

OPERATION *MARKET-GARDEN* 1944 (2)

The British Airborne Missions



KEN FORD

ILLUSTRATED BY GRAHAM TURNER

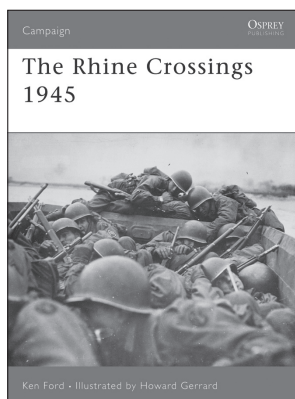
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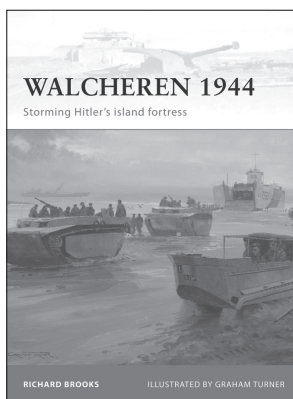
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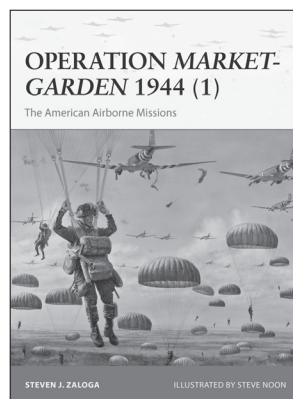
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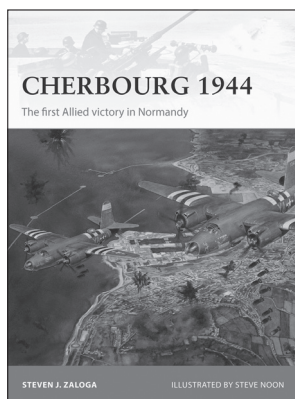
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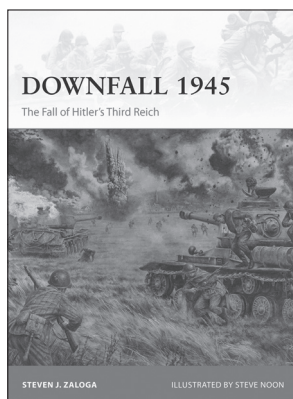
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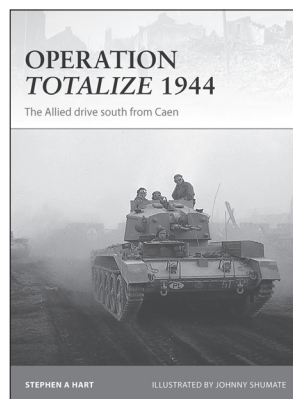
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OPERATION MARKET- GARDEN 1944 (2)

The British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem



KEN FORD

ILLUSTRATED BY GRAHAM TURNER

Series editor Marcus Cowper

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ARTIST'S NOTE

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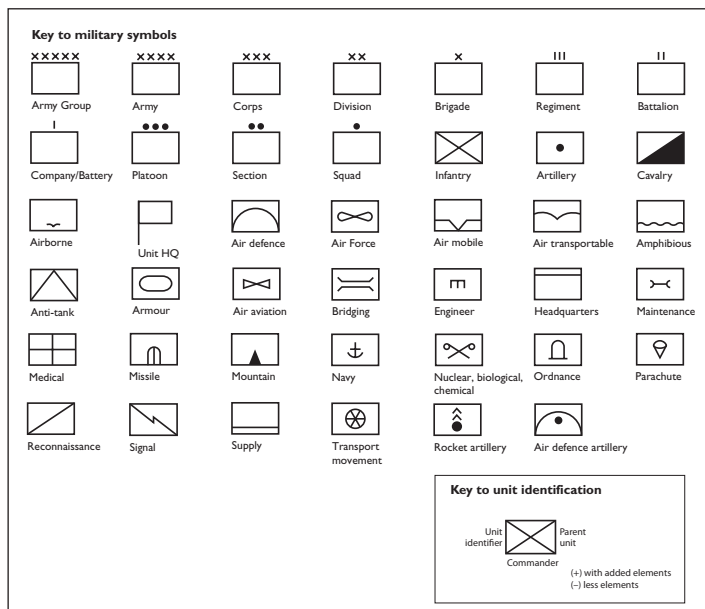
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CONTENTS

ORIGINS OF THE BATTLE	5
CHRONOLOGY	9
OPPOSING COMMANDERS	11
British commanders ■ German commanders	
OPPOSING FORCES	16
British and Polish forces ■ British and Polish order of battle ■ German forces ■ German order of battle	
OPPOSING PLANS	24
Allied plans ■ German plans	
THE CAMPAIGN	30
The first wave ■ The dash for the bridges ■ The second day, Monday 18 September ■ The third day, Tuesday 19 September ■ The fourth day, Wednesday 20 September ■ The perimeter ■ The end of the 1st Airborne Division	
THE AFTERMATH	89
THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY	92
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	94
INDEX	95

Operation Market-Garden



ORIGINS OF THE BATTLE

At the end of August 1944 the situation in Western Europe favoured the Allies. The Supreme Commander Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower had led his forces out of the post-invasion battlefields of Normandy and they were pushing the scattered and demoralized German Army back towards its homeland. In the south, the Allied Army that landed in southern France, Gen. Hodges' US Seventh Army, was likewise on the rampage, driving the enemy to the north-east towards the German frontier. Throughout the Allied nations, the general opinion was that the German Army in the West was in a state of total collapse and, with Russian troops pressing inexorably towards Berlin from the east, the end of the war was possibly in sight. The mood in the Allied camp was euphoric.

General Eisenhower's strength was on the increase, in stark contrast to the paucity of new troops available to Hitler. Every few weeks saw a new freshly trained American division being shipped across the Atlantic to be introduced into battle. Unfortunately Britain's contribution to the arsenal of fighting men had peaked long before. Those new recruits that became



British 1st Airborne Division's main objective in Operation *Market* was the road bridge at Arnhem located right in the centre of the town. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF006)

available to Montgomery had to be fed into existing units in order to preserve their current strength, rather than being organized into new fighting formations. After five years of war Britain was exhausted. There was, however, a strategic reserve back in England in the shape of the airborne divisions that were just waiting for the call to re-enter the fight. At that stage of the conflict it was becoming imperative that these airborne divisions should see more action.

The airborne divisions were expensive to train and equip and required a great quantity of aviation resources to be deployed to ferry them into action. To many critics these divisions were a luxury; they took the best troops – especially in terms of the number and calibre of their NCOs – the best officers and used the best and most expensive training methods. They were also resource hungry, resources that could perhaps be better used by ground troops. They were rarely committed into battle as divisions and when they were, the highly dispersed nature of their drops resulted in only piecemeal victories of a tactical nature. The major successes thus far obtained by airborne troops were in *coup de main* actions and shock deployments to capture tactical objectives. Unless the divisions could be committed in an operation that could bring some strategic results, many thought they were an ill-affordable luxury. With the prevalent feeling amongst senior commanders that the war in Europe was moving into its final phase, pressure was being applied from the top to get the airborne divisions into action.

In Washington the US Chief of Staff, Gen. George Marshall, made it clear that he wanted large-scale airborne attacks to be launched. The Commanding General of the US Army Air Forces, Gen. Henry Arnold, was of the same opinion. There were three fully equipped US airborne formations in Britain: the recently arrived US 17th Airborne Division and the two experienced divisions which had seen action in Normandy, the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. A further formation, the US 13th Airborne Division, was being raised at that time in the USA ready to be shipped to Europe. There were also two British formations in England, the 6th Airborne Division, which had recently returned from Normandy, and the 1st Airborne Division, which had been serving in the Mediterranean. Eisenhower was aware that a major role had to be found for these elite formations and had, during the previous two months, been looking for likely opportunities to deploy them.

In early September 1944 events were changing fast; the pace of the German collapse and the speed of the Allied advance had produced conditions that were ripe for exploitation. The Allies could now contemplate large-scale paratroop and glider infantry landings being dropped behind the front line, well ahead of the leading troops, to disorganize the retreating enemy and open the way for a more rapid advance.

Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model, Commander German Heeresgruppe B, had seen his forces decimated in Normandy. Model's fortunate presence at Oosterbeek, just as the first waves of 1st Airborne Division arrived, was a great blow to the operation. Model quickly grasped the significance of the attack and was able to organize a spirited response from the nearby Panzer formations. (IWM, MH12850)





A flight of C-47 transport aircraft carrying airborne troops towards the Netherlands on the first day of Operation *Market*. The deployment of the highly trained Allied airborne divisions before the end of the war had, in late summer 1944, become a matter of great importance to the Allied High Command. (IWM, EA74538)

Between the D-Day invasion and the end of August 1944, a few operations had been suggested that could be considered as sound propositions for the deployment of airborne forces. Many of these had even got to the advanced planning stage before they were cancelled because the advancing ground forces had already overrun the proposed objectives. With the whole of the Allied High Command now anxious to see the airborne arm being used, increasing pressure was applied to field commanders and their planners to come up with new targets. It was critical that a large-scale attack deep into enemy territory be made, to see what could be accomplished by these shock troops. The question was, where?

September 1944 offered new opportunities to the Allied advance. The slow, steady war of attrition that had marked June, July and August had given way to a war of movement. Rapid thrusts against a retreating enemy could now be contemplated. German Heeresgruppe B (Army Group B), commanded by Generalfeldmarschall (GFM) Walter Model, which had fought in Normandy, had been shattered. Its 7. Armee Oberkommando (Seventh Army) had virtually ceased to exist after being surrounded at Falaise in August and its 15. Armee Oberkommando (Fifteenth Army) was being squeezed into a pocket in Northern Belgium against the river Scheldt. Field Marshal Montgomery's British 21st Army Group had captured the great port of Antwerp intact, although it was unusable for shipping as its approaches along the Scheldt estuary linking it to the sea were still in enemy hands. Throughout the rest of Belgium and the Netherlands German troops were in retreat with such speed that the withdrawal had almost degenerated into a rout.

When, in early September 1944, Field Marshal Montgomery studied the terrain in front of his 21st Army Group, over which he planned to advance from Belgium across the Netherlands into northern Germany, he was confronted not by high ground (the region was after all referred to as the

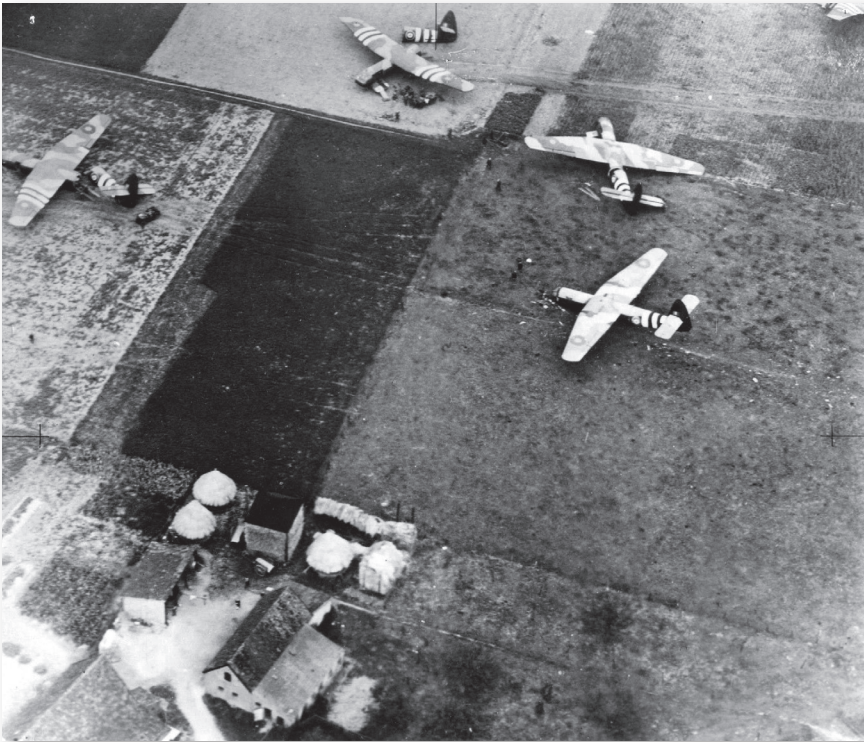
On 17 September, airborne troops rest in the early autumn sunshine before boarding their Horsa gliders to join the first wave of aircraft bound for Arnhem. (IWM, CH13859)



‘Low Countries’), but by many rivers and canals which crossed his path, some of which were the largest in all Europe. He and his planners reasoned that these obstacles might be overcome with the use of the airborne reserve.

Montgomery’s first plan, Operation *Comet*, was influenced by the speed of the German withdrawal. His eyes were drawn to the north of Holland close by the German border where, if he could get over the Lower Rhine, his British Second Army could wheel eastwards and get behind the German Siegfried Line defences to attack the important industrial area of the Ruhr. The way to Berlin would then be open to him. Operation *Comet* envisaged an airborne drop at Arnhem in the Netherlands or, alternatively, at Wesel just inside Germany, to seize a road bridge over the Rhine. General Miles Dempsey’s British Second Army would then advance up from the Belgian border with XXX Corps, cross the river and drive into Germany. When the commander of the Allied Airborne Army, Lt. Gen. Lewis Brereton, considered the plan, he vetoed any operation near Wesel because of the heavy flak installations along the Dutch–German border. Arnhem, however, seemed a much more realistic target. It was decided that British 1st Airborne Division, with Polish 1st Parachute Brigade under command, would seize the road and rail bridges at Arnhem and capture the airfield of Deelen 16km (ten miles) to the north. The British 52nd Division would then be flown in to help consolidate the area. These forces would hold the lodgement until relieved by XXX Corps driving up from the south.

Operation *Comet* was given the go-ahead by Eisenhower and planned to take place on 7 September. Unfortunately, the weather closed in and made airborne operations impossible. *Comet* was then scheduled to take place the next day, but was again cancelled. By this time, however, German resistance to the advance of British Second Army had increased and Montgomery decided that the airborne landings some 120km (75 miles) ahead of the leading ground troops would be particularly vulnerable. Operation *Comet* was therefore cancelled completely, but the idea of such a spectacular use of airborne forces did not go away. The field marshal now set his planners to



Damaged gliders on Landing Zone S shortly after landing. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF01)

produce a new operation based principally on the concept of *Comet*. Montgomery was then able to submit a considerably enlarged operation involving both British and US airborne divisions to his boss Eisenhower for approval, with the bridges at Arnhem still as its main objective. The new plan, Operation *Market-Garden*, was approved by Eisenhower on 10 September with the start date set for the 17th. The plan consisted of two distinct parts: Operation *Market*, the airborne phase of the battle and Operation *Garden*, the land battle. The plan would have three airborne divisions dropped well ahead of the front line to capture important river and canal crossings whilst British XXX Corps raced forward to meet up with them and then continue its advance into Germany.

CHRONOLOGY

August	German Heeresgruppe B collapses in Normandy and Nazi forces begin to retreat from Northern France.
3 September	Brussels captured by British Second Army.
4 September	British XXX Corps captures the port of Antwerp.
10 September	Operation <i>Market-Garden</i> approved by Gen. Eisenhower.
17 September	Operation <i>Market</i> opens with the first wave of landings by British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem.

17 September	Further airborne landings are made by the US 101st Airborne Division close to Eindhoven, and by US 82nd Airborne Division near Nijmegen.
17 September	Operation <i>Garden</i> gets under way with an advance into the Netherlands by the Guards Armoured Division of British XXX Corps.
17 September	The 2nd Parachute Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. John Frost captures the northern end of the road bridge at Arnhem.
18 September	German opposition at Arnhem prevents reinforcement of the 2nd Parachute Battalion at the Arnhem bridge.
18 September	Second wave of landings at Arnhem are fed piecemeal into the battle to deal with increasing enemy resistance.
18 September	XXX Corps meets up with the US 101st Airborne Division and reaches Eindhoven by nightfall.
19 September	German counter-attacks against the Arnhem bridge prevent any hope of reinforcing Frost's slim hold on the northern end.
19 September	British XXX Corps meets with the US 82nd Division at Grave.
20 September	German infantry backed by armour successfully surrounds the British 1st Airborne Division and forces it into a small pocket at Oosterbeek. Frost's men at the bridge are completely cut off.
20 September	US 82nd Division captures important road bridge at Nijmegen.
21 September	During the early hours the Germans capture northern end of road bridge at Arnhem and eliminate Lt. Col. Frost's battalion.
21 September	Polish 1st Parachute Brigade is landed south of the Lower Rhine near Driel.
21 September	Attempts by XXX Corps to advance between Nijmegen and Arnhem are stopped at Elst.
22 September	Polish lodgement south of the river is attacked by Panzer troops.
22 September	XXX Corps links up with the Polish parachute brigade.
22 September	XXX Corps's highway is cut in the rear at Veghel.
23 September	1st Polish Parachute Brigade makes an unsuccessful attempt during the night to cross over the Lower Rhine to join up with the besieged British airborne force.
24 September	Attempts are made by 4th Dorsets to reinforce the airborne lodgement, but only two companies are able to get over the river.
25 September	The order is given for the 1st Airborne Division to be evacuated across the Lower Rhine during the hours of darkness.
26 September	Battle of Arnhem is over; just 2,398 survivors make it across the river to join up with friendly troops.

