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Were the British 1st Airborne Division fit for purpose for Operation Market Garden?

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by

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Abstract

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Title: Were the British 1st Airborne Division fit for purpose for Operation Market Garden?

The argument of the dissertation is structured in the following way:

Chapter 1 – Introduction; is a discussion of the nature and extent of the question and outlines the methodology that will be used to answer the question.

Chapter 2 – Background; explores the history of airborne warfare in a general sense and the specific history of the British 1st Airborne Division. This establishes the complex nature of airborne operations and shows how the division came to be in the position that was, in January 1944.

Chapter 3 – Men of the Red Beret; this is an examination of the personnel factors that effected the division in the build up to September 1944, specifically it examines if the right people were in place prior to and during the operation. This is will be with specific reference to the suitability to command of Major-General Urqhart. In addition there is an examination of the command structure and the training regime put in place for the operation. There is also an examination of the planning for the operation and the

relationship between the Allied Airborne Army and 1st Airborne. There are comparisons between the divisions own formations and to other formations outside the 1st Airborne to demonstrate the weakness in their training regime. There is also an examination of the prevailing attitudes of the men and officers of the 1st Airborne.

Chapter 4 – Tools of the Trade; considers the material factors that effected the planning and conduct of the operation. Questions are asked of the suitability of the equipment employed by the division and will demonstrate what alternatives were available.

Chapter 5 – The conclusion; this chapter wraps up all the elements of the dissertation and concludes that there were serious shortcomings in the preparations for the operation and that the failure of the division to put them right rendered the them unfit for purpose for Operation Market Garden.

Chapter One

Introduction

On the 17th of September 1944 the first wave of what would ultimately be almost twelve thousand members of the 1st British Airborne Division (here after, 1st Airborne) and the attached 1st Independent Polish Parachute Brigade departed for Holland, their destination was the city of Arnhem. They were taking part in British Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery's ambitious plan to by pass the German defensive fortifications known as the Siegfried line and win the war by the end of 1944, the plan was called Operation Market Garden. By the time the operation had officially ended on the 26th of September 1944 and the survivors had been withdrawn to the allied lines more than two thirds of these men would be missing, captured or killed.

Given the high level of casualties and its failure it is hardly surprising that the operation is considered to be one of the most controversial carried out by the Allies during World War Two. Many questions have been asked of this operation; where the blame lies, who bares the largest responsibility for the operations failure, was it ever worthwhile and could it ever have succeeded? This dissertation instead seeks to ask whether the 1st Airborne were ready for the operation, if, to borrow from the Home Secretary John Reid, they were 'fit for purpose'¹ While Operation Market Garden will provide the background

¹ Cited in *Reid blasts management failures at Home Office* by Philip Johnston, Home Affairs Editor, Daily Telegraph
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml;jsessionid=RHC1GFAMCL2M5QFIQMGCF4AVCBQUIV0?xml=/news/2006/05/24/nreid24.xml> 25.03.07

for this discussion, its main purpose will be to provide examples of the consequences of the actions of 1st Airborne in the build up to the Operation. This dissertation is more concerned with the administration and preparations of the division for operations in Europe generally, it is simply that this is the operation in which the division found itself employed and which thus highlighted the division's shortcomings. The technical issues in Chapter Four are more concerned with this specific operation. This dissertation will examine all aspects of the division from top to bottom, including personnel, training and equipment.

I will outline the history of 1st Airborne including general comments on the nature of airborne warfare in World War Two. There will then be a summary of the plan for Operation Market Garden generally and a specific outline of the part which was assigned to 1st Airborne. It will not concern itself with such traditional considerations as the suitability of the landing zones, the disregarding of the intelligence gathered by Major Brian Urquhart and the Dutch resistance, the performance of the ground forces and it will not consider United States Air force Lieutenant-General Lewis H Brereton's critical mistakes in the planning of the air transport schedule. It will not discuss the mistakes made in planning that were taken above 1st Airborne's level, that is to say at British Airborne Corps headquarters, First Allied Airborne Army Headquarters, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces Europe or those made by Field Marshall Montgomery, unless they are directly relevant to the actions of officers of 1st Airborne. Finally I will not examine if there is any truth behind Lieutenant-General Browning's

often quoted but never witnessed statement that they 'might be going a bridge too far.'² This dissertation also does not seek to offer a solution to making the whole of Operation Market Garden a success. While these questions are all interesting and important, they have been examined in great detail by a considerable number of authors. This dissertation is more concerned with the steps that 1st Airborne took in the build up to Market Garden that would lead to problems during the operation, rather than the operation it's self. Most authors have adopted a liner approach to the history of the operation concentrating on the whole story from start to finish. It is my intention to give a narrow and more precise focus to an area that has often been ignored or only briefly examined.

This dissertation will ultimately conclude that a number of significant problems, in the areas of personnel, command, equipment, training, moral and attitude hampered 1st Airborne. I will show that these factors, many of which were well known to the officers of the division, and the failure to carry out any corrective actions rendered the division unfit for purpose. I will also, where appropriate show alternatives and offer comparisons to highlight these factors. To highlight failures it is easiest to offer an alternative which best highlights what could have been. The key criticisms will be that the wrong man commanded the division and that from this fatal decision most other factors flowed. There will be careful examination of the way the division used the time available to them in England during 1944. These most vital of factors will be discussed in Chapter Three along with all matters pertaining to the activities, skills, behaviour and attitude of the members of the division. Chapter Four will examine the more technical issues that affected the division, this will concern its self with the suitability of the equipment the

² Cited in Cornelius Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1999) p.9

division had available to it, their use of equipment, and will examine other sources of equipment which could have been exploited.

To do this I will draw upon a number of different accounts of 1st Airborne's activities from its creation up until September 1944, but especially for the nine months from January to September 1944 in which it was stationed in England preparing for the invasion of Europe. These accounts will include official histories, academic studies and personnel accounts of veterans both in published form and in archived interview form. It will be crucial to examine as many accounts as possible to work through the fog of war and time that can cloud a veteran's memories and lead to conflicting accounts. It is also important to examine academic studies as veterans are members of the great airborne fraternity and this can bias accounts, especially when concerned with the actions of their former officers. This dissertation will seek to provide a balanced and well-supported answer.

Chapter Two

Background

The British were not the first country to experiment with airborne operations, before the Second World War had begun the Russian army held a demonstration of a corps sized airborne drop. The Italian army had also raised two airborne formations in the 1930's, but despite fighting in World War Two neither of these units ever made a combat parachute drop. It was however the German army that really pushed the development of airborne warfare. During World War Two the Germans used paratroops and glider borne airlanding troops in their operations in Norway, Denmark, France, Belgium, The Netherlands and Crete. The German paratroopers in Crete suffered such heavy casualties that despite the fact that they were victorious, Hitler banned all future airborne operations. It was however this victory that inspired Churchill to order the expansion of the fledgling British airborne forces from a corps to a division. Thus the 1st Airborne was born, it was initially made up of the 1st Parachute Brigade and 1st Airlanding Brigade, airlanding troops being deployed by Glider rather than parachute. The division was commanded by Major-General Fredrick Browning and would later be made up to divisional strength by the attachment of 2nd Parachute Brigade. Brigadier Shan Hackett's 4th Parachute Brigade would later replace them, when they were removed to become part of British 6th Airborne division.

The division was sent in parts to Africa, under the command of Major-General Hopkinson. While there the various elements of the division fought but not together as a division, instead they fought in their own formations with elements from the different allied armies operating in the theater. They fought hard and launched three airborne assaults; the first to capture the Bone airfield between Algiers and Tunis, the second was to land in advance of 1st Army and capture the town of Beja and the third drop was to capture two more airfields south of Tunis. As well as these airborne actions the division spent close to six months fighting as regular infantry. The division then went on to take part in the invasion of Sicily. During their time in Sicily they took part in the *coup-de-main*³ seizing of the Ponte Grande Bridge, which was mainly carried out by the glider borne infantry of the 1st Airlanding Brigade. The 1st Parachute Brigade also took part in an airborne assault against Primosole Bridge. This second operation was ultimately a success but it was a costly one in terms of the casualties the brigade suffered. This was due to the fact that the landings were scattered by a combination of weather and inexperienced tug and glider pilots. Once on the ground they also met with higher than expected resistance, as we shall see, unknown to the brigade this would prove to be something of a warm up for Operation Market Garden.

With Sicily secure the campaign for Italy could begin. 1st Airborne were given the task of occupying the town of Taranto, this would be done via sea landing. The division took part in six days of fighting, none of it very heavy, they captured a number of small towns and suffered comparatively low casualties, Major-General Hopkinson was however one of them. Major-General Eric Downs replaced him. The division was then committed to

³ A swift and direct attack that relies upon speed and surprise to achieve its objectives.

the defence of Taranto, they were tasked to fortify the town in case of a German counter attack. However according to the official war histories of the British Airborne Divisions the elite assault troops of the 1st Airborne Division found this task ‘distasteful ... [and] their appetite for close contact with the enemy had been whetted not diminished by a year of strenuous campaigning.’⁴ Thus we can already see that the aggressive fighting spirit of this relatively new formation was already well established. The division had also learnt many valuable lessons about airborne warfare and interestingly the capturing of bridges. In November 1943 the bulk of what remained of the division was withdrawn to England by sea. In January 1944 Major-General Roy Urquhart assumed command of 1st Airborne.

