

## »MARKET GARDEN« – THE EPIC AND THE TRAGEDY OF ALLIED PARATROOPERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

## »MARKET GARDEN« – JUNAŠTVO IN TRAGEDIJA ZAVEZNIŠKIH PADALSKIH ENOT NA NIZOZEMSKEM

**Abstract** Operation “Market Garden” is an allied military operation fought in the Netherlands and Germany in the Second World War, considered by certain military specialists as the biggest, most daring and most dramatic allied airborne operation during the war. This article highlights two phases of this operation: the “Market” (air) phase, which employed fighters, bombers, transport aircraft and gliders with the objective of seizing and securing the bridges in the targeted area, and the “Garden” (ground) phase of the operation, which was intended to allow the ground troops, supported by tanks and infantry, to cross the Netherlands at highest speed, occupy a bridgehead across the Rhine and enter Germany.

The author details all the steps of the Battle (17-25 September 1944), mentioning the early successes, the logistic shortcomings, the strong controversies among the most important allied military leaders, the landings, the advances and the German reactions, also pointing out the role played by the Polish Parachute Brigade, commanded by Major General Stanislaw Sosabowski.

To conclude, he enumerates the main reasons for the indisputable failure of this Operation, not leaving aside a conspiracy theory belonging to French historian Jacques de Launay.

**Key words** *Allied airborne operation, phase operations; air landings, General B. L. Montgomery, General George S. Patton, Polish Parachute Brigade.*

**Povzetek** Operacija *Market Garden* je bila zavezniška vojaška operacija na Nizozemskem in v Nemčiji med drugo svetovno vojno. Po mnenju vojaških strokovnjakov je bila to največja, najbolj drzna in najbolj dramatična zavezniška zračnodesantna operacija v drugi svetovni vojni.

V članku sta opisani dve fazi te operacije: (zračna) *Market*, v kateri so sodelovala lovška letala, bombniki, transportna ter jadralna letala, ki so imela cilj zaseči in zavarovati mostove na ciljnem območju, in (kopenska) *Garden*, katere namen je bil

kopenskim enotam ob podpori tankov in pehote omogočiti, da čim hitreje prečkajo Nizozemsko, zasedejo mostišče čez reko Ren ter vstopijo v Nemčijo.

Avtor natančno opiše vse korake te bitke, ki je potekala od 17. do 25. septembra 1944, ter pri tem izpostavi začetne uspehe, logistične pomanjkljivosti, huda nasprotja med najpomembnejšimi voditelji zavezniških vojsk, pristanke, napredovanje in nemške odzive, opozori pa tudi na vlogo, ki jo je v operaciji imela poljska padalska brigada pod poveljstvom generalmajorja Stanislawo Sosabowskiga.

V sklepu našteje glavne razloge za neuspeh te operacije, pri čemer ne izpusti niti teorije zarote, ki jo zagovarja francoski zgodovinar Jacques de Launay.

**Ključne besede** *Zavezniška zračnodesantna operacija, fazne operacije, jadrarnoletalsko delovanje, general B. L. Montgomery, general George S. Patton, poljska padalska brigada.*

**Introduction** The (airborne) parachute troops, developed as a result of the new perspectives that the aviation provided to the spectacular growth of the speed of manoeuvre by transporting troops by air, by completely eliminating the servitudes of the terrestrial communications, and by creating excellent conditions for achieving surprise, attracted a special interest in the period before the Second World War. Their creation and development represents, in fact, the recognition of the virtues of a service that could be deployed quickly and at great distances, over obstacles and improper terrains sometimes totally inaccessible to other services. Surprising the enemy thus became a major advantage, causing considerable losses to the enemy, with important and, why not, even decisive consequences for the development and outcome of military actions in progress.

As the specialists have widely appreciated, the Second World War in the twentieth century was the largest deployment of human forces that fought for over six years on the ground, in the air, as well as on and under the sea.

The outstanding achievements in the field of weapons, ammunition, combat equipment and materials from units and large units, which naturally produced major changes in the military art of belligerents, undeniably marked the progress of war.

In the theatres of military actions of the Second World War, the Germans and the Japanese, followed shortly by the Soviets, the British and the Americans, courageously addressed certain new types of operations that military theorists had imagined in the interwar period. Air, air-naval, air-ground-naval and air-ground operations provided the ones who invested in the new types of forces and means with rapid and sweeping successes on the fronts in Europe, Asia, North Africa and the Pacific.