OPPOSING COMMANDERS

The main architect of Operation *Market-Garden* was the commander of British 21st Army Group, **Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery**. His forces held the left wing of the Allied advance from France through Belgium and the Netherlands towards the north of Germany, with the Canadian First Army (Lt. Gen. Harry Crerar) clearing the coastal sector and British Second Army (Lt. Gen. Miles Dempsey) on the right flank. At that time in the war Montgomery was the most successful British commander, with a great deal of experience from operations in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and Normandy.

BRITISH COMMANDERS

The British airborne attack on the bridges at Arnhem was just one aspect of Operation *Market*. The other objectives of the operation, the river and canal crossings on the route up to Arnhem along which British XXX Corps would advance, were all part of the American airborne missions. Both British and American forces were part of First Allied Airborne Army commanded by an



Lieutenant-General Frederick Browning, Commander British 1st Airborne Corps. The picture dates from the time when he was still a major-general in command of the airborne division. (IWM, H24128)

American, **Lt. Gen. Lewis Brereton** (1890–1967). His deputy was the British officer **Lt. Gen. Frederick Browning** (1896–1965).

Lieutenant-General ‘Boy’ Browning was also the commander of British 1st Airborne Corps, which contained all forces taking part at Arnhem. Browning was commissioned into the Grenadier Guards in 1914 and saw action during World War I where he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). He was seen by many as the ‘father of British airborne forces’ from his early work with the fledgling British 1st Airborne Division, which he commanded from late 1941. However, modern historians think that this sobriquet belongs to other more energetic and practical commanders, rather than to someone who was so much involved in the politics of command. Browning was a rather ‘prickly’ character who was often at odds with fellow officers and especially with his American allies. Many thought he had gained his position through patronage rather than through talent and combat experience.

British 1st Airborne Corps in *Market-Garden* contained just one airborne division and one airborne brigade – the British 1st Airborne Division, and the Polish 1st Airborne Brigade. Commanding the 1st Airborne Division was **Maj. Gen. Robert ‘Roy’ Urquhart** (1901–88). Urquhart had no experience of airborne operations when he took command of the division in January 1944. His appointment was a surprise to many fellow officers who expected the commander to be appointed from one of the veteran brigadiers within the division. Although lacking airborne experience – Urquhart had not even made a parachute jump – he had seen a good deal of active service whilst in command of 231st Infantry Brigade during amphibious assault landings in both Sicily and Italy in 1943.

Major-General ‘Roy’ Urquhart, Commander British 1st Airborne Division. Urquhart’s elevation to command the division surprised many for he had no previous airborne experience, but he had seen a good deal of action in the Mediterranean in command of an infantry brigade. (IWM, H40947)



The lack of airborne experience by its commander was more than made up for by the division’s three British brigadiers. Commanding 1st Parachute Brigade was **Brig. Gerald Lathbury** (1906–78) who had been with airborne forces since he helped raise, and then take command of, 1st Parachute Battalion in 1941. He was later promoted to brigadier and sent to command the 1st Parachute Brigade in North Africa. He then led his formation during the invasion of Sicily where he was badly wounded and awarded the DSO during the brigade’s epic battle to capture Primosole Bridge. After service in Italy, Lathbury brought his brigade back to England in preparation for the invasion of Europe.

The division’s other parachute brigade, 4th Parachute Brigade, was commanded by **Brig. John Hackett** (1910–97). He helped raise the formation in Egypt in early 1943.

Before then Hackett had served as an infantry officer in pre-war Palestine and with the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force where he was twice mentioned in dispatches. He was wounded in the Syria-Lebanon campaign and then served with the 8th Hussars in North Africa. By then he had been awarded the DSO and had won the Military Cross.

Brigadier Philip Hicks (1895–1967) commanded the third brigade in the division, the 1st Airlanding Brigade. Hicks had seen service in the Great War where he won the Military Cross. During the retreat to Dunkirk in 1940 he was awarded the DSO. Hicks led his brigade during the invasion of Sicily where he was awarded a second DSO.

For the landings at Arnhem a fourth brigade, the Polish 1st Parachute Brigade, came under command of the division. The formation was led by **Maj. Gen. Stanislaw Sosabowski** (1892–1967). During World War I Sosabowski was wounded whilst serving in the Austro-Hungarian Army. After the war and Poland's independence, he served in the Polish Army. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939 he led his 21st Regiment against the Nazis, taking part in the fierce fighting around Warsaw. At the Polish surrender he was made prisoner of war, but soon managed to escape and eventually made his way to France. Working with the exiled Polish government he gathered many other Polish refugees to help form the Polish 4th Infantry Division. His stay in France was not a lengthy one for, after the German attack in 1940, Sosabowski led his men westwards across France and was evacuated to England via La Pallice. During the following three years he raised and trained the Polish 1st Parachute Brigade as an independent unit, which was later assigned to British 1st Airborne Division.

There was also a good deal of airborne experience within the division at battalion level. Probably the most famous airborne commander at that time was **Lt. Col. John Frost** (1912–93). Frost was one of the first officers to join the Parachute Regiment in 1941. By 1942 he had been promoted to major and was selected to lead a special airborne operation against the German radar installation at Bruneval in France (Operation *Biting*, see Raid 15: *The Bruneval Raid* by Ken Ford, Osprey Publishing Ltd.: Oxford 2010). This daring night-time assault brought back important information on the enemy's Würzburg radar system, along with many of its vital components. The raid became the first of the Parachute Regiment's battle honours. By the time Frost went into action at Arnhem, he had also taken part in two other actions which earned celebrated battle honours for the Parachute Regiment, those of Primosole Bridge and Oudna.

The transport, protection and re-supply of the forces that landed at Arnhem were the tasks of the RAF and the USAAF. RAF 38 and 46 Groups from Transport Command provided the troop carriers and glider tugs for 1st



Brigadier Hicks, Commander of 1st Airlanding Brigade, served in France in 1940 as a battalion commander. He took over the airlanding brigade in 1942 and led his formation during the invasion of Sicily. (TS Collection)

Brigadier Gerald Lathbury, Commander British 1st Parachute Brigade. Lathbury was wounded and made prisoner during the battle, but later escaped across the Lower Rhine to the safety of the British lines. (IWM, H40924)





Major-General Stanislaw Sosabowski in conversation with Lt. Gen. Browning. Sosabowski's confrontational style led to many disagreements with British senior commanders and he was harshly criticized, perhaps unfairly, after the Arnhem battle. (TS Collection)

SS-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm Bittrich, Commander II SS-Panzer Korps. Bittrich had seen action in Poland, France, Russia and Normandy before the Arnhem battle. (TS Collection)



Airborne Division. No. 38 Group was commanded by **Air Vice-Marshal Leslie Hollinghurst** (1895–1970), a member of the Royal Flying Corps during World War I. Hollinghurst led from the front and often flew on operations. On 5 June 1944 he took part in the D-Day invasion, flying an Albemarle carrying British paratroops. At Arnhem Hollinghurst was once again in the air, this time flying in a Stirling from which he directed his group during the initial lift. No. 46 Group was commanded by **Air Commodore Lawrence Darvall** (1898–1968), another veteran of the Royal Flying Corps in 1918. Further C-47 troop

transports carrying paratroopers were provided by 52nd Troop Carrier Wing USAAF. The 52nd Wing was commanded by **Brig. Gen. Harold Clark** (1893–1973). Clark was a career airman who had been in army flying since 1917. His formation was previously engaged in North Africa and took part in the invasion of Sicily in 1943 (Operation *Husky*).

GERMAN COMMANDERS

After the German collapse of early September 1944, Hitler reinstated the veteran **GFM Gerd von Rundstedt** (1875–1953) from forced retirement to once again become Oberbefehlshaber West (OB West or Commander-in-Chief West). The post had been held for the previous 18 days by **GFM Walter Model** (1891–1946), who also commanded Heeresgruppe B. Model was pleased to relinquish the responsibility for the direction of the war in the west and could now concentrate his efforts on commanding Heeresgruppe B. His first priority was to stem the great German retreat through Holland. Generalfeldmarschall Model was a career soldier, who had served in both the Reichswehr and the Wehrmacht between the wars and later had achieved spectacular success with his exploits on the Eastern Front. His rapid rise through various commands had brought him to the attention of Hitler who was impressed with his aggressive spirit. In March 1942 he was made *Generalfeldmarschall*, one of the youngest ever in the German Army.

SS-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm Bittrich (1894–1979) commanded II SS-Panzer Korps, the strength of which at the beginning of September had been reduced to just a fraction of its original establishment by the fighting in Normandy. The corps was desperately in need of replenishment of both men and equipment. Generalfeldmarschall Model ordered Bittrich to move his corps to the province of Gelderland in the central eastern part of the Netherlands, to carry out the refit of his two Panzer divisions. By chance this move settled it

right into the area planned for the drop by British 1st Airborne Division near Arnhem. Bittrich was an ardent Nazi and a veteran of the early fighting during the campaigns in Poland and France in 1940. He then served in divisional commands in Russia before taking over II SS-Panzer Korps in Normandy. By September he had realized that the war was lost and began doubting the direction in which Hitler was leading the German Army. He was quite vocal in his dissent and his comments were beginning to be noticed in Berlin.

II SS-Panzer Korps contained two formations, the 9. and 10. SS-Panzer Divisions. The 10. SS-Panzer Division was commanded by **SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel** (1906–2000). Harmel joined the SS in 1935 and at the beginning of the war held the rank of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* in command of a company. He was engaged in most of the campaigns in Europe, including those in France, the Balkans and the Soviet Union. Harmel had the reputation of being a brave and fearless commander, always up near the front with his men. His bravery was confirmed when he was awarded the Tank Destruction Badge for destroying an enemy tank with a hand-held weapon. He ended the war amongst Germany's most decorated soldiers, eventually becoming one of just 159 recipients of the award of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords.

SS-Obersturmbannführer Walter Harzer (1912–82) was in acting command of 9. SS-Panzer Division at the time of the Arnhem battle. He was the division's fourth commander since the Normandy invasion. Harzer had spent much of the war in various staff and combat roles with the division, including action on the Eastern Front and in Normandy. These campaigns brought him in close contact with his corps commander Wilhelm Bittrich.

Commanding the garrison at Arnhem was 49-year-old **Generalmajor Friedrich Kussin** (1895–1944), a veteran of the World War I. His unit, Feldkommandantur 642, was responsible for security and control duties around Arnhem, as well as the defence of the town's bridge. Kussin had spent most of his career in German Army pioneer units before being placed on the reserve list in 1943. In September of that year he was promoted to *Generalmajor* and given the relatively quiet task of looking after a town hundreds of kilometres behind any potential front line. Also in the area of Arnhem was an SS training and replacement unit commanded by **SS-Obersturmbannführer Joseph 'Sepp' Krafft** (1907–86). Krafft was a career SS officer who had fought on the Eastern Front before taking over various training establishments in the occupied countries.



SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel, Commander 10. SS-Panzer Division. Harmel had been a member of the SS since 1935 and prior to the Arnhem battle had seen action in campaigns in France, the Balkans, Russia and Normandy. (Norbert Rosin)

OPPOSING FORCES

During the planning of Operation *Market* it was expected that the landings at Arnhem would be against relatively light enemy forces. One of the main worries was not the strength of German ground forces, but the concentration of flak guns in the area. The delivery of one full airborne division and one parachute brigade, with a proposed later arrival of a full air-transportable infantry division once a suitable airfield had been captured, would require a great deal of protection from the air. By the time of the start of *Market*, the planners were reasonably content that the operation was suitably resourced for both the expected air and ground battles.

BRITISH AND POLISH FORCES

The British 1st Airborne Division was founded as a complete division in October 1941, although elements of the division had been training since 1940 when the first parachute unit was raised. As the fledgling parachute arm took shape, it conducted a series of raids into enemy territory to gain experience in airborne operations.

In February 1941 seven officers and 31 men took part in a raid against the Trigano Aqueduct in Italy. The objective was reached and destroyed, but

A famous staged photograph of airborne troops advancing through Arnhem, taken by the Army Film and Photographic Unit. The picture was quickly sent back to England for the benefit of the press and the public. (TS Collection)



all those taking part were eventually captured. Two more small-scale airborne actions were made in 1942. The first, in February, was on the German radar station at Bruneval in France (Operation *Biting*); the second was a glider-borne attack on the Norwegian hydroelectric power plant at Vemork (Operation *Freshman*).

The 1st Airborne Division then consisted of two brigades: 1st Parachute Brigade and 1st Airlanding Brigade. Brigadier Richard Gale, later to command 6th Airborne Division in Normandy, was the first commander of 1st Parachute Brigade and Brig. George Hopkinson was appointed to lead 1st Airlanding Brigade. Major-General Frederick Browning assumed command of the division after he was promoted to major-general following his move from the command of 24th Guards Brigade.

The division, or more properly parts of the division, was involved in the campaigns in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. In 1944 the division returned to England to make good its losses in the Mediterranean and prepare for the invasion of Europe. It was not chosen for the Normandy campaign – that honour went to Maj. Gen. Gale's unused 6th Airborne Division – but spent the summer training to be ready for the next big drop, wherever that might be.

By the time of the Arnhem operation, the basic composition of British 1st Airborne Division consisted of three brigades: 1st and 4th Parachute Brigades and 1st Airlanding Brigade. Each of these formations contained three battalions of parachute infantry. For *Market-Garden* the division took under its command the Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade, which also contained three battalions.

Airborne troops from 1st Airlanding Light Regiment Royal Artillery man an American 75mm pack howitzer. Its 8,300m (9,000-yard) range enabled it to give support to Lt. Col. Frost and his troops at the Arnhem road bridge from positions within Oosterbeek 6.5km (four miles) away. (TS Collection)



Airborne battalions by necessity carry only light weapons into battle. Heavier support was provided at Arnhem by the 1st Airlanding Light Regiment Royal Artillery, which had been with the airborne division since Italy in 1943. The regiment consisted of three batteries, one to support each of the division's brigades. Each battery had two troops of four guns, giving the regiment a strength of 24 guns. The regiment was armed with the versatile American 75mm pack howitzer, which was capable of being broken down into six main parts. At Arnhem the guns were transported fully assembled in order to bring them into action as soon as they were landed. Each was carried in a Horsa glider together with its towing vehicle and ammunition trailer. The gun's crew was flown in a separate glider along with a jeep and two more ammunition trailers. The 75mm howitzer fired a 15lb (7kg) shell with a range of nearly 8,500m (just over 9,000 yards). It proved to be invaluable in the Arnhem battle. Also present with the division were the 1st and 2nd Airlanding Anti-tank Batteries, which were equipped with not only the standard 6-pdr weapons, but also the powerful 17-pdr gun. This larger gun and its towing vehicle could fit into the giant Hamilcar glider. At Arnhem the airborne division had 52 6-pdr and 16 17-pdr anti-tank weapons.

British 1st Airborne Division was reinforced for the operation by the addition of the Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade under the command of Maj. Gen. Sosabowski. His formation consisted of three parachute battalions: the 1st Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. M. Tonn, 2nd Battalion under Lt. Col. W. Ploszewski and the 3rd Battalion led by Maj. W. Sobocinski. All three battalions were organized along British lines. The brigade was originally formed by the Polish Government in exile, with a view to assisting any Polish uprising against the German occupation. Initially it was independent of British command, but Churchill opposed this autonomous line and convinced the Poles to allow the brigade to be used in the forthcoming invasion of Europe as part of Montgomery's forces. Several operations were planned after D-Day, but all were cancelled. When the Warsaw Uprising took place in August 1944 the Polish Government asked for British support for their besieged countrymen, but this was declined. With the arrival of the

Market-Garden operation, it was decided that the Polish paratroopers should at last see action. The brigade would land as part of the 'follow-up' waves after the bridges at Arnhem were captured.

Also planned to arrive as further reinforcements to the bridgehead was the British 52nd (Lowland) Division. It would be flown into Deelen airfield, 16km (ten miles) north of Arnhem, once the airfield had been captured by airborne forces. The Lowland Division had originally taken part in the British retreat from France in 1940. Once back in England it was trained as a mountain

This 17-pdr anti-tank gun is a veteran of the battle. It shows signs of the damage to its shield from enemy action. The gun is now on display outside the Hartenstein Hotel in Oosterbeek. (TS Collection)





division. Unfortunately, after two years of rigorous training in mountain warfare, it was decided that the division should be re-organized and trained in air-landing operations. It was then placed under command of the First Allied Airborne Army. By that time, because of the chronic shortage of reinforcements available to Britain, it was the only unused operational formation left in the United Kingdom.

The men of the Glider Pilot Regiment crewed the gliders that carried the division into Arnhem. They belonged to a special group of volunteers who were trained as pilots and co-pilots and then operated as infantry after landing. The regiment was often referred to as the 'NCO Regiment' as each of the pilots held the rank of sergeant. The regiment had the usual complement of officers found in an infantry battalion, although the regiment was later organized along air force lines into wings, squadrons and flights. All men were trained and were proficient in the operation of the various light weapons used by the airborne division. Once landed and the lodgement was secured, the glider pilots were to be pulled out of battle and returned to the UK. They were much too valuable an asset to be used merely as infantry.

Two RAF groups, 38 and 46 Groups, carried most of the division to Arnhem. No. 38 Group consisted of a mixture of aircraft types used as tugs and paratroop carriers. Modified bomber aircraft were used, with the Stirling being the most numerous. Albemarle and Halifaxes were also used by 38 Group. No. 46 Group used exclusively Dakota transports (American C-47s) as tug aircraft and paratroop carriers. Further contribution to the air armada at Arnhem was provided by the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing USAAF. The

Halifax bomber aircraft towing a Hamilcar glider. These heavy gliders were mainly used for carrying the large 17-pdr anti-tank guns during Operation Market. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF 007)

The crew of a 3in mortar operates its weapon from the security of a deep pit situated within the besieged airborne perimeter at Oosterbeek. (TS Collection)



61st, 314th and 315th Troop Carrier Groups, equipped with C-47 and C-53 transport aircraft, also carried British and Polish parachute troops on the initial first lift and the two subsequent follow-up lifts into Arnhem.

