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# XVIII CORPS

## [AIRBORNE]

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by Ray M. Stroupe
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Capt., Inf

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# OPERATION

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# VARSITY

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HEADQUARTERS XVIII CORPS (AIRBORNE)
Office of the Corps Commander
APO 109, U. S. ARMY

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R-968+2

SUMMARY OF GROUND FORCES PARTICIPATION IN
OPERATION "VARSITY"

25 April 1945

GENERAL

1. On or about 09 February 1945, while still engaged in the ROER River area north of SCHMIDT, I received from the SUPREME COMMANDER, in person, my first instructions concerning this operation. He informed me that the XVIII Corps (Airborne) would successively command a three-airborne division operation east of the RHINE, in support of the 21st Army Group; would be promptly withdrawn; and shortly thereafter a two-airborne division operation, likewise east of the RHINE, in support of the 12th Army Group.

2. The Corps was withdrawn from the SCHMIDT area, 13 February, returned to base at EPERNAY, FRANCE, and, in accordance with directives from FIRST ALLIED AIRBORNE ARMY, began planning for "VARSITY", under planning control of the 21st Army Group.

PLANNING

3. 21st Army Group directed the operation would be in support of British SECOND ARMY. The mission, evolved from conferences with General Officer Commanding that Army, Commanding General, FIRST ALLIED AIRBORNE ARMY, and Commanding General, XVIII Corps (Airborne), was:

> "To disrupt the hostile defense of the RHINE in the WESEL sector by the 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 the SECOND ARMY."

The 6th British and the 13th and 17th U. S. Airborne Divisions were made available to the Corps. British SECOND ARMY and U. S. NINTH ARMY, both under 21st Army Group control, were directed to furnish the necessary supporting troops and services. Both were furnished in generous measure, the bulk consisting of British formations, particularly artillery. Subsequently, due to insufficient air lift, the 13th Airborne Division was withdrawn from the operation.

4. British SECOND ARMY agreed to defer its assault crossing of the RHINE by as much as five days, if weather should compel postponement of the airborne effort, which the COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, 21st Army Group, and the General Officer Commanding British SECOND ARMY, considered essential to the success of the RHINE crossing. Daylight was chosen for the airborne operation, in order to take full advantage of complete Allied air supremacy and the overwhelming superiority of available Allied artillery.

5. Decision was made that the airborne strike would follow the ground force assault crossing, the first time during the employment of airborne forces in which this was done.

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(Summary of Ground Forces Participation in Operation "Varsity", Continued.)

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6. Development of the operation was planned successively to clear and secure divisional areas; to establish contact rearward with assaulting British XII Corps and to expand the bridgehead laterally to the south to seal off WESEL and make contact with the U. S. NINTH ARMY (WESEL was to be seized by a rapid night assault by the British 1st Commando Brigade); to further deepen the bridgehead to a depth of about 10,000 yards by a coordinated Corps attack to seize key terrain; to be prepared, on ARMY order, to deepen this bridgehead to 15,000 yards by an attack in conjunction with XII Corps on its left; and thence to exploit eastward in accordance with ARMY orders and the situation.

7. It was decided that the XVIII Corps (Airborne), less its divisions, would withdraw from this operation not later than D/6, in order to mount the next airborne operation, as directed by the SUPREME COMMANDER.

## EXECUTION

8. Weather was excellent. Execution began on D Day, 24 March. Both divisions led with their parachute echelons. The drops, commencing at 1000 hours, concluded with the last glider element shortly after noon. Fifteen minutes later, 240 heavy bombers dropped one day of supply by parachute to each division. Ground contact being established with British XII Corps on D Day, and ferrying and bridging operations being ahead of schedule, the supply situation permitted cancellation of all planned subsequent air resupply missions. The airborne phase of "VARSITY" therefore terminated at about 1330 on D Day.

9. The operation was developed in full conformity, phase by phase, with the plan. By the time the final planned phase line, about 15,000 yards deep, was about to be reached, the Corps ordered this line disregarded, and maximum exploitation to the east, the objective being to seize debouchment areas beyond the defiles at DULMEN and HALTERN, in order to permit British and American armor to break out into the north German plain.

10. Prior to this time the 6th Guards Armored Brigade (Scots Guards, Coldstream Guards, Grenadier Guards) had been attached to this Corps. Attaching the 513th Parachute Infantry to this brigade, it was pushed with maximum speed and energy to the east, and rapidly seized the debouchment areas desired. Immediately on the heels of this brigade, the infantry of the 17th Airborne Division arrived, took over the defense of these areas, and freed the Guards Armored Brigade for its rapid subsequent movement on MUNSTER.

11. Meanwhile, through both the DULMEN and HALTERN defiles, the exits of which were now securely held, the U. S. 2d Armored Division exploited eastward.

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## STATISTICS

12. During the six-day period, 24 to 30 March, in which this Corps controlled the operation, it averaged a daily advance of over seven miles; took 8,000 prisoners; destroyed the 84th Infantry Division; and, by verified but very incomplete count,

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(Summary of Ground Forces Participation in Operation "Varsity", Continued.)

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captured or destroyed 124 artillery and AA pieces and 26 tanks. The withdrawal of the Corps on D/6 made it impossible to get full reports from the divisions. It is believed that the amount of materiel captured and destroyed greatly exceeds the above figures.

## CONCLUSIONS

13. a. Concept and planning were sound and thorough, and execution flawless.

b. The impact of the airborne divisions, at one blow, completely shattered the hostile defense, permitting prompt link-up with the assaulting XII Corps, the 1st Commando Brigade, and the NINTH ARMY on the south.

c. The rapid deepening of the bridgehead materially increased the rapidity of bridging operations, which, in turn, greatly increased the rate of build-up on the east bank, so essential to subsequent successes.

d. The insistent drive of the Corps to the east, and the rapid seizure of key terrain in the DULMEN and HALTERN areas, were decisive contributions to this operation, and to subsequent developments, as by it both British and U. S. armor were able to debouch into the north German plain at full strength and momentum.

e. In planning and in execution, the cooperation of participating air forces, both British and American, I consider completely satisfactory. There was no enemy air interception. The fighter-bombers, in their counter-flak role, were as effective as could have been expected. The air resupply by heavy bombers was timely, and met a critical need. Troop delivery by IX Troop Carrier Command was on time, and with minor exceptions, in the correct areas.

f. I wish particularly to record that throughout both planning and execution, the cooperation and actual assistance provided by the Commanders, Staff and troops of the British formations under which this Corps served, which it commanded, or with which it was associated, left nothing to be desired. For my part, I have never had more satisfying professional service in combat, nor more agreeable personal relations with participating commanders.

M. B. Ridgway

M. B. RIDGWAY,
Major General, U. S. Army,
Commanding.

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HEADQUARTERS, XVIII CORPS (AIRBORNE)
United States Army

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:Date: 25 Apr 45
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25 April 1945

REPORT ON OPERATION VARSITY

1. PLANNING PHASE:

a. Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne) was at ZWEIFALL, GERMANY preparing plans to cross ROER River when Major General M. B. RIDGWAY received orders to report for conference 9 February 1945 with Commander-In-Chief, TWENTY-FIRST ARMY GROUP. At this conference the XVIII Corps (Airborne) was alerted for Operation VARSITY, an airborne operation in conjunction with the crossing of RHINE River by SECOND BRITISH ARMY, with date to be 31 March 1945. The Corps was relieved from FIRST U.S. ARMY and proceeded to base in EPERNAY, FRANCE, closing there 14 February 1945.

b. The 6th British Airborne Division, 17th U.S. Airborne Division and 13th U.S. Airborne Division were assigned for the airborne operation. The 6th British Airborne Division moved to ENGLAND from FRANCE for training and preparation for departure from airdromes in the UNITED KINGDOM. The 17th U.S. Airborne Division was withdrawn from combat in the ARDENNES Area and closed in the vicinity of CHALONS, FRANCE on 14 February 1945 for reorganization, reequipping and training. VARSITY was to be the first combat airborne operation of the 17th U.S. Airborne Division. The 13th U.S. Airborne Division had recently arrived on the continent and was reorganized under new T/O & E. It had not been in combat. This division was released from Operation VARSITY on 8 March 1945.

c. During the planning phase numerous conferences were held to "button up" the multitude of details as a pre-requisite to the successful mounting of a combined river crossing and airborne operation. A detailed account of all the general and special staff conferences is not within the scope of this report, but it should be recorded that the staff planning of the tactical and logistical aspects of the operation, both air and ground, contributed in large measure to its successful execution. Three (3) major conferences were conducted by Headquarters, SECOND BRITISH ARMY resulting in adoption of the following broad plan as it affected operations of XVIII Corps (Airborne):

D Day - 24 March 1945.

D-3 - Air neutralize enemy air by bombing airdromes, particularly those used by jet-propelled aircraft; sweep on D Day.