Operation Market Garden was actually an expansion of the earlier Operation Comet plan, which called for 1st Airborne to carry out all the operations that Market Garden would ultimately assign to three full airborne divisions of the 1st Allied Airborne Army. The objective of the operation was to provide a route for 2nd British Army to bypass the German defences known as the Siegfried Line or West Wall and punch straight across the Rhine and into Germany’s industrial heartland, The Ruhr. The plan was two fold; the first part code named Market was to deploy the three airborne divisions along the line of ‘Eindhoven – Nijmegen – Arnhem’⁵ Their tasks would be to seize and hold bridges over a total of eight Dutch waterways, thus creating a corridor along which the mechanised forces of the Garden element could pass. The American 101st Airborne would land north of Eindhoven, while the American 82nd Airborne would land south of Nijmegen. 1st Airborne with the attached 1st Independent Polish parachute brigade of Major-General

⁴ Without author, *By Air to Battle: the Official Account of the British Airborne Divisions* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1945) p.68

⁵ Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1997) p498

Stanislaw Sosabowski would land west of Arnhem, in 'total 33,971 men would go into action by air.'⁶ There would also be a fourth division in reserve, the British 52nd (lowland) Division, which was designated as an air portable division, and so could be brought in once a suitable airfield had been secured. The over riding command issued to the assembled officers of the 1st Allied Airborne Army by their commanding officer, General Lewis Brereton was to 'seize the bridges with thunder-clap surprise.'⁷ The overall operation in the field would be under the command of his deputy Lieutenant-General Frederick 'Boy' Browning, who when told by Montgomery that the 1st Airborne would be relieved by the ground forces within 'two days ... [replied that] we can hold it for four.'⁸ These two estimates would turn out to be very poorly judged.

The Garden element, consisting of the British three division strong XXX Corps under the command of Lieutenant-General Brian Horrocks, would drive north from the Belgium border along the airborne corridor with the aim of reaching 1st Airborne at Arnhem within two days. Their advance would be spearheaded by the 'Guards Armoured Division, [followed by] the infantry of the 43rd (Wessex) and the 53rd (Northumbrian) Divisions.'⁹ There would be close to twenty thousand vehicles advancing sixty-four miles along the mainly single lane high way, hopefully secured by the three airborne divisions. Montgomery's orders passed down to Horrocks were that his corps move should be 'rapid and violent.'¹⁰

⁶ Martin Middlebrook, *Arnhem 1944: The Airborne Battle* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995) p.13

⁷ Cited in Ryan op. cit. p.78

⁸ Cited in Major-General Urquhart CB, DSO *Arnhem* (London: Pan Books, 1960) p.16

⁹ Middlebrook op. cit. p.14

¹⁰ Cited in Middlebrook op. cit. p.14

Although Market Garden was to be a bottom to top operation, in which if any one of the three airborne divisions failed in their allotted tasks the whole operation would fail, it was the final objective of the 'Arnhem and its 400-yard-wide crossing of the Lower Rhine,'¹¹ which itself represented the most important task, failure to secure a crossing at Arnhem would render the operation pointless. This objective was assigned to 1st Airborne by Browning who, highlighting it's location on a map said; 'Arnhem Bridge – and hold it.'¹² The division's primary objective would be the Arnhem Road Bridge; an impressive 'concrete and steel, three span highway bridge ... [which] was almost 2000 feet long.'¹³ They were also to capture a railway and pontoon bridge over the Lower Rhine. These two bridges would be secondary to the road bridge, which was the most suitable and hence the primary objective. It would therefore be vital to secure the objectives as quickly as possible and in the maximum possible strength.

However, due to the fact that the combined allied air forces were unable to provide sufficient planes and gliders to carry the whole of the airborne army in one go, priorities had to be made. As I have explained above the first part of the corridor was the given precedence over the other two and all resources were passed along the line accordingly, therefore the 101st Airborne would get the largest proportion of the transport, followed by the 82nd Airborne but 1st Airborne and the Polish would get the least and therefore would not be at full strength until day three. Thus, Urquhart's plan also had to allow for holding onto the dropping and landing zones for the subsequent lifts. In addition to this hindrance, the air transport element of the operation felt that anti aircraft defences in the area were

¹¹ Ryan op. cit. p.78

¹² Cited in Urquhart op. cit. p.13

¹³ Ryan op. cit. p.78-79

heavy and represented too great a risk to pilots and planes, so the nearest landing zones to the Bridge would be eight miles away.

Urquhart's plan was to bring in the majority of Brigadier Gerald Lathbury's 1st Parachute Brigade on the first day, the glider borne troops of the Brigadier Phillip 'Pip' Hicks's 1st Airlanding Brigade and the 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron along with other divisional units such as the airborne field ambulances and divisional artillery. Two of 1st Parachute Brigades three parachute battalions, 2nd and 3rd, would set out along two routes to seize the river crossings, while 1st Battalion was to be held temporarily in reserve.

They would follow the route that the reconnaissance squadron would take but only once the other battalions were on their way and they would first be tasked to take an area of high ground along the route. The three battalions would each be 'accompanied by parties of Royal Engineers and single troops of anti-tank guns.'¹⁴ The reconnaissance squadron would launch a *coup-de-main* attack against the Arnhem Road Bridge using its twin machine gun armed jeeps. The 1st Airlanding Brigade would hold the landing and dropping zones allocated to the second days lift. The second and third lifts were basically intended to reinforce the first lifts and extend their perimeter. Indeed if all went to plan, Sosabowski's Polish brigade would land after the arrival of XXX Corp.

This will be discussed in greater detail later but at this time it is sufficient to say that once the weather in Britain delayed the second and third drops, the division was unable to reach the objective in strength or reinforce the elements that did reach the road bridge.

They had tried to complete their objective and held out in two major pockets of resistance

¹⁴ William F Buckingham, *Arnhem 1944* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004) p.95

for nine days, which was seven days longer than Montgomery had said they would need to hold out for and five days longer than Browning had said they were capable of holding out for. This act of defence has gone down in British history as one of the greatest feats of arms in the history of its armed forces and has become so legendary that it has long overshadowed the achievements of the American airborne divisions that took part in Operation Market Garden. The Garden forces of XXX corps had failed to reach them, the unexpectedly high level of German resistance which included the unexpected presence of SS armoured units, communications failure, weather, the loss of surprise caused by the distant dropping zones and some poor performance in the opening hours also contributed to their failure. However we will now turn back the clock a little further and examine the preparations and state of readiness of 1st Airborne prior to the launching of Operation Market Garden.

Chapter Three

The Men of the Red Beret

It has often been said that an army is only as good as the men who lead it and in this chapter we shall examine the personnel factors that affected 1st Airborne in the build up to and execution of their part in Operation Market Garden. There is no better place to start than at the top. In January 1944, 1st Airborne division were handed their fourth commanding officer since their formation in 1941, Major-General Robert Elliot 'Roy' Urquhart. He was to replace Major-General E.E. 'Eric' Downs. Before I go any further in the discussion of Urquhart's appointment, I think it is pertinent to examine the man he replaced.

In June 1941, Downs was given command of number 11 Special Air Service Battalion, one of the first formations to be founded in the British airborne forces. This was considered to be a problem command by the establishment, indeed when Richard Gale, the future commanding officer of the British 6th Airborne division, was chosen to be the first commanding officer of the newly formed 1st Parachute Brigade he was advised by the War Office to disband the battalion. But 'Gale was so impressed'¹⁵ with the changes that Down had effected he retained the formation and renamed it 1st Parachute Battalion. In 1942 the 2nd Parachute Brigade was formed and command was given to Down and this formation became part of 1st Airborne. He fought in Africa with his Brigade and was involved in front line fighting with his old battalion, 1st Parachute, during March 1943. In

¹⁵ Buckingham, Op. Cit. p.14

late 1943 he was sent by 'Browning to raise 44th Indian Airborne Division,'¹⁶ a task he did not depart for until after the end of Operation Market Garden. He was, a man well described by the historian Martin Middlebrook as being 'saturated in airborne experience.'¹⁷ Not only did he have the airborne experience, he had the divisional command experience. The ideal choice to command an airborne division in the allied invasion of Europe, yet Browning elected to have him replaced by the infantry soldier, Roy Urquhart. Why he did is a matter of historical debate but here it is less relevant than the suitability of his appointment to replace a man who was firmly one of the few ideal candidates for the position.

Virtually all authors when writing about the appointment of the new commanding officer for 1st Airborne in 1944 quote Browning as accepting Montgomery's suggestion of a non-airborne officer with the proviso that the officer be 'hot from the battle.'¹⁸ In this respect Urquhart could not be found wanting, he had been hardened in the Mediterranean theatre of operations and the post war accounts of the Battle of Arnhem, mostly written by men who fought there are littered with praise for Urquhart's abilities but it was his abilities in commanding the conventional defensive fighting after the failure of the airborne operation that attract this praise. Urquhart's career in the British army really took off after his posting to the 3rd Infantry Division as a staff officer in October 1940, this was followed by a promotion to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and shortly afterwards he was given command of the 2nd Battalion, The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. A year later

¹⁶ Major-General Julian Thompson, *Ready for Anything, The Parachute Regiment at War* (London: Fontana, 1990) p.117

¹⁷ Middlebrook op. cit p.21

¹⁸ Ibid. p.21

in March 1942 Urquhart was posted as General Staff Officer Grade One to the 51st Highland Division in Egypt. Once again this posting lasted for a year and in March 1943 he was given command of the 231 Infantry Brigade Group, he led this formation in both Sicily and Italy. After these campaigns he was recalled to England to Serve with British 12th Corp as Brigadier-General Staff. In January 1944 he was appointed Major-General and commanding officer 1st Airborne.