Although Allied air forces had mastery of the skies at that time, there was still some chance of opposition to the airborne armada from the Luftwaffe and of course great danger from enemy flak. The flight paths from England to Arnhem crossed many areas known to have great concentrations of German anti-aircraft guns; even the area close to Arnhem itself was a flak hotspot. To protect the vast sky trains of transport aircraft, fighter protection was provided by the aircraft of the RAF and USAAF. RAF Second Tactical Air Force and the USAAF Ninth Air Force were deployed to shepherd the transport aircraft carrying of troops to Arnhem, whilst RAF Bomber Command and the USAAF Eighth Air Force were employed to attack enemy airfields and flak installations prior to the start of the action.

BRITISH AND POLISH ORDER OF BATTLE

21ST ARMY GROUP

British Second Army

First Allied Airborne Army

British 1st Airborne Corps
 British 1st Airborne Division
 1st Airlanding Light Regt RA
 21st Independent Para Coy
 1st Airborne Recce Sqn
 1st Airborne Div Sigs
 1st Parachute Brigade
 1st Para Battalion
 2nd Para Battalion
 3rd Para Battalion
 1st Airlanding Brigade
 1st Border Regiment
 7th King's Own Scottish Borderers
 2nd South Staffordshires
 4th Parachute Brigade
 10th Para Battalion
 11th Para Battalion
 156th Para Battalion
 Polish 1st Independent Para Brigade
 Polish 1st Para Battalion
 Polish 2nd Para Battalion
 Polish 3rd Para Battalion

FIELD MARSHAL BERNARD MONTGOMERY

Gen. Sir Miles Dempsey

Lt. Gen. Lewis Brereton

Lt. Gen. Frederick Browning
 Maj. Gen. Robert Urquhart
 Lt. Col. W. Thompson
 Maj. B. Wilson
 Maj. C. Gough
 Lt. Col. T. Stephenson
 Brig. Gerald Lathbury
 Lt. Col. David Dobie
 Lt. Col. John Frost
 Lt. Col. John Fitch
 Brig. Philip Hicks
 Lt. Col. Thomas Hadden
 Lt. Col. Robert Payton-Reid
 Lt. Col. W. McCardie
 Brig. John Hackett
 Lt. Col. Kenneth Smyth
 Lt. Col. George Lea
 Lt. Col. Sir Richard des Voeux
 Maj. Gen. Stanislaw Sosabowski
 Lt. Col. M. Tonn
 Lt. Col. Ploszewski
 Maj. Sobocinski

GERMAN FORCES

In the weeks leading up to Operation *Market-Garden*, the German Army in the Netherlands was in complete disorder. On 4 September, when the go-ahead was given for Operation *Comet*, many combat formations that had

been in action in France and Belgium were streaming back through Holland. A few were being withdrawn all the way into Germany for refit. The collapse of German forces in the west suddenly made the security of the Netherlands a priority. Generalfeldmarschall Model at the headquarters of Heeresgruppe B was confronted with two main tasks: first to halt the inexorable advance of the British and Americans and second to rebuild his battered forces before the Allies reached the Rhine.

Previously the fall of the great port at Antwerp in Belgium had prompted Hitler to send Gen. Student and the headquarters of 1. Fallschirmjäger Armee to the Dutch–Belgian border to organize a defence of the Netherlands. Hastily formed lines were established using existing static units together with those troops withdrawing in the face of the advancing Allies. In front of Lt. Gen. Dempsey's British Second Army, along the Meuse–Escaut Canal and northwards towards the sea, Student gathered ad hoc formations from Luftwaffe training units and elsewhere to provide some resistance to the Allied advance. He was assisted by the commander of German 85. Infanterie-Division, GenLt. Kurt Chill.

Generalleutnant Chill had previously been ordered to gather the survivors of his division in the Rhineland area just inside Germany for reorganization. However, when he arrived on the Belgian–Dutch border he was alarmed by the chaotic situation and decided, on his own initiative, to gather all the German personnel that were streaming back to safety at rallying points along the Albert Canal. Chill managed to take hold of all manner of men from Kriegsmarine, Luftwaffe and military government personnel, as well as troops from a variety of Wehrmacht formations. With these stragglers he formed some sort of defensive line against the British. These hastily assembled troops managed to stop the rout and slow down the Allied advance.

Over the next two weeks Gen. Student began to receive more of his own parachute troops in the southern part of Holland to strengthen his 1. Fallschirmjäger Armee. This extraordinary turnaround was noted by Allied



German prisoners captured by airborne troops during the battle. The tennis courts at 1st Airborne Division Headquarters at the Hartenstein Hotel served as a POW cage. (TS Collection)

Headquarters. An American report described this notable change of events: 'The degree of control exercised over the regrouping and collecting of apparently scattered remnants of a beaten army was little short of remarkable.' The collapse of the Germans in the Low Countries had begun to stabilize and the open roads envisaged in Montgomery's original plan for Operation *Comet* and then *Market-Garden* were starting to close.

At Arnhem the situation was a little quieter. The German troops stationed in and around the town and in the local countryside were there either in an occupational role or in training establishments. Garrisoning the town of Arnhem itself was Feldkommandantur 642, commanded by GenMaj. Friedrich Kussin. He had few troops under his command, just sufficient to ensure the security of the town. Based nearby was an independent training and replacement unit, the SS-Panzer Grenadier Ausbildungs und Ersatz Bataillon 16. It was commanded by SS-Obersturmbannführer Joseph 'Sepp' Krafft and consisted of 13 officers, 73 NCOs and 349 other ranks, many of whom were still training and not yet fit for action. The battalion was organized into two infantry companies and one heavy weapons company. It was located at Oosterbeek, just a few kilometres east of Arnhem, close by the actual landing grounds chosen for the first wave of the British airborne division. Krafft's battalion had originally been based near the coast, but had been shifted to the Arnhem area as part of a battle group (*Kampfgruppe*) under the command of GenLt. Hans von Tettau. Tettau had brought together a mixture of defence and training battalions throughout Holland to establish a co-ordinated opposition wherever it might be needed. Once the battle began, more and more disparate units were taken under command until

German troops moving cautiously through Oosterbeek. The picture is thought to be of some SS men from Krafft's training battalion. (TS Collection)



Tettau's *Kampfgruppe* virtually approached divisional status. Krafft's troops arrived at Oosterbeek just five days before the landings and were to prove to be one of the main reasons that 1st Airborne Division was unable to achieve its main objective.

Another enemy unit close at hand was the SS-Unteroffizierschule 'Arnheim'. This unit was responsible for training Waffen-SS NCOs. Its men had combat experience from various theatres and had spent at least a year in the front line. The unit comprised two companies of three infantry platoons and a heavy weapons platoon. A few 20mm cannons provided heavy firepower. Its instructors were high-quality hardened veterans as was the unit's commander, SS-Standartenführer Michael Lippert. He had previously served with distinction in Russia. The NCO school was based at Arnhem and used the surrounding areas as a training ground. With the rapidity of the Allied advance in early September, SS-Unteroffizierschule 'Arnheim' was moved to the river Waal, some 80km (50 miles) from Arnhem as part of Tettau's *Kampfgruppe*, able to be introduced into battle as and when it was required.

The plan for British 1st Airborne Division's attack at Arnhem was struck with bad luck from the moment of its inception. One of the most unfortunate incidents to befall the division happened prior to its arrival. II SS-Panzer Korps, commanded by SS-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm Bittrich, had been in almost constant action since arriving in Normandy in July. Its two armoured formations, the 9. SS-Panzer Division 'Hohenstaufen' commanded by SS-Obersturmbannführer Walter Harzer and the 10. SS-Panzer Division 'Frunderberg' commanded by SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel, had been severely mauled by continual battle and, by early September, were down to just 25 per cent of their strength. They both needed rest, refit and replenishment. Generalfeldmarschall Model decided to pull them out of the line and send them to the rear close to the German border in central Holland. He directed that both divisions should be serviced in the quiet countryside around Arnhem, but a few days later decided that Harzer's 9. SS-Panzer Division should hand over all of its heavy weapons, including tanks, to Harmel's division and then move to Siegen in Germany for complete refit. This left one battle-hardened SS armoured division in the area selected for the British airborne attack. To make this twist of fate even more ominous, the field marshal decided that he would also move his Heeresgruppe B Headquarters to Arnhem and took up residence in the Tafelberg Hotel in Oosterbeek, just 8km (five miles) from the bridges at Arnhem.

GERMAN ORDER OF BATTLE

HEERESGRUPPE B

II SS-Panzer Korps

9. SS-Panzer Division 'Hohenstaufen'

10. SS-Panzer Division 'Frunderberg'

Kampfgruppe von Tettau

SS-Panzer Grenadier Ausbildungs und Ersatz Bataillon 16

SS-Unteroffizierschule 'Arnheim'

Feldkommandantur 642

GENERalfeldmarschall MODEL

SS-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm Bittrich

SS-Obersturmbannführer Walter Harzer

SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel

GenLt. Hans von Tettau

SS-Obersturmbannführer Joseph 'Sepp' Krafft

SS-Standartenführer Michael Lippert

GenMaj. Friedrich Kussin

OPPOSING PLANS

Once Eisenhower had given the green light to Operation *Market-Garden* on 10 September, Montgomery's planners could get to work modifying and enlarging the *Comet* plan. The new operation involved a much larger force of both US and British formations, which brought extra problems. Both the air component and the number of airborne forces involved in the battle had more than doubled.

ALLIED PLANS

The enlarged version of *Comet* would now include two US airborne divisions along with the British airborne and the armoured strength of British XXX Corps. The new plan, Operation *Market-Garden*, was both vast in its scope and breathtaking in its audacity. Arnhem would still be its main objective – it was imperative to capture the road, rail and pontoon bridges over the Lower Rhine and establish a lodgement north of the river – this time, however, the airborne troops at Arnhem would have more chance of holding the bridgehead until the ground forces of XXX Corps joined up with them. The new arrangements called for US airborne troops to seize a route of captured ground over which the armour of XXX Corps could move forwards. All the major bridges along the advance would be taken by US parachute and glider-borne troops and held until they were reached by ground troops. The operation, if successful, would push the front line 120km (75 miles) forward at a stroke and put Allied troops in a position to veer eastwards onto the great German manufacturing base of the Ruhr and northwards towards the Zuider Zee.

Operation *Market-Garden* was in fact two separate, mutually supporting, operations; *Market* was the plan to drop British and American airborne troops and *Garden* was the armoured drive by XXX Corps to meet up with these troops and relieve the lodgement at Arnhem.

British XXX Corps, commanded by Lt. Gen. Brian Horrocks, was the lead formation of British Second Army. On 11 September when the plan was agreed, XXX Corps had reached the Dutch–Belgian border amid increasing enemy resistance to its advance. The start line for the *Garden* battle was a small lodgement over the Meuse–Escaut canal, 21km (13 miles) south of Eindhoven. The attack would begin with a heavy barrage laid down by artillery fire and fighter-bomber attacks. Close behind the rolling barrage the Guards Armoured Division would advance northwards along a single road

that led to Arnhem through the major towns of Eindhoven, Veghel, Grave and Nijmegen. The crossing points over various canals and the major bridges over the Maas and Waal rivers would by then have been captured by the Americans. The start time for the advance coincided with the arrival of the first waves of airborne forces over their target.

XXX Corps's move up to British 1st Airborne Division was along a single highway that led straight to Arnhem. This direct route was without any possibility of using alternative parallel routes. To protect the flanks of the advance, British VIII and XII Corps would also attack either side of XXX Corps, after the battle had begun.

The American objectives for Operation *Market* were to capture the key locations along XXX Corps's route and to hold the road open until relieved by ground troops. Two US formations were allocated to these tasks. The division closest to XXX Corps's start line was Maj. Gen. Maxwell Taylor's US 101st Airborne Division, with the task of capturing the canal and river crossings between Eindhoven and Veghel. To the north was Brig. Gen. James Gavin's US 82nd Airborne Division, the responsibility of which was the area between Grave and Nijmegen and the capture of the bridges across the formidable Maas and Waal rivers. (See Campaign 270: *Operation Market-Garden* (1) by Steven J. Zaloga, Osprey Publishing Ltd.: Oxford, 2014.)

The task given to Maj. Gen. Urquhart's British 1st Airborne Division was the most difficult of all. Maps and aerial reconnaissance photographs showed that there were very few suitable sites for glider and paratroop landings close to Arnhem. Ideally, the town's road and rail bridges would best be captured by landings close to the sites in a *coup de main* operation such as that carried out at Pegasus Bridge in Normandy. Unfortunately, the town sides of both bridges were in built-up areas and the far sides of the bridges were backed by soft marshy ground, which was apparently unsuitable for glider landings. Arnhem itself was also the site of good anti-aircraft defences as it was under



The ground chosen for glider landings was flat farmland, perfect for the task. Here gliders litter the ground of Landing Zone Z. The railway line from Amsterdam to Arnhem runs across the top of the picture with Landing Zone S beyond. (IWM, CL1172)

one of the main flight paths used by Allied bomber forces on their way to attack northern Germany. Airborne drops close to Arnhem would have to land in the face of a high number of anti-aircraft guns. It was therefore decided that the main landings would take place to the west of the town. The sites chosen for the landing and drop zones were located in the vicinity of the village of Wolfheze, some 6.5km (four miles) north-west of Arnhem. The area contained a broad expanse of flat heathland perfect for gliders and parachute landings. The individual drop and landing zones covered a vast area, the nearest to Arnhem being 9.5km (six miles) from the town and the farthest 13km (eight miles) from the road bridge.

Major-General Urquhart chose these sites with some reservations. The distance between the drop zones and the target would mean a loss of surprise when the leading troops attacked the bridge; after all it was impossible to hide thousands of men and gliders landing some 9.5km away. The delays between arrival and attack could also lead to increased German opposition for the enemy would be quick to realize that the object of the landings was to capture the bridges across the Lower Rhine.

The landings were to be made in daylight. There was some discussion about whether or not this was a good idea. A daylight attack would be likely to lead to more casualties to transport aircraft from the heavy flak around the target and along the low-level flight paths that led to the drop zones. A night attack might prevent some of these casualties, but could lead to a more scattered and ineffectual drop by paratroops and gliders, as was witnessed during the Normandy invasion. On balance it was decided that the attack would take place during daylight hours.

Another question that concerned the planners was which of two routes should be taken to Arnhem. The most direct, northerly, route crossed less enemy-held territory, but passed over the Scheldt–Maas estuary on the coast where the aircraft would be subject to the fire of flak barges and coastal flak



Aerial view of the Lower Rhine at Arnhem. The German pontoon bridge can be seen in the upper centre of the picture; the road bridge is some 400m (440 yards) upstream to the left. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF005)

batteries. The other, southern, route would take the air convoy over more enemy territory and the concentrated flak batteries to the south of Eindhoven along one of the main Allied bomber routes into Germany. After much deliberation it was decided that the northern route would be chosen for the British air convoy.

There was also another major problem, this time concerning the scale of the initial attack. A shortage of tow and transport aircraft meant that the division could not be carried in a single wave. Demand for troop carriers, gliders and tow aircraft was high. *Market-Garden* differed from Operation *Comet* by having three airborne divisions landing at the same time and there were just not enough aircraft to go around. As a consequence the strength of all three airborne attacks had to be cut back from the original plan. Far from landing all three complete divisions together, only part of each division could be flown in on the initial airlift. It was now expected to take three days, weather permitting, for the entire force of British and Polish airborne troops and equipment to be airlifted to their objectives at Arnhem. General Urquhart was unhappy about this arrangement, but air force commanders insisted that aircrews could fly only one transport sortie a day. They would not allow their planes to be re-fuelled and dispatched back to Holland on the same day, quoting the need for spot maintenance, repair of battle damage and the need for rest for the crews between missions. Urquhart would therefore have to prioritize each successive wave of landings to fit in with his plan of attack.

The first wave of landings on D-Day would be made by two brigades. Brigadier Hicks' 1st Airlanding Brigade would land the main body of his force in gliders on Landing Zone S to the north of the Arnhem–Amsterdam railway and Landing Zone Z to the south of the railway, whilst the paratroops of Brig. Lathbury's 1st Parachute Brigade would come down on Drop Zone X also to the south of the railway. The airlanding brigade would then hold the drop zones whilst the parachute brigade made its dash for the road and rail bridges, with the concrete and steel road bridge being the main objective. Leading the race for the road bridge would be the four troops of Maj. Gough's 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron. Gough's unit was charged with the task of reaching the road bridge in quick time and holding it in a *coup de main* attack until the remainder of the brigade arrived. The reconnaissance squadron was to travel in jeeps mounted with machine guns and on motorcycles. It would set off just as soon as it had landed and gathered itself together.

The advance to the bridges by 1st Parachute Brigade would be made along three main routes. The northern route close to the railway was 'Leopard' Route and would be taken by the 1st Parachute Battalion, but would not start until the other two battalions were well on the way

A modern view of Drop Zone X. Although almost 11km (seven miles) from the road bridge, it was a perfect location for trouble-free parachute landings. (TS Collection)



with their tasks. In the middle, the 3rd Battalion would take the direct route into Arnhem along the Utrechtseweg (the Utrecht Road) labelled 'Tiger' Route. This battalion would be the first to the road bridge. The southern route, which skirted the Lower Rhine, 'Lion' Route, was to be taken by the 2nd Battalion. On its way to the road bridge it would seize the rail bridge near Oosterbeek and a pontoon bridge close to the centre of the town.