Thus, the **airborne troops** affirmed and enhanced themselves within the wide range of military structures in the years of the Second World War, being present in different numbers, from one state to another, depending, first of all, on the capacity to provide the means of air lift. Starting from the operation “*Weserübung*”, launched by the

German army in the spring of 1940, in order to conquer Denmark and Norway, and until August 1945, when the Soviet troops landed in the Far East, the actions of airborne troops took place in the theatres of military operations at tactical, operational and strategic level. Renowned for their spectacular and bold actions, resulting in impressive, resonant victories, beneficial for all military operations, airborne operations also resulted in failures, which triggered political decisions about the future of these forces.

Unlike the extraordinary development of German airborne troops in the period preceding the war, the Anglo-American troops were developed with great restraint and evolved slowly, but surely and effectively, the German experience in the field being further refined. The operations of allied airborne troops culminated in 1944, in June and September.

The successes gained in previous operations had granted the airborne troops with a posture which, it was believed, suggested their widespread use.

Largely dependent upon the synchronisation of actions of the three components of the battle space (land, air and sea), the success of airborne operations was often uncertain, because the land forces with which they would interconnect failed to fulfil their missions in due time. Hence, the engagement and retaining of airborne troops in actions that exceeded their combat power and strength. The case of the 1<sup>st</sup> British Airborne Division in Arnhem is, as we shall see, conclusive in this regard.

Operation “*Market Garden*” in September 1944 was considered by military experts to be the biggest, boldest and most dramatic allied airborne operation of the Second World War (Sainte-Croix, 1978, p. 107) and, at the same time, the last major operation of allied airborne troops in Europe. Yet, “*Market Garden*” was a failure because of the ambitions of certain vain commanders, and, why not, because of the superficiality in planning operations and a series of wrong decisions, resulting in the unnecessary death of thousands of paratroopers, many of them participants in well-prepared operations launched under what seemed to be successful circumstances.

## 1 PRELIMINARY CALCULATIONS

After the Normandy landings (Operation *Overlord*, June 1944) and the opening of a second allied front in Europe, the allied terrestrial offensive did not go as easily as the allies would have wanted it, because the Germans put up fierce resistance. The hardships encountered in providing adequate logistic support to the entire allied front required the focusing of the effort on certain directions, which caused strong controversy among allied military leaders (General B. L. Montgomery, Commander of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group, in the North, and General George S. Patton, Commander of the US Third Army, in the South), who each wanted that the main attack and the crossing of the Rhine would take place through the sector of the troops they commanded.

It was believed that the success in Normandy credited the airborne troops with a status that required their extensive use. After being sent to Great Britain to recover, in early August 1944, the First Allied Airborne Army was activated, consisting of US 13<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Divisions, British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne and 6<sup>th</sup> Parachute Divisions and a Polish 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade, the US 9<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Command and Royal Air Force troop carrier units. This great and powerful structure was commanded by American General Lewis H. Brereton who, even though was not a specialist in the use of airborne troops, had great experience in air operations.

Although many airborne operations were planned, most of them were cancelled because the actions on the ground proved many times to be more efficient and less costly in this offensive against the clock towards Berlin.