As we can see Urquhart was clearly an experienced leader of men, but he was a leader of traditional British infantry not of the new and considerably different airborne school of warfare. Despite the British army's 'one size fits all mentality',¹⁹ airborne forces are not simply as many have suggested 'normal troops who merely use unusual methods of transport',²⁰ their methods of conducting themselves are different from a regular infantry formation, from the lowest tactical level up to the divisional formation level and even the equipment of the airborne soldier. John Frost, who by 1944 was the commanding officer of 2nd Parachute Battalion and certainly one of the most experienced airborne officers in the British army, observed that there were 'physical, mental and indeed spiritual problems',²¹ because of the special handicap of resources that airborne formations suffered in combat in comparison to regular infantry formations.

Urquhart had only commanded a brigade group in the field. This brigade group could well be seen as being a scaled down division as it consisted of infantry, armour, artillery and other support elements, which required many of the same skills of divisional

¹⁹ Buckingham op. cit. p.35

²⁰ Ibid.p.35

²¹ Major-General John Frost CB, DSO, MC, *A Drop Too Many* (London: Sphere, 1983) p.194

commander, I tend to agree with William F. Buckingham's assessment that this point has merit but it overlooks the importance of the fact that 1st Airborne was an 'airborne formation, and not a conventional infantry unit.'²² This difference would become vital.

The differences between the two types of soldiering notwithstanding it was still held in common belief in the British army that a 'good fighting soldier'²³ of which Roy Urquhart certainly was, could easily pick up the basics of this form of soldiering. However as historian and career paratroop officer Marcus Tugwell succinctly observes, 'an airborne division can be likened to a rapier, [but] an infantry division resembles a mace.'²⁴ As such the method of using them differs greatly. Understanding these differences would be crucial in the planning and execution of any airborne operation. By Urquhart's own admission he had 'no idea how these chaps functioned.'²⁵ As we shall see, Urquhart's lack of specialised knowledge would lead to him to make crucial mistakes in the planning of his divisions operations in Arnhem.

Before he could even begin planning his division operations Urquhart was immediately hamstrung by the unusual and highly unsuitable nature of control of airborne operations. In the British army unlike their American counter-parts the air force was in charge of all aspects of the operation until the troops actually hit the ground. The air force immediately ruled out landings to the south of the bridge believing the ground to be unsuitable for gliders and paratroopers. They also ruled out a *coup-de-main* glider landing at the bridge

²² Buckingham op. cit. p.35

²³ Maurice Tugwell, *Arnhem: A Case Study* (London: Purnell Book Services Limited, without date) p.19

²⁴ Ibid. p.19

²⁵ Urquhart op. cit. p.26

due to concern about the level of anti aircraft defences both at the bridge and that the pilots would encounter on their way out. This was a very serious set back for Urquhart's planning as conventional military tactics recommend that the best way to take a bridge is from both ends. In addition it also removes the principal strength of an airborne attack, surprise. The further away from the objective the division landed the longer the Germans would have to calculate their objective and react accordingly. The landing zones that the air force offered would be between six to eight miles from their objective. As we have seen, Urquhart had by his own admission 'no choice.'²⁶ But was that actually the case?

As we have already seen 1st Airborne had, during their operations in Scilly suffered a large number casualties caused by scattered landings that were subsequently strongly opposed. This had lead to the development of an opinion within the division that it was 'more important to land accurately and safely'²⁷ than to land close to the objective. It is clear that this thinking had influenced Urquhart. However the reality was that this flew the face of the only other comparable airborne operation, the Normandy landings. The allies had landed three airborne divisions in support of the Overlord beach landings, their performances had been mixed. However in the case of the British 6th Airborne, it had been a success, they had landed reasonably well and by the end of the day had completed all of their divisional objectives. These had included capturing bridges over the Orne and the Caen Canals, this had been done by a glider *coup-de-main* operation. Major-General James Gavin the commanding officer of the American 82nd Airborne in both Normandy and Holland summed up the lessons of Normandy simply; 'it is generally better to take

²⁶ Ibid. p.19

²⁷ Wilmot Op. Cit. p.499

landing losses while landing hard on the objectives.’²⁸ So shocked was he when he heard the British plan for Arnhem that he said to a colleague, ‘my God, he can’t mean it!’²⁹ Gavin was not the only high-level airborne officer who saw the folly in this matter. Major-General Richard Gale the commanding officer of British 6th Airborne was asked by Browning for his opinion and he stated that the bridge should be taken by *coup-de-main* and followed up by the landing of at ‘least a brigade’³⁰ next to it. However Browning did not make this advice available to Urquhart, but Urquhart did receive support of a more direct nature from the commanding office of the Glider Pilot Regiment. Colonel George Chatterton, who made it clear that he ‘strongly supported the idea of a glider-borne *coup-de-main*,’³¹ but was overruled by both the air force and Browning. Even within his own division opinion was divided, John Frost the veteran paratroop officer was adamant that troops ‘needed to be landed at the bridge and over the bridge.’³² At this point an experienced airborne officer, fully versed with the nature of airborne operations and backed by the support of his peers should have taken a stronger position with the planners. Gale himself stated that he would have ‘resigned rather than carry out the Arnhem operation’³³ as it was laid out. Brigade-Major Anthony Hibbert also maintained that ‘Eric Down would never have accepted the plan.’³⁴ At this point the divisional commander could have threatened to resign unless the plan was changed, which despite arguments that changes could not be made to the plan because it was too

²⁸ Ibid. p.499

²⁹ Buckingham op. cit. p.83

³⁰ Ibid. p.86

³¹ Ibid. p.86

³² Major-General John Frost, Commanding officer 2nd Battalion the Parachute Regiment, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 9th November 1987

³³ Buckingham op. cit. p.87

³⁴ James Anthony Hibbert, Brigade Major/Staff Officer 1st Parachute Brigade, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 6th February 1995

close to D-Day. I think its clear that the proximity of D-Day would have made it more likely that a much stronger protest from Urquhart would have been accepted, after all Browning would not want to have to replace a divisional commander so close to the off. This may seem like an extreme course of action but in was in fact one that Browning could hardly have ignored as he himself had used it during an argument with Brereton regarding a prior prospective operation called Linnet Two, which he had wanted cancelled as he felt it was unsafe. Perhaps it would have been a good time to try giving him a taste of his own medicine.

Urquhart's lack of divisional experience and more crucially his lack of airborne knowledge led to him making another critical mistake in the planning phase of this operation. As we have seen his choice of landing and dropping zones was dictated to him by the air force planners, but the composition of his loads were for him to decide. Shortly after the announcement of Operation Market Garden, Browning informed Urquhart that he would be losing thirty-two gliders and their tugs from his first day's allotment. These gliders would be used by Browning to deliver his Corps headquarters to Nijmegen, they would have been able to carry an entire air landing battalion of infantry to Arnhem.

Urquhart's response to this was to inform his staff that they should make the required changes but in no way reduce the amount of anti-tank guns that were scheduled for the first day. This was a mistake and one that is difficult to understand. Long after the event people have justified the in Arnhem by pointing out that vital intelligence was with held from the division regarding the number and type of tanks they could expect to encounter. If this was the case and Urquhart was not expecting to encounter a heavy armoured

presence why did he dedicate such a large amount of his limited resources to ant-tank weapons? In addition he also carried in two troops of airborne artillery in the first wave, these elements require a large amount of heavy equipment and take up a lot of transport space. On top of this a large amount of space was given over to such luxuries as 'jeeps and motorcycles.'³⁵ Since the first heavy tanks were not encountered until the second day, this transport could have been better used to bring in additional infantry, this would have provided Urquhart with two additional options, he could have either reinforced 1st Parachute Brigades advance to the Rhine or he could have maintained a substantial reserve of infantry ready to exploit or reinforce as required. The ability of an airborne commander to introduce reserves to battle is one of the 'four [key] lessons from the successful German airborne operations.'³⁶ The American divisions concentrated on bringing in their infantry on day one and their heavy equipment on day two. This is what Urquhart should have done, after all heavy equipment cannot take an objective. If he had been able to spend time in command of the division in the field or in exercises then perhaps he would have done this differently. As it was he was clearly thinking like a regular infantry commander.

The position of divisional commander of 1st Airborne was one, which in itself harboured a number of inherent weaknesses, regardless of whom occupied it, which needed to be ironed out if effective command was to be maintained in combat. These weaknesses could have been spotted if the division had ever operated in its entirety, and more specifically if divisional headquarters its self had ever exercised command in a combat

³⁵ Tugwell op. cit. p.27

³⁶ Ibid. p.28

situation. While all of the division's sub units had gained combat experience in Africa, Scilly, Italy and in some small raiding operations in Europe, the divisional headquarters had not yet operated, in either an airborne or conventional command role. Further strains were placed on the divisional commander by the complex, multi-service and allied nature of both Operation Market Garden and indeed any perspective operation.

