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Eitzendorf, April 25, 1948

Heinz Fiebig
Generalmajor a.D.

Last Commander of the 84th Infantry Division

The 84th Infantry Division

during the battles from the Reichswald

to Wesel.

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War diary from January 19, 1945 to March 25, 1945.

This war diary has been written almost three years later. The data that had been available for me are slight; the course of events can therefore be described only roughly.

January 19-31, 1945

During this time there was not much combat activity on either side. Especially in the evening hours the enemy covered the supply roads and ways with harassing fire of the artillery. Our reconnaissance patrol activity was lively, and that of the enemy irrelevant. From statements of prisoners we made it was evident that the enemy situation had not greatly changed. The battalions were relieved in their usual turn. The mission of the enemy was defense. There were no major intentions of attack. Positions were being improved.

The division continued the training of commanders and specialists. In addition to the improvement of the main defensive area the improvement of the rearward positions was continued. Apart from small switch positions, behind the MLR, which were being improved by the combat element, two more lines were constructed:

1. Northern edge of Willingen - Niel - Kranenburg - northern edge of the Reichswald.
2. West Wall - Rindom - Douisbrueggen - across the Reichswald - Pocket.

The improvement was carried out by the:

1. The trains of the grenadier regiments.
2. The Todt Organization units and the construction engineer units.

General situation:

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Enemy: The I. Canadian corps with the 2nd and 3rd Canadian infantry divisions was standing between the Meuse and the Rhine. Boundary: see map. Every bridgehead had one battalion as reserve. There was a regular weekly turn of relief. The enemy had apparently the mission to defend itself. Equipment, food supply and care of the troops were very good. The soldiers were practically all green, their combat value was that of average. The enemy had a loose system of posts, with tanks supporting single points. The enemy reacted very strongly on our reconnaissance patrols. The air activity of the enemy was very lively.

Our troops consisted in the main of soldiers that had had a short time of training. The enlisted men were on the whole with major battle experience. The division had been newly activated when the West Wall was occupied (last days of September 1944), after it had been smashed almost completely since the battles during the invasion front in Normandy. The equipment of the forces was bad. Especially among the medium guns there were various foreign materiel having only small ammunition supplies. Active and passive AT defense was being trained and carried out. The supply troops were mostly horse-drawn, the motorized parts consisted of different types. Small anti-aircraft forces and only few airplanes supported the defense of the division very scantily. Tanks or mobile AT units had not been assigned to the division.

The terrain was very unfavorable for defense. The division had proposed several times that the front be improved by taking back at various places for several hundred meters; they were rejected. Our MLR ran in a north-south direction along the valley between the hilly terrain southeast of Nymwegen and the Reichswald. The enemy lying at the eastern edge of these hills had a good view into the entire main defense area as far as the Reichswald, -

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in the north even as far as Emmerich. Counterattacks could therefore be carried out by day in the face of the enemy. The water level being very high, our positions were very moist so that one could hardly dig deeper than 1,20 meters. In the sector of the division the enemy had crossed the Meuse toward the east; this fact had to be taken into account regarding the enemy's intention of major attacks - for a crossing of the river, forces were not needed anymore. The Reichswald protruded far into the defensive area, being an obstacle for the enemy. But once the enemy had penetrated into the forest, the disadvantages were slight, because our reserves were weak. In the north of the division sector major parts of the terrain could be flooded, which could contribute in shortening the front.

The division, which wanted to conduct the defense as actively as possible by means of constant combat patrol undertakings, had these intentions:

- a. Increased training of commanders and specialists.
- b. AT training of the entire division.
- c. Preparation of fighting airborne enemy that had landed.
- d. Blocking of the Reichswald.
- e. Flooding parts of the northern sector.
- f. Blocking the probable point of main effort of the enemy along the road Nymwegen - Cleve.

Simultaneously, the main defensive area and the rearward positions were generally improved.

February 1-7, 1945

Contrary to the estimate of the situation by superior headquarters, the division had more and more the impression in those days that the enemy was

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planning a major attack against our sector. Merely the time period for the beginning was uncertain.

During the day there were observed:

current instructions about the terrain,

increased air activity,

appearance of numerous tanks,

construction of bridges across the Meuse (by air reconnaissance), adjustment fire of enemy artillery, even of medium and heavy calibers.