D-1 - 1730 - RAF heavy aircraft bomb WESEL.

1800 - Massed artillery begin all night preparation.

2100 - 30th British Corps launch assault crossing of RHINE on one (1) division front to seize a bridgehead in the vicinity of REES.

2200 - 1st Commando Brigade cross RHINE and launch sneak attack on WESEL.

2230 to 2245 - RAF bomb WESEL at request 1st Commando Brigade.

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D Day - 0200 - 12th British Corps launch assault crossing of RHINE North of WESEL with 15th (Scottish) Division; seize BISLICH (A1443) and advance on BOCHOLT (A2260 and BORKEN (A3961).

1000 - (P Hour) - 6th British Airborne Division and 17th U.S. Airborne Division begin simultaneous drops in the area Northwest of WESEL indicated on Sketch No. 1, attached. Drops and landings to be completed by 1245, D Day. See Paragraph 2, "Plan of Commanding General, XVIII Corps (Airborne)" for further details of initial mission and subsequent employment of airborne units to exploit the bridgehead.

1300 - Resupply by air.

2. PLAN OF COMMANDING GENERAL, XVIII CORPS (AIRBORNE): (Sketch No. 1)

a. Mission XVIII Corps (Airborne): To disrupt the hostile defense of the RHINE North of WESEL by seizure of key terrain by airborne attack in order to rapidly deepen bridgehead, facilitate crossing by SECOND BRITISH ARMY and link-up with NINTH U.S. ARMY; then be prepared for further offensive action eastward on SECOND BRITISH ARMY Order.

b. Initial Mission 6th British Airborne Division: To drop during daylight, 24 March 1945, beginning at P Hour; seize, clear and secure the Division Area with priority to the high ground in the general area (160475 - 163468 - 170461), the town of HAMMINKELN, and the bridges over the ISSEL River at (218497) and (222485); protect the left (North) flank of the Corps; establish contact with the 12th British Corps, and the 17th U.S. Airborne Division. Objectives to be held at all costs.

c. Initial Mission 17th U.S. Airborne Division: To drop during daylight, 24 March 1945, beginning at P Hour; seize, clear and secure the Division Area with priority to the high ground East of DIERSFORDT in the general area (181449 - 183443 - 191441), and the bridges over the ISSEL River from (253439) to (235458) (both inclusive); protect the right (South) flank of the Corps; establish contact with the 1st Commando Brigade, the 12th British Corps and the 6th British Airborne Division. Objectives to be held at all costs.

d. Plan for subsequent operations called for advance to Phase Line LONDON (Sketch No. 1), by 17th U.S. Airborne Division by 0700, D plus 1; advance to Phase Line NEW YORK by 1700, D plus 1 with 6th British Airborne Division and 17th U.S. Airborne Division (with 1st Commando Brigade attached); 12th British Corps to relieve elements of 6th British Airborne Division North of inter-Corps boundary during the night of D plus 1 and 2; advance to Phase Line PARIS on D plus 2; continue the advance on order of General Officer Commanding, SECOND BRITISH ARMY.

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3. PERSONALITIES:

General Officer Commanding, TWENTY-FIRST ARMY GROUP
Field Marshal Sir BERNARD L. MONTGOMERY, KCB, DSO

General Officer Commanding, SECOND BRITISH ARMY
Lieutenant General Sir MILES DEMPSEY, KCB, DSO, MC

Commanding General, FIRST (ALLIED) AIRBORNE ARMY
Lieutenant General LEWIS H. BRERETON

Commanding General, XVIII Corps (Airborne)
Major General MATTHEW B. RIDGWAY

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REPORT ON OPERATION VARSITY, Hq, XVIII Corps (Airborne), dated 25 April 1945.

Deputy Commander, XVIII Corps (Airborne)
Major General RICHARD N. GALE, DSO, OBE, MC, General Officer Commanding, 1st British Airborne Corps

General Officer Commanding, 8th British Corps
Lieutenant General EVELYN H. BARKER, CB, CBE, DSO, MC

General Officer Commanding, 12th British Corps
Lieutenant General NEIL RITCHIE, CB

Commanding General, 8th Bomber Command (B-24 Resupply)
Major General FREDERICK L. ANDERSON

Commanding General, IX Troop Carrier Command
Major General PAUL L. WILLIAMS

Commanding General, 17th U.S. Airborne Division
Major General WILLIAM M. MILEY

General Officer Commanding, 6th British Airborne Division
Major General ERIC L. BOLS, DSO

General Officer Commanding, 6th Guards Armored Brigade
Brigadier W. D. C. GREENACRE, MVO

General Officer Commanding, 1st Commando Brigade
Brigadier DERCK MILLS-ROBERTS, DSO, MC - Irish Guards

Officer Commanding, SAS Ground Force
Lieutenant Colonel BRIAN FORSTER MORTAN FRANKS, DSO, MC

4. CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS:

a. 24 March 1945: (Sketch No. 2)

The operation proceeded according to plan with drops and landings being made in moderate to intense antiaircraft fire. Details of patterns is a matter of separate study, but in general they may be classified as good. By night fall reports were received that all objectives had been taken by both divisions, except that the 513th Parachute Infantry, 17th U.S. Airborne Division was launching a night attack to secure the high ground in the heavily wooded area North of DIERSFORDT. This attack was successful. Five (5) bridges across the ISSEL River had been seized intact and HAMMINKELN had been seized by 6th Airlanding Brigade, 6th British Airborne Division. 194th Glider Infantry, 17th U.S. Airborne Division held crossings of the ISSEL River within its zone. Contact had been made between all units. 1st Commando Brigade held the western half of WESEL. Build-up of supporting units across the RHINE proceeded slowly due to difficulty with Class 50-60 Rafts. The Corps Commander crossed during the afternoon and joined the Commanding General, 17th U.S. Airborne Division. Two hundred and forty (240) B-24 aircraft dropped five hundred and forty (540) tons of ammunition, food and gasoline at 1300 Hours. 6th British Airborne Division reported capture of fifteen hundred (1,500) prisoners, 17th U.S. Airborne Division two thousand (2,000) prisoners, during the day, with identification of 84th Infantry Division predominating.

The airborne drop was of such depth that all enemy artillery and rear defensive positions were included and destroyed, reducing in one (1) day a position that might have taken many days to reduce by ground attack only.

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Resupply mission by air for 25 March 1945 was cancelled.



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b. 25 March 1945: (Sketch No. 3)

XVIII Corps (Airborne) assumed control 1st Commando Brigade at 0930, (which was confirmed later by Headquarters, SECOND BRITISH ARMY) and it was attached to 17th U.S. Airborne Division. WESEL was not completely clear at opening of this period.

17th U.S. Airborne Division launched an attack with 194th Glider Infantry and 507th Parachute Infantry at 1500 to seize Phase Line LONDON. The 194th Glider Infantry reported on its objectives by 1800; resistance classified as light with no enemy artillery or mortar fire encountered. 507th Parachute Infantry with stiffer resistance in vicinity of WESEL had two (2) battalions on Phase Line LONDON prior to midnight.

Build-up preceeded slowly with each division reinforced by one (1) battery self-propelled antitank guns (17 pounder, British) and 17th U.S. Airborne Division reinforced by one (1) tank company. 6th British Airborne Division had been reinforced by the equivalent of one (1) tank company (amphibious) on D Day.

Corps Tactical Command Post opened on the East bank at DIERSFORDT (178442) at 1400, and the same afternoon issued orders for attack on Phase Line NEW YORK with divisions abreast, formation and boundaries as planned previously (see Sketch No. 1) at 0900, 26 March 1945; 3d Parachute Brigade, 6th British Airborne Division in Corps Reserve.

844 POW

c. 26 March 1945: (Sketch No. 4)

6th British Airborne Division and 17th U.S. Airborne Division attacked as planned and secured all objectives on Phase Line NEW YORK. Resistance classified as light along the entire front. Only two (2) counterattacks reported up to this time each of about company strength.

Plans were completed for continuation of the attack on Phase Line PARIS at 0900, 27 March 1945, with arrangements made for relief of elements of 6th British Airborne Division by 12th British Corps North of the previously agreed inter-Corps boundary by 0200, 27 March 1945.

Build-up of reinforcements proceeded more rapidly due to opening of Class 40 Bridge ahead of schedule and construction of two (2) Class 40 Bridges at WESEL by NINTH U.S. ARMY.

6th Guards Armored Brigade after crossing RHINE during night 26 - 27 March 1945 was attached to XVIII Corps (Airborne), and plans were prepared to reinforce it with the following:

513th Parachute Infantry (less one (1) battalion)
144th Self-Propelled Antitank Battery
6th Field Regiment
1 Air Support Tentacle

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and to attack on Corps Order to seize the line DORSTEN (4740) - RHADES (4450).

17th U.S. Airborne Division secured bridge site at (323397) to safeguard bridging operation of XVI U.S. Corps following day.

