explosive and incendiary bombs were dropped on the towns of Bocholt, Dorsten, Coesfeld, Borken, Haltern, Raesfeld, Anholt, Isselburg and several towns in that general area. (See Map B) This was performed by the 2d TAF, RAF Bomber Command, IX Bombardier Division and

(20) A-8, p. 4-5; (21) A-8, p. 13.

VIII Air Force. The railway systems in this area were damaged to such an extent that only one main line could operate in that area, and this one not closer than Dorsten. The Air Force was active throughout Operation Plunder and assisted materially in the ultimate success. (22)

All available Artillery was massed in this area prior to the attack. Over thirteen hundred field pieces were concentrated in the British Second Army zone and XVI Corps of Ninth Army had over six hundred guns supporting it. (23)

With all preparations made, units of 21st Army group were poised and anxiously awaiting the big push.

THE RHINE CROSSING AND ATTACK

At 1530 hours, 23 March 1945, Field Marshall Montgomery gave orders to commence Operation "Plunder". The big show was now to take place. The weather at this time was excellent and combined with such detailed advanced planning, chances of success were mounting. With the artillery laying down heavy volumes of fire, 30 Corps, at approximately 2100 hours 23 March 1945, launched its crossing when the assault waves of 51st Division were ferried across the Rhine in Buffaloes near the vicinity of Rees. In addition to personnel, essential vehicles were also taken. In the short space of seven minutes, word was sent back that the assault wave had reached the east bank. The enemy defenses were weak here and before morning 51st Division was approaching the outskirts of Rees. (24) (See Map D)

While 51st Division had easy going initially they were in for a shock when they hit the town of Rees. Here the Germans resisted stubbornly behind strongly fortified positions within the town, and it took forty-eight hours of hard fighting before units of 30th Corps could claim its capture. (25)

At 2200 hours, 12th Corps following the same procedure as 30th

(22) A-2, pp. 54, 55, 57; (23) A-1, p. 254; (24) A-1, p. 255; A-2, p. 250; (25) A-3, p. 84.

Corps, touched the water at crossing site near Wesel and thirty minutes later were poised on the outskirts of that town. This unit was 1st Commando Brigade. The brigade halted momentarily to permit British Bombers to drop one thousand tons of bombs on the enemy in Wesel. The brigade followed closely on the heels of the bombers and by 0300 hours entered Wesel. Here the British encountered stubborn opposition, but slowly and surely they pushed forward relentlessly with success as their principal thought. By nightfall the town of Wesel had been captured, contact had been made with 17th U. S. Airborne Division which had dropped near the Diersford Forest. (See Map D)

At 0200 hours, 24 March 1945 which is actually known as D-Day, 15th Division with four Assault Battalions commenced their crossing in the vicinity of Xanten with the mission of pushing forward in its zone, capture Bislich and make contact with the British 6th Airborne Division which was to drop the next morning near the Issel River in the vicinity of Hamminkeln. Initial opposition was extremely light and within twenty minutes the assault battalions were on the far bank and resupply had commenced. The left brigade of 15th Division met with stiff German resistance and 15th Division reserve was committed to beat down this opposition. By noon of the 24th the bridgehead was relatively secure and contact had been made with elements of 30th Corps on the north. (26) (See Map D)

In both 12th and 30th Corps zones the assault wave consisted of two brigades each. Each brigade consisted of two assault battalions which were taken over in Buffaloes. Storm boats ferried the reserve battalions. Class 9 ferries were used to transport heavier equipment, and class 50/60 Rafts were also employed. As soon as the situation permitted, class FBE bridge, class 12 and class 40 Bailey bridges were put in operation.

The plan for crossing vehicles over the Rhine was well organized. Vehicles were placed in a marshalling area. From there they went to a (26) A-1, p. 256; A-3, p. 82.

vehicle waiting area. As space became available, Bank Control Group called the vehicles from the waiting area and then they were ferried across. After bridges were put in, the same procedure was followed. Some criticism might be enumerated as follows:

- "(1) Better control could have been exercised from ferry site to vehicle waiting areas.
- (2) Drivers of vehicles should be instructed in advance the proper speed in crossing temporary bridges.
- (3) More stress should be placed on proper handling of rafts because needed equipment was delayed several hours as a result of damage being done to bridges by runaway and improperly driven craft." (27)

In the Ninth Army sector XVI Corps, under command of Major General John B. Anderson was designated the assault corps for the Army by making the main effort, crossing the Rhine in the vicinity of Rheinberg, and to secure a bridge head for Ninth Army in that area. Ninth Army consisted of XVI, XII and XIX Corps with XVI Corps being the only unit destined to cross the Rhine on D-Day. (28)

The Corps Commander had decided to use 30th Division and 79th Division in the initial crossing. The actual crossing was preceded with a one hour artillery preparation during which time approximately one thousand rounds per minute were fired. This softened the German positions considerably. In an interrogation of captured German artillery officers the next day, it was found that the artillery preparations had been so effective that when captured they had not as yet seen their own infantry retreating and this was what they had been waiting for when the American troops captured them. (29)

At 0200 hours, 24 March 1945, 30th Division crossed the Rhine River with three regiments abreast with the first two waves in storm boats and the next two in double assault boats. This crossing was in the vicinity of Ossenbergl.