In the opinion of the division, the lively reconnaissance of the enemy and the increased operations of searchlights for the illumination of the enemy's supply roads confirmed its estimate of the situation. The German Battle of the Bulge had failed, the troops having been thrown back to their jump-off position. Strong forces of the enemy were now free to start at one or several places of the front for the major attack across the West Wall. Where could conditions be more favorable for the enemy than in the Cleve sector; here the West Wall was in the main just an imaginary line because of the factors of the terrain condition mentioned above; here it was not necessary to cross the river as everywhere else further to the south; during the development of the attack a menace for the flank from east to west.

The request of the division that mobile units, reserves and sufficient AA forces be assigned to it was rejected. The available reserves were small, the Army did not want to tie itself; it supposed that in the Cleve sector there would be carried out merely a sham attack, the major attack being launched from Nymwegen to the north as far as the Zuider Sea to cut off all German forces in Holland.

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The division still held the view that exploiting the Meuse crossing, which had been gained at Nymwegen, the enemy would first launch its major attack toward the east and would then, closely west of the Rhine, turn to the south to roll up the entire northern sector of the West Wall, after the enemy had not succeeded in breaking through to the Ruhr district directly by means of the attack at Aachen.

In the first days of February it could be more and more strongly felt that the enemy forces assembled in the area of Nymwegen would not attack toward the north but toward the east. The division intensified its endeavors to improve the positions and to train the commanders and subordinate commanders and specialists. An directive was issued, entitled "Recognition and behavior during enemy large-scale attack" in order to give the commanders and subordinate commanders who had had no experience in major fighting practical advice.

A strong enemy air raid on Cleve on February 7 was estimated by the division as initial phase of the expected major attack. Throughout the night of February 7, there was strong enemy air activity over the division sector. Our supply roads were constantly covered by strong harassing fire by enemy artillery.

The division therefore proclaimed all subordinate units on the alert and had rearward positions occupied by security detachments. Alert units and construction engineers were among others used therefore. This decision was taken because by day, shifting of any forces was hardly possible since the Luftwaffe had been completely eliminated. Especially the rearward positions along the road Nymwegen - Cleve were occupied - a measure that proved

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right the following day. Moreover, these positions had been so constructed that our counterattacks could be launched from them. The division could not expect any effective reserves to arrive for the first day of the major attack, because the corps itself had no reserves available. The nearest army reserves standing at Arnhem had to cover too great a distance over the only Rhine bridge at Wesel to become effective in time. Adjacent division could merely help by taking out single battalions; their commitment was, then, possible after 48 hours at the earliest. In the very last moment a battalion of the 2nd Parachute Division was subordinated to the division. This division was being transported by railroad from the area around Strasbourg (Upper Rhine) to the First Parachute Army (Fallschirm AOK I); having been assembled in the area east of Huelz it was to be employed at the Meuse, at the mouth of the Niers in order to help diminish the extremely wide division sectors of the LXXXVI Army Corps.

Instead of giving up this plan as a consequence of recent developments so as not to pour oil into the fire of excitement and to leave those forces in the front that knew the terrain and to have a well organized unit as reserve, the army ordered that this battalion relieve that night one battalion of Regiment 1025. This late order had the effect that this relief was begun at 0400 hours because the approach route had been so long, and the enemy artillery fire had been very lively. As a result of the heavy barrage by the enemy on the MLR beginning at 0500 hours, the battalion employed there could not manage to get out of its position. The result was that unnecessary losses were suffered, because this sector was too densely occupied, that the chain of command was mixed up in the beginning, and that a reserve was not available.

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February 8, 1945

As was soon recognized - and this is always the important point - the point of main effort of the enemy artillery barrage, beginning at 0500 hours was the front sector on both sides of the road Nymwegen - Cleve. At the beginning of the infantry attack it was important to commit the artillery there with all gun barrels available, including those of participating adjacent units, and to move observation posts which had been kept in reserve, to the rearward positions at the road mentioned in order to guarantee uninterrupted fire by the artillery, which was also accomplished.