1st Commando Brigade replaced 3d Parachute Brigade at 1800 as Corps Reserve vicinity of WESEL.

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d. 27 March 1945: (Sketch No. 5)

During the night 26 - 27 March 1945, 6th British Airborne Division sent patrols as far out as Phase Line PARIS, and upon finding no resistance quickly pushed two (2) battalions forward so that by daylight they were on that line. The Corps Commander issued instructions to disregard Phase Line PARIS and to advance aggressively on the line DORSTEN - WULFEN (5047) - LEMBECK (4951) with particular attention to bridges on the LIPPE River. Units were instructed to push the attack relentlessly day and night in order to obtain maximum exploitation with minimum delay.

The 6th Guards Armored Brigade was delayed crossing the RHINE bridges, but with 513th Parachute Infantry (less one (1) battalion) attached, it attacked at 1500 and passed through leading elements of 17th U.S. Airborne Division during the night.

Despite stiff resistance in the Forest WESEL Area, gains up to nine thousand (9,000) yards were made in the Corps Zone.

XVIII Corps (Airborne) Command Post opened at 1500 at 225427, North of WESEL.

493 POW

e. 28 March 1945: (Sketch No. 6)

6th Guards Armored Brigade (reinforced by 513th Parachute Infantry) entered DORSTEN at 0600, and at 1230, 28 March 1945, oral orders were issued by Corps Commander to advance rapidly on the axis HALTERN (6249) - DULMEN (6859) - MUNSTER (9273). Resistance at LIPPRAMSDORF (5546) consisting principally of self-propelled guns held up the brigade until darkness. This resistance was bypassed during the night.

6th British Airborne Division continued the attack, seizing the town of ERLE (4050) by 0800, and pushed on to meet stubborn resistance at LEMBECK which was shelled and also bombed by RAF. LEMBECK was seized during night of 28 - 29 March 1945. 6th British Airborne Division and all the supporting artillery of 8th British Corps passed to 8th British Corps control at 2400.

17th U.S. Airborne Division (less 513th Parachute Infantry) continued the attack. 507th Parachute Infantry seized WULFEN by 2100; it was then motorized and ordered to advance rapidly to join the Guards Armored Brigade in HALTERN where it took responsibility for security of the town and sent out security to the East perimeter of STAUBECKEN LAKE.

1st Commando Brigade relieved from assignment to XVIII Corps (Airborne) and reverted to command 8th British Corps upon arrival in ERLE.

Plan for future operation: 6th Guards Armored Brigade with 513th Parachute Infantry attached, to press advance on axis HALTERN - DULMEN - MUNSTER; 507th Parachute Infantry to secure HALTERN; 194th Glider Infantry to move by motor on DULMEN to garrison and secure that area. 17th U.S. Airborne Division (less 513th Parachute Infantry) pushed rapidly forward by motor to HALTERN and DULMEN, was ordered to secure "bridgeheads" at those places covering exits and defiles, thus insuring openings through which Guards Armored Brigade and later the 2d U.S. Armored Division could advance rapidly and exploit far beyond.

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Corps TAC Command Post opened at 1700 vicinity PEDDENBERG (313415).

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f. 29 March 1945: (Sketch No. 6)

6th Guards Armored Brigade, reinforced, was relieved in HALTERN by 507th Parachute Infantry prior to daylight and continued advance capturing DULMEN by 1000. Further advance was blocked by extensive rubble in streets and marshy ground on outskirts of city. Engineer facilities were pushed forward to clear path. By 1900 plans were complete to continue advance night 29 - 30 March 1945 to BULDERN (7463), which was occupied at 0505, 30 March 1945.

194th Glider Infantry continued move by motor shuttle to DULMEN.

17th U.S. Airborne Division Headquarters and bulk of division troops assembled in vicinity of HALTERN.

The 2d U.S. Armored Division, of XIX U.S. Corps, NINTH U.S. ARMY at 1800, 29 March 1945 advanced on axis DORSTEN - HALTERN - DULMEN, to pass through and relieve 17th U.S. Airborne Division in HALTERN and DULMEN. 17th U.S. Airborne Division with all U.S. attachments upon being passed through to come under command XIX U.S. Corps 0600, 30 March 1945. All British units, remaining attached to 17th U.S. Airborne Division and XVIII Corps (Airborne), to revert to 8th British Corps at 0600, 30 March 1945. XIX U.S. Corps to assume responsibility for that part of XVIII Corps (Airborne) Zone in NINTH U.S. ARMY Zone and 8th British Corps to assume responsibility for that part of XVIII Corps (Airborne) Zone in SECOND BRITISH ARMY Zone. XVIII Corps (Airborne) to revert to FIRST (ALLIED) AIRBORNE ARMY same date and hour (0600, 30 March 1945).

1529 POW

g. 30 March 1945: (Sketch No. 6)

XVIII Corps (Airborne) closed Command Post at 0600, and departed for EPERNAY, FRANCE.

5. SUPPLY AND EVACUATION:

a. Supplies for Operation VARSITY group themselves in the following categories:

(1) Basic loads.
(2) One (1) day of air resupply (two hundred and forty (240) tons per division) to be delivered on D Day immediately after the airborne landing.
(3) Two (2) days of air resupply to be delivered on D plus 1 unless cancelled.
(4) Overland supply transported across the river by DUKWs from dumps established on the West bank of the river.
(5) Supplies pre-loaded on division landtails.
(6) Normal supply over the bridges from regularly established supply points.

b. By the afternoon of D Day, it became apparent:

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(1) That the basic load and the D Day air resupply had arrived in good order.
(2) That the resupply by DUKWs was going rather slowly over the regularly established DUKW ferries, but that the bridges were being installed with a rapidity which would make it possible to route DUKWs across the bridges.
(3) That sufficient of the division roadtail could be moved across the river on D Day so that by the morning of D plus 1 each airborne division would have a total of all classes of supply from all the aforementioned sources to give them a reserve of at least two (2) days in addition to what was coming in through the normal flow.

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c. Based on the above estimate, resupply by air, scheduled for D plus 1 was cancelled.

d. The flow of traffic over the bridges thereafter proceeded at such a rate that by the morning of D plus 4 each airborne division had under its control on the East bank of the river all of its organic and attached transportation and a minimum of five (5) days of supply. This, in effect, marked the end of the build up and thereafter supply proceeded in the normal fashion.

e. Casualties may be classified as follows:

(1) Those casualties held by divisions.
(2) Those casualties held by holding units established on the East bank of the river.
(3) Those casualties held by field and evacuation hospitals established about five (5) miles to the West of the river.

f. The holding unit on the East bank of the river, including a few ambulances, was established on D Day. Evacuation from this point to an ambulance collecting point on the West side of the river was made by DUKW and from there to the field or evacuation hospitals by ambulance. Evacuation from the divisions to the holding unit was by "jeep" ambulances belonging to the divisions, supplemented by the ambulances of the holding unit. Loaded ambulances were given priority across bridges and as sufficient bridges were installed, evacuation was made direct from the East bank holding unit to the hospitals, and later, direct from the divisions to the hospitals.

6. AIR INCLUDING TRANSPORT AND RESUPPLY:

a. The air plan for VARSITY was divided into phases which covered the neutralization of certain hostile installations, interdiction of traffic by the bombardment of road nets and bridges, the protection of Troop Carrier Command aircraft during the delivery of the airborne forces, against both hostile aircraft and flak, and close cooperation by the 2d tactical Air Force with the 6th British and 17th U.S. Airborne Divisions.

b. On D-3 all enemy airdromes which were within effective range of the VARSITY area were bombed with particular attention being paid to those used by jet-propelled aircraft. On the morning of D Day at first light these field were swept by fighter aircraft of the 8th and 9th Air Forces and the effectiveness of these attacks is indicated by the non-appearance of the Luftwaffe.

c. From D-3 to D-1 road nets in the PLUNDER-VARSITY Area were kept under almost continuous attack by medium bombers and fighter-bombers of both the U.S. and British Air Forces.

d. On D-1 at 1730 Hours RAF heavy aircraft attacked the city of WESEL. At 2230 Hours to 2245 on D-1 the RAF again bombed WESEL at the request of the 1st Commando Brigade. At the time of the bombing, the Commandoes were within 1,500 yards of the target and no report was received of any injury to the personnel of that unit.

e. At 1000 Hours on D Day the 6th British Airborne Division and the 17th U.S. Airborne Division started a simultaneous parachute drop and glider landings in the area North of WESEL. Parachute drops and glider landings were completed by 1245 Hours. The forces involved in this part of the operation were the IX Troop Carrier Command and the 38th and 46th Groups of the RAF. The IX Troop Carrier Command dropped six hundred and sixty seven (667) loads of paratroopers which included seventy-two (72) C-46 type aircraft. This was the entire parachute commitment of the 6th British and 17th U.S. Airborne Divisions. The 38th and 46th RAF Groups towed four hundred and forty (440) Horsa