The role of 1st Airborne's commander was not merely restricted to matters within the division his role also involved personal communication with the 'USAAF's 9th Troop Carrier Command and the RAF's No.38 and 46 Groups,³⁷ who would be carrying the division into the European theatre of operations. In addition to these meetings he was obliged to attend higher-level meetings and planning sessions, the frequency of which increased dramatically as the D-Day for Operation Overlord approached. These meetings were usually in London, many miles from the division's headquarters in Lincolnshire. These meeting did not decrease in number after D-Day as 1st Airborne was prepared for a large number of operations, sources differ on the number but all offer somewhere between ten and twenty cancelled operations prior to Market Garden. Each of which ran to different levels of planning, including at least one that was cancelled when the troops had already boarded the planes.

This punishing schedule of meetings was not aided by the fact that the division's formations were scattered across three counties in the East Midlands; Lincolnshire, Rutland and Leicestershire. Travel between these locations was frequently limited to road transport as the weather, a lack of landing strips and Urquhart's own airsickness limited

³⁷ Buckingham op. cit. p.33

the use of his personal aircraft. It is not difficult to agree with Buckingham that the stress of Urquhart's heavy schedule was heavily responsible for a severe attack of malaria that removed him from command for 'three weeks in mid April 1944.'³⁸

There was however a simple solution to this problem which if implemented could have allowed certain problems that developed in the battle of Arnhem to be avoided. The solution should have been the creation of a deputy commander 1st Airborne Division. An officer, most likely of Urquhart's choosing would have occupied this position, and would likely have been drawn from within the division, probably Gerald Lathbury, hence being someone of sound airborne experience and background. It strikes me as strange that no such role existed when Urquhart had so many external demands upon his time. Indeed not only did 1st Airborne's parent formation, the 1st Allied Airborne Army have just such an arrangement, with the British officer Browning being deputy to the American Brereton, so to did both American airborne divisions employed in Market Garden. This appointment would have prevented the problems caused when Urquhart became separated from the division for 'the [most of the] first forty hours'³⁹ of the operation.

From almost the moment the division arrived in Arnhem it was plagued with communications problems, which I will examine in more detail in chapter three. However these problems were further complicated for Urquhart by rumours about the non-arrival of the reconnaissance jeeps, which were meant to make the *coup-de-main* attack to seize the bridge. He ordered their commander Major Gough to return to make a report, but in

³⁸ Ibid. p.24

³⁹ Ibid. p.131

the mean time he had taken the decision to head out after Lathbury's 1st Parachute Brigade to encourage them to greater speed. As soon as he left his divisional headquarters his radio link to them was severed and he effectively lost control of the division. After spending the night with 3rd Parachute Battalion, he and Lathbury attempted to make their way back to divisional headquarters but became lost in the streets of Arnhem and were forced to shelter in a Dutch home, where they became trapped by German assault gun, which parked outside. During this period Lathbury was injured and Urquhart was forced to leave him in the care of a Dutch couple. Eventually he was able to escape and make it back to divisional headquarters but by then events were fast running beyond his control. The fact of the matter is that Urquhart should not have left his headquarters in the first place, however strong a commanders desire to influence aspects of his divisions performance, it is his place to command the whole division. But this problem was compounded by the fact that he had no deputy to take his place nor had he firmly established a chain of command to cover his removal from the division.

Shortly before take off on the 17th of September Urquhart had informed his senior staff officer; Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Mackenzie that the chain of command after himself would be as follows; Brigadier Lathbury, Brigadier Hicks and then Brigadier Hackett. The problem with his choice was that in age Hicks was far more senior but in terms of rank Hackett was the senior officer but Hackett was not only the youngest of the senior officers but he was an ex-cavalry officer and it has been argued that this prejudice was the reason for Urquhart's choice. However Urquhart did not inform Hackett of his decision. The chain of command for the division should have been established very early

on and made known to all members of the division that needed to know. Not taking this course of action further confirms Urquhart's lack of understanding regarding the nature of airborne warfare, especially the fact that 'no officer was guaranteed safe arrival'⁴⁰ at the battle zone. The decision may have been partly motivated by that fact that, in his own words, he 'had no intention of becoming a casualty'⁴¹ and that he clearly felt that odds were long on Lathbury been out of commission at the same time as himself. So when this exact situation occurred Hicks was forced to take command of the division.

Hicks was immediately faced with having to make choices about how best to use the division, a position in which he had no experience. The only element that had reached the bridge were around seven hundred members of 1st Parachute Brigade mostly from John Frosts 2nd Battalion, they had to be reinforced as soon as possible, but German resistance was making all movement towards the bridge a slow process. Hicks decided to immediately dispatch some of the troops defending the landing zones and then as soon as Hackett's 4th Brigade arrived in the morning he would send one his battalions straight into Arnhem. Hackett on arriving was not pleased, he felt that the situation was 'grossly untidy'⁴² and that his troops were being sent into battle without any clear purpose or situational knowledge. The Brigadiers argued and any decision was delayed by this argument, which was eventually settled by Mackenzie. The problem for Hicks was that he could not deal with the untidy situation in anyway other then to attempt to rescue the plan that Urquhart had laid down, as far as Hicks was aware, Urquhart was

⁴⁰ Buckingham op. cit. p.175

⁴¹ Urquhart op. cit. p90

⁴² Cited in Geoffrey Powell, *The Devil's Birthday: The Bridges to Arnhem 1944* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992) p.110

only missing and not a casualty and 'could reappear at anytime.'⁴³ Former Parachute officer and veteran of Arnhem, Geoffrey Powell argues convincingly in his book, that had there been a deputy divisional commander they could have taken the drastic steps the situation required and modified the original plan. All the evidence supports this position. A deputy commander could have organised a new plan to support the men at the bridge, attempted to modify the landing zones for the remaining lifts and commanded with the certainty of his position. In fact alternative drop zones were available for this purpose. They were intended for use on day three if required and there was a working radio link to the United Kingdom, all it needed was someone with the authority to act. This type of situation could have occurred in any Operation, the need for a deputy was one that needed to be addressed regardless of where the division was assigned.

As we have seen Roy Urquhart was an exemplary infantry soldier and officer but was a man out of his depth when placed in command of an airborne division. He lacked the experience, knowledge and support he needed for such a complex command and his appointment was a waste of his talents, which could have been better employed elsewhere.

Shortly before Urquhart assumed command of the division it had returned to England from the Mediterranean where the majority of its constituent parts have received their baptism of fire in combat. They returned to England with an attitude that has been described as 'cocky and self-assured.'⁴⁴ This attitude was further enhanced by the

⁴³ Ibid. p.111

⁴⁴ Buckingham op. cit. p.31

volunteer nature of recruitment to the airborne forces and its elite status, exemplified no better than by their red berets. The division was in the process of absorbing a large amount of new recruits including new officers. Many of these like Urquhart came from outside the airborne fraternity. One such officer, Major Phillip Tower, a Brigade Major to the division's artillery commander recalled of his arrival in the division that he found them 'hard to convince that other people had done a lot of fighting in the war.'⁴⁵ He also observed that they were 'very closed-minded'⁴⁶ when it came to accepting advice from outside the airborne world. This also tied into Urquhart's own observation that the division 'were a marvellous lot but they over estimated their prowess,'⁴⁷ and that they 'were a wonderful lot, but lacked training.'⁴⁸ He was not alone in noticing the division's shortcomings, the assessment made of them by the Germans during their time in the Africa said that they were 'very brave but not very good on tactics.'⁴⁹ It can be argued that the divisions attitude actually came down from the top, for example, when Sosabowski had objected to one of the earlier plans for the post Overlord deployment of 1st Airborne and his brigade, Browning had dismissed his objections with the statement that 'together the Polish and British airborne forces could do anything.'⁵⁰ If the division had been in a top state of readiness on its return to England in 1944 then perhaps this attitude could be forgiven, but as we will see 1st Airborne was very far from well trained and less than adequate measures were taken to remedy this.

⁴⁵ Cited in Middlebrook op. cit. p.22

⁴⁶ Cited in Ibid. p.22

⁴⁷ Cited in Ibid. p.22

⁴⁸ Major-General Roy Urquhart, Commanding Officer 1st British Airborne Division, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 6th February 2001

⁴⁹ John Parker, *The Paras: The inside Story of Britain's Toughest Regiment* (London: Metro, 2002) p.63

⁵⁰ Cited in Buckingham op. cit. p.69

Upon assuming command of the division Urquhart immediately recognised that it was deficient in both 'formation level training and experience,'⁵¹ In addition to this he also felt that the level of training across the division was not 'standard'.⁵² That is to say that some units were better trained than others. These two problems were exasperated further by the division's high level of new recruits who continued to be brought in until February 1944 when the division reached full strength. The window to sort these problems out would run from January to the end of May, this was known and should have encouraged an intensive training regime. At this time the division was training in preparation for an unspecified role in the post invasion conflict in Europe. Undoubtedly Urquhart intended to solve these problems himself, when he had taken command of 231 Infantry Brigade he had identified its shortcomings and immediately taken them on a number of field exercises to help remedy this problem. However the constraints on Urquhart's time, his bout of malaria and the geographic locations of his division's component units meant that it was four months before he was able to command the division in a full scale exercise, code named Rags. But perhaps it could be hoped that the individual formations of the division were doing their best to make good to use the time available to the maximum.