(27) A-2, pp. 250-252; (28) A-5, p. 36; (29) A-1, p. 256; A-6, p. 231.

At 0300, the same morning, 79th Division crossed in a similar manner at sites near Dinslaken. In each zone LCMs, LCVPs and DUKWs were employed to transport supporting weapons, supplies and vehicles to the east bank. (30) (See Map D)

By dusk on 24 March, XVI Corps had crossed all of the 30th Division and the 79th Division and other units were in the process of crossing. The engineers had constructed a bridge across the Rhine at Wallash under enemy fire in nine and one-half hours. The 75th Infantry Division with 15th Cavalry Group attached had supported the crossing by fire and were now employed to protect the bridge crossings and sites. The assault units had succeeded in capturing 1896 prisoners of war, killing 250 and wounding 430 Germans. They had forced a bridgehead 4,000 to 6,000 yards in depth. Losses to American troops totaled 38 killed, 426 wounded and 3 missing which is considered extremely light considering the type of operation involved. (31)

An integral part of Operation Plunder was the plan to use the XVIII U. S. Airborne Corps in an air drop called Operation Varsity in the vicinity north of Wesel. The order of battle for the corps consisted of the British 6th Airborne Division located in England and the 17th American Airborne Division based in France. The corps was under operational control of British Second Army initially and was given the specific mission enumerated below:

"To disrupt the hostile defense of the Rhine in the Wesel Sector by seizure of key terrain by airborne attack in order rapidly to deepen the bridgehead to be seized in an assault crossing of the Rhine by British ground forces, and in order to facilitate the further offensive operations of British Second Army." (32)

The 6th Airborne Division became airborne over England on the morning of 24 March 1945 made a rendezvous with the 17th Airborne Division over (30) A-1, p. 256; (31) A-1, p. 258, A-5, pp 44-46; (32) A-7, p. 17.

Belgium and proceeded to the drop and landing zones. Operation "Varsity" was on its way. (33). At 0952 hours troopers left their planes and in two hours and forty two minutes both Airborne Divisions had landed including glider units. The jumps were in the main successful except that the 513th RCT of 17th Airborne Division landed approximately 2,000 yards north of its drop zone and as a result encountered heavy initial fighting. They actually dropped where some British troops were supposed to land a short while later. By approximately 1500 hours, 17th Airborne Division had linked up with 1st Commando Brigade near Wesel secured Diersfordt and the high ground to the east. The British 6th Airborne Division had little difficulty in securing Hamminkeln and the crossings over the Issel River. By this time both divisions of XVIII U. S. Airborne Corps had made contact on each flank. (34) (See Map D)

During the night 24 March, XVIII Airborne Corps was successful in repelling two counterattacks. One came from the Ringenberg area and one from the Bergen area. Each was an attack in force but was promptly met by our troops north of Wesel. (35)

By midnight 24 March, 1945 it is safe to say that the bridgehead had been relatively secured. (See Map D).

OBITUARY NEEDED
25 March found the Allies still pushing forward. 30th Corps expanded its bridgehead in the Rees area, captured Rees and was now advancing steadily. 12th Corps completed the capture of Bisloh and reenforced their initial link with the airdrop. This was a rather quiet day for the XVIII Airborne Corps in that they were engaged mostly in mopping up, and securing the ground already gained. 1st Commando Brigade came under operational control of XVIII Airborne Corps and was attached to 17th Airborne Division. One major activity did take place in this zone. The 17th Airborne Division crossed the Issel Canal at 1500 hours and were able to advance 3,000 yards during the night. On XVI Corps front, progress was continued and the town of Dinslaken was captured. 30th and (33) A-8, p. 16; (34) A-8, p. 21; (35) A-8, p. 22, p. 23.