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gliders to the landing zones of the 6th British Airborne Division. The IX Troop Carrier Command towed nine hundred and six (906) CG 4A gliders, five hundred and ninety-two (592) of which were double-towed by C-47 aircraft. Seventeen (17) airfields were used by the IX Troop Carrier Command and eight (8) by the 38th and 46th RAF Groups in launching this operation. Three (3) airfields were used by the 8th Air Force B-24's for resupply.

f. Immediately following the glider landings, a resupply mission of five hundred and forty (540) tons was delivered by B-24 type aircraft of the 8th Air Force employing a total of two hundred and forty (240) aircraft.

g. During the airborne delivery and the resupply delivery continuous protection was afforded the aircraft of the IX Troop Carrier Command and the 8th Air Force by the 8th Air Force, the 9th Air Force, the Fighter Command and the 2d Tactical Air Force. The losses of the IX Troop Carrier Command are reported to have approximated fifty (50) C-47 and C-46 type aircraft. Glider losses from antiaircraft fire are known to have been very light. B-24 losses were reported to have been approximately twenty (20).

h. Just prior to last light on D Day, airfields occupied by night fighter forces of the Luftwaffe were attacked by the 8th and 9th Air Force fighters. Throughout the entire operation of the XVIII Corps (Airborne), there were no reported enemy air attacks on its forces.

i. The 2d Tactical Air Force supported units of the XVIII Corps (Airborne) throughout the entire operation. 2d Tactical Air Force furnished communication parties which were attached to the Corps and each division and which had direct communication with the 2d British Army G-Air, the FCP, and with the supporting aircraft. Requests for air support were submitted direct to Army if the targets were not of a pressing nature, and in case of an emergency direct to the FCP, by-passing Army. There were very few targets submitted by the two (2) airborne divisions to the air forces, because of the disorganization of the German forces and scarcity of suitable targets. Targets which were submitted were quickly and effectively attacked.

j. A new type of air support to the Corps was made available in the form of medium bombardment close support. Medium bombardment aircraft were standing by and were prepared to attack a target within 30 to 45 minutes after its submission to the 2d Tactical Air Force by the Corps. No suitable targets were encountered and hence the effectiveness of this type support could not be appraised.

7. ARTILLERY:

a. Artillery support for Operation VARSITY fell naturally into two (2) distinct phases: (1) The artillery bombardment prior to P Hour on D Day, and (2) The close support rendered the airborne divisions by artillery from positions on the West bank of the RHINE River immediately after the airborne troops had arrived on the ground. 12th British Corps planned and executed the preliminary bombardment. Commencing at 1800 Hours on 23 March 1945 (D-1), the bombardment continued unabated until P Hour (1000) on D Day. Prior to the commencement of the bombardment a silent policy had been in effect. Positions were occupied and ammunition dumped nearby under cover of darkness. Radio silence was maintained. Gun crews were not permitted in the position area during daylight. The strictest camouflage discipline was enforced. A special committee was formed to study counter-flak fires, and the last half hour of the preparation was devoted to neutralizing enemy flak installations. Earlier fires had concentrated on neutralizing known enemy batteries, punishing enemy strong points, disrupting his communications, and denying him any rest. After daylight on D Day the artillery concentrated its fires on the area short of the bomb line while the RAF pummeled the land to the East of that line. Each airborne division submitted its requests for areas to be fired upon; these requests were honored in the master fire plan. Careful supervision insured that

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the Landing Zones would not be pitted by shell holes. Working in the most thorough and painstaking manner 12th British Corps CCRA produced a most excellent fire plan, admirably executed. The exact composition of the artillery massed for the delivery of the preparation may be found in the Artillery Report. It is sufficient to record here that light, medium, and heavy calibers crowded each other to the river bank and every piece had its several hundred rounds of ammunition dumped hard by. The general effectiveness of the bombardment is revealed by the answers of the dazed prisoners of D Day, who, when questioned as to why they surrendered, so often replied: "It was too much; it was more than I could stand". As to the effectiveness of the counter-flak fires there remains the mute testimony of the forty-five (45) planes of the first flight, all of which returned in formation to the West bank of the river. Later flights were not so fortunate, for it was planned, and rightly so, to cease firing when the first planes of the sky train appeared over the gun areas and to fire no more until the airlanding was completed. At that time XVIII Corps Artillery (Airborne) took active command of Corps Artillery and second phase came into being.

b. For the close support of the airborne divisions after they were on the ground a division artillery field regiment (British) in position on the West bank of the river was placed in direct support of each airborne division. The 6th British Airborne Division had three (3) field regiments and two (2) medium regiments; the 17th U.S. Airborne Division had three (3) field regiments and one (1) medium regiment in direct support. The 6th British Airborne Division was allotted the extra medium (4.5" Gun) regiment to gain more fire at greater range, for its division zone extended deeper than did the area of the 17th U.S. Airborne Division. In general support was 8th AGRA and the 40th U.S. Group. On call were the artilleries of 12th British Corps on the left and XVI U.S. Corps on the right. The key to the whole problem of giving close support to the divisions was to be found in the communication system. Radio, of course, was the only solution; radio and trained observers - for all early fires of necessity had to be observed fires. The 6th British Airborne Division had its own airborne forward observer unit which answered the need admirably. No such organic unit existed for the 17th U.S. Airborne Division. As a consequence XVIII Corps Artillery (Airborne) trained and equipped such a group for that division calling principally on the division for the personnel. Actually the equipment had been procured and the personnel trained for such an operation prior to the Von Runstedt offensive, which precipitated this Corps into a ground role and dissolved the school. VARSITY, however, demanded TRANSLATOR teams with the British artillery formations on the West bank in order that U.S. observers' sensings could be translated into British fire commands. NINTH U.S. ARMY supplied the necessary translator teams and equipment. These teams, along with the airborne observer and liaison teams were given a week's intensive schooling at EPERNAY and then went out to join their units. The details of the communication plan can be found in the Artillery Report on the operation. That the communications system worked was gratifying, that every airborne radio paradropped and gliderborne, a total of fourteen (14) radios, functioned during the operation was nothing short of miraculous. The effect of having a trained observer with each infantry battalion in direct communication with an artillery regiment already in position is difficult to evaluate. That the observers proved themselves, however, is shown by the fact that one (1) infantry regiment had over one hundred and ten (110) observed fire missions fired for it during the period P to P plus 36 Hours. The observers adjusted fire visually by day and night and on occasion by sound. They reported "Fire Effective" in every instance. When the divisions moved on eastward the forward observers for Corps Artillery were no longer needed. But for forty-eight (48) hours they gave to the airborne divisions something unique in airborne annals - observed close-support artillery fire in great mass during the crucial period when the airborne division artilleries were seeking to assemble and organize on the ground.

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8. ENGINEER FUNCTIONS:

Engineer plan for the operation covered initially the clearing of routes through WESEL and bridging the LIPPE River and the LIPPE - SEITEN Canal on the main road South of WESEL.

Based on a route plan prescribed by SECOND BRITISH ARMY an overlay showing priority of clearance of routes through WESEL was prepared and given to 16th Airfield Construction Group. This plan was coordinated with NINTH U.S. ARMY engineers working in the same area.

Reconnaissance parties crossed on D Day to check the routes selected and to make any necessary changes. Late on D plus 1 troops and equipment of 16th Airfield Construction Group crossed the river and began the work of clearing the town on D plus 2. Additional troops of the 16th Airfield Construction Group crossed and helped with work already under way.

By this time two (2) routes through WESEL were opened to traffic.

On D plus 3 the balance of 16th Airfield Construction Group troops and equipment together with additional 8 CRE troops and equipment arrived. Bridging over LIPPE River began by 8 CRE troops.

On D plus 4 balance of 8 CRE troops and additional bridging equipment arrived and a bridge over the LIPPE River was completed. Troops of 503d Field Company and one (1) Bailey Platoon came under Corps control and were placed in support of 6th Guards Armored Brigade. Troops of 16th Airfield Construction Group and 8 CRE reverted to 8th British Corps as of 1800 this date.

On D plus 5 troops of the 503d Field Company with equipment loaned by 8th British Corps cleared routes of obstacles as far as DULMEN and by 1810 Hours had cleared two (2) single lane routes through DULMEN.