## 2 EXAGGERATED OPTIMISM AND MISTAKEN HYPOTHESES

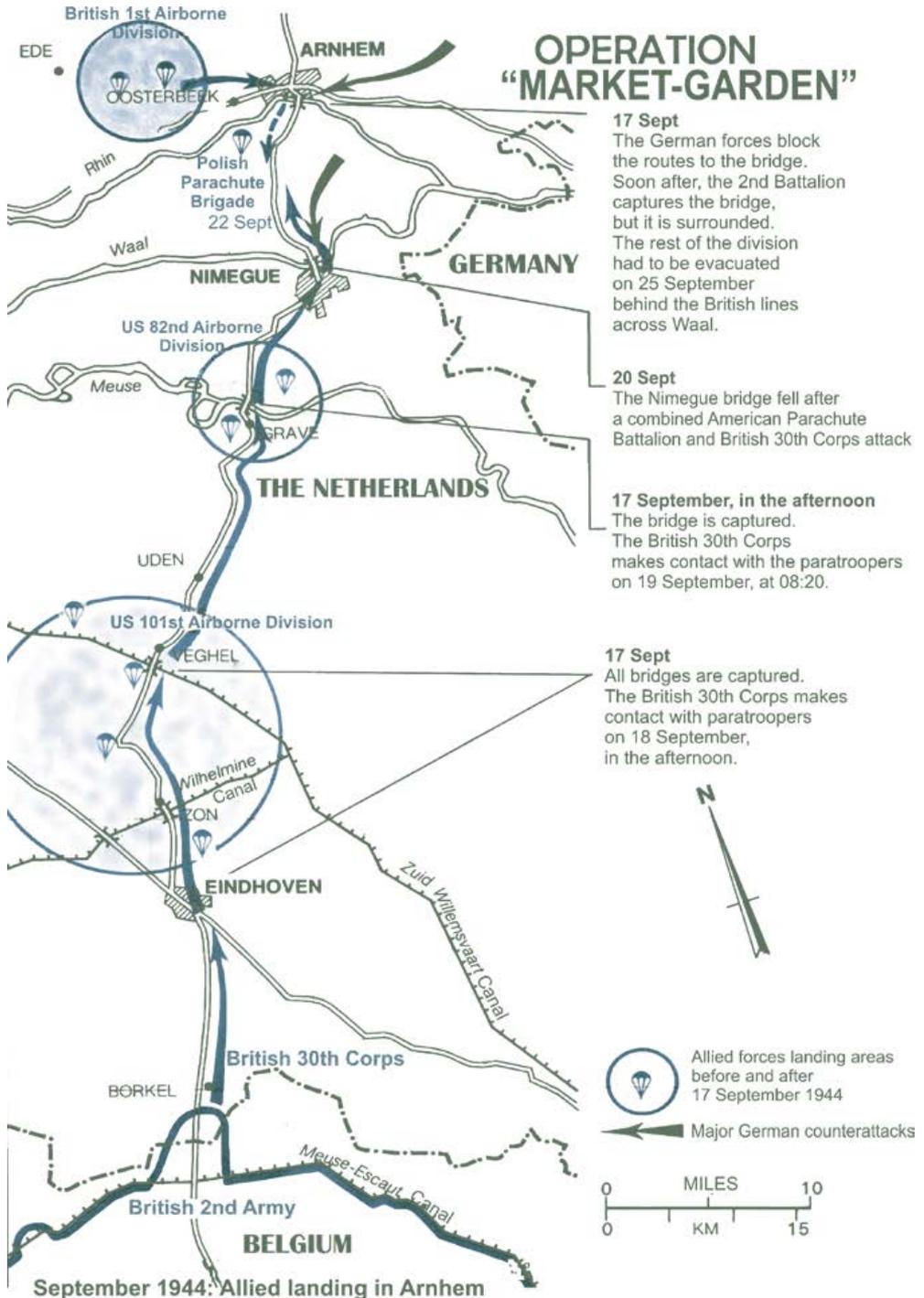
The threat posed by the Germans, who could massively launch their new V-2 rockets, as well as the desire to keep the German army under pressure, can be considered among the causes that led to the outbreak of Operation “*Market Garden*”, although the conditions for success were not met basically. Moreover, the range of action of allied transport aircraft, for which airfields in Europe had not been built yet and which therefore had to take off from Great Britain, required that the operation should be prematurely launched. In the atmosphere of optimism that reigned at the Allied Headquarters, it was estimated that the war would end by winter and this would be the last opportunity to highlight the role of airborne troops (Ryan, 1977, pp. 118-119).

This time, same as in Normandy, the allies relied on the element of surprise and on the striking power of the airborne troops which, conquering the bridges over Meuse and Rhine by rapid action, would be immediately supported by the armoured troops that would move quickly on the lines of communication in the region. As we shall see, this premise proved to be wrong, starting right from the fact that the German army was not as weak as the allies would wish it to be.

## 3 FORCES, MEANS, MISSIONS, GOALS

American General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, assigned the 21<sup>st</sup> Allied Army Group, US 81<sup>st</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Divisions, British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division and Polish Parachute Brigade for this operation, employing a total of 35,000 people, 5,000 aircraft and 1,500 gliders. British General Bernard Law Montgomery, who established the concept of the operation, made the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group in charge with the mission to initiate the offensive on the line along the Albert canal, in the direction of Eindhoven, Arnhem and, in cooperation with the air landing launched in the districts of Eindhoven, Nijmegen, in order to seize the crossings over the Meuse and Rhine, free the Netherlands and turn the fortified line “*Siegfried*” through the north.

Figure 1: Map of Operation Market-Garden



The “*Market*” (air) phase of the operation stipulated the use of nearly 5,000 fighters, bombers and transport aircraft and over 2,500 gliders. US 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (General Maxwell D. Taylor), with 501<sup>st</sup>, 502<sup>nd</sup> and 506<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiments, was to be launched north of Eindhoven and to conquer the bridges over the canal and the river, from Son and Veghel, in a sector of 24 km between Eindhoven and Veghel. The American 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division (General James M. Gavin), with 504<sup>th</sup>, 505<sup>th</sup> and 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiments, had to reach the area between Grave and Nijmegen, in a sector of 16 km, and to conquer the bridges over the rivers Maas and Waal and the 800-metre long bridge in Nijmegen. The British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (General Robert “*Roy*” E. Urquhart), with 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Brigade (General Philip “*Pip*” Hicks), 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade (General Gerald Lathbury) and 4<sup>th</sup> Parachute Brigade (General John “*Shan*” Hackett) and the Polish 1<sup>st</sup> Independent Parachute Brigade (General Stanislaw Sosabowski) were assigned with the most difficult part of the job, namely to take action in the northern extreme of the front, near Arnhem, where the road bridge across the lower Rhine was, having a width over 360 m in this area, and the railway bridge from Oosterbeek, both considered vital to the success of this operation.