1st Parachute Brigade were certainly aware of the need for a great deal of training. Its head quarters issued a detailed list of the areas in which they felt that training was most vital and planned a brigade level parachute dropping exercise. This exercise was scheduled to take place in late January 1944 but was eventually cancelled, as the aircraft needed were not available. The brigade did however undertake refresher parachute

⁵¹ Cited in Ibid, p.32

⁵² Urquhart op. cit. p.97

training starting in January but it was on a small scale and it took eight separate exercises for the entire brigade to get through the process, however they did eventually take part in a brigade level drop in April 1944. Besides the length of time these training jumps took to carryout there was more time lost to preparation for the jumps and travel to the airfields. For the whole of the first week of March 1944 all battalion commanders from the brigade were away attending a training course in North Yorkshire. The brigade also lost its commanding officer 'when he took over as acting divisional commander'⁵³ during Urquhart's sick period. There were additional company and battalion exercises in February and March. The whole brigade did join in the two divisional exercises, which took place, the first codenamed Mush was to provide an enemy for 6th Airborne's training for Operation Overlord and the second was the afore mentioned Rags.

The 4th Parachute Brigade did have one advantage in January 1944, it had returned to England 'virtually intact,'⁵⁴ so did not need to take time integrating large numbers of replacements. Its training schedule was however similar to its sister formation. The brigade spent the whole of February engaged in parachute refresher training, in small groups rather than at any kind of formation level. There were two tactical parachute exercises but neither involved the Brigade as a whole. If the recollections of Regimental Sergeant Major White are accurate then one of the Brigade's battalions, 10th Parachute, had in their nine months in England 'never trained as a single battalion'⁵⁵ but always trained as individual companies. The brigade also took part in exercises Mush and Rags.

⁵³ Buckingham op. cit. p.41

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.44

⁵⁵ Cited in Charles Whiting, *A Bridge At Arnhem* (London: Futura, 1974) p.104

All of the Brigade's parachute battalions went on two days of 'field firing [exercises] at Strensall.'⁵⁶

Buckingham has calculated that that the average member the 1st Parachute Brigade spent 'fourteen days on tactical exercise and twelve days on parachute training, while members of the 4th Parachute Brigade were engaged for twelve and seven days,'⁵⁷ respectively. These figures are for the whole of the January to June training widow available to the division. This clearly represents a very small amount of time spent on what Urquhart had highlighted as being the most pressing issues the division faced. But one Brigade was making attempts to remedy its shortcomings.

Brigadier Hick's 1st Airlanding Brigade undertook a very heavy level of training in comparison to their parachute counter parts. One battalion spent a whole month providing live loads for glider pilot training. Various elements also took part in live firing exercise and one battalion, the 7th Kings Own Scottish Borders, were sent to Hull to take part in street-fighting exercises. By the time May arrived the average member of this Brigade had carried out 'twenty days ... [of] tactical training,'⁵⁸ they had also carried out eight exercises, virtually all of these involving the majority of or the entire brigade. Not bad for a formation considered to be less elite by its paratroop counter parts.

It would I think be educational to compare the overall level of training undertaken by 1st Airborne during these crucial months to that of one of the other formations that would be

⁵⁶ Buckingham op. cit. p.43

⁵⁷ Ibid. p.42-43

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.47

taking part in Operation Market Garden, the 1st Polish Independent Parachute Brigade. In the space of only one month, the Polish brigade carried out a succession of exercises running the full course from ‘individual training through to company ... battalion and up to the full brigade.’⁵⁹ There was also one parachute jump from aircraft. This low level of parachute training from aircraft is partly down to a difference in training doctrine. Sosabowski the Polish commander felt that jump training from a static tower was sufficient and that aircraft training jumps ‘were superfluous and a source of needless injuries.’⁶⁰ This would certainly have allowed the Polish more time for training as parachute training took a considerable amount of additional time besides the time spent doing the actual jump. There were also some issues with getting access to the planes and runways that they needed. However the Polish brigade had completed more of the required training in a month than its British counter-parts would in six months.

Returning to 1st Airborne, the rest of its time was spent in basic infantry training; fitness, weapons skills, marching, small unit skills and so on. However important these skills are, it cannot be a justification for them taking up the majority of the divisions time. The division exceptional performance in defence after the operation had failed shows just how well these skills were learnt. But what would have been the benefit of the additional levels of formation training that Urquhart was so adamant that the division needed?

Brigadier Lathbury’s 1st Parachute Brigade had been tasked with the taking of the Rhine crossings. This it should be remembered was the objective assigned to the entire division.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.59

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.56

But to make matters worse Lathbury assigned additional objectives to his three parachute battalions who were to make for the Rhine. 1st Battalion was to take high north of Arnhem, 2nd Battalion was to secure three bridges: road, railway and pontoon and the main German head quarters in the city itself. The 3rd Battalion seems not have been issued with any orders other than to take the Arnhem Road Bridge in support of the 2nd Battalion. First battalion would move off last, acting first as divisional reserve. These three battalions would be attacking behind the reconnaissance sections *coup-de-main* jeep attack. As we can now see, one of the division's three brigades was attempting to secure five objectives, from which they had landed several miles away. As John Frost would latter recall, 'taking three bridges was too much.'⁶¹ Lathbury was making the mistake of attempting to do too much with too little. This was a lesson that he should have already learnt during the taking of the Primasole Bridge in Sicily, here too the brigade found its 'combat strength dispersed on peripheral tasks'⁶² instead of being focused on their number one objective. If this were not lesson enough then a number of full brigade exercises in England should have allowed him to understand this and use his resources more realistically. He vitally seemed to have failed to recognise that not only was his brigade attempting to carryout the entire divisions main task but that crucially he was also further dispersing that strength down to individual battalions. Instead of concentrating his strength and aiming for the one primary objective.

It took more than an hour for the brigade to form up and for the 2nd and 3rd battalions to move off. This was partly due to the fact that Lathbury had ordered that the battalions be

⁶¹ Major-General John Frost, Commanding officer 2nd Battalion the Parachute Regiment, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 9th November 1987

⁶² Buckingham op. cit. p.22

fully formed up and be matched up with their accompanying support elements before they left but it was also heavily influenced by a simple lack of urgency among the paratroopers. More than one veteran of Arnhem has remarked that there was little sense of urgency and that it felt almost 'like a training exercise.'⁶³ This was a shortcoming that was also evident in the actions of 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron. Although it took around thirty minutes to unload the Horsa gliders that brought in the squadrons jeeps, this did not justify the length of time it took for the squadron to set off. Since their mission was one that could only really have any hope of success by being carried out quickly while the element of surprise still existed, it would be hoped that they would set off as quickly as possible, but in fact that were 'the last [to leave] ... its forming up area ... two hours after landing'⁶⁴ This lack of urgency should have been eliminated by intensive training in the build up to divisional deployment. Rapid deployment is one of the most vital skills the airborne soldier needs to learn. It is important to remember that the Germans anti-parachute training emphasised the importance of 'driving into the teeth of the landings before the parachutists could form up.'⁶⁵ Essentially it's a race between the paratroopers and the defenders, and it's a race that the airborne troops needed to win. The more time passed the more the initiative would swing towards the Germans.

This slowness in setting off was ultimately responsible for the failure of the *coup-de-main* attack. By the time the squadron set off from the landing zone, the Germans had established a blocking zone whose Northern end covered the route to be taken by the

⁶³ Arnold Baldwin, NCO of B Squadron the Glider Pilot Regiment, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 25th July 1998

⁶⁴ Buckingham op. cit. p.127

⁶⁵ Robert J. Kershaw, *It Never Snows In September: The German View of MARKET-GARDEN and The Battle of Arnhem, September 1944* (Hersham: Ian Allan Publishing, 2004) p.74

squadron. They lost two jeeps in the ensuing fire fight and were forced to halt. Then when Urquhart ordered Gough to report to him, the squadron simply ceased to advance and eventually the attack was abandoned. From the beginning the squadrons commander, Major Gough was unhappy with the role assigned to him as it was not what his unit was trained or equipped to do. He wanted to advance ahead of the three parachute battalions acting as scouts. But Lathbury wanted something to replace the glider *coup-de-main* attack and this was it. Clearly it would have been essential for some training to be given to the squadron, although time was short between the announcement of Market Garden and its D-Day, there is no record to indicate that the squadron took part in any additional training. Indeed their performance after losing Gough, suggests that they were not the least bit motivated to carryout their assigned task. Once stopped by the Germans, the squadron simply remained in place until it was ordered to withdraw, there was no attempt to find an alternative route to continue the advance. As we shall see in chapter three another unit was available which could have supplemented the squadron and increased it chances of success in carrying out its assigned task.

British Parachute troops are armed with a disproportionately high amount of automatic weapons, this is partly to make up for the lack of support weapons that they can deploy and partly because paratroopers were intended to make short, vicious and high tempo attacks against a specific target, hence British paratroops carried a larger amount of the Sten submachine gun than their normal infantry counterparts. But this style of warfare requires a considerably higher level of aggression especially as the enemy will often be dug in, have superior numbers and considerable heavier weapons. Aggression is not a

normal state for most people and has to be encouraged in training. For example the bayonet charge can generally only be successful if a suitable level of aggression accompanies it. Hence the use of furious war cries, which are carried out in practise drills against straw sacks. However during the Battle of Arnhem the majority of airborne units showed a lack of aggression, especially on the first day, as Brigade-Major Anthony Hibbert recalls the British soldier had a tendency to stop when faced with a problem, which was a 'failure of aggression.'⁶⁶ This is reinforced by the fact that all members of the division would by the time they went into action have had either no experience of combat or been out of contact with the enemy for many months. A complaint that Urquhart levelled at his own men's performance on the first day was that once engaged by the enemy they tended to stop and dig in, rather than take a more aggressive action. He did however feel that this 'perfectly natural'⁶⁷ especially for men that had not seen combat for some months. However what was alarming was his troops tendency to be rather too correct with the Dutch people, many peoples accounts recall men knocking on the door of local civilians and asking for permission to enter their homes or of great care been taken not to damage gardens. These kinds of aggressive assault techniques should have been the subject of intensive training.