9. SIGNAL COMMUNICATIONS:

a. Wire Communication: Providing the Corps Headquarters with wire communication for Operation VARSITY presented the problem of obtaining wire circuits across the RHINE River to the 17th U.S. Airborne Division and 6th British Airborne Division. To fulfill this mission it was necessary to have a minimum of five (5) spiral-four (4) cables from the Corps Command Post across the RHINE River operating at all times. Prior to 1200 Hours D Day six (6) spiral four (4) cables had been installed from the Corps Command Post to test point on the East bank of the river. In order to assure that a minimum of five (5) cables would be working at all times, sixteen (16) spiral four (4) cables were laid under water across the river, eight (8) being laid at one (1) point and eight (8) at a different point further up stream. These cables were connected to test points which permitted selection of any five (5) of the sixteen (16) cables. The first cable to be laid across the river was installed and operating by 0945, D Day. The wire teams continued to lay cable until eight (8) cables were installed. The first crossing of eight (8) cables was completed 1400, D Day. The construction teams then moved up stream and installed another eight (8) cables. The second set of eight (8) cables was completed by 1800, D Day. At 1630, D Day, wire laying teams had arrived on the East bank of the RHINE River and had begun to extend cables to the 17th U.S. Airborne Division and to the 6th British Airborne Division. These wire teams had extended spiral-four (4) cables as far as MUHLENFELD by the evening of D Day. They were unable to extend the lines any further due to enemy action in the area through which they must proceed and were forced to wait at MUHLENFELD until the morning of D plus 1. At this time they continued towards the divisions' command posts. At 1430, D plus 1, the first cable arrived at the Command Post of the 17th U.S. Airborne Division. At 1600, D plus 1 the first cable arrived at the Command Post of the 6th British Airborne Division. The crews then proceeded to extend backwards from the divisions to complete the

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second cable from each division to the Corps Command Post. After the initial system was installed the crews continued to extend the cable to accommodate the rapidly moving command posts of the divisions.

b. RADIO COMMUNICATION:

(1) XVIII Corps (Airborne) Command Net C-1: Communication established as follows:

(a) 17th U.S. Airborne Division at 1830, 24 March 1945.
(b) 6th British Airborne Division at 1245, 25 March 1945. (Delay caused by radio set not being available for net until 1200, 25 March 1945.)

(2) XVIII Corps (Airborne) Command Net C-2: Communication established with 6th British Airborne Division at 1430, 24 March 1945.
(3) XVIII Corps (Airborne) Command Net C-3: Communication established with 17th U.S. Airborne Division at 1235, 24 March 1945.
(4) Army Net C-4: Communication established with SECOND BRITISH ARMY and NINTH U.S. ARMY at 2330, 23 March 1945.
(5) SECOND BRITISH ARMY Command Net A-1: Communication established at 2330, 23 March 1945.
(6) FIRST (ALLIED) AIRBORNE ARMY Command Net C-5: Communication established 1014, 24 March 1945.
(7) 17th U.S. Airborne Division Resupply Net C-6: The monitor station at Corps Headquarters heard the 17th U.S. Airborne Division establish communication with the FIRST (ALLIED) AIRBORNE ARMY at 1158, 24 March 1945.
(8) XVIII Corps (Airborne) Administrative Net C-8: Communication was established with Corps Base at 0812, 24 March 1945.
(9) 6th British Airborne Division Resupply Net C-9: The monitor station at Corps headquarters heard communication established at 1235, 24 March 1945.

10. Enemy units engaged included 84th Infantry Division (destroyed), 466th Division (BG KARST), elements of 7th Parachute Division, numerous Antiaircraft, Replacement, Volkssturm, Fortress, Engineer, Assault Gun, Signal, Artillery, Fusilier, and other units.

11. CONCLUSION: (Sketch No. 7)

Operation VARSITY in its conception and planning envisaged seizure of key terrain to disrupt the hostile defense, and the rapid establishment of a deep bridgehead by airborne troops with early link up by other river crossing forces. Plans for subsequent operations to exploit the surprise and confusion gained, were based upon flexible and aggressive command and early reinforcement by supporting armor, antitank weapons, artillery and additional supplies and service troops, particularly engineers, over very limited crossing facilities.

The successful execution of the airborne and exploitation operations in which XVIII Corps (Airborne) advanced a total of forty-one (41) miles and captured eight thousand and nine (8,009) prisoners in six (6) days was made possible not by the remarkable circumstance of having events develop according to schedule, but rather by the thousands of individuals who through bold and aggressive action, by tireless and intelligent efforts caused those events to occur.

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It is believed that strategic and tactical doctrine governing the employment of airborne forces were served in VARSITY, and that it may well serve as a model for future airborne operations.

M. B. RIDGWAY,
Major General, U. S. Army,
Commanding.

1 ANNEX:
Troop List as of 2400, 25 March 1945.

SKETCHES:
No. 1 to 7 Inclusive, attached.

DISTRIBUTION:
Twelfth Army Gp
Twenty-First Army Gp
First U.S. Army
Second Brit Army
Ninth U.S. Army
FAAA
IX TAC
IX TCC
12th Brit Corps
XVI U.S. Corps
6th Brit Abn Div
17th U.S. Abn Div
1st Cdo Brig
6th Gds Armd Brig

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ANNEX 1 to accompany REPORT ON OPERATION VARSITY, Hq, XVIII Corps (Airborne), dated 25 April 1945.

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TROOP LIST AS OF 2400, 25 MARCH 1945

XVIII Corps (Airborne)
- Hq & Hq Co, XVIII Corps (Airborne)
- Hq & Hq Btry, XVIII Corps Artillery (Airborne)
- 54th Sig Bn (Airborne)
- One (1) Graves Registration Plat (Atchd)
- 224th Fd Coy
- 508th Corps Fd Pk Coy RE (Atchd)
- Hq 106th Br Coy RASC (Atchd)
- Tipper Plat, 8th Corps Comp Coy RASC (less Det) (Atchd)
- One (1) BD Plat RE (Atchd)
- 16th Airfield Construction Gp (Atchd)
- 25th Mechanical Equipment Plat RE (Atchd)
- 8th Corps Tps RE (less Fd Pk Coy) (Atchd Approx D plus 2)
- Det, Tipper Plat, 22d Coy RASC
- Det Tipper Plat 8th Corps Comp Coy RASC (Atchd Approx D plus 2)
- 1626th FBE Plat
- 8th AGRA
  - 25th Fd Regt
  - 61st Med Regt
  - 53d Hy Regt
  - 547th FA Bn (155mm Gun) (U.S.) (Atchd)
  - 548th FA Bn (155mm Gun) (U.S.) (Atchd)
  - 549th FA Bn (155mm Gun) (U.S.) (Atchd)
- 9th AGRA: (In general support for counterbattery)
  - 9th Med Regt
  - 11th Med Regt
  - 107th Med Regt
  - 3d Super Hy Regt
  - 382d HAA Regt (less 2 Btys)
- 6th Airborne Division
  - Division Hqs
  - Hq 3d Para Bde
    - 8th Para Bn
    - 9th Para Bn
    - 1st Cdn Para Bn
  - Hq 5th Para Bde
    - 7th Para Bn
    - 12th Para Bn
    - 13th Para Bn
  - Hq 6th Airldg Bde
    - 12th Devon
    - 2d Oxf Bucks
    - 1st RUR
  - 22d Indep Para Coy
  - 6th Airborne Armd Recce Regt
  - Hq RA
    - 53d (WY) Airldg Lt Regt RA
    - 2d Airldg A Tk Regt
    - 2d FOU
  - Hq RE
    - 3d Para Son RE
    - 591st Para Son RE
    - 249th Fd Coy RE (Airborne)
    - 286th FD Tk Coy (Airborne)
  - 6th Airborne Div Sigs

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Hq RASC
398 Comp Coy (Airborne Hy) RASC
63d Comp Coy (Airborne Hy) RASC
716th Comp Coy (Airborne Lt) RASC
224th Para Fd Amb
225th Para Fd Amb
195th Airldg Fd Amb
Hq RAOC
6th Airborne Div Ord Fd Pk
Hq REME
6th Airborne Div Wksps
6th Airborne Div Pro Coy
Div Postal Unit
317th FS Sec
Sqns Glider P Regt
One (1) Sqn 44th R Tks (less 17 Pdr Tks) Equipped with DD Tks (Atchd)
One (1) SP A Tk Bty (12 SP M-10 17 Pdrs) (Atchd)
6th Fd Regt RA (Atchd Approx D plus 1)
52d (L) Arty Gp
63d Med Regt
146th Med Regt
79th Fd Regt
80th Fd Regt
180th Fd Regt
1 Bty, 382d HAA Regt
17th Airborne Division
Hq & Hq Co, 17th Abn Div
Sp Trs, 17th Abn Div
MP Plat, 17th Abn Div
17th Abn Div Band
Rcn Plat, 17th Abn Div
717th Abn Ord Maint Co
411th Abn QM Co
517th Abn Sig Co
17th Prcht Maint Co
224th Abn Med Co
139th Abn Engr Bn
155th Abn AA Bn
Hq & Hq Btry, 17th Abn Div Arty
464th Prcht FA Bn
466th Prcht FA Bn
680th Gli FA Bn
681st Gli FA Bn
507th Prcht Inf
513th Prcht Inf
194th Gli Inf
1st Commando Brigade (Atchd)
771st Tank Bn (Atchd)
605th TD Bn (3" Towed with 55 DUKWs) (Atchd)
692d FA Bn (25 Pdr) (Atchd)
387th AAA AW Bn (Atchd)
Co A, 3d Cml Bn (Mtz) (4.2 Mort) (Atchd)
One (1) AT Bty SP (17 Pdr) (Atchd)
53d (W) Div Arty Gp (In Support from P Hour)
81st Fd Regt
83d Fd Regt
133d Fd Regt
17th A Tk Regt
25th LAA Regt
77th Med Regt 8th AGRA
1 Bty 382d HAA Regt
6th Guards Armored Brigade