The waves of air attacks on the MLR and the main defensive area confirmed the decision of the division command regarding the commitment of infantry forces, viz. that shifting them by day would have been impossible. The posts of the corps observation battalion, employed in the division sector, reported that the enemy artillery was estimated to belong to about 6 - 8 divisions, reinforced by medium GHQ antiaircraft and direct tank fire. After a $5\frac{1}{2}$ hour of artillery barrage, the enemy shifted his fire to our second positions along the western edge of the Reichswald and, supported by numerous tanks, the infantry launched its attack. Our infantry forces that were still in our MLR and by the defense fire by our artillery, the attack was stopped. Enemy artillery barrage was then again shifted to the front sector of the main defensive area. Beginning with another attack at 1230 hours, the enemy succeeded in breaking through at several places. During the day the central sector of Grenadier Regiment 1051 was lost. If the enemy would have exploited its fire and its tanks in an attempted breakthrough then, Cleve would have been quickly taken without difficulty. But the British method of fighting, based on security, , the enemy assembled once more in

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front of the 2nd position, and the enemy once more delivered an artillery barrage against it. This British method of fighting, which was again and again observed elsewhere on the front, we often have gained time for re-organization of our forces and assembling the reserves that had been moved up. Since Grenadier Regiment 1051 had been destroyed, only inexperienced forces (stomach battalions) were facing the enemy in the second position and the West Wall.

February 9, 1945

As a result of the penetration into the center of the division front and the strong tank-supported infantry attacks (in the northern sector even amphibian tanks were used) the front of the other two Grenadier regiments began to stagger as well, especially because our artillery had to remain concentrated on the front sector that was most endangered. Although our artillery had a very mobile technique of fighting, there were, of course, certain limits. There may not be ordered or demanded excessively much, for then nothing will be accomplished. If sufficient forces are not available - for an attack or defense - it is the more important to concentrate on points of main effort. This is a platitude, which was confirmed in the further course of the fighting, for practically the divisions were fighting merely with combat teams and small groups; theoretically, though, on the situation map of the OKW they were considered fully fit for combat, being designated by division flags and all other paraphernalia.

February 10, 1945

On February 10, 1945 Cleve was lost. Parts of the 2nd Parachute Division, which had arrived in the meantime, could not hold this town, which was important

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for the continuation of the defensive battle. The possession of Cleve was identical with the domination over the terrain east of the Rhine and south of it as far as Calcar, since it was possible from the heights of Cleve there was full view into this area. When attacking Grenadier Regiment 1052 in the northern sector, the enemy succeeded in taking Rindern after a hard house to house combat.

During the continuation of enemy attacks the division could hold a thin line of resistance, which was running from Griethausen (western edge) - Kellen (western edge) - Qualburg (western edge) - Bedburg - Han - northern edge of the Reichswald as far as the road Cleve, Zelchsheide - from there west of the road named toward Zelchsheide.

From 1800 hours on the division was subordinated to the XXXXVII Panzer Corps, which was to recapture the dominating plateau Rindern - Donsbrueggen - northern edge of the Reichswald by an attack of the 116th Panzer Division and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division.

February 11, 1945

The enemy continued the attack along the entire front. In the central sector (Grenadier Regiment 1051) the enemy succeeded in taking Han and penetrated into the northern part of the Reichswald. After hard combat in the Reichswald the enemy had infiltrated through the thin front at several places in the Grenadier Regiment 1062 sector west of the road Cleve - Zelchsheide. The front was still intact, but in the wooded terrain of the eastern part of the forest it was not safe any more. The constant losses, especially of experienced officers of the division (Battalion Commanders) were very high.

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February 12, 1945

The attack of the XXXXVII Panzer Corps, beginning at 0930 hours, was repulsed by the enemy, having itself assembled for an attack, and broke down in the jump-off position. The enemy, now changing over to attack, succeeded in taking Bedburg, driving a wedge between the 84th Infantry Division and the 116th Panzer Division. It also made a deep penetration at the boundary between the 116th Panzer Division and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, piercing through the Reichswald and took possession of the eastern part of the Reichswald. During the battles in the Reichswald the bulk of Grenadier Regiment 1062 of the division was smashed. During the evening of February 12, Grenadier Regiment 858 was assigned and subordinated to the division. It was employed south of the road Cleve - Calcar, making connection with Grenadier Regiment 1052 at the wooded terrain east of Bedburg. The course of the front on the evening February 12: Emmerich - south of Huisbergen - heights 2 km northwest of Bedburg (here 116th Panzer Division). During the night parts of Grenadier Regiment 1062, fighting in the Reichswald, managed to fight its way through to the east.