The “*Garden*” (ground) phase of the operation stipulated the advance, in the sector previously open, of the British 30<sup>th</sup> Corps and the Armoured Division of the British 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, accompanied by 43<sup>rd</sup> Wessex and Northumbrian 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions and, on a distance of 100 km, starting from the Meuse Canal to the Escaut. These ground forces had four days to reach, one by one, the areas of action of American 101<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Divisions, British 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Division and Polish Parachute Brigade, the infantry taking over from the paratroopers their defensive missions. According to Montgomery’s plan, the ground troops, supported by tanks and infantry, were to cross the Netherlands at highest speed, occupy a bridgehead across the Rhine and enter Germany. Operation “*Market Garden*” was meant to give the Germans the coup de grace that would eventually lead to the collapse of the Third Reich and end the war by the end of 1944 (Ryan, 1977, p. 24).

#### 4 ASSUMED, BUT UNJUSTIFIED RISKS

In order to perform the airborne operation, the allies took into account the fact that the transport of troops was made at over 500 km, requiring no less than 24 airfields to board the more than 35,000 men and heavy pieces of equipment in aircraft and gliders. Moreover, a false landing in another district was part of the plan. It was estimated that the entire operation needed more than 5,000 aircraft of all types, among which over 1,500 fighters and bombers. The use of American *Dakota* transport aircraft both for transporting troops and for towing gliders and the planning of troops transport based on an incorrect weather forecast *extended* the forces landing process on two days, with an unacceptably long delay of air support and air resupply. In fact, not even one group of forces was transported in support of paratroopers on the first day!

A novel aspect was also the decision that the operation was to be carried out in the daytime, contrary to the usual rule that air landings must take place at nighttime, but in the moonlight. Planners thought that all the conditions for a successful landing in daytime were met, as they consider that allied fighters, which had daytime air supremacy, could neutralise the German anti-aircraft defence, and especially that it was very dangerous to deal with the *Luftwaffe* at nighttime. The lack of moonlight that week, as well as the advantage of easily identifying the launching areas, thus avoiding confusion after landing, were additional arguments to support the decision.

According to Cornelius Ryan, “*Certain classic airborne risks had to be accepted: divisions might be dropped or landed by gliders in the wrong areas; crossings might be destroyed by the enemy even as the attack began; bad weather could make air resupply impossible; and even if all the bridges were seized, the corridor might be cut at any point. [...] The planners were gambling on speed, boldness, accuracy and surprise – all deriving from a precise synchronised land-and-airborne plan that, in its turn, gambled on German disorganisation and inadequate strength. Each link in Market Garden was interlocked with the next. If one gave way, disaster might result for all*” (Ryan, 1977, p. 117). Even though such risks had to be accepted, according to the allied airborne troops headquarters: “*it was not expected that any mobile force larger than a brigade group [about 3,000 men] with very few tanks and guns could be concentrated against the airborne troops before relief by the ground forces. [...] the flight and landings would be hazardous, while the capture intact of the bridge objectives was more a matter of surprise and confusion than hard fighting*” (Ryan, 1977, p. 117).

Even though it can be said that the advantage of daytime parachuting was significant, as large units landed and regrouped easily in the planned areas, what the planners did not see and therefore cost the paratroopers a lot was an unexpected presence of German troops in the area. In early September 1944, the German troops from Western Europe were put under the command of Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt (instead of Marshal Walther Model), the German 15<sup>th</sup> Army was brought from Pas de Calais, where it had waited in vain the June 1944 landings in the Netherlands, while a significant armoured force was sent on 4 September in Arnhem. In addition, the pieces of information received by the allies from the Dutch resistance were misinterpreted or even ignored by the Supreme Allied Headquarters.