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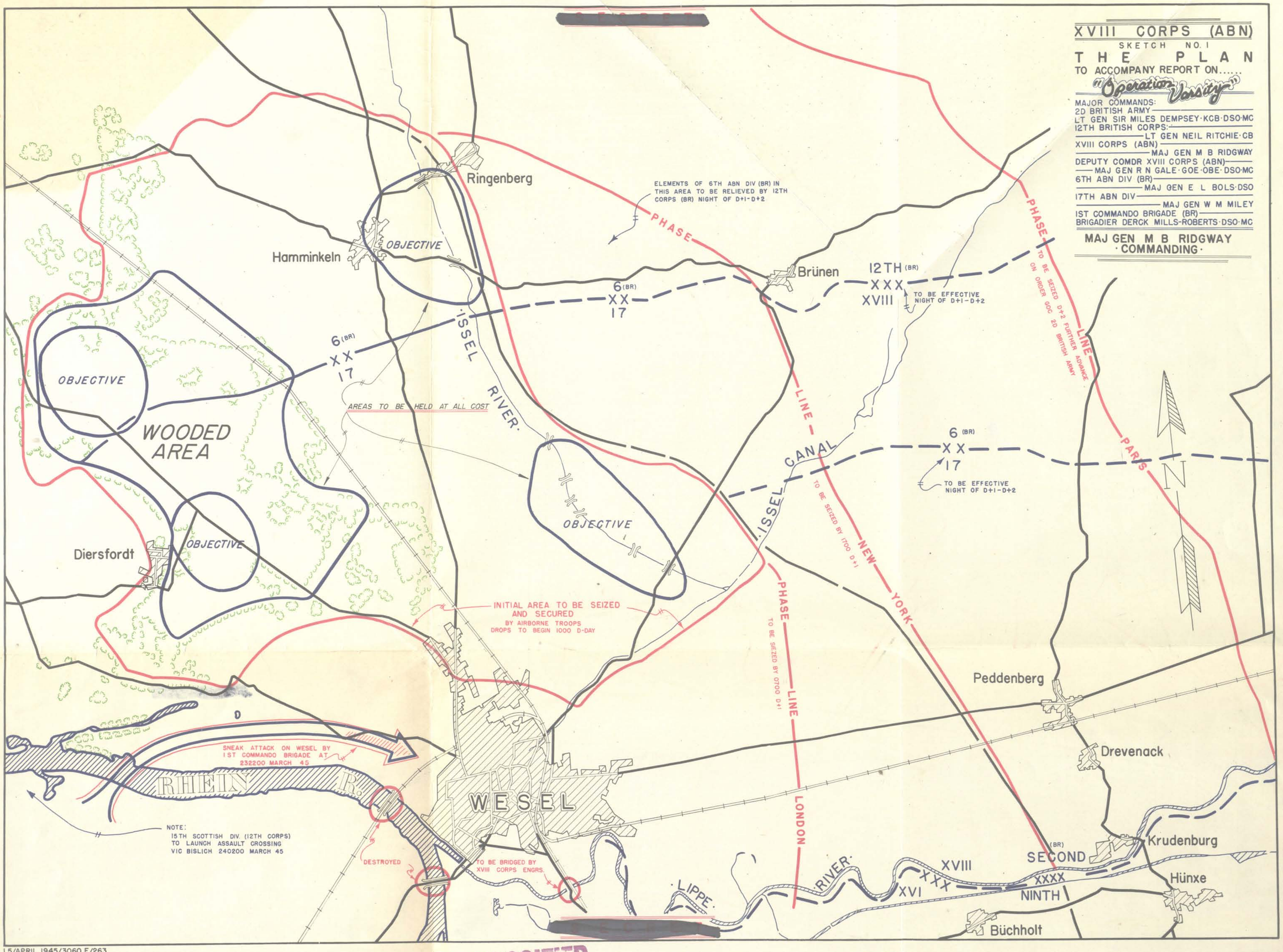


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# XVIII CORPS (ABN)

SKETCH NO. 2

## SITUATION AT CLOSE OF D-DAY 24 MAR 45

TO ACCOMPANY REPORT ON....

"Operation Varsity"

MAJOR COMMANDS:
2D BRITISH ARMY — LT GEN SIR MILES DEMPSEY·KCB·DSO·MC
12TH BRITISH CORPS: — LT GEN NEIL RITCHIE·CB
XVIII CORPS (ABN) — MAJ GEN M B RIDGWAY
DEPUTY COMDR XVIII CORPS (ABN) — MAJ GEN R N GALE·GOE·OBE·DSO·MC
6TH ABN DIV (BR) — MAJ GEN E L BOLS·DSO
17TH ABN DIV — MAJ GEN W M MILEY
1ST COMMANDO BRIGADE (BR) — BRIGADIER DERCK MILLS-ROBERTS·DSO·MC

**MAJ GEN M B RIDGWAY**
**·COMMANDING·**

Ringenberg
5 Para Bde BY 241300
6 AL Bde BY 241300
Hamminkeln
6 (BR)
Brünen
ELMS. OF 3 Para Bde BY 241300
3 Para Bde BY 241300
CONTACT 44 Bde BY 6 ABN DIV
6 XX 17
3 513 242030
ISSEL
513 INF ATTACK NIGHT OF 24 MARCH
17
RIVER
194 CT BY 242030
CANAL
CONTACT 44 Bde. AND 17 ABN-242155
Diersfordt
507CT
ISSEL
Peddenberg
WESEL
Drevenack
RHEIN R.
Cdo Bde 241000
DESTROYED
Krudenburg
LIPPE
RIVER
Hünxe
Büchholt
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15/APRIL 1945/3060 E/263

YARDS 1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 YARDS
METRES 1000 500 0 2 3 4 KILOMETRES

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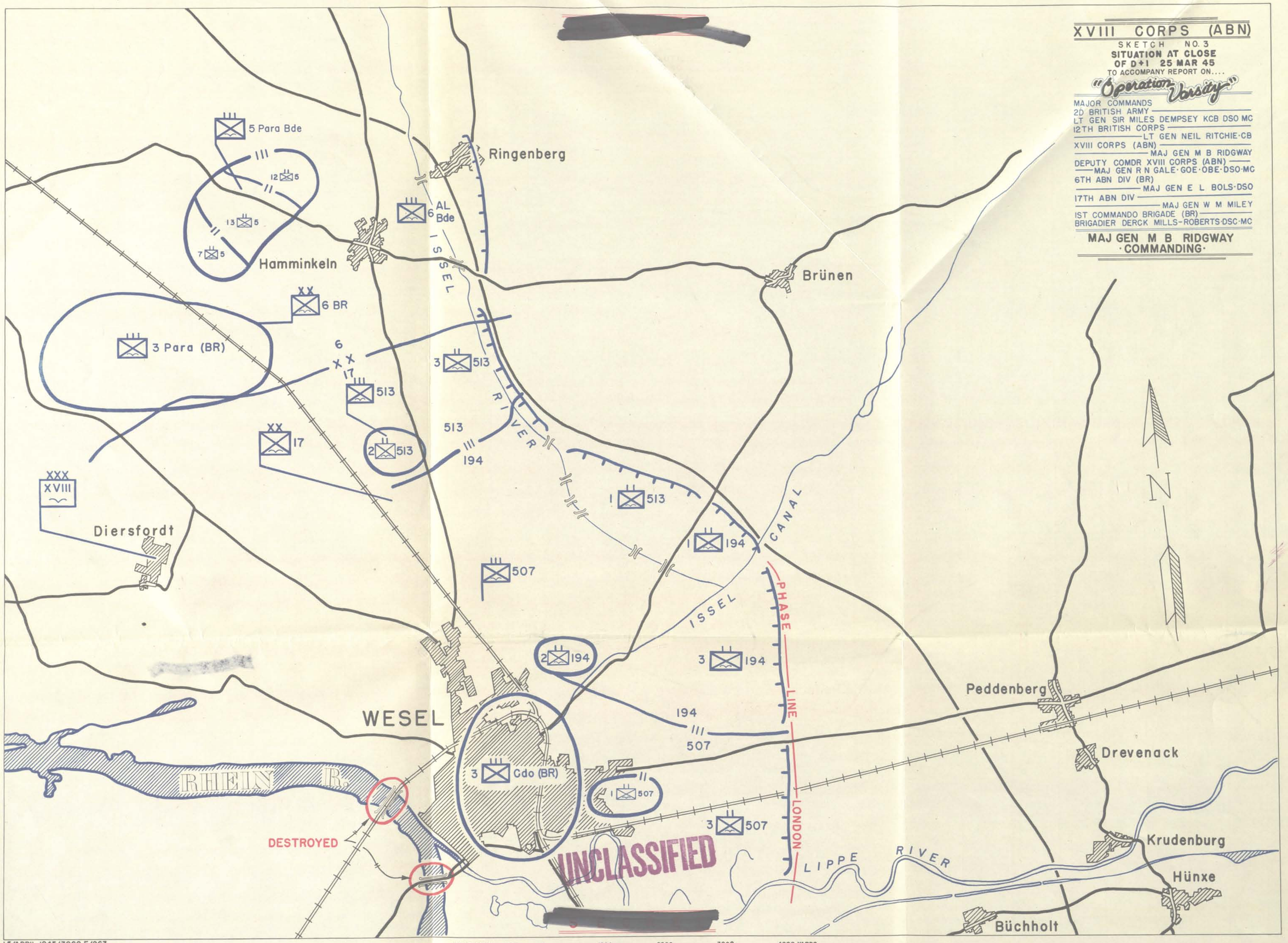