February 13, 1945

During these days the enemy launched more attacks. Contrary to the previous days they were not carried out along the entire front, but as partial attacks in company or battalion strength with strong tank support. Apart from minor partial success by the enemy, resulting in a local withdrawal of the MIA here and there, the division succeeded on the whole to repel the attacks, because when the enemy used this technique of fighting, it was always possible to shift reserves to the endangered spots and to concentrate the artillery and medium guns on the attacking enemy. On the evening of February 16 the

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division was relieved by the 6th Parachute Division. Being subordinated directly to the First Parachute Army in the area south of Bees it was to be brought up to strength by replacements.

February 17-19, 1945

No replacements arrived. Out of the remainders of the Grenadier Regiments the division formed Grenadier Regiments 1052 and 1062 with two battalions each, Grenadier Regiment 1051 was disbanded.

February 20, 1945

The situation at the front of the XXXXVII Panzer Corps had deteriorated to such an extent that the exhausted 84th Division had to be committed there again. It was inserted between the 116th Panzer Division and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, northwest and west of Udem, on the right wing of the road Udem - Bedburg, left wing at the railroad line Xanten - Goch.

February 21-26, 1945

The enemy attacks were continued. After a hard fight the enemy could gain terrain toward the east. Udem was lost. When the sector was taken over by the II Fallschirm (Parachute) Corps the remainders of the combat elements of the division were subordinated to the 6th Parachute Division as combat team Katzmann. Division headquarters (last CP closely southeast of Santeck) and the signal battalion were taken out with a special mission by the First Parachute Army.

February 27 - March 2, 1945

Under the command of the headquarters of the 84th Infantry Division, a formation of alert units and training troops was established southwest of

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Kempen. It had the mission to stop the enemy advancement through Suechteln - Duellen toward the Rhine bridge at Duisburg. Since the enemy consisted of armored units and medium armor-piercing weapons were not available - with the exception of an anti-aircraft battalion which was operating as an artillery unit - the mission could be carried out only in such a manner that we offered delaying resistance. It was, then, a constant withdrawal from any enemy attack. Roughly speaking, the lines of resistance drawn on the map were occupied from day to day. Since by explicit order by the Fuehrer that no combat unit was to be taken back across the Rhine - instead of building up a new front on the eastern side in time - the bridgehead of Wesel became smaller and smaller in the course of the fighting, the superiority of the enemy's forces and materiel being overwhelming.

March 3, 1945

On March 4 the division received orders to take over the front sector on the western bank of the Rhine.

Front Sector of Wesel

March 5 - 24, 1945

The Montgomery offensive - beginning at the Reichswald on February 8, 1945 had come to an end for the time being, when the left bank of the Rhine had been reached. The German headquarters, including those of the divisions that were just preparing for defense on the eastern bank, were facing this problem:

Will the pause the enemy made of necessity because of the preparations for crossing the Rhine suffice to build up a strong defense front on the

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eastern bank with the units that had been greatly exhausted and smashed west of the Rhine. The division estimated the situation as follows:

Since the enemy had to deal merely with German units that were greatly exhausted, it was important to strike the final blow when crossing the Rhine. The boundary between American and British was supposed to be at Wesel. For both sides the first phase of the fighting would be the battle for the Ruhr district. A frontal attack from west to east through the Ruhr district with its continuous masses of houses could be considered improbable. Much more probable was an enveloping attack from south to north, thereby simultaneously splitting up the German defensive forces in the Ruhr district. It would also mean that the superior tank weapon was not dissipated by street fights but could be employed strategically. For this purpose the bridgehead on the right bank of the Rhine, which had been so easily gained by taking the undestroyed Rhine bridge of Neuwied and had rapidly been expanded, could be exploited excellently. In the north an advance had to be expected north or south of the Lippe. In continuing the former conduct of battle by the British and American forces, the Lippe would be the boundary between the two Allies, so an American attack had to be expected south of the Lippe, while the British attack, after the river had been crossed at, and north of, Wesel, would advance into the Northern German plain, following the large roads leading from Wesel to the north and northeast. The question was then still open, whether the British attack north of the Lippe would be carried out simultaneously.