With the landing and drop zones held by the glider force, a second wave of landings would take place the next day on D+1. Brigadier Hackett's 4th Parachute Brigade and the remainder of Hicks' airlanding brigade would arrive together on Drop Zones Y and Z to enlarge the lodgement. On the third day, D+2, Maj. Gen. Sosabowski's Polish Brigade would land south of the river on Drop Zone K. By that time the bridges would have been captured and the anti-aircraft guns surrounding the town eliminated. The division would then be in total control and holding a defended perimeter around Arnhem. On this day, or the next, ground troops of British XXX Corps would have driven up from the south to relieve the besieged troops in the bridgehead. Then the airfield at Deelen would be captured and the 52nd Division flown in to enlarge and strengthen the lodgement further. This would put British Second Army in a position to wheel right and descend into Germany and capture the Ruhr.

No one doubted that the operation as planned was risky. The feeling at British 1st Airborne Corps was apprehensive but positive, as was later recalled by those who were present: 'The flight and landings we knew would be hazardous; the capture of the bridge objectives was more a matter of surprise and confusion than hard fighting; the advance of the ground forces would be swift if the airborne operations were successful and that, in the circumstances, the considerable dispersion of the airborne forces was acceptable.'

GERMAN PLANS

In September 1944 the German Army in Western Europe had but one plan and that was to resist the Allied Army from gaining any more territory. Its war was now a defensive war, able only to react to Allied attacks wherever they came from. In Holland that autumn, Hitler and his commanders were trying to decide where the next blow would fall.

The presence of British Second Army on the Belgian–Dutch border had provoked a reorganization of German forces in Holland. General Student's 1. Fallschirmjäger Armee was gradually being reinforced by Luftwaffe units from Germany and was systematically laying out defensive perimeters and stop lines to block the British advance. It was assisted by Kampfgruppe Chill, which was strung out along the Albert and Meuse–Escaut canals. More troops were available from Armed Forces Command Netherlands under the leadership of a Luftwaffe officer, General der Flieger Friedrich Christiansen. This command consisted of men involved throughout the country in administration and occupational duties, such as guarding military installations, railways, supply dumps and roads. All of these bodies had a role to play in the coming battles to hold on to Reich territory. General Student was charged with defending the southern part of the Netherlands whilst Christiansen held the territory to the north, even though he had by then relinquished most of the forces he originally held for the defence of the country.

As the Allies approached northern Germany they came closer to Wehrkreis VI, the military district based at Münster, which covered the provinces of Westphalia, the Rhineland and parts of Belgium. This military district was responsible for training replacements, organizing new units and channelling *matériel* to divisions. By the autumn of 1944 it had been robbed of most of its training units to reinforce other formations, but it did have its administrative element intact and was located just across the Dutch–German border within striking distance of Arnhem.

The Germans knew that the British were massing for an attack in the south of Holland, for their intelligence reported a constant stream of reinforcements concentrating behind the right wing of Second Army. Model's headquarters issued daily bulletins warning of an imminent attack to be launched in the direction of Nijmegen, Arnhem and Wesel, with the objective being the area of the Ruhr. The Germans also knew that the Allies had an airborne reserve, which would soon be used against them. There was some dispute amongst the high command at OB West about where it would be committed. Von Rundstedt was convinced it would be dropped east of the Rhine as the Allies approached the river; Generaloberst Jodl, head of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff, expected it to be dropped in the northern part of Holland or even Denmark. No one in high command suggested airborne landings would be made in the centre of the Netherlands.

Generalfeldmarschall Model had a slightly different view. On 11 September he received a report that the Allies were assembling landing craft in British ports and reasoned that they were preparing for a seaborne invasion of Holland. A week later this assumption was reinforced when further reports cited significant active air and sea reconnaissance off the Dutch coast. Model felt that the Allied airborne reserve would be dropped in conjunction with a seaborne invasion of the Netherlands. He immediately ordered Gen. Christiansen to defend the coast with all forces at his disposal. He also ordered that a mobile force be formed capable of moving against any Allied attack, using men from various units and those of II SS-Panzer Korps that had recently moved into the Arnhem area.

Although there was not any armour located in Arnhem itself, the presence of the II SS-Panzer Korps' tanks just 24km (15 miles) away meant that they could be sent against the airborne division at short notice. This PzKpfw IV was knocked out near the road bridge. (TS Collection)



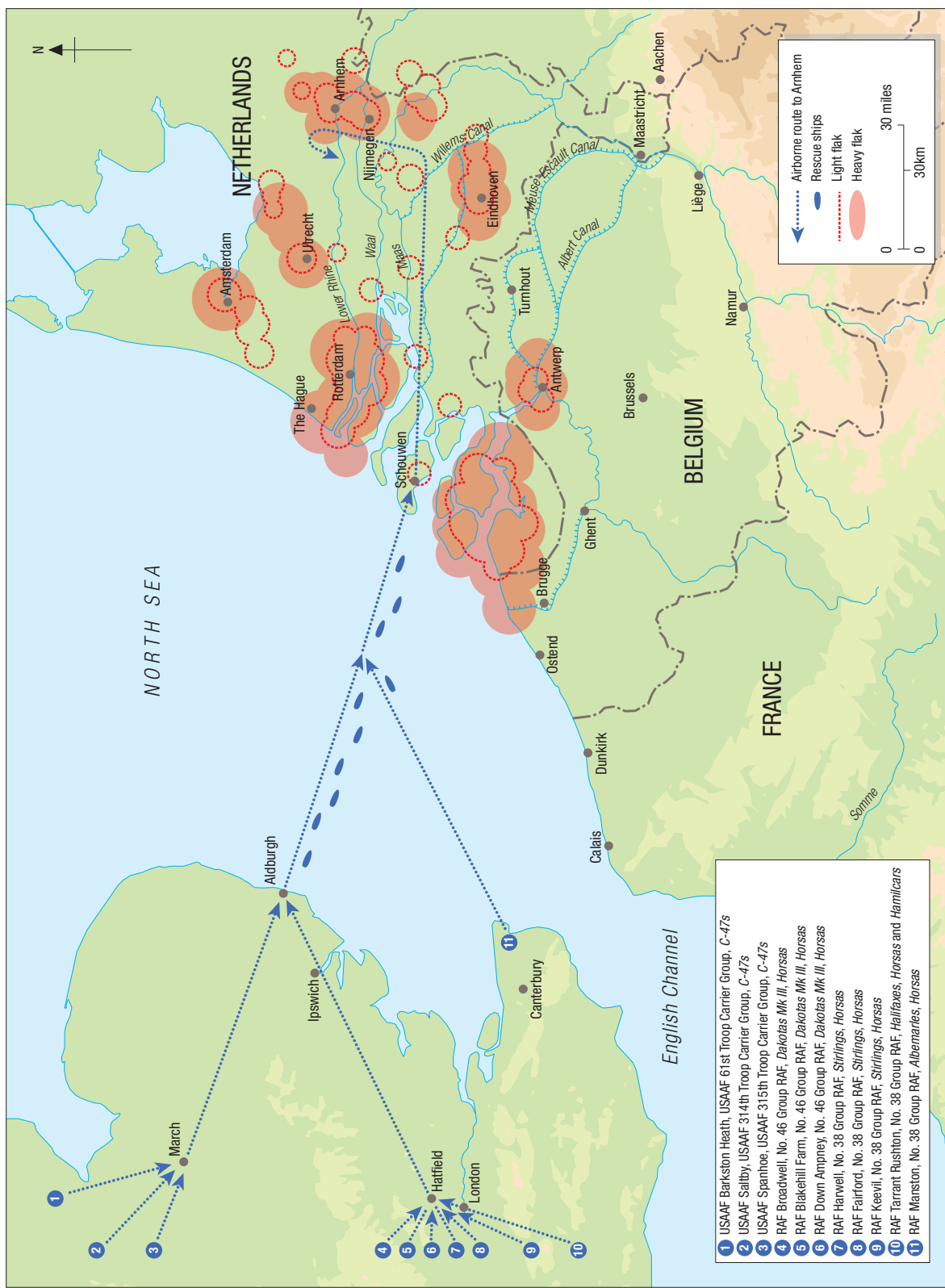
THE CAMPAIGN

A Stirling bomber towing a
Horsa glider of the type used at
Arnhem. (Museum of Army
Flying, MAF018)

D-Day for Operation *Market-Garden* was 17 September 1944; H-Hour was 1300hrs. By good fortune, the day dawned bright and beautiful: a perfect early autumn day with few clouds and brilliant sunshine. Even before the first rays of light began to chase away the darkness, the sky above airfields all over southern and eastern England was filled with the roar of aircraft engines as over 1,400 bombers set out to attack German airfields and flak positions in the Low Countries. Throughout the day more and more other aircraft lifted off; troop transports, glider tugs, fighters and fighter-bombers, all heading east, marshalled together into great air fleets. The mightiest airborne force the world had ever known began moving inexorably towards its targets.



The first lift to Arnhem



The numbers of aircraft involved in the whole operation were staggering. First came the bombing of enemy fighter airfields and anti-aircraft positions by RAF Bomber Command and USAAF Eighth Air Force in which 435 British and 983 American aircraft took part – only two Lancasters, two B-17s and three other aircraft were lost in the missions. Next, 1,131 Allied fighters became airborne to protect the glider and transport fleet. The northern route was shielded by 371 Tempest, Spitfire and Mosquito planes from the RAF. The southern route was protected by USAAF aircraft, which included 548 P-47, P-38 and P-51 types provided by US Eighth Air Force and 212 various aircraft from US Ninth Air Force.

Before the main force of airborne troops took off, 12 British Stirlings and six American C-47 transports went on ahead carrying Pathfinder teams to Arnhem to mark the landing zones. They arrived just 20 minutes before the main landings to drop their troops on deserted fields. Following behind, lifting off from 24 English airfields, the great air armada carrying *Market-Garden's* airborne troops took to the sky in a fleet of 1,545 transport planes and 478 gliders.

The first lift, containing 5,700 troops of British 1st Airborne Division, was carried in 332 RAF aircraft, 143 American aircraft and 320 gliders. This initial wave brought the divisional headquarters, advance parties of 4th Parachute Brigade, virtually all of 1st Parachute and 1st Airlanding Brigades, the 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron and around 60 per cent of the division's artillery and engineer battalions.

THE FIRST WAVE

The first of the main force to arrive in the fields to the west of Arnhem was Maj. Wilson's 21st Independent Parachute Company. It landed safely on its allocated drop zones at 1240hrs. Its men then quickly marked out Drop Zone X and Landing Zones S and Z for the incoming gliders and paratroops. They set up their 'Eureka' transmitting beacons, which immediately began sending out the appropriate code for each zone to the north and south of the Amsterdam–Arnhem railway line. Large white 'T'-shaped panels were laid to indicate wind direction. Just before the main force arrived, smoke canisters were also lit to gauge the wind direction and speed. Other members of Pathfinder platoons took up defensive positions to guard all the activity. There was very little opposition to this advance guard of paratroopers. The Germans were taken completely by surprise even though bombers had been attacking targets in the surrounding area since shortly after dawn.

Nineteen minutes after the first of the Pathfinders touched down, the leading gliders carrying the airlanding brigade swooped earthwards from the south-west onto their assigned landing zones. Soon the air seemed full of Horsa and Hamilcar gliders, each vying for an open stretch on the increasingly busy landing fields. Every glider carried determined men eager to set about their tasks. The process of unloading precious loads progressed as though the whole event was a training exercise; anti-tank guns were unloaded, ammunition wagons hauled onto the ground, jeeps were gently guided down steel ramps whilst men waited patiently to clamber aboard. Across the whole of the landing zone hundreds of infantrymen burst through the sliding doors of the Horsas onto the enemy-held ground. Each man was eager to reach the



rendezvous points for his particular company whilst all the time looking to avoid incoming gliders. The landings were remarkably successful, but not without casualties. Some gliders crashed into others, a few tipped over. In a few the sudden braking as the glider's nose pushed into the soft ground wrenched free heavy loads, crushing those at the front of the aircraft. In total 11 glider pilots died during this first wave of landings, but 283 of the 320 gliders that had left England landed successfully on or close to their targets. A few gliders landed in the sea, others came down amongst the enemy.

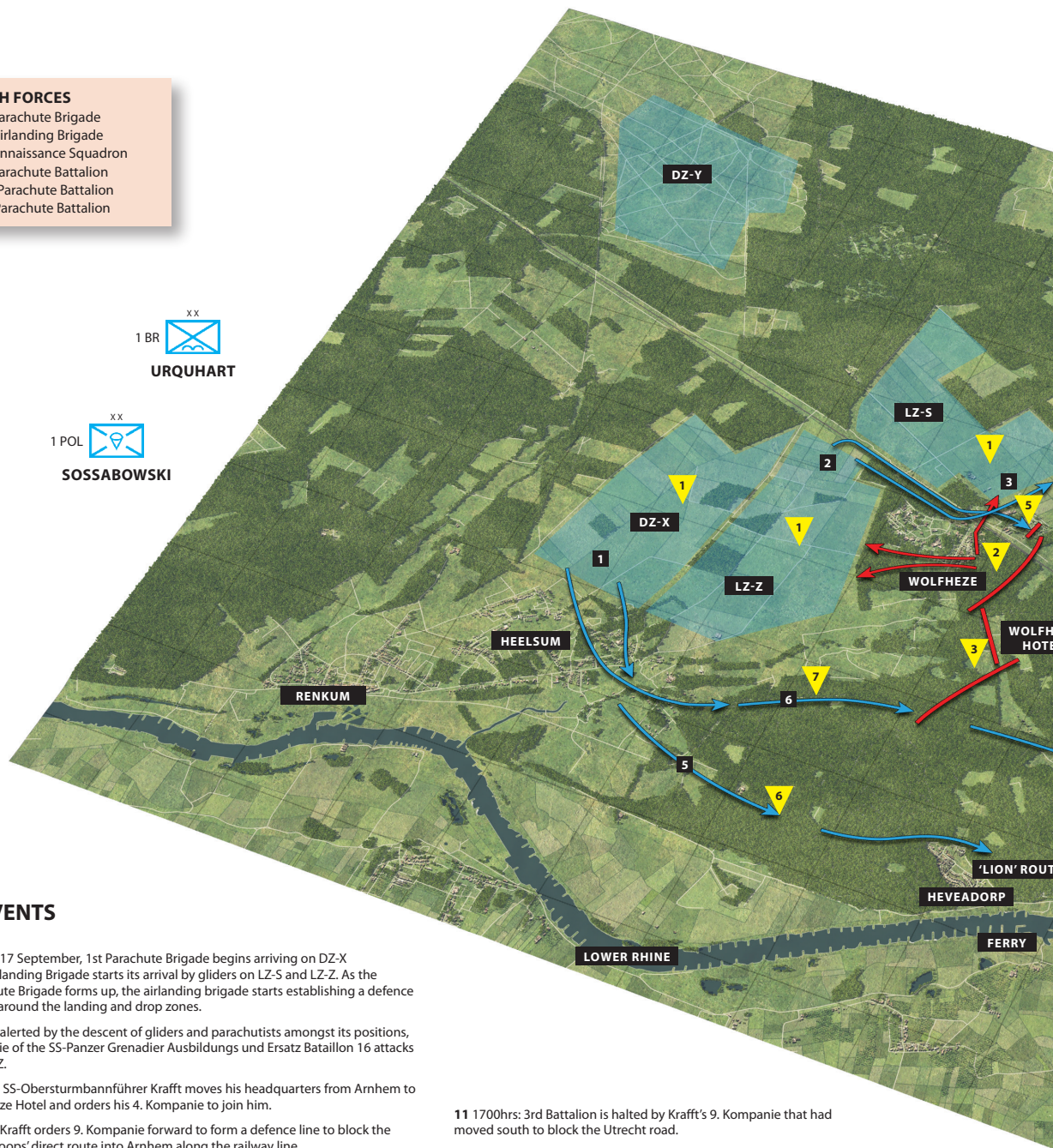
Drop Zone X, used by the paratroopers, was to the west of the gliders' Landing Zone Z. It was an elongated stretch of heathland, 3km (two miles) long by 1.5km (one mile) wide. Forty minutes after the gliders had landed, the first C-47s bringing the 1st Parachute Brigade came in low over the target at only 180m (600ft), dropping their sticks of paratroopers with precision just as they had done many times previously in England. Watching the arrival with some satisfaction was Maj. Gen. Urquhart, who had landed earlier in a glider.

Also watching the descent from his headquarters at the Tafelberg Hotel in Oosterbeek was GFM Model. He was just about to sit down to lunch at 1300hrs, when he was alarmed by low-flying aircraft. When parachutes eventually began descending in the distance Model felt sure that the British were coming for him; a raid, he thought, to snatch him and his headquarters. Model and his staff gathered up what they could and made a dash away from the landings towards the headquarters of II SS-Panzer Korps at Doetinchem, 40km (25 miles) east of Arnhem.