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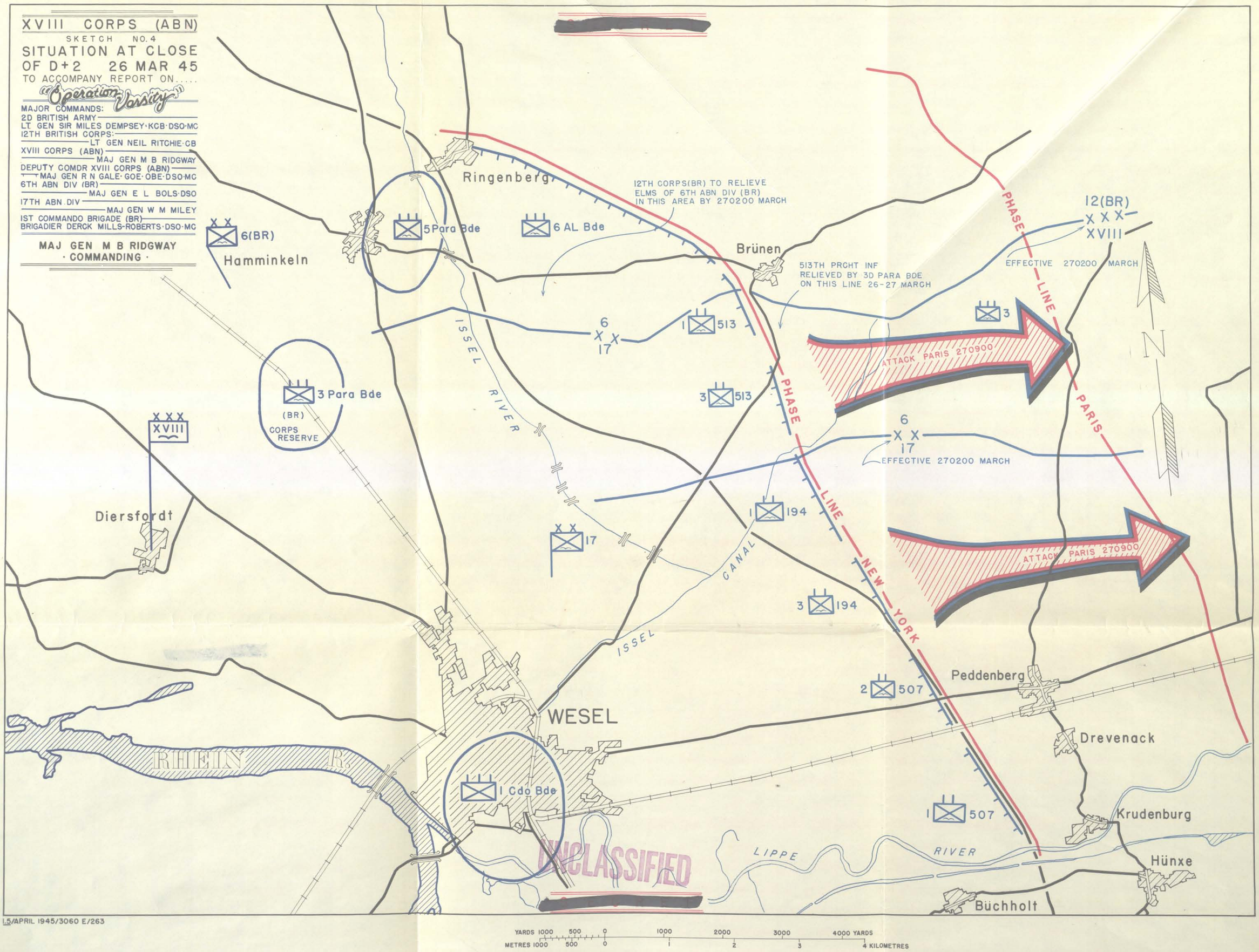


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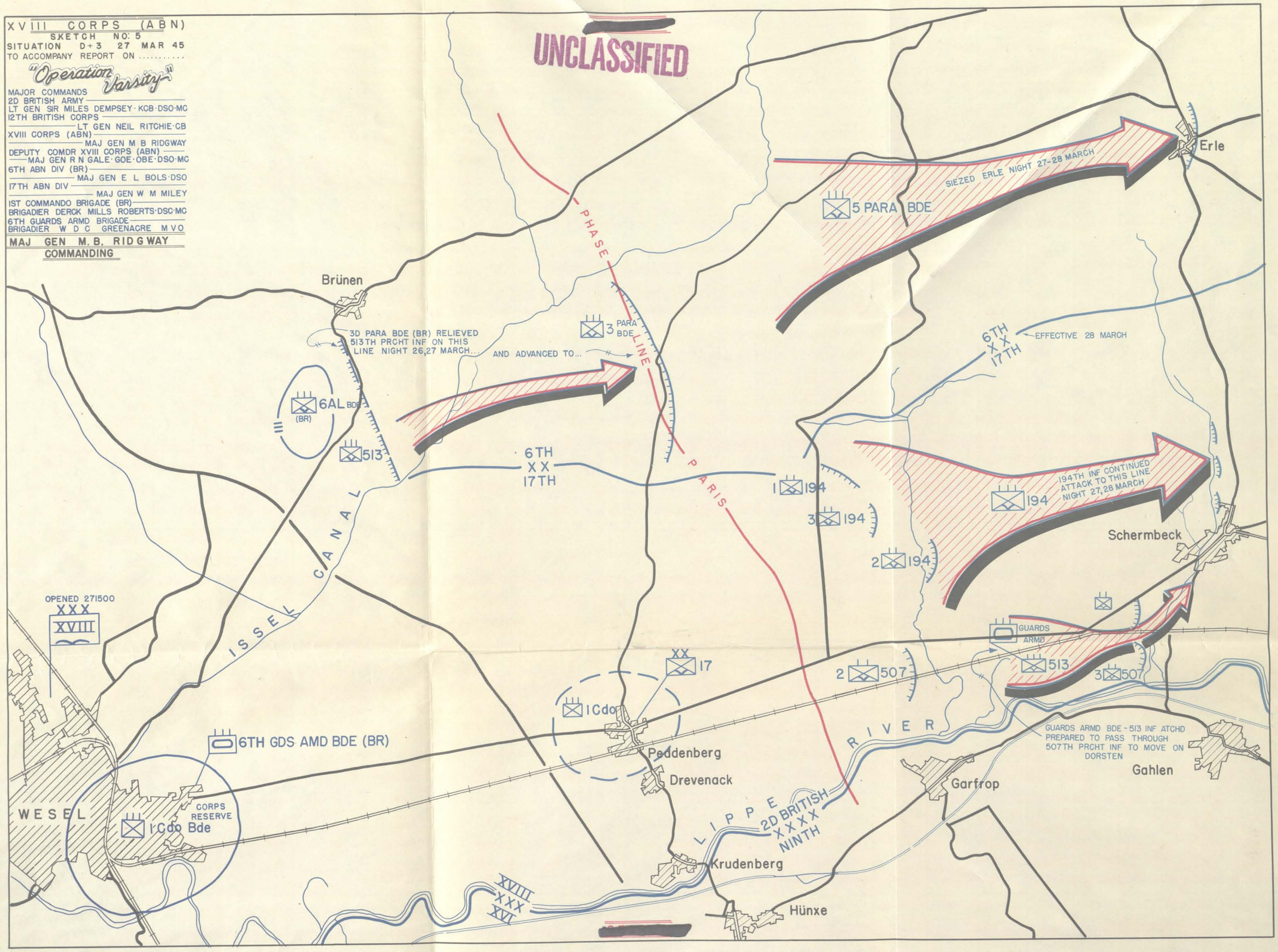