## 5 TOO MANY BRIDGES IN THE NETHERLANDS!

Beginning from 13:00 in the afternoon of Sunday, 17 September 1944 (Loghin, 1984, p. 397), the American 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division landed near Eindhoven, without too many launching errors (*picture 1*). The 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel Howard R. Johnson, was headed into the direction of village of Veghel, neutralising the German resistance, and towards the four bridges over the Aa river and the Zuid Willem Canal. The 502<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment occupied the village of St-Oedenrode and the crossing over the Dommel River quite

easily, but had difficulties in occupying the village of Best. After the 506<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel Sink, established a bridgehead on the Wilhelmina Canal, the Division Commander decided to clear the road between Eindhoven and Grave. After heavy fighting with the German tanks, the sector was cleared, but only with the decisive intervention of the British 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, with which the Regiment made contact (Hedny, Malcros, 1974, pp. 151-152).

The American 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, launched at the same day in the Nijmegen region (*picture 2*), was made in charge of destroying the two bridges in Nijmegen (a road bridge and a railway bridge), the three bridges over the Meuse and two over the Meuse-Waal Canal. The 504<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel Reuben Tucker, conquered the bridge to the north of the village of Grave, then the one in Heumen. The bridges that were further north, after being destroyed by the Germans, were repaired and reopened for circulation. The 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel Roy E. Lindquist, attacked the two bridges in Nijmegen, through which the road to Arnhem passed. If this bridge, one of the most important ones in the operation, had been attacked from the first day, the chances of conquering it would have been very considerable. Instead, in the second day, the Americans had to face the strong resistance put up by the German 9<sup>th</sup> Waffen SS Panzer Battalion. After several failed attacks, the 508<sup>th</sup> and 504<sup>th</sup> Regiments launched an assault on the bridges, with the help of the British 2<sup>nd</sup> Army troops. For 8 days, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division controlled this sector by itself, making it possible for the forward elements of the British 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to advance. The Division lost over 2,000 troops (Hedny, Malcros, 1974, p. 152).

The British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division was parachuted at the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem, at 120 km behind the German front lines. Just as all the other bridges conquered, this one also had to be taken and kept intact until the arrival of ground forces. One hoped that the German reaction would be slow and the British, although they were short of heavy weapons, could resist, but, as General Sir Frederick Arthur Montague Browning, Commander of the British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Corps, said, upon estimating that the allied tanks would not arrive on time to make the connection with the air landing, the bridge was “*too far*” (Ryan, 1977, p. 99).

Considering the pieces of information according to which a strong air-defence artillery and other defence forces were concentrated near the bridge, which represented the true gateway to Germany, the Division Commander, General Urquhart, chose not to launch paratroopers near the bridge, but in areas at least 10 km away from it, which turned out to be another critical mistake of the operation.

The British Division had the most numerous forces, receiving support from the Polish Parachute Brigade, and the Scottish 52<sup>nd</sup> Lowland Division had to be sent by air as soon as the runways in the vicinity Arnhem were identified and prepared. However, the poor planning of the operation caused the division to use only half of its forces in the first phase, while the other half landed only the next day (*picture 3*).

Moreover, this Division had trouble with the radio communications, because of serious failure in setting them up and providing them.

The British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division led heavy fighting for nine days to conquer the bridge at Arnhem (*picture 4*). Although the fact that it was the least experienced large airborne unit was known, the allies made it in charge of the hardest mission, to conquer the most difficult objective, at the greatest distance. The mission to conquer the bridge was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade, commanded by General Gerald Lathbury. For this, the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Battalion remained in the parachuting area at the beginning, and then occupied the north of the town of Arnhem. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Battalion, commanded by Colonel John Dutton Frost, turned south and reached western Arnhem on the morning of 18 September, but the advance was stopped by the 9<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Division, which had railway cannons, among others. Only a few people from the battalion escaped from this confrontation and together with Colonel Frost they managed to establish a support position west of Arnhem. The 4<sup>th</sup> Parachute Brigade, launched late due to fog, tried to come to their rescue, but having to face a strong German retaliation itself, was reduced to the size of a company and lost a significant number of troops after carrying out a bayonet attack in order to make its way through enemy positions.

On 18 September, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Battalion rejected two enemy attacks, but the next day Colonel Frost was seriously injured. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Battalion, commanded by Colonel John Fitch, had the mission to attack the target from the north, but encountered strong German resistance. However, the British set up an ambush that led to the capturing of German General Friedrich Kussin, Commander of the Arnhem garrison, while returning from an inspection on the front (Hedny, Maleros 1974, pp. 153-154).