After the concentrated attack against the German forces withdrawing toward the bridgehead of Wesel, the numerous attack units of the enemy were lying in a very suitable position opposite the mouth of the Lippe for an

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attack planned above. Most of them were experienced combat troops with very good equipment. The losses that had arisen during the battles between the Meuse and Rhine had certainly been compensated within a short period of time. The fact that the rearward area was illuminated by searchlights had to be considered, when estimating the overall situation, as a means of facilitating the speeding up of supply services. The fact that a constant smoke screen was laid over the entire area must also be explained thus: the enemy wanted to prevent us from having any view into its preparations for attack. Operations by parachute units had certainly been expected for assisting in the crossing of the Rhine. If one based considerations on German principles of operation, one had to expect an operation in the depth of the point of main effort of the enemy's attack, i.e. in the area of Borcken - Raesfeld for the purpose of taking possession of the major crossroads there. In compliance with this estimate of the situation the reserve division (training troops without artillery, engineer and supply units) subordinate to the Army was transferred to the above-mentioned area. Parts of one regiment were moved to the area around Buemen. According to the British system of security, which had been confirmed again and again, one had to expect an attack across the Rhine with very strong forces, exploiting all available means.

For our troops it was important, then, to prevent the enemy from crossing the Rhine by all means and to have alert units participate in the smashing of any enemy unit that landed in the depth zone.

The division was roughly replenished by replacement training units. Construction of positions was speeded up in feverish haste. The division had again three Grenadier regiments, one battalion had been newly incorporated.

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The regiment was rather immobile for the major attack that had to be expected and was not fully fit for operations because of the lack of sufficient means of traction and signal equipment. For the organization of the division in combat, see map.

Since there was no air reconnaissance on our side, and the enemy laid a smoke screen over its terrain by day, it was impossible to carry out any reconnaissance. There was a complete radio blackout on the enemy side. Although the enemy artillery delivered the adjustment fire very skillfully, certain points of main effort of the enemy artillery could be recognized opposite the mouth of the Lippe between Xanten and the Xanten Forest.

Through very active fighter-bomber activity the enemy attempted constantly to paralyze our anti-aircraft defense, whereby the impression was increased that in the beginning of the attack the enemy intended to employ airborne troops.

From day to day the artillery activity of the enemy increased. Even throughout the nights the supply roads were covered with strong harassing fire.

On March 23, by 2300 hours, a large air force unit of the enemy covered Wesel and its surroundings, which was almost entirely destroyed with saturation bombing. Under such a protection and supported by simultaneous strong artillery fire, the enemy succeeded in a surprise crossing of the river with superior forces and entering the city.

From the early morning hours on the artillery barrage began on the entire division sector north of Wesel. The MLR and fire positions of the

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artillery, which had been recognized or were assumed there, were covered by very strong fire from the enemy artillery. At the same time air force units saturated the main defensive area. A great number of fighter-bombers and reconnaissance planes were constantly flying above the division sector. Hell had been unleashed, the decisive major attack had begun.

By 0930 hours there was a strong noise of engines from northwest. In endless formations unit after unit was approaching Wesel from the northwest, hundreds of troop-carrying gliders were uncoupled above the area of the eastern edge of the Diersfordter Forest - Haminkeln - Wesel. At the same time parachute units jumped off. The crossroad of Haminkeln and the Diersfordter Forest, as well as the fire positions of the artillery and command posts, located there, were the target of this attack. Once the artillery had to change over to close combat as infantry unit, it could not take part in the defense of the MLR. In that moment north of Wesel the enemy infantry launched its attack across the Rhine, being strongly supported by artillery situated at and near the eastern bank of the Rhine. Regiment and battalion headquarters were all engaged in battles with airborne enemy units so that the conduct of battle had become completely impossible.

Contrary to the expected strategic operations of parachute units, they were employed against the immediate surroundings of the main defensive area itself. Parts of the enemy landed west of the Diersfort Forest, others were driven off as far as east of Bruenen.