USAAF C-47 transport aircraft flying low in formation prior to dropping paratroops into the Netherlands during Operation Market. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF012)

BRITISH FORCES

- 1 1st Parachute Brigade
- 2 1st Airlanding Brigade
- 3 Reconnaissance Squadron
- 4 1st Parachute Battalion
- 5 2nd Parachute Battalion
- 6 3rd Parachute Battalion



EVENTS

1 1300hrs: 17 September, 1st Parachute Brigade begins arriving on DZ-X and 1st Airlanding Brigade starts its arrival by gliders on LZ-S and LZ-Z. As the 1st Parachute Brigade forms up, the airlanding brigade starts establishing a defence perimeter around the landing and drop zones.

2 1340hrs: alerted by the descent of gliders and parachutists amongst its positions, 2. Kompanie of the SS-Panzer Grenadier Ausbildungs und Ersatz Bataillon 16 attacks LZs-S and Z.

3 1400hrs: SS-Obersturmbannführer Krafft moves his headquarters from Arnhem to the Wolfheze Hotel and orders his 4. Kompanie to join him.

4 1415hrs: Krafft orders 9. Kompanie forward to form a defence line to block the airborne troops' direct route into Arnhem along the railway line.

5 1500hrs: the *coup de main* party from the Reconnaissance Squadron moves from the landing zone towards the road bridge but is stopped by Krafft's troops near the railway line.

6 1500hrs: 2nd Battalion moves off the landing grounds towards the Arnhem bridge along 'Lion' Route.

7 1500hrs: 3rd Battalion moves out along 'Tiger' Route.

8 1530hrs: 1st Battalion starts its advance, not along 'Leopard' Route as planned, but moves directly north to pick up the Amsterdam road. It is eventually stopped by enemy resistance in the wooded area.

9 1600hrs: advance guard of 9. SS-Panzer Division arrives along the Amsterdam road.

10 1630hrs: Luftwaffe troops from Deelen airfield block 1st Battalion's advance.

11 1700hrs: 3rd Battalion is halted by Krafft's 9. Kompanie that had moved south to block the Utrecht road.

12 1700hrs: 2nd Battalion arrives near the rail bridge and dispatches C Company to capture the structure. It is blown by the enemy before it is reached.

13 1800hrs: more troops from 9. SS-Panzer Division collect with all available local troops to block access to Arnhem along the centre route into the town.

14 2000hrs: Lt. Col. Frost's 2nd Battalion makes it to the road bridge.

15 2000hrs: Kampfgruppe Spindler establishes a strong defence line barring all northern routes into the town.

16 Nightfall, unable to make any further significant advance along 'Tiger' Route, 3rd Battalion rests for the night in the area around the Hartenstein Hotel.

17 In the face of heavy resistance, 1st Battalion continues moving through the night to try to reach the Utrecht road, abandoning its attempt to move along the northern route.

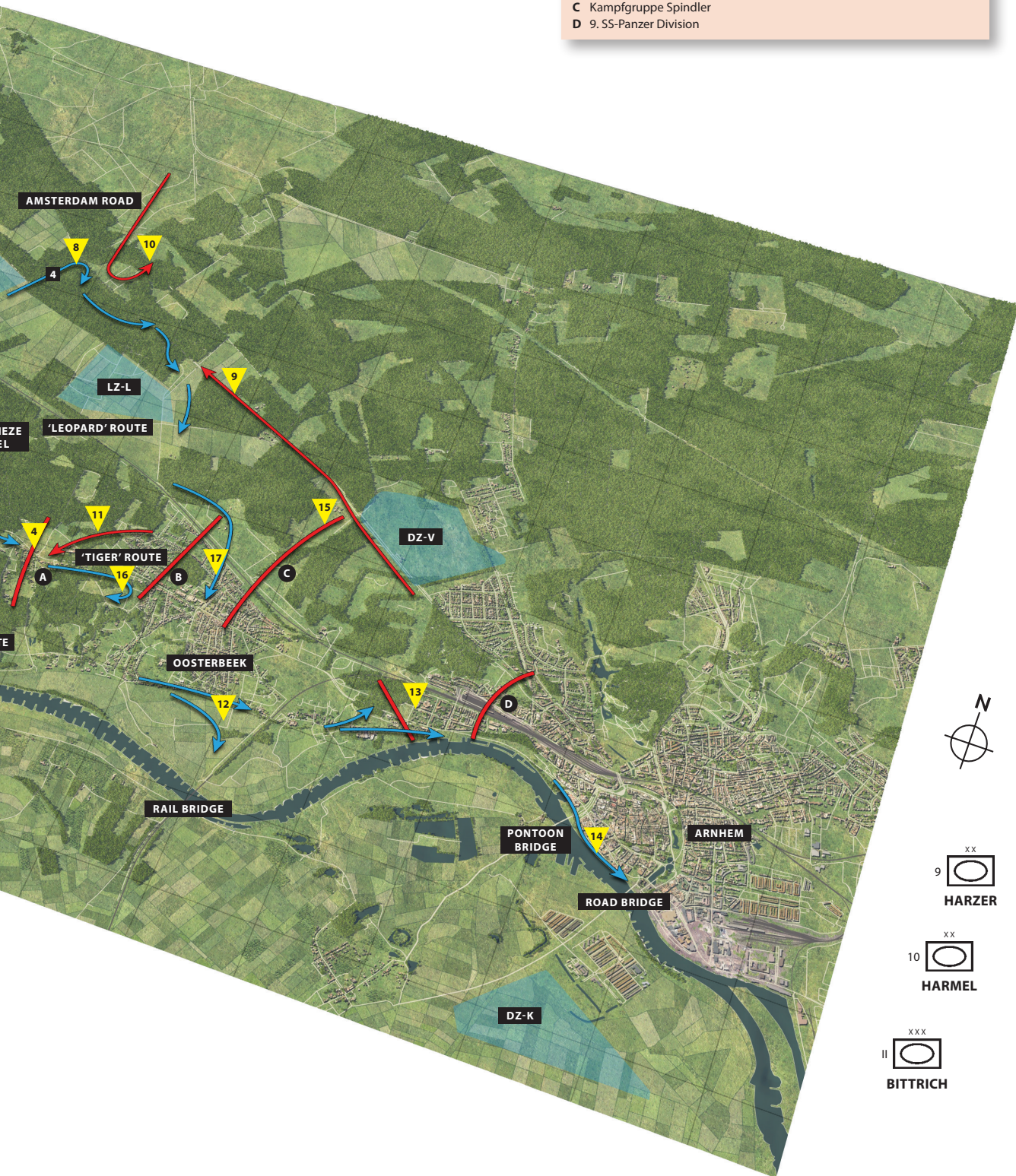
THE FATEFUL FIRST DAY

Airborne Division's initial moves into Arnhem to capture of the road and rail bridges.

Note: Gridlines are shown at intervals of 1km

GERMAN FORCES

- A 4. Kompanie, SS-Panzer Grenadier Ausbildungs und Ersatz Bataillon 16
- B 9. Kompanie, SS-Panzer Grenadier Ausbildungs und Ersatz Bataillon 16
- C Kampfgruppe Spindler
- D 9. SS-Panzer Division



When the main part of the division had arrived, its men could set about their objectives. The first task was the security of the landing zones and the capture of the two nearby villages of Wolfheze and Heelsum in preparation for the second lift. The divisional headquarters, Airlanding Brigade and the Light Regiment of Artillery all remained in the area of the landings whilst the three battalions of Brig. Lathbury's 1st Parachute Brigade gathered at their individual rendezvous sites and prepared to move towards the division's objectives in Arnhem.

Lathbury's brigade intended to use three routes into Arnhem, one for each of its battalions. The most northerly route, codenamed 'Leopard', ran parallel to the railway line and then into the northern part of the town; the middle route, 'Tiger', passed through Heelsum and continued down the main Utrecht–Arnhem road, whilst the southern route, 'Lion', followed minor roads close to the river and led straight to the road and railway bridges.

Also watching the descent from his headquarters close to the landing zones was SS-Obersturmbannführer Joseph 'Sepp' Krafft. His SS-Panzer Grenadier Ausbildungs und Ersatz Bataillon 16 had been exercising in the area the previous few days. Krafft had seen the parachutes and gliders in the distance, but was unsure about the size and the extent of the British attack. He immediately ordered his 2. Kompanie to attack the landings and sent small patrols out to gain more information. Within a short time the patrols reported back that they had engaged a very large body of men, they estimated about 4,000, and after engaging them with small arms fire quickly retreated in the face of superior numbers. The scale of the landings convinced Krafft that a major attack was under way with the objective of capturing the road

and rail bridges over the Rhine.

The SS colonel realized that the invaders would soon move off the landing zones towards Arnhem and would most likely take the most direct routes along the road through Wolfheze and along the railway line. Krafft quickly organized his 2., 4. and 9. Kompanien forward from Arnhem to block these axes. As other troops arrived and his unit began to gather itself, defensive positions were organized. Krafft then fed mortars and anti-tank weapons into these positions and sent other groups farther south to harass any British movements eastwards. Over the next few hours the area between the landing

Paratroops from 1st Parachute Brigade descend on Drop Zone X as part of the first wave on the opening day of the operation. (IWM, CL1168)



zones and Arnhem became increasingly hostile to the British force. Krafft's proximity to the landings and his swift reaction to the attack proved to be invaluable to the Germans during the first few hours of the operation.

THE DASH FOR THE BRIDGES

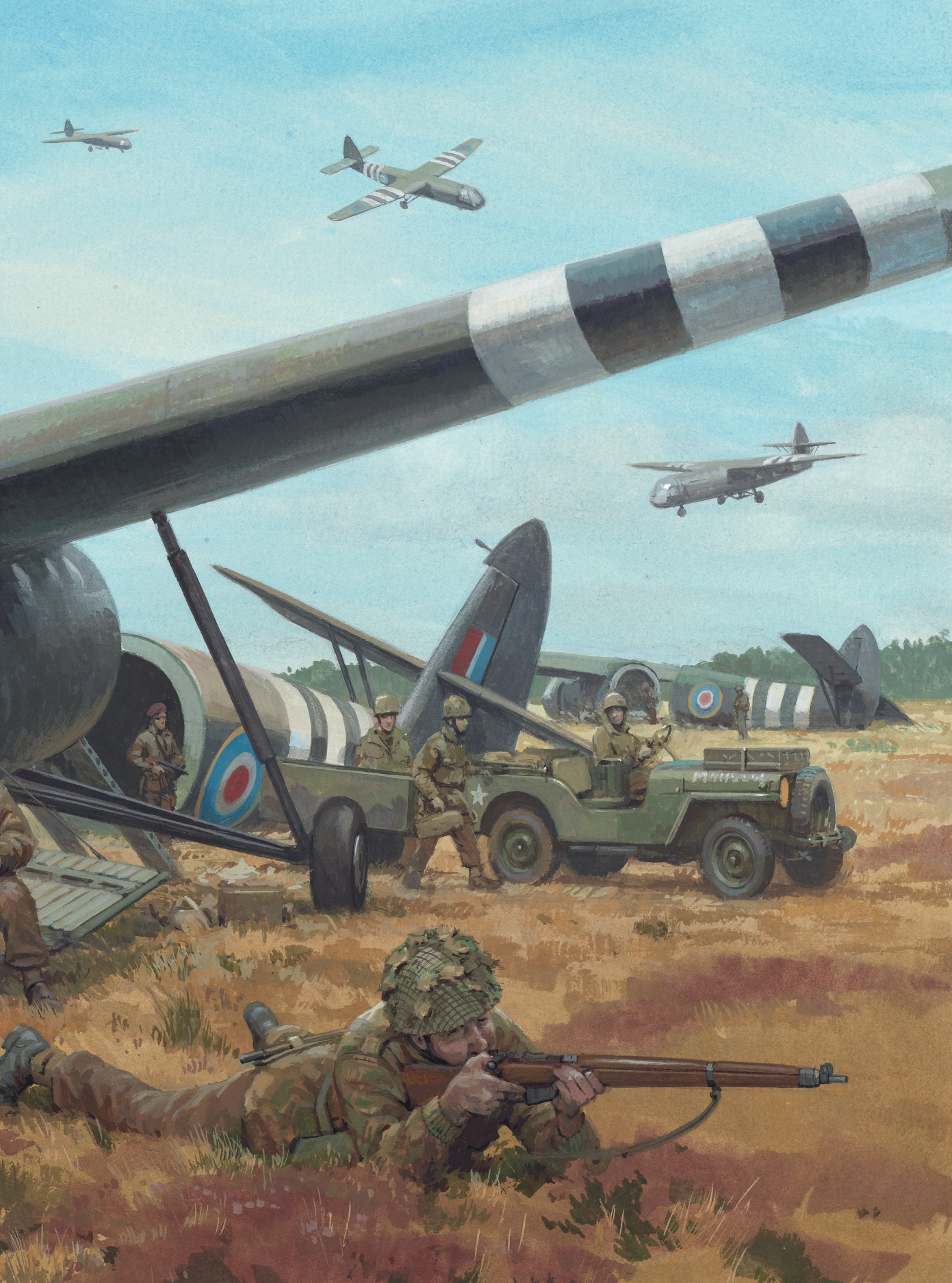
First to set off was the Reconnaissance Squadron, with the intention of driving straight for the road bridge along the northern route. Its orders were to act as a *coup de main* party to capture the bridge, remove any demolition charges they could find and hold it until reinforced. Unfortunately, the squadron did not get away to a good start, for it moved off piecemeal as there was some delay in assembling the troops, jeeps and motorcycles after the landings. When the squadron did get moving the advance then did not get too far. Along the road near the railway line it ran into a roadblock set up by Krafft's SS troops. The first two jeeps were ambushed and most of the paratroops inside were killed or wounded. The following jeeps met the same ambush and quickly became involved in a fierce battle. Too few men and too little room for manoeuvre caused the advance to halt completely. Other men of the squadron who might have helped overcome the resistance were still back on the landing ground, for it was proving difficult to unload the jeeps from gliders that had experienced hard landings. The hold-ups led to some confusion and disorganization. Momentum was lost as precious time slipped away. By the time others of the squadron were able to move, the 1st Battalion was itself preparing to leave the landing ground along the same route. This first attempt to reach the Arnhem road bridge with speed had failed almost as soon as it had started.



Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson, Commander 1st Airlanding Light Regiment RA, helps unload the Horsa glider that carried part of his battalion headquarters to Arnhem on the first day of the landings. (IWM, BU1164)



GRAHAM TURNER '16





THE AIRLANDING BRIGADE DESCENDS ON LZ-Z (PP. 38–39)

LZ-Z (1), located just to the south of the Amsterdam–Arnhem railroad, was one of two landing zones allocated to the brigade. The other, LZ-S, was located on the northern side of the railway line. Some 19 minutes after the men of the Independent Company had arrived to mark out the landing zones, the first of the gliders swept down onto the open fields. The 1st Airlanding Anti-Tank Battery, the Reconnaissance Squadron, the Airlanding Light Regiment RA and the vehicles of the brigade arrived in Horsa and Hamilcar gliders, together with divisional troops, to begin their attack on the bridges at Arnhem.

Little local opposition was met during the initial waves, save for some desultory small arms fire from enemy located in the trees flanking the site. Of the 167 gliders planned to land on LZ-Z, 150 actually arrived. On the other landing zone, LZ-S, 133 gliders landed out of the 153 planned. Losses en route were caused by a variety of factors including broken tow ropes, enemy action and engine failures to towing aircraft. The heavy ground caused some mishaps and a few gliders found their undercarriage collapsing as they ground to a halt with their heavy loads. A few others made awkward nosedives into the ground when the leading wheel of the undercarriage buckled causing appalling casualties inside the glider as the loads broke free. Taken as a whole, however, these mishaps were minor in terms of numbers and the landings were seen as relatively uneventful. One observer commented that they were better organized than an exercise on Salisbury Plain.

Here we see the Airspeed Horsa glider (2), which was the primary transport aircraft used by the airlanding brigade for carrying troops into battle. The larger Hamilcar glider was used for carrying heavier loads such as light tanks and 17-pdr anti-tank guns. The Horsa was originally designed with 32 seats – 28 along the two sides with four across the back – but its usual load into battle was 25 men, depending on configuration, for it was also capable of carrying a variety of vehicles and weapons. The unloading of bulky cargo, such as jeeps, was facilitated by the removal of the tail section after landing. (3) A later Mark II Horsa had a hinged nose section for easier disembarkation of heavy loads. The Horsa was built completely of 3-ply wood in order to save valuable raw materials for the manufacture of other types of aircraft. Its basic parts could be constructed in relatively low-skilled workplaces such as furniture factories. These parts could then be assembled into complete gliders elsewhere. The Horsa's nose section carried two pilots sitting side by side at dual controls. The glider had good all-round visibility through a rounded Perspex windscreen (4).

Once landed, and with their loads and passengers disembarked, the two glider pilots from each aircraft become fighting troops (5). Each man has been trained in the use of all weapons used by the airborne division so he can play his part in helping to capture and protect its objectives. For example, those pilots whose gliders carry anti-tank guns join the gun crews to help with defence.

At 1400hrs, just over an hour after the first wave of paratroops had landed, all three battalions of the parachute brigade were at their rendezvous points and ready to move off. The first two away were the 2nd and 3rd Battalions along 'Lion' and 'Tiger' routes; the 1st Battalion was kept back until the other two were well forward, then was expected to follow along the route that the reconnaissance squadron had intended to take through Wolfheze.