## 6 THE POLISH DRAMA IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Polish Parachute Brigade was launched near the village of Driel, with the mission to cross the Rhine River by ferry through this point and support the action of the British Division. The Germans, being warned of the passing of the aircraft that towed the gliders bringing in vehicles and anti-tank guns of the brigade, opened fire heavily. Still, the supplies and materials of the brigade were poorly parachuted, at a distance of 15 kilometres from the positions held by the Brigade. In addition, the 750 Polish paratroopers led by Sosabowski, having occupied a position on the south bank of the Rhine, were surprised to find that the ferry had been destroyed. The amphibious vehicles “*Ducks*”, with which they tried to cross the river, got stuck and only about 50 paratroopers were able to reach the other shore. Although it was almost entirely destroyed, the Polish Brigade was unfairly accused after the war of playing a big part in the failure in Arnhem (*picture 5*).

## 7 THE BITTER GLORY OF WITHDRAWAL

General Urquhart gave the order according to which a single battalion of the British Division should remain in position, the other troops being withdrawn in the Oosterbeek suburb, a few kilometres from Arnhem.

Meanwhile, the German aviation attacked the Nijmegen bridge and cut the supply road of the American 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, preventing them from making contact with the British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. After the eighth day, in the night of 25/26 September, about 2,400 survivors from the Division were withdrawn over the river with assault boats and transported by air to Great Britain, taking off from an airfield set up near Nijmegen.

As historian Liddell Hart writes, *“much of the British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, parachuted in Arnhem, was isolated and forced to surrender, after trying to hold out until the arrival of aid, with a heroism that became legendary”* (Hart, p. 228). The British lost 7,605 men and all procurement in this operation. Only 160 troops remained from the Polish Parachute Brigade (Hedny, Malcros, 1974, pp. 153-154).

## 8 WHO IS TO BLAME?

If one had to establish who was to blame for this, one should look elsewhere. First, among those who planned the operation and credited the Allied 30<sup>th</sup> Corps with the ability to move quickly through the existing lines of communications in the Netherlands and to arrive on time to make the connection with the airborne troops launched into the enemy disposition and mostly lacking in the heavy weapons. The 30<sup>th</sup> Corps, which ultimately had to conquer the set targets, moved very slow, on the one hand, because of a flawed concept of action (General Brian Horrocks refused to start moving until he received confirmation that the airborne troops reached their targets) and, on the other hand, because of the difficulty of moving on the single line of communication that connected all operation objectives and that could not be changed with other adjacent or detour routes due to the surrounding marshland, and to the restriction in force at that time that stipulated that tanks should move also at night. Consequently, the Guards Armoured Division and the two Infantry Divisions, which were to support the airborne action and bring the allied victory in this operation, were unacceptably late, thus allowing the Germans, who already had both ends of the bridges, to further strengthen their defensive south of Arnhem.

## 9 MAJOR LOSSES, MINOR RESULTS

According to Cornelius Ryan, the number of total allied casualties in Operation *“Market Garden”* was over 17,000 dead, wounded and missing. The British lost 13,226 troops (dead, wounded, missing), the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division being almost completely destroyed, as well as the Polish brigade. Only at Arnhem there were 7,872 dead, wounded and missing, including the aircraft and gliders pilots! The

Americans lost 3,974 troops, 1,432 from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and 2,118 from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, and the 9<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Command lost 424 aircraft and glider pilots. The same author estimated the total number of German casualties: over 3,300 people, although he mentioned the number of 7,500-10,000 troops lost by the Army Group “B” of General Model since the beginning of the offensive in Neerpelt, then along the corridor, in the battles at Nijmegen, Grave, Veghel, Best and Eindhoven (Ryan, 1977, p. 532).

Due to poor initial planning (which was not even respected entirely, especially by the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps), Operation “Market Garden” had minor results. Because of the unacceptably long delay of ground forces, their timely junction with the air landing at Arnhem failed, therefore, they could not benefit from the advantage of surprise, the trump card of airborne operations, because of the precise reaction of the Germans. They gained only a corridor of 80 km, and the bridge at Arnhem was still in German hands. The attempt of reversing the “Siegfried” line fortification by surprise failed (Ciobanu, Popa, Pricop, 1988, p. 154).

## 10 THE CAUSES FOR A ... PLANNED FAILURE

Among the reasons for this indisputable failure, one may be mentioned:

- incorrect assessment of enemy’s possibilities: the Germans had the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Divisions in the area, transferred from France, as well as the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Divisions, which were moving from Denmark to Westphalia; a series of information from the Dutch resistance, about the existence of several tank formations sent from Germany in the Arnhem area, could not be verified due to the short time available. Such pieces of information were not included in the research briefings that were sent to the Higher Allied Headquarters. Although extremely careful and thorough in everything he did his entire career, Marshal Montgomery seemed to have ignored or undervalued the possibilities for retaliation of the Germans this time:
- the engagement of numerous, interconnected forces, in an area with limited communication system; it was believed that once the bridges were conquered, the tanks of the British 30<sup>th</sup> Corps could easily go through this narrow corridor and enter Germany with no difficulty (Ryan, 1977, pp. 118-119). However, the allied tanks were not able to move outside the ordinary roads, due to the many canals in the area. On the only existing road, which was quite unpredictable, the tanks could move only in single file, and the infantry was unable to accompany them and intervene when necessary;
- German General Walther Model, Commander of Army Group “B”, was at that time only a few kilometres from Arnhem, at Oosterbeek, and could respond immediately. Moreover, the Germans were organising an airborne army at that moment, consisting of six divisions of paratroopers who, even though lacked the combat experience of the veterans from Crete, were still able to react

immediately; General Kurt Student, Commander of this army that was undergoing an organisation process, obtained the Operation “*Market-Garden*” Plan, found onboard of one of the gliders shot down by German anti-aircraft artillery, and thus had the opportunity to properly retaliate against allied airborne troops;

- the inclement weather hindered the planned development of actions, and the fact that paratroopers were launched far from their targets, as was the case in Arnhem, created a great difficulty: the troops were engaged in battle and lost their combative capacity long before reaching the target. The second air transport to Arnhem (troops, equipment, ammunition) arrived only the following day, at 14:00, therefore, the subsequent resupply of the forces engaged in combat and the restoring of their capacity was very delayed.

## 11. THE CONSPIRACY OF ... ERRONEOUS AND IGNORED INFORMATION

Of course, the conspiracy theory was present as well. French historian Jacques de Launay showed that, in order to justify the failure, allied intelligence services came up with the idea of betrayal, on the part of a member of the Dutch resistance, Cristiaan Lindemans, who was said to have sent to the service *Abwehr III F* a letter addressed to British fighters from the Dutch resistance who were ordered to wait for weapons and instructions before triggering the insurrection. De Launay believes that this “*King Kong*” (as the Dutch was called) could not have sent the message before 15 September, when the two German tank divisions were already in motion since 8 September, and the message contained only the information of a possible offensive area and not a certainty (Launay, 1988, p. 219).

Therefore, even if it represents one of the pages of glory of airborne troops, Operation “*Market Garden*”, one of the most controversial military operations, meant a serious error of allied strategy.

## 12. THE LAST JUDGMENT

After the war, Montgomery called “*the battle of Arnhem 90% successful*” (Ryan, 1977, p. 8), yet, he also said bitterly “*every allied victory is an American success and every allied defeat a British failure*”. Winston Churchill said “*the battle of Arnhem involved high risks, but they were justified by the intended purpose, so close to being reached. [...] The battle was a decided victory, although the vanguard division, asking in vain for reinforcements, was destroyed*” (Ryan, 1977, p. 9). D.D. Eisenhower, in turn, said that “*the attack began well and unquestionably would have been successful except for the intervention of bad weather. This prevented the adequate reinforcement of the northern spearhead and resulted finally in the decimation of British airborne division and only a partial success in the entire operation. We did*

*not get our bridgehead but our lines had been carried well out to defend the Antwerp base” (Eisenhower, 1975, p. 415).*

American historian Charles B. MacDonald disagrees, saying the operation was a failure, even if at first glance it would seem that this failure “*was to blame on the Goddess of Fortune: the number of SS tank divisions, the active presence of German Generals Model and Student, the capturing of the operational order of allies, the bad weather*”. However, the American historian believes that “*Operation <Market Garden> could have succeeded if the British infantry column had attacked with greater vigour the southern Eindhoven and the region of northern Waal and if the American 82<sup>nd</sup> Division had shown the verve and vigour expected from such troops and had assigned at least a small force to support those who fought at the big bridge on the Waal at Nijmegen*” (Eisenhower, 1975, p. 10).

In turn, Jacques de Launay says with certainty that “*the Battle of Arnhem, the largest airborne action in history, ended in an undeniable defeat*”, pointing out that although the American 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Divisions were maintained in the sectors Nijmegen and Eindhoven, making the contact with ground troops, the main goals of Operation “*Market Garden*” were not achieved, as the Germans continued to hold the entire area along the Rhine and resist in the Netherlands until 27 March 1945. The V-2 rocket bases remained intact, and the port of Antwerp remained unusable (Launay, 1988, p. 219).

The words of Romanian historian Cristian Popișteanu written in Cornelius Ryan’s book foreword seem to be extremely meaningful in this respect: “*In Arnhem, an epic was written and a tragedy was played*” (Ryan, 1977, p. 9).

The failure of allied airborne forces in the Netherlands was not an end of road, as in the case of the German troops after operation “*Mercury*”, but a new beginning whose results were mostly seen on the active theatres of military actions after the Second World War.