In the entire division sector there arose battles of single groups, continuing into the night and March 25. Parts of Regiment 1062 were still defending the castle of Diersfordt on March 25, while the citadel of Wesel

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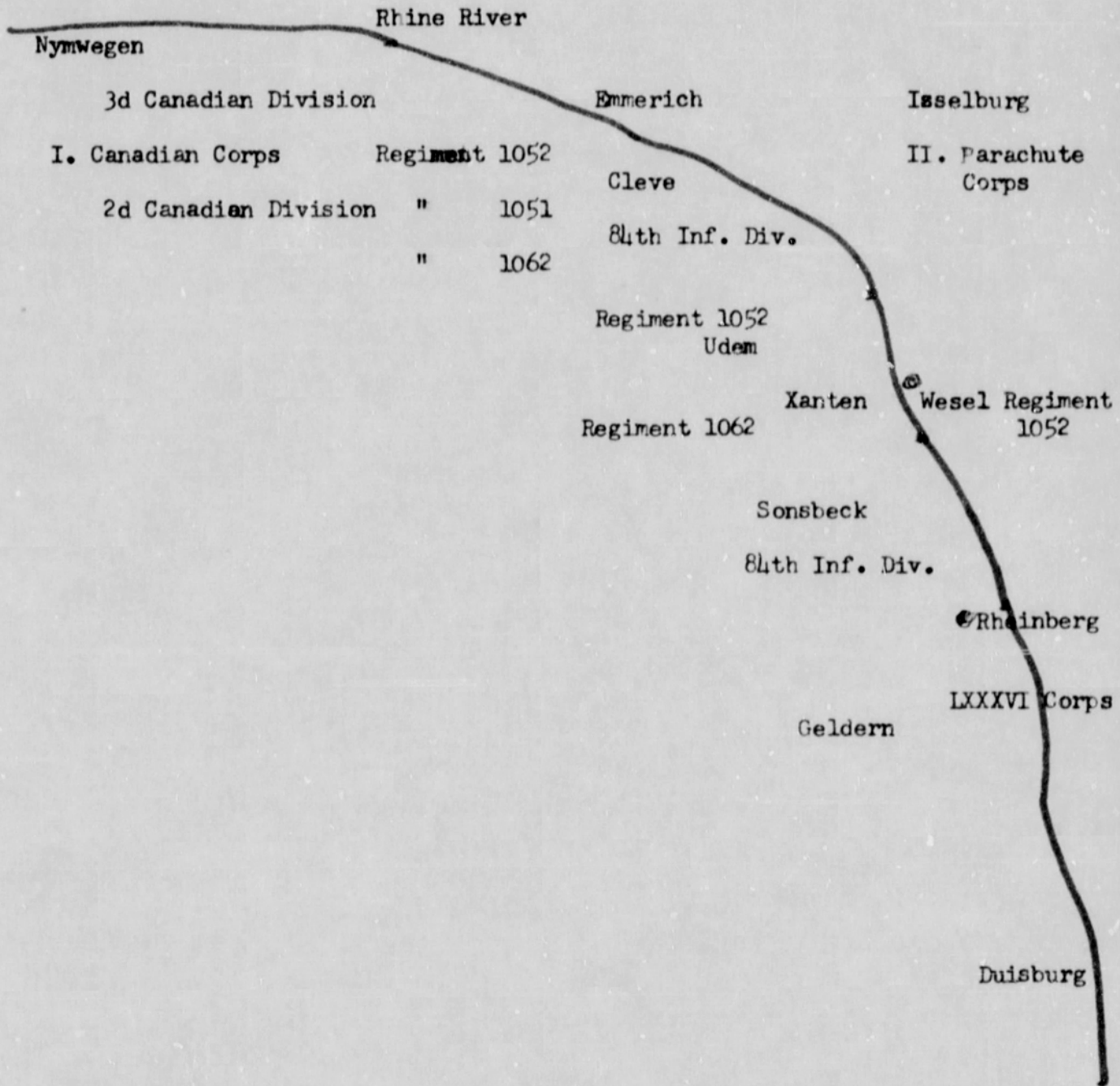
fell into enemy hands during the evening hours.