Lieutenant-Colonel Fitch's 3rd Battalion started out in one long column, which, once into its journey, was over 1.5km (one mile) long. The troops marched along each side of the main road with jeeps and 6-pdr anti-tank guns in the centre of the column. Some sporadic German fire came at them from various directions, which caused the advance to pause, but this was quickly dealt with. However, it was not too long before the column ran into more serious opposition when they met an enemy anti-tank gun supported by German infantry. This resistance was a different matter and a short battle broke out causing the leading troops to disperse off the main road and into an increasingly urban landscape. With progress forward stopped, the other troops also manoeuvred off the road to get around the enemy roadblock. As they did so more and more of the enemy came into contact and the advance eventually faltered.

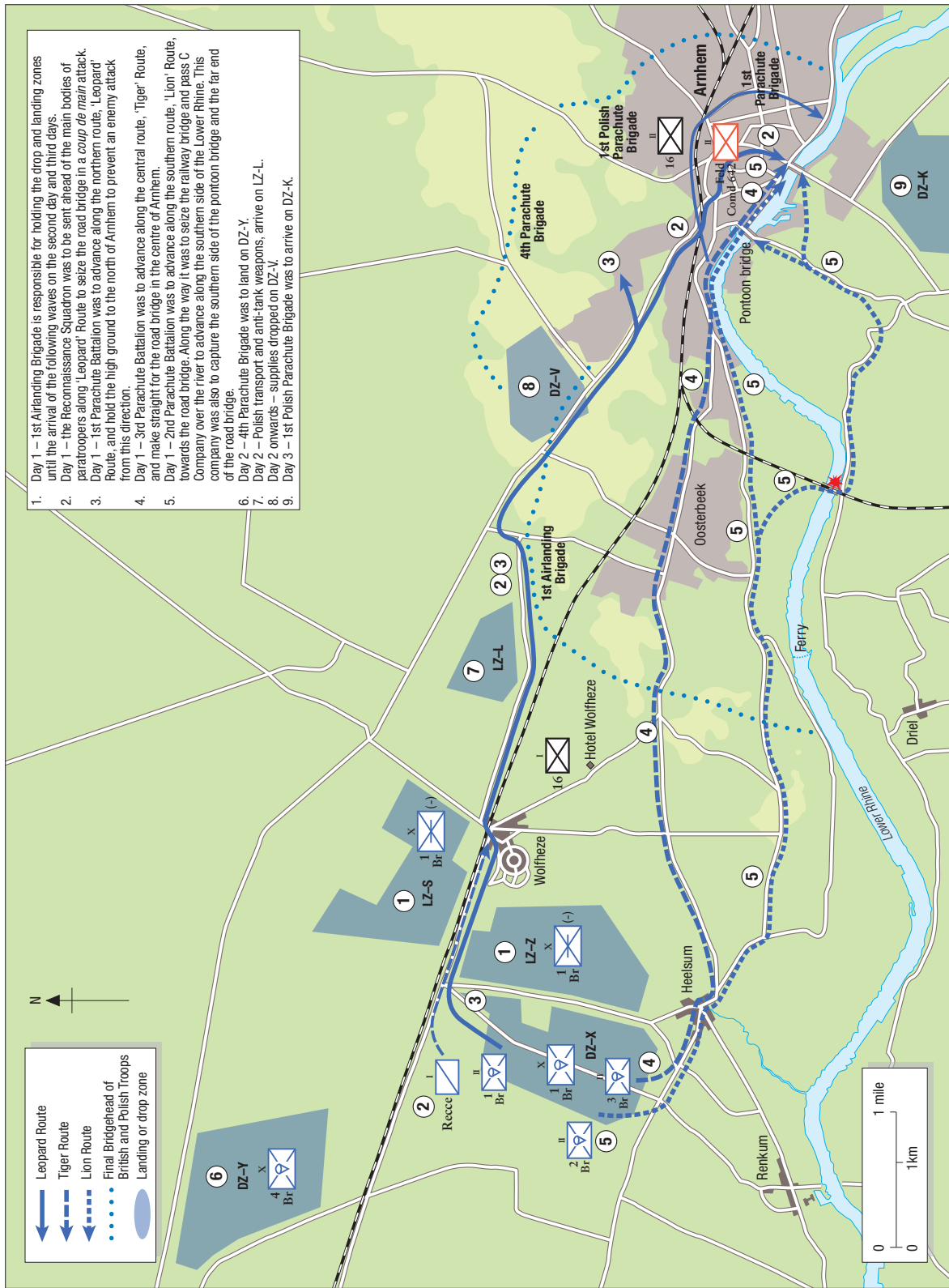
Lieutenant-Colonel Frost's 2nd Battalion moved along 'Lion' Route, which brought it closer to the river. The direction took it south through the village of Heelsum then through a wooded area. When the leading paratroopers came out into the open they were met with small arms fire. After this was overcome, the lead company pressed on into Heveadorp near to the landing stage of the Rhine ferry and then on to Oosterbeek. Here the British were welcomed by a warm and joyful reception from the local villagers who rushed out of their houses to greet what they thought was their liberation. It took some time for the men to disentangle themselves from the hospitable Dutch people and press on. The momentum was beginning to flag. By this time it was 1800hrs.

At Oosterbeek Lt. Col. Frost was confronted with his first objective, the rail bridge over the Lower Rhine. He detached Maj. Dover's C Company to attack the structure whilst the main body moved on towards the road bridge



Arriving paratroops are met with hospitality from Dutch civilians who believed that the descent of the airborne division amongst them was the start of their liberation from German occupation. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF003A)

British 1st Airborne Division's plan for the capture of the bridges at Arnhem



in Arnhem. C Company's orders were to capture the rail bridge intact and then cross over to the far side, turn left and advance along the south side of the river to the southern ends of both the road bridge and the pontoon bridge. By that time Frost and the battalion would be on the northern side of both these bridges.

Major Dover sent his 9 Platoon on ahead to seize the rail bridge with 8 Platoon as support. The leading group moved along the embankment under cover of smoke, only to have the bridge blown by the enemy as they reached the first span. Frost heard the explosion and realized that his plan to attack both ends of the road bridge was now no longer possible. C Company was told to withdraw with the column into Arnhem and then attack its secondary objective, the headquarters of the town's German garrison.

By this time Brig. Lathbury had come forward to speak with Frost and told him the bad news that the reconnaissance squadron had failed in its attempt to reach the bridge ahead of him. He urged Frost to press on with all speed as the Germans were now well aware that a major attack was under way with the road bridge as its main objective. Brigadier Lathbury then left to join up with the 3rd Battalion to insist that it too should go all out for the area of the bridge.

Back at the landing grounds earlier that afternoon, news had reached Maj. Gen. Urquhart that the *coup de main* party had failed and was unlikely to reach the road bridge as planned. Urquhart felt that Lathbury should be told of this setback and took it upon himself to seek out the brigadier and urge him to get to the bridge as quickly as possible. When Urquhart reached Lathbury's headquarters in the rear of Frost's column he discovered that the brigadier had just left to join the 3rd Battalion. Urquhart now set out in his jeep with his driver and wireless operator to find Lathbury. The general was now loose in the rear of enemy-occupied territory without escort. In fact both of these senior commanders were now absent from their headquarters at a most crucial time in the operation.



Troops from SS-Obersturmbannführer Krafft's unit move cautiously towards Wolfheze after the landings, unsure about which roads have been taken by the airborne troops. (TS Collection)



LEFT

The car carrying GenMaj. Kussin and his driver after it had been ambushed by airborne troops at the Wolfheze–Utrecht crossroads. The general's right breast pocket shows signs of having had something torn off by souvenir hunters. (TS Collection)

MIDDLE

The body of GenMaj. Kussin has been dragged out of his car and posed for the photographer to make a more dramatic picture. (TS Collection)

RIGHT

Generalmajor Kussin's driver has also been pulled from the car and arranged with a rifle for dramatic effect. (TS Collection)

Earlier that afternoon in Arnhem, reports to the garrison commander GenMaj. Friedrich Kussin confirmed that there were enemy airborne landings to the west. Conflicting messages made the situation unclear and so Kussin decided to set off to find out what exactly was happening. When he reached Obersturmbannführer Krafft's headquarters at the Wolfheze Hotel he was told that a major British attack was under way and that the capture of the road and rail bridges in Arnhem were the obvious targets. Kussin was amazed to find that his command was now in the centre of a major battle. He needed to get back into town as quickly as possible to organize a proper defence of the road bridge and the centre of Arnhem.

As he left to drive back to his headquarters, Kussin was warned by Krafft to be careful for the British were already moving along many of the roads leading towards the town. This warning went unheeded for as Kussin turned into the main road from the lane that led up Krafft's headquarters, he ran into the flanks of 3rd Parachute Battalion's advance. Startled by the general's sudden arrival in their midst, several paratroopers opened fire with all the weapons they had and riddled the car and its occupants with bullets. Kussin and his driver died instantly. They were left in the road where they fell and every man that passed that day had a good look at a real dead German general. Soon a photographer was on the scene to record the incident. Generalmajor Kussin had met an unfortunate and very public death. After a long career as a pioneer officer that stretched back to World War I, he had earned a quiet retirement. In 1943 he was brought back on active duty, promoted to *Generalmajor* and given the quiet posting as garrison commander in a small town hundreds of kilometres to the rear of any fighting. It no doubt came as a great surprise to his family that he was killed in action.

SS-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm Bittrich, at the headquarters of II SS-Panzer Korps at Doetinchem, was also quick to deduce that the British airborne landings had the Arnhem bridge as their main objective. He was joined in this assessment by GFM Model, who had arrived at Bittrich's headquarters after fleeing from the Tafelberg Hotel earlier that afternoon. The two commanders also had news of further landings by the Americans close to Nijmegen. A picture of Allied intentions quickly emerged that suggested that Arnhem and Nijmegen were key strategic objectives in a major Allied attack. Model took II SS-Panzer Korps under his immediate command and ordered Bittrich to send SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel and his 10. SS-Panzer Division south to hold the bridge at Nijmegen and form a defensive line around it. He also told SS-Obersturmbannführer Walter

Harzer to stop the move of his formation to Germany for its refit and to gather his forces and move the 9. SS-Panzer Division against the British landing grounds. He also stressed the need to ensure that the defence of the road bridge at Arnhem was properly secured. Generalfeldmarschall Model then began mobilizing forces farther afield to move against the landings in the north. General Christiansen was given the task of attacking the British landing grounds from the west, using those units he had available, most notably Kampfgruppe von Tettau. Model contacted Supreme Headquarters OB West and asked GFM von Rundstedt to send reinforcements to Arnhem, stressing the need for more anti-aircraft guns and self-propelled artillery, as well as infantry.

Important events well to the south of Arnhem were also well under way. Back near the Belgian–Dutch border the advance formations of British XXX Corps had begun their attack. The Guards Armoured Division had moved out of the bridgehead formed over the Meuse–Escaut Canal and, backed by formidable air support, was driving north to meet up with US 101st Airborne Division, which had landed near Eindhoven. The division would then move northwards through the positions of the newly arrived US 82nd Airborne Division near Nijmegen, to join up with the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem.



Men from the 1st Airlanding Brigade during the expansion of the airborne lodgement on the first day. They seem to be very relaxed about the situation, which was at that time progressing as though it was an exercise. The enemy had not by then shown himself on the western side of the landings. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF010A)



Airborne troops moving towards Arnhem just after the landings. The trooper in the foreground is armed with a Projector Infantry Anti-Tank (PIAT) weapon, which fired a 2.5lb (1.1 kg) bomb at a maximum direct range of around 100m (110 yards). (Museum of Army Flying, MAF004)

This bigger picture and the scale of the Allied offensive soon became clear to Gen. Student at the headquarters of 1. Fallschirmjäger Armee. He had seen the flypast of American gliders as they swooped over his headquarters and knew something major was afoot. When British XXX Corps ground forces attacked and news of the airborne landings strung out along the road to Arnhem was reported to him, it all suggested that the events were linked and a major Allied offensive had begun. The days of waiting were over, the Allies were on the move again and Student now had a significant battle on his hands. He began to mobilize his forces to concentrate on the long north-south corridor that the Allies were trying to carve out. He was also worried that this same corridor would split his army in two.

The last of Brig. Lathbury's units to move off into Arnhem was the 1st Parachute Battalion, but not exactly to the original plan. It had been decided that Lt. Col. David Dobie's 1st Battalion would not be sent towards the centre of Arnhem for it was thought that the other two battalions were sufficient to capture the town and the bridges. Dobie's main objective was the area of high ground to the north of the town, through which an enemy attack might be launched. His battalion had intended to advance along 'Leopard' Route until it reached the town then swing north onto the high ground, but the enemy resistance along the railway line that had been met by the reconnaissance squadron earlier that afternoon induced Dobie to move his battalion northwards towards the Amsterdam-Arnhem highway, before trying to turn eastwards for Arnhem.

Dobie's battalion did not get far before it ran into trouble. Small skirmishes along the way began to pick off men as Krafft's troops from the SS training battalion came into contact. The leading elements of the battalion tried to get forward through a wooded area, but they soon hit a larger number of Germans from the Luftwaffe base at Deelen when they came out into the



Gliders on Landing Zone Z, some of which have overshot the landing area. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF013)

open on the main road. Then German tanks began to rumble forward and the battalion found itself stalled by a force using much heavier weapons than it had available. Again Dobie tried to bypass the opposition, but this move proved to be unsuccessful. For the rest of the day the column of 1st Parachute Battalion was pinned down, unable to make any significant progress to its objective, whilst its long tail was harassed by machine guns and snipers. Dobie's front had run into the leading armour of 9. SS-Panzer Division whilst his rear was being hit by small arms and mortar by Krafft's men and those from Deelen airbase.

The SS troops were part of a *Kampfgruppe* from the 'Hohenstaufen' Division led by SS-Obersturmbannführer Spindler. This scratch formation was made up of quick-reaction units of the division which happened to be at hand. Kampfgruppe Spindler was able to form a blocking line across roads leading into Arnhem with remarkable speed. Other *Kampfgruppen* were also being organized as quickly as possible to deal with the British. One such group was Kampfgruppe Moeller, which consisted of artillery companies and engineers. It came into contact with paratroopers on the western side of Arnhem adjacent to Spindler's group. Later that day Krafft's group joined with Moeller. Other quick-reaction groups were assembled and moved to face the British. By nightfall all the scattered German units around Arnhem had been brought into the stop line created by Kampfgruppe Spindler. The Germans had reacted with alarming speed to the landings.

The 3rd Parachute Battalion's advance was forced to a halt along the middle route by heavy enemy opposition. Lieutenant-Colonel Fitch, urged on by Brig. Lathbury, sent C Company round to the left to outflank the enemy. About this time Maj. Gen. Urquhart arrived to meet with Lathbury and discuss the situation, stressing the need to press on to the bridge. Just then news came in that the battalion's rear company, A Company, was in action with a party of Germans at the tail of the column. The company fought for over two hours trying to deal with the opposition and keep the route open back to the landing grounds. Worse was to come, for C Company had found that there was no easy way around the enemy defences. By this time it was becoming dark and Lathbury and Fitch decided that the battalion should

The rail bridge at Arnhem. The bridge was blown by the enemy as Maj. Dover's C Company of the 2nd Parachute Battalion approached. The attack came along the rail line from the left of the picture. (TS Collection)



remain roughly where it was. Nearby was the Hartenstein Hotel, until recently the staff mess of Model's Heeresgruppe B Headquarters. With the approval of both Urquhart and Lathbury, Lt. Col. Fitch decided that his battalion should remain in the grounds of the hotel and dig in for the night. This meant that two of the brigade's three battalions had been stopped dead at a most crucial time. Speed of advance was critical; every hour that passed weakened the advantage seized by the airborne division's surprise landings. It was a most unsatisfactory start to the battle.

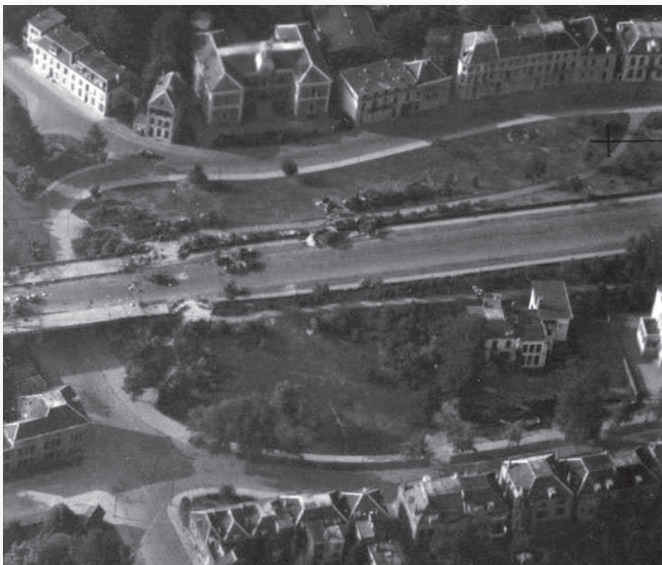
Lieutenant-Colonel Frost's 2nd Battalion column had earlier continued on its way into Arnhem during the late afternoon. Soon after the rail bridge was blown it reached the railway underpass at Oosterbeek. Here it found more opposition supported by an armoured car. A short firefight, then the column moved on to the next bout of German opposition, this time from some high ground to the left at den Brink. Here the enemy were more determined for they included a few troops from 9. SS-Panzer Division. It was now clear that the local German troops were being organized to stop the British reaching the bridge, but, as yet, there had been no resolute counter-attack by heavier forces.

Leaving B Company to deal with the opposition at den Brink, Frost led his men on into Arnhem itself. No major resistance was met to the move, although small arms forced the leading troops, including Frost, to take to back gardens and to skirt around houses to avoid the enemy roadblocks and snipers. The area of the pontoon bridge was reached and a small group was left to guard it, although it was of little immediate use, for the centre section of the bridge was moored on the far side of the river. This floating bridge had been an objective of B Company, but at that time it was busy with the enemy at den Brink.