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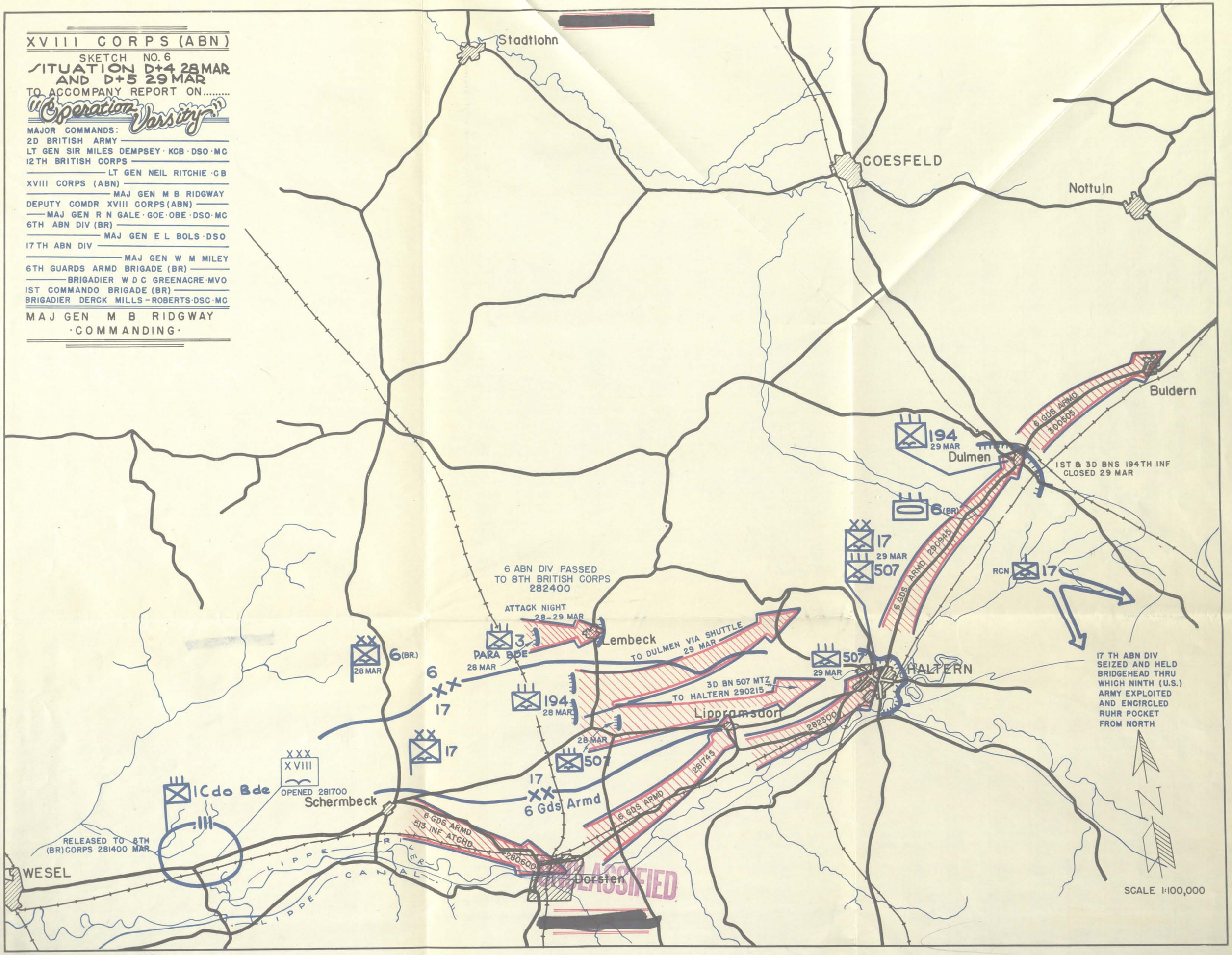


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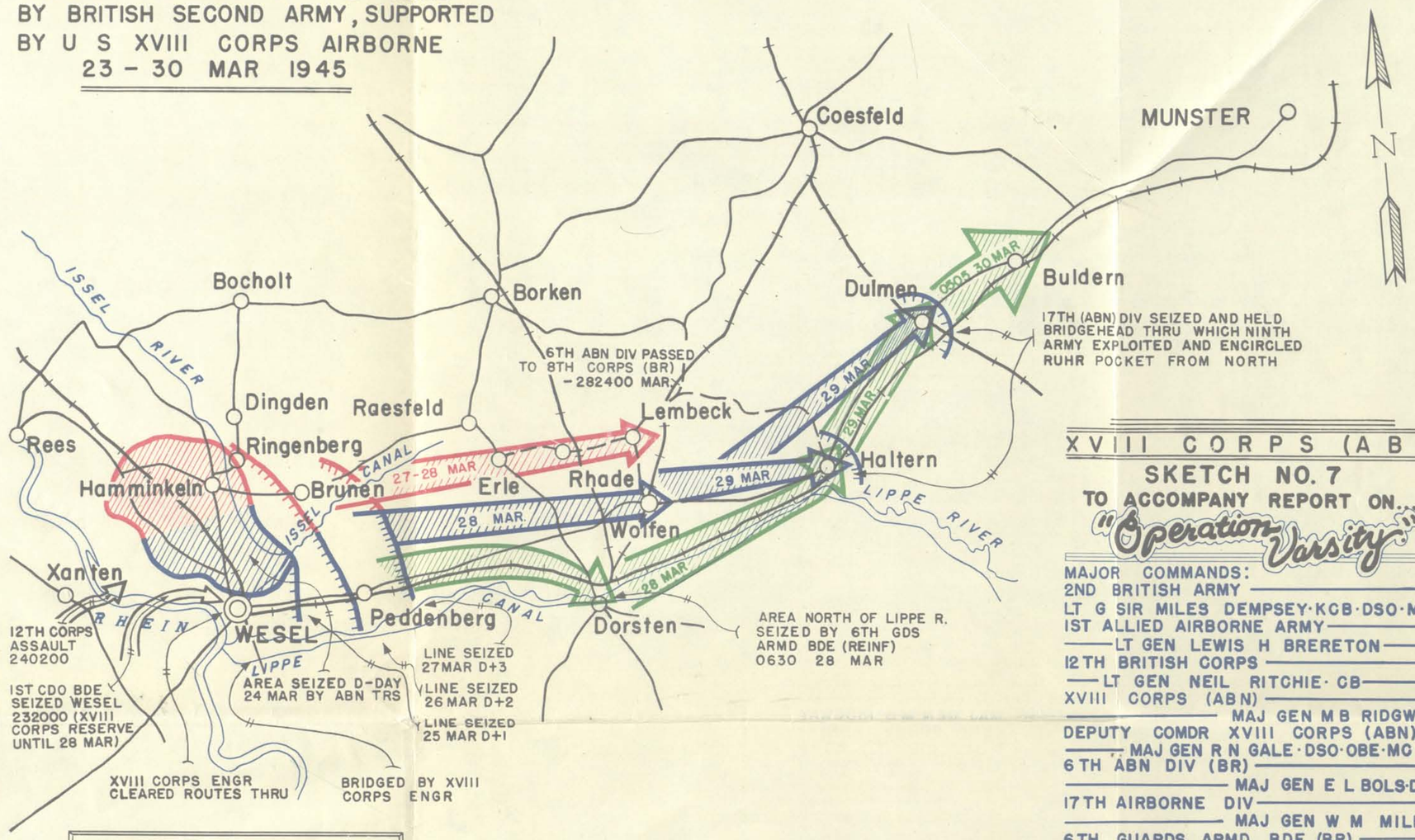
ASSAULT CROSSING OF THE RHINE
BY BRITISH SECOND ARMY, SUPPORTED
BY U S XVIII CORPS AIRBORNE
23 - 30 MAR 1945




XVIII CORPS (ABN)

SKETCH NO. 7

TO ACCOMPANY REPORT ON....

"Operation Varsity"

MAJOR COMMANDS:
2ND BRITISH ARMY
LT G SIR MILES DEMPSEY·KCB·DSO·MC
IST ALLIED AIRBORNE ARMY
LT GEN LEWIS H BRERETON
12TH BRITISH CORPS
LT GEN NEIL RITCHIE·CB
XVIII CORPS (ABN)
MAJ GEN M B RIDGWAY
DEPUTY COMDR XVIII CORPS (ABN)
MAJ GEN R N GALE·DSO·OBE·MC
6TH ABN DIV (BR)
MAJ GEN E L BOLS·DSO
17TH AIRBORNE DIV
MAJ GEN W M MILEY
6TH GUARDS ARMD BDE (BR)
BRIGADIER W D C GREENACRE·MVO
IST COMMANDO BRIGADE (BR)
BRIGADIER DERCK MILLS-ROBERTS·DSO·MC

MAJ GEN M B RIDGWAY - COMMANDING

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