Once the allies had invaded Europe 1st Airborne were on stand by for operations, as we have already seen, these operations were frequently cancelled, usually due to the rapid advance of ground forces in France. This led to the division referring to its self as the

⁶⁶ James Anthony Hibbert, Brigade Major/Staff Officer 1st Parachute Brigade, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 6th February 1995

⁶⁷ Major-General Roy Urquhart, Commanding Officer 1st British Airborne Division, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 6th February 2001

'still born division' and many members of it began to despair that they would never see action. However the rapid allied advance in France was generating an attitude that the war was won and that the Germans were all but beaten. This attitude is shown in the recollections of the divisions veterans who remembered that they 'were ready to go'⁶⁸ and had 'no apprehension, [we] were going to give them a good belting.'⁶⁹ This dangerously underestimated the ability of their future adversaries. It was however in part unavoidable, a large amount of the division had never seen combat or had never fought the Germans. Brigadier Hackett had and he knew that the men 'didn't understand the Germans ability to improvise a defence that would be rapid and violent.'⁷⁰ Although 1st Airborne were not alone in their opinion of the Germans, it made a potent combination when mixed with their existing arrogance surrounding their own abilities, an arrogance that the vastly experienced Sosabowski considered to be 'completely unjustified.'⁷¹ He was referring to both their opinion of themselves and off the Germans. This arrogance would be punished in Arnhem by forces, which for the most part were far from elite. Post war analysis of Market Garden by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation considered that allies had been beaten by improvised combat groups of 'untrained or poorly trained troops ... consisting of ... teenagers or old and infirm men.'⁷² While the veteran formations of the SS armoured corps were there they were stretched thin across the whole of the Market Garden area and were operating at between '20 per cent to 30 per cent' of their original deployment strengths. Indeed the 1st Parachute Battalions first encounter

⁶⁸ John Starleigh, British Paratrooper, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 1986

⁶⁹ Arnold Baldwin, NCO of B Squadron the Glider Pilot Regiment, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 25th July 1998

⁷⁰ General John Winthrop Hackett, Commanding officer 4th Parachute Brigade, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, date unknown

⁷¹ Cited in Powell op. cit. p.45

⁷² Kershaw op. cit. p.310

with the Germans was with a detachment of *Luftwaffe*⁷³ ground crew from a signals section.

The announcement of Operation Market Garden gave the division only a few days to prepare for the specific requirements of that operation but they had been in training for over eight months by then, if we look at accounts of past operations we can see that the division was not always so wasteful of its time. In preparation for the capture of the Primasole Bridge elements of the division launched, as one veteran recalls ‘very intensive training’,⁷⁴ which included daily practise of the approach they would have to make to the bridge, this went on for almost two months. It could perhaps be argued that in this situation that it is easier to be motivated when there is a definite deadline, but I feel that this argument is a weak one. The parachute division has long surrounded its self with the mystique of being an elite formation and thus superior to other formation in the British army. One measure of an elite unit is their professionalism, regardless of the closeness of a perspective operation any unit based close to the enemies front line, in this case the Atlantic Wall and being part of a national army that is in a state of war, should not have needed an additional motivation to train hard for their part in a future operation, especially one as complex as the invasion of occupied Europe.

As we can see from this, the division had wasted a considerable amount of its limited training time and made insufficient efforts to deal with its shortcomings. Indeed despite the factor that any operation in Europe would be highly likely to result in the division

⁷³ The German air force

⁷⁴ Cited in Parker op. cit. p.69

fighting in an urban environment only one battalion shows any record of training for street fighting. Urquhart himself admits that the concept was never 'considered in the divisional planning for Arnhem'⁷⁵ and thus presumably in planning for other cancelled operations. This is a ludicrous oversight and is emphasised further by the fact the divisions opponents in Arnhem, 2nd SS *Panzer Korps*⁷⁶ had been specifically trained in 'countering airborne operations',⁷⁷ they had been prepared for exactly the role they would carryout. Planning in general seems to have been a shortcoming within the division, both of 1st Airborne's most senior officers: Urquhart and Lathbury despite all of their experience both planned to do too much with too little and based their planning on flawed strategic and tactical ideas. These shortcomings could only have been overcome by experience or training. The former cannot be found on the home front and the latter was simply not given sufficient priority. 1st Airborne was hampered by a poor attitude and was lacking experience, qualified leadership and adequate training as it prepared for the invasion of Europe. As we shall in chapter four, these personnel issues would be compounded by equipment problems.

⁷⁵ Urquhart op. cit. p.203

⁷⁶ German armoured corps.

⁷⁷ Buckingham op. cit. p.102

Chapter Four

Tools of the Trade

After the defeat of the British Expeditionary Force and its subsequent evacuation from Dunkirk in the summer of 1940, a vast amount of equipment was lost and had to be replaced quickly and cheaply. This was shown in the creation of such weapons as the Sten gun and the Projector Infantry Anti Tank (PIAT), which were both cheap and reasonable effective, but always suffered from problems and limitations. The airborne forces were victims of this in the same way that all British forces were. However airborne forces require certain specialist equipment and this was not always available.

Through out the history of warfare the ability of a commander to exercise effective control of his troops has always been limited to the extent of his communications facilities. From the dawn of time until World War One the main method of communication was via messengers, either mounted or on foot. During World War One communications were improved slightly by the use of the field telephone but messengers were still vitally important, towards the end of the conflict primitive wireless communications were coming into existence. But it was during the inter-war years that this technology really developed. However in the British army not every branch of the service was making the same amount of effort. During these years only the 'armoured and artillery arms'⁷⁸ had worked hard to get the right type of radio equipment. The

⁷⁸ Kenneth Macksey, *Military Errors of World War Two* (London: Cassell plc, 1998) p.198

infantry had clung to the old ideas and consequently were poorly equipped. This would cause a major problem for the as yet unborn airborne forces.

The list of the communications problems that occurred during the battle of Arnhem is long: the divisional headquarters could not talk to its brigade's headquarters or to Browning's corps head quarters in Nijmegen, which was only fifteen miles away. They could get messages back to England, who could then pass on messages to Browning but this resulted in a delay and often in a loss of the sense of urgency about messages. They also could not communicate with the air forces. The Brigade headquarters could not communicate with their battalions in the town especially not with Frosts men at the bridge. Although some communication was possible between Frost and the divisional headquarters 'via the artillery radio net.'⁷⁹ But this was still limited.

However on the ground at individual battalion level communications were also poor. Once sections, platoons or companies became separated from their parent formation communications were often lost. This was especially difficult for Colonel Frost who had his small force of men spread out in a perimeter of houses at the edge of the bridge, most communication was therefore carried out by runners whom risked attracting heavy German machine gun, sniper and mortar fire. The principal outcome of all this was that it was in Colonel Frosts own words 'difficult to exercise command.'⁸⁰ It was impossible to act on opportunities; gaps in the enemy lines could not be exploited because it took to

⁷⁹ Major-General John Frost, Commanding officer 2nd Battalion the Parachute Regiment, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 9th November 1987

⁸⁰ Major-General John Frost, Commanding officer 2nd Battalion the Parachute Regiment, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 9th November 1987

long to assemble a force. Warning of locations of heavy German resistance or counter attacks could not be easily shared. Supply dropping locations could not be changed and tactical air support was non-existent. No finer example of the problems that the poor radio equipment caused can be found than the example of airborne radio operator Private Rob Graydon, who during the entire battle of Arnhem was able to make 'one successful radio link-up.'⁸¹ His radio was essentially a useless heavy weight.

One other terrible consequence of the poorly equipped and prepared signallers of 1st Airborne was the loss of the allied forces most significant strategic advantage, air superiority. During operations in Normandy, the allied forces had become used to being able to call up dedicated fighter forces to support their operations, these forces, especially the fighter bombers which could easily destroy German armour, attack strong points and devastate infantry formations with virtual impunity. All the ground forces needed to call up air support was an effective air force liaison via the wireless communication. However in the hasty preparations of Market Garden, this was not the case. This was because air control teams were 'few, poorly trained and equipped with radios ... that [did not] work.'⁸² This would come to be a major problem when the division was engaged by significant amounts of heavy German armour and when engaging the German blocking forces in the streets of Arnhem.

The British airborne forces were never issued with a purpose built radios during World War Two. None of the existing radios were suitable for the task; they were too big, their

⁸¹ Max Hastings, *Armageddon, The Battle for Germany 1944-45* (London: Pan Books, 2005) p.58

⁸² Tugwell op. cit. p.28

transmitting range was inadequate or they were too fragile for airdropping. Most sets were all three. There were three British inter-unit radios in operation in 1944, the first two: the '22' and the '19' both required jeeps to transport them and their batteries. The third, 'the '68' was a man pack radio with a range of about three miles.'⁸³ The battalions that made up 1st Airborne were issued with the '68' while Urquhart's divisional headquarters were issued with the '22' and the divisional artillery was issued with the '19' which was the heaviest but also the most powerful set available to the British army. The radios that the division used also had to be unassembled and packed in parts for the parachute drops, on landing they would be reassembled but this took time.