The Arnhem road bridge was eventually reached by Lt. Grayburn's platoon at 2000hrs. Its approach to the northern end was free of enemy fire. Unbelievably, there were no Germans defending the long ramp that led up to the bridge itself. There were Germans on the bridge, mostly grouped around a pillbox at the end of the ramp, but they seemed to be unaware of the arrival

of Frost's men. No sign of enemy troops was seen around the town end to interfere with the arrival. Frost's men were fortunate, for only two hours before a force of 30 armoured cars and tracked vehicles SS-Aufklärungs Bataillon 9, led by Hauptsturmführer Graebner, had passed over the bridge on their way to Nijmegen to patrol the ground between Arnhem and the American landings. All was now quiet, save for a solitary German truck, which rolled past over the bridge with its driver unconcerned about the arrival of British paratroops. In complete silence Grayburn and his platoon quickly moved to establish themselves along the ramp. Within a few minutes A Company and Lt. Col. Frost arrived.

The ramp leading up to the road bridge in the centre of Arnhem. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF001)



There was disappointment in finding no sign of anyone from the 3rd Battalion at the bridge. Fitch's battalion should by then have been established at the bridge. Frost quickly set out those of his battalion that had arrived into an all-round defensive position and waited for reinforcements. He was pleased to see that the bridge was still standing intact and not blown to pieces like the rail bridge. Very soon, at around 2045hrs, the brigade headquarters group came up to join him, almost doubling the number of men at the bridge. Frost's force was well below its full complement for it was still without B and C Companies and had lost a number of men during the march.

Several attempts to take the bridge were made during the night. The first, by just a few men, tried to sneak their way over. The attempt faltered when they came under fire near the pillbox. The next attempt was made by Lt. Grayburn's platoon. It too failed when the men were caught by a bout of machine-gun fire. A third effort was made at 2200hrs. This time it was backed by an anti-tank gun and a flame-thrower team. The pillbox was destroyed along with several huts on the bridge. These huts contained fuel and ammunition and a burst from the flame-thrower set them ablaze. The southern end of the bridge disappeared in sheets of flame. The fires continued to burn all night long when the paintwork on the bridge also caught alight. During the night a few enemy lorries tried to cross the bridge from the south. These were immediately destroyed by Frost's men and left burning across the road. With the near end of the bridge lighting up the darkness, there appeared to be no possibility of getting troops onto the structure whilst the fires raged.

Back along the road on the edge of Arnhem, Maj. Crawley's B Company had moved on from den Brink and had arrived at the pontoon bridge site. When the news reached Lt. Col. Frost he decided that perhaps Maj. Crawley and his men could find some sort of craft to ferry them over to the far side. They might then move down the river and attack the defences on the southern side of the bridge. After a night of fruitless searching, no boats were found and the plan had to be abandoned. B Company was then ordered to move into the bridge area to join up with the remainder of the battalion, leaving just one platoon to guard the pontoon area. During the night a few more men trickled into Frost's position around the bridge. They had made their own way to the objective after having been split up from their units during the march. This brought the total under Frost's command to between 600 and 700, well short of the 2,000 men that had been planned to hold the bridge. The bulk of 1st and 3rd Parachute Battalions were still bogged down and had by then not even reached the outskirts of Arnhem. And the bridge was still in enemy hands.

On the landing grounds, the 1st Airlanding Brigade had dispersed to protect the area from enemy attack. Its men also set about strengthening positions and preparing the area for the second lift due the next day. The 1st Border Regiment moved south across the railway line to secure Landing Zone Z, which would be used by the second wave. The 2nd South Staffordshire Regiment, only half of which had arrived with the first lift – the remainder was to land the next day – remained on Landing Zone S to secure the area around Wolfheze and the northern limit of the airborne lodgement. The brigade's third battalion, 7th King's Own Scottish Borderers, moved westwards to cover Drop Zone Y which would be used for the landings of 4th Parachute Brigade on D+1.

Lieutenant-Colonel John Frost was one of the most famous airborne commanders of the war. He had risen to worldwide attention after he led a company of men from the parachute brigade on a daring raid to steal radar secrets from the Germans at Bruneval. He later took part in campaigns in North Africa and Sicily. (TS Collection)





The Arnhem road bridge after the battle. In the centre is the concrete pillbox guarding the town side of the bridge. To the right are the houses that formed part of Lt. Col. Frost's defences, later destroyed in the fighting. (TS Collection)

THE SECOND DAY, MONDAY 18 SEPTEMBER

During the hours of darkness, Monday 18 September began with more frustration for 1st Airborne Division. The 1st Parachute Battalion, which had been halted by elements of 9. SS-Division, changed its plan of advance. Instead of trying to hold the area to the north of Arnhem against enemy attack, Lt. Col. Dobie decided to try to manoeuvre south-eastwards and to drive direct for the centre of the town. News had been received during the night that Frost's 2nd Battalion was on the bridge and needed reinforcement. The 3rd Battalion was also moving forward, this time along the side roads through Oosterbeek, the main road still blocked by the enemy. Both Maj. Gen. Urquhart and Brig. Lathbury were at battalion headquarters and agreed to sidestep the advance and try to reach the lower road by the river as a means of gaining the bridge.

In the west of the lodgement, the 1st Airlanding Brigade was coming under fire from many directions. Generalleutnant Hans von Tettau had assembled his scratch formation of various units which included SS-Unteroffizierschule 'Arnheim', the Dutch Wach Bataillon 3, Panzer Kompanie 24 and Luftwaffe, Kriegsmarine and police units. His *Kampfgruppe* had grown almost to divisional status. None of these units had a great deal of experience, but their numbers allowed them to be continually fed into the action as they arrived in the hope of trying to grind down the opposition. They were certainly competent enough to be able to provide effective harassing fire on the landing grounds.

That morning the 3rd Battalion gradually progressed through Oosterbeek and made it to the road along the side of the Rhine, but not without opposition. By this time it was becoming light and the enemy had managed to infiltrate the route with snipers in trees and pockets of infantry in houses and gardens in the village. The rear of the column now came under accurate small arms fire, causing the long line of paratroopers and vehicles to stop and start. Sections of the column became detached and several parties took the wrong route. At the head of the battalion the leading company was compelled to halt about 1.5km (one mile) from the bridge. Here it met with some armour from Kampfgruppe Spindler and was forced to take cover in nearby houses. The troops also came under fire from Germans on the south side of the river. As

more of the column arrived, they too had to take cover. Amongst them were the brigadier and the commanding general. Through the morning and into the afternoon those of the battalion that had reached this forward position had to seek shelter from increasingly overwhelming enemy fire. The riverside road was dominated by self-propelled artillery and the nearby houses were under fire from front and rear by parties of the enemy. The men in this forward part of the battalion were gradually being surrounded, including Maj. Gen. Urquhart and Brig. Lathbury. The battalion's advance to the bridge, to the relief of Frost's battalion, once again ground slowly to a halt.

The 1st Battalion to the north also tried to move through Oosterbeek, but along the main road that led past St Margaret Hospital, the Utrechtseweg. Lieutenant-Colonel Dobie's battalion was trying to join the road beyond the enemy positions that had held up the 3rd Battalion the day before. This main road was the central axis into Arnhem with the railway to the north and the river road to the south. As the routes got closer to the centre of the town the three routes began converging, leaving a relatively small section between the railway and the river. This point was perfect for an enemy blocking position to halt the move to the bridge. The previous evening the Germans had begun organizing substantial roadblocks on virtually every possible means of moving from west to east across the town. By mid-morning Dobie's 1st Battalion met this zone and tried to force its way past the first roadblock. When this method stalled, after taking many casualties, it tried to swing

Men of the airborne division keep watch on the enemy from a bomb crater near the village of Wolfheze. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF009)



southward to outflank the German position. The battalion was now close by the area in which the 3rd Battalion was pinned down and contact was soon made with some of Fitch's unit. The attack had become a shambles with no longer any solid front, or indeed any solid flanks or rear, for all of the paratroops had dispersed into houses and back gardens to try to get themselves out of trouble. Prominent amongst these troops were Urquhart and Lathbury.

The general and his brigadier had decided that being pinned down was not an option and attempted to escape: Maj. Gen. Urquhart to his divisional headquarters and Brig. Lathbury to join up with his brigade headquarters at the bridge. It was not a good idea, for as the two senior officers tried to negotiate local streets thick with German troops, they came under fire. Lathbury was badly wounded and left behind, whilst Urquhart and two other officers, one of whom was his intelligence officer, were forced to take refuge in the attic of a nearby house. They were now completely out of touch with anyone else in the division.

This second day of the battle found Lt. Col. Frost strengthening his 2nd Battalion's positions around the northern end of the bridge. Through the night more stragglers had come into the perimeter and were quickly put into the defences, including men from C Company of the 3rd Battalion. Major Lewis's company had become separated from its battalion the previous afternoon and made its way independently towards the bridge. Most of the unit got through, but two platoons ran into an enemy party preparing to seal off the bridge area and were captured. Unfortunately, Maj. Dover's C Company from Frost's battalion, which had been detached to attack the German Headquarters in the town the previous afternoon, had failed in its mission. It did not attack its objective and did not succeed in its attempt to reach the bridge. On its passage towards the centre of the town it ran

headlong into enemy opposition moving into a blocking position. There were German infantry everywhere moving westwards as C Company was moving east. Despite numerous attempts to escape the net that quickly closed around it, the company was forced to surrender. Three officers and around 100 men became prisoners. Also captured that night was the platoon from B Company that had been left to guard the pontoon bridge. It was proving to be exceedingly difficult to reinforce Frost's precarious hold on the bridge.

SS-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm Bittrich had several serious problems to deal with that day. His II SS-Panzer Korps had SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel's 'Frundsberg' Division

Glider pilots help clear a school damaged by shelling or bombing. The incident was most probably staged for the media. (TS Collection)



trying to clear and hold the ground between Nijmegen and Arnhem, whilst SS-Obersturmbannführer Walter Harzer's 'Hohenstaufen' Division concentrated on Arnhem and its bridge. Both formations were well short of their normal complement of men and machines after the fighting in Normandy and both were widely dispersed. An added problem was that both of these divisions were north of the Rhine. Harmel's 10. SS-Panzer Division needed the road bridge at Arnhem to get south of the river to face the Americans. Whilst the British held the bridge, his only means of achieving his objectives was to use ferries farther upriver. It was a slow and cumbersome exercise. Harzer's division had to fight the British in two distinct areas. Part of his formation had to deal with the landing grounds and blocking British moves to reinforce the bridge, whilst his other units needed to eliminate Lt. Col. Frost's force holding the northern end of the bridge.

At 1st Airborne Division's headquarters there was still a great deal of uncertainty about the position in Arnhem and the whereabouts of the commanding general and Brig. Lathbury. Little news was being filtered back to the landing grounds and, to make matters worse, there was no contact with Lt. Gen. Browning at 1st Airborne Corps Headquarters situated 32km (20 miles) to the south with the Americans. Nor was there contact with First Allied Airborne Army Headquarters in England. Signalling problems plagued the division throughout the whole of the battle.

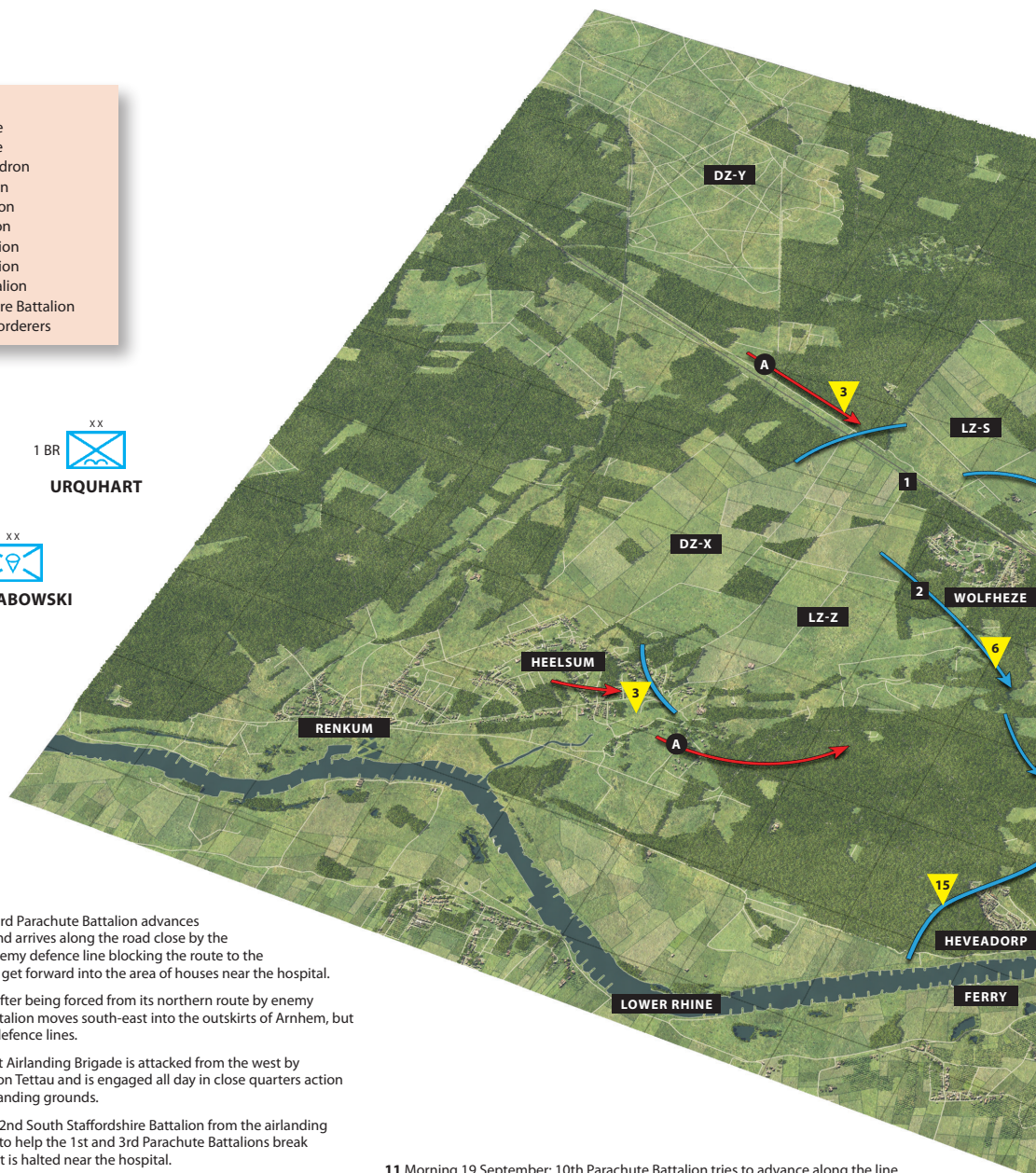
Urquhart's chief of staff, Lt. Col. Charles Mackenzie, realized that the division was leaderless and somewhat isolated from the outside world. He informed the airlanding brigade's commander Brig. Hicks that he should take over command. Hicks agreed and decided that, as only one battalion was reported to have reached the bridge, reinforcements should be sent to Frost immediately. Hicks now ordered Lt. Col. McCardie to take his depleted battalion, the 2nd South Staffordshire Regiment (only half of which had been carried in the initial lift), into Arnhem. This left just the glider pilots who were on Landing Zone S and a few men of the reconnaissance regiment to hold the northern edge of the landing zones. When the second lift arrived later that day with the remainder of the 2nd Staffordshires, they were to join up with the main part of the battalion. Hicks also decided that after 4th Parachute Brigade had landed, its 11th Parachute Battalion should also go straight to Arnhem. Both of these battalions were to come under the command of 1st Parachute Brigade, the headquarters of which was with Lt. Col. Frost on the bridge, with its brigadier lying wounded somewhere in Arnhem.

Two photographers from the British Army Film and Photographic Unit receive cups of coffee from a friendly Dutch civilian, whilst eating a meal from their canned rations. (IWM, BU1150)



BRITISH FORCES

- 1 1st Airlanding Brigade
- 2 4th Parachute Brigade
- 3 Reconnaissance Squadron
- 4 1st Parachute Battalion
- 5 2nd Parachute Battalion
- 6 3rd Parachute Battalion
- 7 10th Parachute Battalion
- 8 11th Parachute Battalion
- 9 156th Parachute Battalion
- 10 2nd South Staffordshire Battalion
- 11 Kings Own Scottish Borderers



EVENTS

1 First light, 18 September: 3rd Parachute Battalion advances through enemy resistance and arrives along the road close by the river but is stopped by an enemy defence line blocking the route to the bridge. The battalion tries to get forward into the area of houses near the hospital.

2 First light, 18 September: after being forced from its northern route by enemy resistance, 1st Parachute Battalion moves south-east into the outskirts of Arnhem, but is again stopped by enemy defence lines.

3 0500hrs, 18 September: 1st Airlanding Brigade is attacked from the west by elements of Kampfgruppe von Tettau and is engaged all day in close quarters action whilst trying to protect the landing grounds.

4 Afternoon, 18 September: 2nd South Staffordshire Battalion from the airlanding brigade is sent into Arnhem to help the 1st and 3rd Parachute Battalions break through the German line, but is halted near the hospital.

5 Afternoon, 18 September: 2nd Parachute Battalion is completely cut off at the bridge and being attacked from all sides.