**Conclusion** Contrary to all expectations, Operation “*Market Garden*” had minor results. Planned and originally credited as one of the most spectacular military operations of the Second World War, although part of a page of (bitter!) glory of airborne troops, it remains controversial, being a serious strategy error of allies, in which the omission, ignorance or lack of adequate capitalisation on the intelligence gathered had significant effects.

The role of intelligence in military actions is a truism and I do not want to go into all the details right now, but by bringing to the attention of our contemporaries the importance of intelligence in designing, planning, implementing and exploiting the results of an already famous military action of the Second World War, I tried to emphasise the need for detailed knowledge and for taking into consideration, during the strategic planning, all the elements that can influence, in one way or another, the

conduct of an operation, regardless of its objectives and scope. This is a principle whose validity is further validated by the successes and sometimes failures of a military action conducted in various areas of post-war conflict.

The nature and real dimension of current and future threats cannot be predicted accurately, but obtaining, identifying and sending them to the beneficiaries certainly creates the possibility of a well-documented evaluation and the development of a political-military course of action with real chance of success.

Intended to support the decision-making process, the intelligence will often have to act as a replacement for the lack of sufficient data about the enemy, but by an optimal management of all information networks and an effective cooperation between the related services, at national and international level, information superiority will be ensured (Botoș, 2014, p. 66). Acquiring strategic intelligence timely and before the opponent, choosing the right time and procedures appropriate to surprise the opponent, exploiting certain geophysical and environmental characteristics able to benefit own troops and seriously assessing the risks and threats are all vital to the success of any military action.

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Picture 1:  
101<sup>st</sup> Airborne  
Division in  
Eindhoven



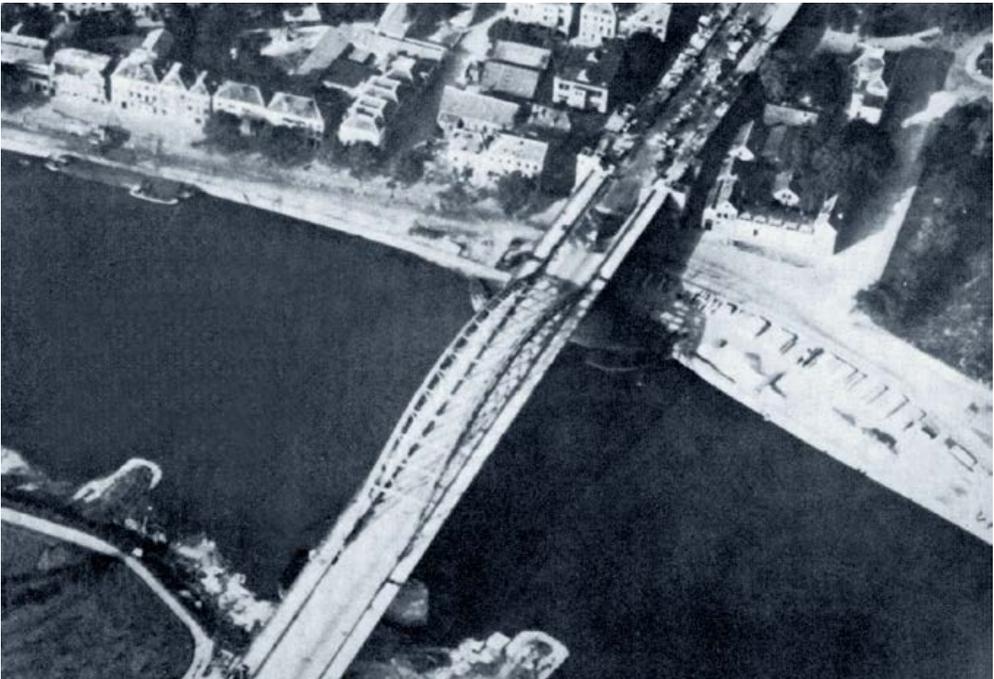
Picture 2: US  
Army 82<sup>nd</sup>  
Airborne  
Division at Gavre



Picture 3: British  
1<sup>st</sup> Airborne  
Division para-  
troopers before  
climbing into  
*Airspeed Horsa*  
gliders



Picture 4:  
Arnhem Bridge



Picture 5:  
Major General  
Stanislaw  
Sosabowski  
(centre),  
Commander  
of the Polish  
Parachute  
Brigade



*Note:* The pictures are from the book *Histoire des opérations aéroportées*, Brussels: Elsevier Sequoi, 1979, the French edition, translated and adapted after *Airborne Operations*, London: Salamander Books Ltd., 1978.