However the '68' sets were inherently unsuitable for the reality of airborne operations. These radios had an operation range of approximately three miles. This was fine if the airborne force was dropped directly onto its objectives as conventional wisdom on the subject dictated that they should be. But they were useless if the operating area was much larger, as it would be in Arnhem, or if the drops were scattered. As the second in command of divisional signals Major Anthony Deane-Drummond makes clear it was well known long before heading to Arnhem that 'there was no way that infantry units could maintain contact with each other'⁸⁴ or therefore with either their divisional or brigade headquarters. He also hoped that 'a higher standard of training would make up for some of the deficiencies of the equipment.'⁸⁵ However as we have already seen, training was not something at which the division excelled.

⁸³ Middlebrook op. cit. p.37

⁸⁴ Cited in Ibid. p.37

⁸⁵ Anthony Deane-Drummond, *Return Ticket* (Glasgow: Fortuna, 1976) p.148

Training for 1st Airborne's battalions had mainly taken place near to their bases, which in the case of 2nd Parachute Battalion was in Lincolnshire. It was as their commanding officer John Frost recalls an area that was 'very open country'⁸⁶ which may be very much like the dropping zones but was nothing like the built up urban terrain in which they would be operating. However an unnamed airborne signals operator remembers another factor, which may well have influenced communications problems during the Battle for Arnhem. He maintains that there was a high level of 'laziness about recharging batteries'⁸⁷ after cancelled operations. This is certainly a believable claim but it would be unreasonable to assign too much weight to its impact. There are also unsubstantiated stories of airborne radios being supplied with the wrong crystals. However the fact of the matter is that at the very least the entire signals staff of the division knew what would happen when they arrived in Arnhem and started to move outside the operating area of the man portable radios, as Urquhart himself stated, 'signals failures were no new phenomenon.'⁸⁸ Plans should have been prepared and training carried out for the eventuality that an operation would require the division to operate outside its ideal radio operating area.

As we have seen in chapter two, 1st Airborne's plan called for a *coup-de-main* seizing of the Arnhem Road Bridge by the jeeps of the Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron. This was a plan that we also know did not meet with the approval of their commanding officer. He wanted to use the jeeps in their intended role of reconnaissance, moving ahead of the troops as they moved into town. However once Major Gough had been over-ruled

⁸⁶ Cited in Parker op. cit. p.110

⁸⁷ Cited in Hastings op. cit. p.46

⁸⁸ Urquhart op. cit. p.48

he sought ways to make his lightly armed and armoured unit better equipped for their mission. The squadron's jeeps were mounted with twin machine guns of a type formally used in aircraft. Gough sought to have these upgraded to heavier twin machine guns for increased firepower but was overruled because of ammunition concerns. However what Gough really sought was a way to deal with the vulnerability of his squadron. For this he wanted to turn to the 6th Airborne Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (Hereafter 6th AARR). Before we discuss 6th AARR potential role in Operation Market Garden, I will briefly outline their history and the relevant technical details of their specialist equipment.

Originally 6th AARR were in fact part of 1st Airborne but when the division was shipped to the Mediterranean they were not up to strength and lacked the gliders to transport them so were left behind, they were then transferred into the 6th Airborne Division. The 6th AARR was a unit of twenty light tanks, called Tetrarchs that were deployed by Hamilcar gilder in support of airborne operations. These tanks were deployed in the early evening of June 6th 1944 as part of Operation Mallard to reinforce 6th Airborne, who had dropped in the early hours of the morning. The original plan was for them to form part of an armoured reconnaissance force which would thrust behind the enemy lines, but on landing the tactical situation did not allow for this and they were instead used to 'hold the airborne bridge head.'⁸⁹ During this time they supported infantry operations, engaged enemy strong points and carried out reconnaissance. When the order for a break out was issued this role become their primary operation. The unit was over the course of August

⁸⁹ Keith Flint, *Airborne Armour* (Solihull: Helion, 2004) p.56

upgraded to Cromwell tanks and by the second week of September the entire unit was returned to England.

The Tetrarch went into production in November 1938 and mounted a two-pound anti-tank gun and a machine gun. It was capable of a top speed of forty miles per hour and required a crew of two.⁹⁰ However by 1944 its main armament was very weak, in fact it was virtually obsolete. It could penetrate '40mm of armour ... at 1000 yards'⁹¹ but modern German tanks were mounting armour of nearer eighty millimetres by this time. But this problem could be overcome by the application of a simple device designed in Czechoslovakia before the outbreak of World War Two called the Littlejohn Adaptor.

This device created a coned bore, which basically reduces the calibre of the gun as the round moves along, thus reducing the area in which the explosive charge is applied. This would make the round much more powerful and give it an increased velocity. With the adaptor fitted the two-pound main gun it could achieve penetration at '1000 yards [of] ... 72mm [and at] ... 500 yards ... 88mm,'⁹² this compared favourably with the standard guns in service on the majority of allied tanks at the time. Although the PIAT offered 100mm of armour penetration this was at a much shorter range and was very slow to reload. The adaptor also had one other advantage over the permanent machining of gun barrels which was the alternative approach to coned bore technology. However once coned a gun could no longer fire high explosive rounds. But since the adaptor could be removed or attached in only in the field the Tetrarch would not lose this vital function

⁹⁰ Ibid. p.9-11

⁹¹ Ibid. p.31

⁹² Ibid. p.32

entirely. This development made the Tetrarch a formidable weapon for the airborne forces, although not as powerful as the six or seventeen pound anti-tank guns, it was self propelled, armoured and more importantly could be unloaded and ready for use in approximately fifteen seconds where as the seventeen pound gun and its towing vehicle could take almost a minute longer to unload⁹³ and would still not be ready for action immediately after unloading.

The Tetrarch also possessed a close support variant, imaginatively enough this was called the Tetrarch Close Support. Instead of mounting the two-pound anti-tank gun it mounted a three-inch howitzer, which could fire high explosive and smoke rounds. The later was its main purpose, to provide cover for the tanks to advance. This variant of the Tetrarch was part of the 6th AARR's head quarters troop.

Returning to Major Gough's request for help from the 6th AARR he is quoted as saying that he wanted 'a troop of light tanks from ... [6th AARR] because ... I didn't see how we could really do this *coup-de-main* unless we had some armour.'⁹⁴ He would have also needed three Hamilcar gliders to transport them. However nothing came of his request. Events in Arnhem suggest that this was a mistake. As we have already seen, shortly after setting off the squadron was ambushed by the German blocking forces of Battalion Krafft less than a mile after setting off. These forces were however entirely made up of infantry, of whom 'forty per cent were graded not yet fit for action,'⁹⁵ and their

⁹³ Ibid. p.42

⁹⁴ Cited in Ibid. p.136

⁹⁵ Kershaw op. cit. p.36

Commander *Hauptsturmführer*⁹⁶ Sepp Krafft had placed them to cover two of the main approach roads to Arnhem from 1st Airborne's landing zones thus spreading his three hundred and six men thinly across a wide area. They would be able to offer fierce but limited resistance across the path of the advancing British troops. However their anti-tank capacity was limited, if Gough had got the troop of Tetrarchs he had requested, they would have provided an armoured spear head that would have allowed the Squadron to break through this defence line and push on towards their objective. This we can see from the accounts of 'Heavy machine gun fire,'⁹⁷ which stopped the Squadrons advance. This would not prove much of a problem to even a relatively lightly armoured tank. However supporting the advance of Gough's column is not the only role that the Tetrarch could have been employed in.

If the Tetrarch had been deployed in significant numbers for Operation Market Garden, it would have required a reduction in the number of standard anti-tank weapons that the division took with it, however when the 6th Airborne Division deployed for Normandy, its commanding officer choose to take the Tetrarchs in preference to the heavier anti-tank guns giving them the 'lions share of his heavy load-carrying gliders,'⁹⁸ despite the fact that he knew they would be facing the heavy tanks of Von Lucks battle group. It can be surmised that their flexibility was too valuable to lose.

During 1st Parachute Brigades advance towards the Rhine crossings, they were repeatedly delayed by engagements with armoured cars and self-propelled guns. Each time these

⁹⁶ A mid level company officer rank used by the SS, roughly translated as Captain.

⁹⁷ Buckingham op. cit. p.124

⁹⁸ Flint op. cit. p.101

were encountered they had to be dealt with in one of three ways: an accompanying anti-tank gun was wheeled into position, a PIAT team deployed or the vehicle was assaulted with hand grenades. The first two options took considerable amounts of time to prepare and the third presented an even greater risk in the loss of manpower. If Tetrarchs had accompanied these advancing columns instead of anti-tank guns they would have been able to quickly engage these vehicles and with their superior armour the Tetrarchs would probably have won the majority of engagements.

One way in which the British could have overcome the continual German blockades was to fight alternative routes and bypass them, after all reaching the objective was of the paramount importance, once their in strength they could deal with the Germans at their leisure. This technique is what J.F.C Fuller labelled the indirect approach. However local housing design caused this task to become difficult; Dutch gardens were surrounded by high wire fences. These fences had to be climbed, cut or circum-navigated. In Urquhart's own words, 'they made movement of the roads a laborious business.'⁹⁹ The ability to move from freely from one route to another would have made a major difference to the speed of an advance. The Tetrarch with its considerable weight of '7.5 tonnes [and] 165 break horse power engine'¹⁰⁰ would have been able to plough through these fences opening up new routes. Similarly to the way the American army used modified Sherman tanks to advance through the *bocarge*¹⁰¹ in Normandy after Operation Overlord.