79th Divisions made contact with each other and 30th Division joined up with 1st Commando Brigade below Wesel. (36) (See Map E)

On 26 March XVI Corps captured Bruckhausen. The 6th Guards Armored Brigade was attached to XVIII Airborne Corps and with this attachment the corps continued a steady advance in the direction of Haltern and Lembeck. 51st Division and 15th Division tied in together and 43d Division a unit of 30th Corps together with 3d Canadian Division captured the towns of Millingen and Hueth. 43d Division then turned north to attack Anholt and Isselburg, while 3d Canadian Division turned west to lay seige to Emmerich. (37) (See Map E)

On 27 March at 0500 hours the 79th Division attacked south, captured Holten and reached the Dortmund-Ems Canal. In the vicinity of Waldruk they ran into heavy resistance and had to put up a stiff fight. The 35th Infantry Division which in the meantime had crossed the Rhine came into the center of XVI Corps zone of advance and at 0600 hours attacked north of Waldruk. The 30th Division met with strong opposition in Gahlen on its own left flank. The 17th U. S. Airborne Division and the 6th British Airborne Division advanced 7,000 and 10,000 yards respectively north of Gahlen. Heavy counterattacks pounding into the British 53d Division were successfully repulsed outside of Ringenburg. (38) 12th Corps advanced to Raesfeld and Bocholt. 30th Corps was attacking north along the Rees-Isselburg road and most of the opposition against them became a thing of the past. 3d Canadian Division established itself on the left of 30th Corps zone preparatory to capturing Emmerich. (See Map E)

By 28 March 1945, XVI Corps troops had captured Gladsbach and Gablen. 17th Airborne Division mounted on tanks of 6th Guards Armored Brigade captured Dorsten and Haltern. 6th British Airborne Division was successful in capturing Erle and finally Lembeck. Rhede had fallen to 12th Corps troops and Bocholt was being shelled. After bitter engagements 30th Corps was successful in establishing a line Haldern-Isselburg-Anholt.

(36) A-1, p. 258; A-8, App. 7, p. 1; (37) A-1, p. 259; (38) A-8, App. 7, p. 3.

3d Canadian Division moved in on Emmerich. (39)

Thus by midnight 28 March the bridgehead crossing of the Rhine north of the Ruhr was made secure and Allied troops occupied a line generally Emmerich-Bocholt-Borcken-Haltern. (See Map E.) In five days the 21st Army Group had secured a bridgehead approximately eighteen miles deep and thirty-five miles long. This paved the way for the future encirclement of the Ruhr and final drives into Germany.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making an analysis of this operation, the first thing that comes to mind is the vast amount of planning which went into the preparation for the assault crossing. Planning had been in progress even prior to the meeting of General Eisenhower on 18 October 1944 with General Bradley and Marshal Montgomery. Such thorough planning with attention given to every detail practically assured success from the beginning.

The use of Naval personnel and craft to assist normal amphibious equipment was a sound decision considering the strong current of the Rhine.

The plan to use XVIII U. S. Airborne Corps to drop north of Wesel after troops had jumped off the night before was a master blow to the Germans, confused them considerably, and paved the way for a much easier continuation of the attack and ultimate victory.

Thorough rehearsal of the part each unit was to play, sound measures of deception put into effect and elaborate tests of every type of equipment put the finishing touches on the detailed planning. This was indeed vital in preventing numerous casualties on the Allied's side while conversely, it contributed immensely to the German losses.

Combined efforts of all supporting arms, closely coordinated with the infantry in every detail made for much smoother performance.

The aggressive spirit of the Airborne troops mounted on tanks pushed

the bridgehead deep into enemy territory in a short period of time and permitted the British and American troops to be ready to proceed further at full strength and momentum. The operation observed from the standpoint of larger units was carried out so smoothly that very little criticism can be made of it. It is noteworthy however, that better control could have been exercised in procuring vehicles from the vehicle waiting area to the bridge and ferry site. Some drivers were slow in approaching and crossing the bridge and thus impeded the build-up. Much needed bridge equipment was damaged and time lost by runaway and improperly driven craft.

LESSONS

1. Security is of vital importance in any operation even though the enemy knows you are in position ready to spring forward.
2. Surprise can be achieved by sound deceptive measures in spite of the fact that the enemy is aware of what you are going to do. He still does not know when and where you are going to do it.
3. Proper application of supporting arms namely air, artillery and engineers, is of vital importance in any river crossing and very conserving in manpower.
4. Airborne troops employed after ground troops have jumped off proved to be effective in routing the Germans and aided materially in expansion of the bridgehead.
5. Naval personnel can be used effectively with ground troops in preparing for a river crossing.
6. Airborne troops riding on tanks of British armored units make an effective tank-airborne team.
7. Complete rehearsals and minute detailed instructions to all participating units in a major river crossing are of extreme importance.
8. Time must be allowed for lower units to make their preparation for any ^{River} crossing (as was properly demonstrated in this operation.)
9. Armies of different Allied Nations can work in close harmony to achieve desired results.

*all supported
by units directly
behind - more
needed on such
support - maintain*

10. Once a river has been bridged, rapid expansion is necessary to insure adequate safety of crossing sites for the forthcoming build-up at the site.