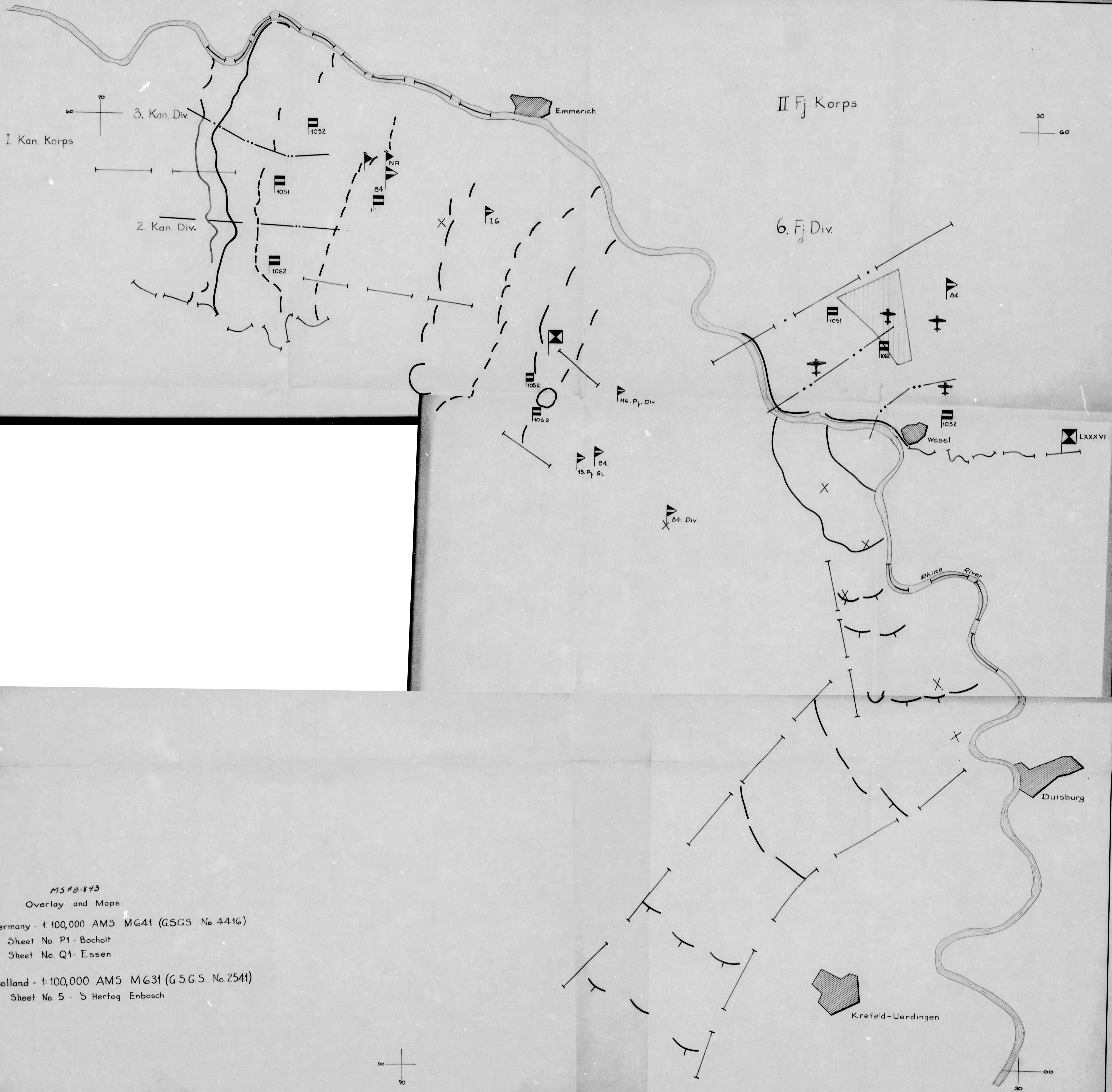
For two days the battle for the Rhine crossing and the city of Wesel had lasted in hard combat, which caused great losses not only for our troops.

Since the jump-off area of the enemy had been wrongly estimated, the reserve division was lying too far in the rear to be moved up quickly for intervening efficiently in the fighting, - the more so since motorized vehicles were not available for quick transportation. It was even employed in dissipated manner so that any decisive result could not be expected.

Because the enemy had employed two airborne divisions, the superiority of the enemy was too great for the division for the defensive battles without having any positive results. Whatever had crossed the Rhine had been exhausted units; there had not been sufficient time to replenish them for in the battles for the crossing of the Rhine.

So the Allies were able to force easily a crossing of the Rhine and then quickly start the decisive thrust into the heart of Germany.





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Overlay and Maps:

Germany - 1:100,000 AMS M641 (G.S.G.S. No. 4416)

Sheet No. P1 - Bocholt

Sheet No. Q1 - Essen

Holland - 1:100,000 AMS M631 (G.S.G.S. No. 2541)

Sheet No. 5 - 'S Hertog Enbosch