⁹⁹ Urquhart op. cit. p.203

¹⁰⁰ Flint op. cit. p.11

¹⁰¹ Thick centuries old French hedgerows which proved difficult for infantry to penetrate

The alternative to bypassing these blockades would be to eliminate them, however in an urban environment it is a very dangerous task to engage enemy strong points, the airborne field artillery could not really help in this matter due to the communications issues and because of the difficulty of spotting targets. However mortars could be deployed by the division to target strong points, this like so many things took time to arrange and execute. The Tetrarch close support tank with its howitzer could have provided on the spot support for assaults against fortified positions. The ability to deploy both high explosive and smoke rounds would have helped to reduce casualties from assaults.

It seems to me that a real opportunity was lost at Arnhem to deploy a valuable and available resource. The 6th AARR could have offered invaluable support in a number of ways. Despite the restrictive air transport capacity available to 1st Airborne it would have only required a slight re-arrangement to incorporate the regiment. Indeed the division was using three Hamilcar gliders to carry in ‘ammunition, engineers and stores ... which was something of an experiment’¹⁰² These gliders could have been reassigned to delivering a single troop of the 6th AARR’s tanks. The experience of the 6th airborne division shows the value of the airborne tank and in Gough the desire to use them had been expressed within the division.

It is clear to see that British airborne forces in general were poorly equipped, lacking the kind of specialist equipment that their specialised form of warfare required. Much of the equipment that they had in common with their regular army comrades was of poor

¹⁰² Flint Op. cit. p.137

quality. This can be in part attributed to the previously mention one size fits all mentality. But issues of quality alone are not a sufficient explanation, much of their equipment was adequate for normal operations but the airborne forces were also equipped with a lot of equipment, which was simply not suitable for the operations they were going to carryout. In the case of communications this would have a tragic effect at Arnhem. Most members of 1st Airborne knew these shortcomings of equipment but little was done to remedy what could be remedied or to modify the plan to counter these problem. Even when the alternatives were suggested or concerns brought up, little was done and in many ways an attitude of resigned acceptance seemed to have surrounded the divisions thinking about matters of equipment. This attitude severally hampered 1st Airborne and directly contributed to its failings during Operation Market Garden.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

At the conclusion of his after action report for 1st Airborne's part in Operation Market Garden, Major-General Roy Urquhart wrote, 'there is no doubt that all [ranks] would willingly undertake another operation under similar conditions ... we have no regrets.'¹⁰³ This statement more than any other that I have heard or read during the researching of this dissertation shows me that from the very top downwards, 1st Airborne was not fit for its intended purpose on 17th September 1944 and that many men paid for this with their lives. An attitude of superiority and supreme self-confidence was endemic within the division, especially in many of its officers. As one more realistic member of the division recalls, 'it was like boy scouts, enthusiastic but not experienced.'¹⁰⁴ These attitude problems were a major factor in shaping the events that befell the division in Arnhem.

As we have seen in the preceding chapters there was what one author refers to as a 'succession of avoidable errors.'¹⁰⁵ This is the crucial factor in analysing what happened to the division in Arnhem and hence reaching the route of the question. There was no one single issue that can be definitively blamed for the disaster that unfolded. There is simply a sliding scale of importance, some issues were relatively minor and perhaps could have been ignored if the more major factors had been dealt with. Indeed with few exceptions

¹⁰³ Urquhart op. cit. p.308

¹⁰⁴ General John Winthrop Hackett, Commanding officer 4th Parachute Brigade, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, date unknown

¹⁰⁵ Buckingham op. cit. p.231

virtually all of the texts that deal with Operation Market Garden place the major proportion of the blame for the failure of the Arnhem portion of the operation onto the communication problems. However as we have seen, this was a problem that was well known within the division, long before Market Garden was ever considered.

Communications problems were an issue that had always plagued the infantry of the British army. So it is clear that this factor while serious was one that should have been dealt with long before September 17th 1944. So if this was not the most significant problem what was?

Major-General Roy Urquhart was the major problem that 1st Airborne faced. In the writing of this dissertation I have been forced to level considerable criticism at an officer whose exemplary conduct prior to joining 1st Airborne had already won him the Distinguished Service Order. But it should be clear that these criticisms stem from his appointment as divisional commander of 1st Airborne, an appointment which he did not seek and about which he was himself 'surprised.'¹⁰⁶ He was a fish out of water in this appointment but this merely qualifies his mistakes and does not excuse them. It seems laughable with the benefit of hindsight that someone so unsuitable for the position would be selected, when the ideal candidate was the man he replaced. Failing that within the division there were people of roughly equal command experience such as Brigadier Lathbury who could have made up their own shortcomings in experience with the specialist knowledge an airborne commander needs. New to the division he had to learn about the methods of airborne warfare, meet the constituent parts of his division, identify

¹⁰⁶ Major-General Roy Urquhart, Commanding Officer 1st British Airborne Division, Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, London, 6th February 2001

the problems and remedy them at the same time as carrying out the day to day duties of a divisional commander. This would be a tall order for any officer even one that was familiar with the division but it was a hopelessly tall order for a stranger. Especially as it was known that the division could be going into action as soon as June 1944. This really only gave Urquhart six months to stamp his authority on the division and whip it into shape. But as we have seen, the workload of the divisional commander in the build up to the invasion of Europe was simply too much for one man, preventing him from exercising control in any real sense for almost four months.

Regardless of who commanded the division in 1944 it is clear that they needed a deputy to help with the workload that was vastly increased in comparison to that which any of Urquhart's predecessors had experienced. It was impossible for Urquhart to influence the nature of the divisions training regime, attend meetings in London, and hold exercises in the midlands as well as carryout the routine administration of the division. In warfare time is a most precious of commodities and Urquhart simply did not have enough of it. If more of his load could have been delegated to a deputy some of the other factors might not have been missed. As we have also seen a deputy could have made vital changes to the plan during Urquhart's enforce absence from the division during the early stage of the operation.

The formation level training the Urquhart had identified as being lacking for the division was also lacking for him, if he had been able to command the division in more than one training exercise then his might have understood the realities of airborne operations,

although this is a debatable point since Arnhem was the first time Roy Urquhart deployed from the air. So it is questionable if he ever would have been completely at home with the nature of airborne warfare. His attitude that once on the ground it was business as normal for the airborne infantry was certainly another factor hampering his planning for operations. Once on the ground apart from his ill-advised trip into Arnhem, Urquhart's performance was in every other way what you could have expected from an officer of his background, but by then his appointment as divisional commander had already done its most telling damage.

A lot has already been made of the communications problems the division faced, the failure of the inadequate radios to do a job they were never intended to do is important. It robbed the commanders of the ability to effectively exercise command and control over large areas, exploitation, reinforcement, fire support and strategic change were all difficult to impossible to organise and carryout. It robbed the division of vital interdiction air support and made it difficult to emphasis to the other forces involved in the operation just how bad the situation was at Arnhem. But with regards to the subject of this dissertation it is more important to say that, this situation was known to be going to occur in any operation that required the division to separate itself outside of a three-mile area or in a built up area. While the division could not been expected to simply find new radios they could have made provision for training on how to deal with this, after all John Frost had trained his battalion to communicate via hunting horns. So the idea that they simply had to accept communications problems does not entirely hold weight.

The failure of the division's senior staff to respond to Gough's very sensible request for a troop of the 6th AARR's airborne tanks was something which certainly deserves more acknowledgement than it has been given over the years. The *coup-de-main* jeep attack against the bridge was going to use a unit that was untrained for that type of task and ill equipped to carry it out. Yet it was something that both Lathbury and Urquhart both felt was vital, so refusing to even attempt to act on this suggestion seems like a very odd way to act towards the commander upon whom such a heavy responsibility lay.

The 1st Airborne was considered by the establishment to be an elite formation, the men of the division considered themselves to be elite. This went to such an extent that the men of the 1st Airborne were not willing to accept new recruits from outside the airborne world and even then those recruits would not be accepted until they had spent a considerable length of time under fire. Within the division the matter of status divided the battalions and brigades, although all members of the division wore the red beret it was considered that the glider borne infantry were second best to the paratroopers, despite the fact that the glider was a much more dangerous method of deployment and that performance in combat and training offered no such separation, in fact in Arnhem the airlanding brigades performance was more than a match for anything the paratroops had to offer. Sometimes a little arrogance can be healthy and it has long been accepted that the fighting spirit of the airborne divisions is what allowed them to overcome their material and numerical disadvantages during the war. But in reality this was only useful in the field, at home it was a massive hindrance. It blinded the division to the useful advice and experience that others might have been able to offer them and it clouded their

judgement towards what would be waiting for them when they were eventually unleashed onto occupied Europe.

So many factors both big and small effected the division in its build up to the invasion of Europe but the majority of them were avoidable and could have been remedied long before September 17th arrived. In Arnhem the division had held its bridgehead for as long as it could, they captured and held their objective with a tiny force of men. The ground forces came within only a few miles of reaching them before the operation was officially abandoned. If this performance was achieved by the division in the state that it went to Arnhem in, it can only be imagined what they could have achieved by remedying the problems that I have outlined. It was sadly still the case that 1st Airborne were not fit for purpose for Operation Market Garden.

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