6 Late afternoon, 18 September: second airlift on DZs-X and Y brings 4th Parachute Brigade into the battle.

7 Late afternoon, 18 September: supplies intended for the airborne division to be dropped on LZ-L mostly fall into enemy hands.

8 Late afternoon 18 September: the newly arrived 11th Parachute Battalion is sent into Arnhem along the main road, only to be stopped amongst the positions of the other battalions near the hospital. Four battalions are now stalled on the western edge of the town.

9 Night 18–19 September: the King's Own Scottish Borderers attack towards the Amsterdam road to clear a path for the 156th Parachute Battalion to seize the high ground between the Amsterdam road and the railway.

10 Morning 19 September: 156th Parachute Battalion attacks towards the high ground but is stopped by Kampfgruppe Spindler, which is holding a very strong defensive position.

11 Morning 19 September: 10th Parachute Battalion tries to advance along the line of the Amsterdam road on the left flank of 156th Battalion. Despite five hours of continuous battle it is unable to penetrate Kampfgruppe Spindler's line.

12 Morning 19 September: the remnants of the four battalions in Arnhem make a concerted effort to break through into the town and get to the bridge. Some progress is made as far as the museum before the enemy gains the advantage and repels all attempts at a breakthrough.

13 Evening 19 September: an attempt by 11th Battalion to cross the railway line and get behind Kampfgruppe Spindler's forces which are engaged with 4th Parachute Brigade's battalions fails with great loss of life.

14 Night 19–20 September: all three battalions north of the railway line are pulled back towards Oosterbeek.

15 20 September: in the face of insurmountable enemy opposition Maj. Gen. Urquhart abandons any further attempts to get into Arnhem and relieve Lt. Col. Frost's position at the road bridge and pulls in all his forces to man a perimeter around his headquarters at the Hartenstein Hotel to await relief by XXX Corps.

A BITTER STRUGGLE

German counter-attacks and the gradual shrinking of the airborne lodgement.

Note: Gridlines are shown at intervals of 1km

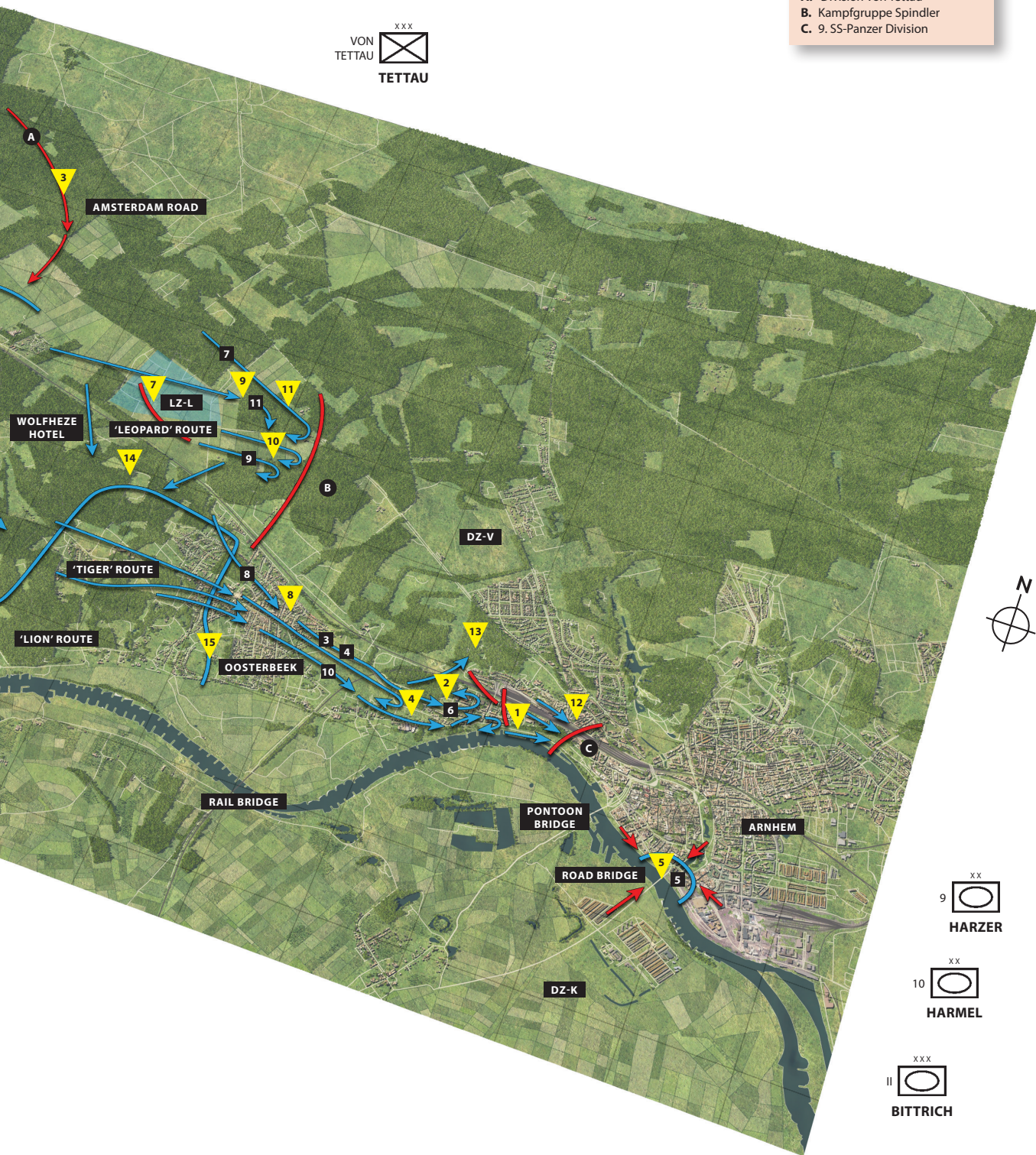
VON
TETTAU

xxx

TETTAU

GERMAN FORCES

- A. Division von Tettau
- B. Kampfgruppe Spindler
- C. 9. SS-Panzer Division



9

xx

HARZER

10

xx

HARMEL

xxx

II

BITTRICH

The second lift bringing the remainder of 1st Airborne Division was planned to take off from England at 0700hrs. Once again it was a massive air undertaking, with over 2,500 aircraft involved in the whole of the *Market-Garden* reinforcement operation. The British airborne division was now to be brought up to strength with the remainder of the division's vehicles, infantry and guns. Also dispatched that day would be the first of the division's re-supply drops to the units already at Arnhem.

Back in England that Monday morning the dawn arrived with many of the airfields covered in mist. All flying operations were cancelled until visibility was improved. The second lift was subject to a delay of four hours, although this news could not be relayed to the isolated division in Arnhem, which was out of radio contact. On the landing grounds near Wolfheze men waited expectantly, and then impatiently, for reinforcements that seemed as though they would never arrive.

When the aircraft did come in low over the fields of Holland they arrived according to a revised plan. The original route suggested for this second lift was by the southern route, but thick cloud over Belgium forced the northern route to be used, which meant a longer time over enemy territory. German anti-aircraft batteries knew that the initial landings would have to be reinforced and re-supplied so they were waiting. Flak was heavy as the air fleet passed over the Netherlands and many aircraft and gliders were shot down.

The 4th Parachute Brigade dropped on Drop Zone Y, the most westerly of the landing zones. They landed on heathland that was ablaze, set on fire by the high volume of gunfire that was exploding across it. The new waves of paratroopers were greeted with bursts of fire from Dutch SS soldiers from Tettau's *Kampfgruppe* who were hiding in the trees close to the landing site. This fire was returned by men of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, spread out around the landing zone. Several sticks of paratroopers missed the landing zone completely and came down elsewhere, some as far away as 13km (eight miles) from their target. Others landed amongst SS troops to the west of the landings. Many were involved in stiff little battles with the enemy from the moment they touched down. Gradually, however, the paratroopers reached their rendezvous points and began to assemble into near-complete battalions ready to move off. The majority of gliders landed on Landing Zone X whilst the remaining 25 per cent of the force landed north of the railway line on Landing Zone S. Landing Zone L, to the north-east of Wolfheze, was originally assigned for re-supply drops, but most of the area was still in enemy hands. When 33 Stirling bombers dropped 83 tons of supplies onto the zone, only 12 tons were recovered and brought back by RASC jeeps and trailers. The remainder went to the Germans.

Fire continued to sweep the landings throughout the day. Each hour brought more and more of the enemy into place around the perimeter as von Tettau's forces pressed eastwards. The glider pilots, signallers, engineers and artillerymen still on the drop and landing zones were forced to defend themselves from enemy fire as they went about their tasks. It seemed that the Germans were everywhere firing at anything that moved. This second lift was certainly not the quiet arrival onto secured ground that had been anticipated.

When Brig. Hackett, Commander 4th Parachute Brigade, arrived, he was met by Urquhart's chief of staff and told that the general was missing.

Brigadier Hicks was now in temporary command of the division. Hackett was also told that his 11th Parachute Battalion was being taken off him and sent into Arnhem to reinforce the lodgement around the road bridge, under the command of 1st Parachute Brigade. Unsurprisingly Brig. Hackett was angry with these changes of plan. He stormed off to find the divisional headquarters, which had by then been moved to the Hartenstein Hotel in Oosterbeek. When he met with Brig. Hicks he argued that his original orders to take the high ground north of Arnhem should stand. Hicks declined to change his mind as he understood the true nature of the potential catastrophe that was unravelling in the town. Hackett was unhappy that his command had been reduced in this way and matters remained tense between the two brigadiers for the remainder of the battle. He was also angry that Hicks commanded the division even though he was more senior.

Earlier that day the 2nd South Staffordshire Battalion had tried to make its way into Arnhem as directed by Brig. Hicks. It took some while to bring in all of the men of the battalion from their defensive positions around the northern landing zones before they started the move into town. As soon as they got onto the main road they had the misfortune to be strafed by enemy fighters. Then, when they reached the eastern outskirts of Oosterbeek, they came under enemy fire. They were now on the same route taken by the 1st Battalion some hours earlier and, just like that battalion, the men were forced to halt and disperse into side roads and creep their way forwards over fences and through back gardens. There seemed no end to the German small arms fire aimed at them from all directions.



On the second day of the operation, men of the 2nd South Staffordshire Regiment move their 6-pdr anti-tank guns along the Utrecht–Arnhem road towards the enemy roadblocks which were holding up 1st Parachute Brigade. (IWM, BU1091)

Then it was the turn of Hackett's 11th Battalion to make the move. It assembled quickly on the landing grounds and marched off as though on exercise. The battalion followed its brigadier to the area of the divisional headquarters at the Hartenstein Hotel and waited, and waited. Two hours later it resumed its march, taking the direct route into the town along the Utrechtseweg to arrive in the congested area near St Elizabeth Hospital. Small firefights with the enemy were dealt with all along the way.

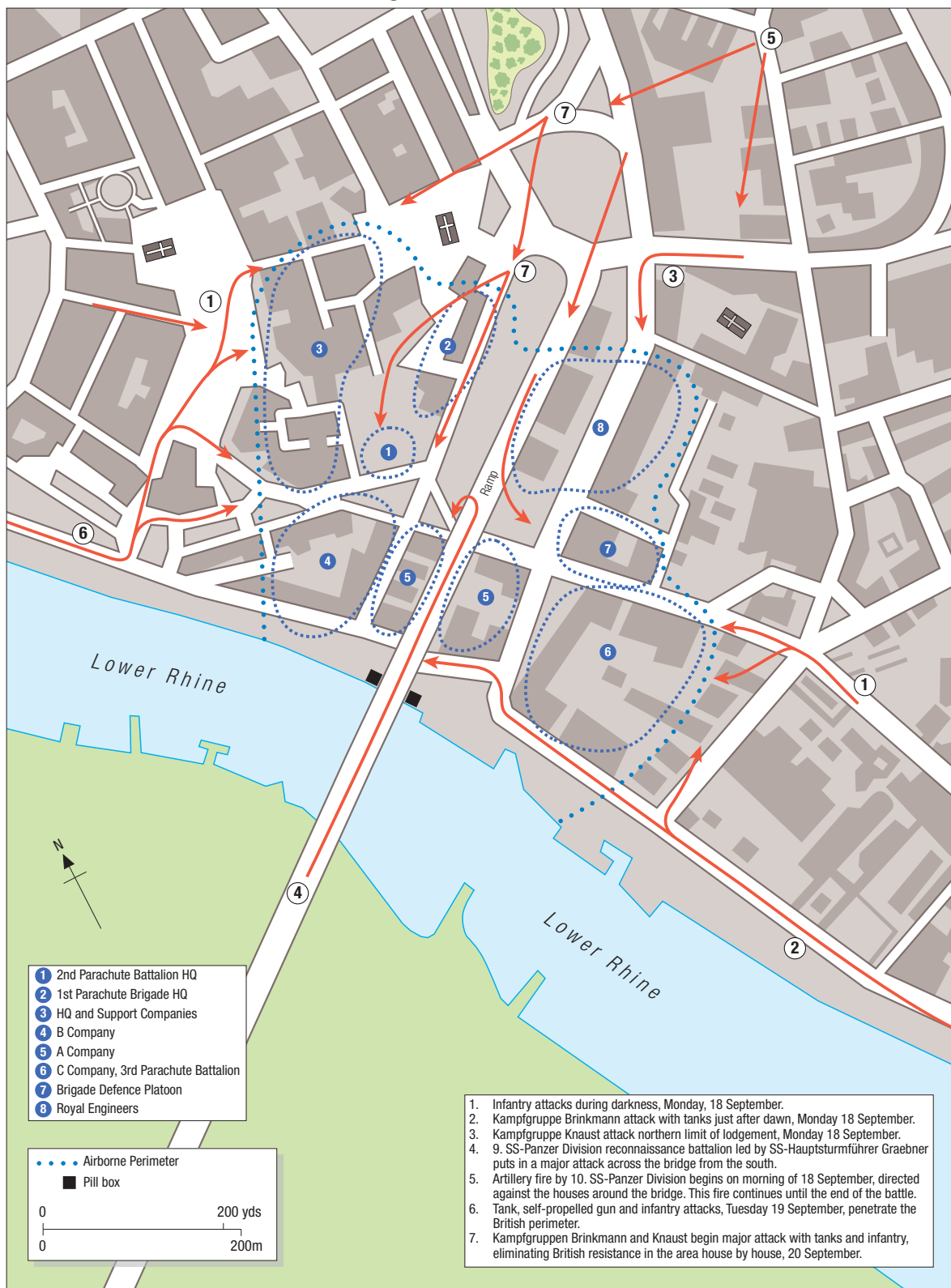
Not long after the 11th Battalion advance, the second party of the South Staffordshires also moved along the road to join up with the advance party of its battalion. It had landed earlier that afternoon and was eager for action. The South Staffordshires' advance was a repeat of the stop-start movements endured by the other battalions trying to make their way through small hidden groups of the enemy. This last move brought two fresh battalions into the area held by the 1st and 3rd Battalions near the hospital. All it needed now was a concerted effort by these four battalions to push their way through to the bridge by sheer force of numbers. Unfortunately, the brigadier under whose command they had been placed was wounded and being cared for by Dutch civilians. The commanding general was still in hiding.

After meeting with Brig. Hicks at the Hartenstein Hotel, Brig. Hackett planned for his 4th Parachute Brigade to make its moves in compliance with its original directive, the high ground to the north of Arnhem. Hackett had been given the King's Own Scottish Borderers to replace the 11th Parachute Battalion after the battalion had been released from guarding the landing grounds. The KOSB was ordered to take the ground to the north of Landing Zone L and allow Hackett's 156th Parachute Battalion to pass through and seize the prominent ground between Amsterdam road and the railway line. This would allow Hackett's third unit, 10th Parachute Battalion, to continue the advance, which would bring it to a position on the northern side of the



A 6-pdr anti-tank gun of the 2nd South Staffordshire Regiment in action at Oosterbeek. This particular gun named 'Gallipoli' is now an exhibit at the Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop in Hampshire. (TS Collection)

The defence of the Arnhem road bridge



railway, forward of the hospital and close to the centre of Arnhem. The move would secure the left flank of the 11th Battalion and the South Staffordshires. This triple advance began during the night, but none of the battalions was able to make significant progress once the leading companies met with Kampfgruppe Spindler from 9. SS-Panzer Division. It was holding a blocking line just to the north of Oosterbeek, well short of the initial spur of high ground which was the objective of Lt. Col. des Voeux's 156th Parachute Battalion.

Daylight earlier that Monday morning found the area around the road bridge calm and quiet after a night of sporadic attacks from the west and east by German infantry. A few lorries had ventured towards the bridge during the night, unsuspecting that they had strayed into the perimeter occupied by Lt. Col. Frost's 2nd Battalion. They were shot up and their drivers killed.

An hour after dawn a more determined group of the enemy advanced from the east along the road by the river. The role of eliminating the British hold on the northern end of the bridge was given to SS-Major Brinkmann, who had under command a collection of Panzergrenadiers and armoured cars from the 10. SS-Panzer Division. The battle group was itself under the command of the 9. SS-Panzer Division. It was supported by a company of infantry from Krafft's SS-Panzer Grenadier Ausbildungs und Ersatz Bataillon 16. The tanks of Brinkmann's battle group had been used for driver training and its accompanying Panzergrenadiers had been rated 'not yet fit for active service'.

The attack was led by SS-Sturmbannführer Knaust, and was formed into Kampfgruppe Knaust. Brinkmann now ordered Knaust to put pressure on the northern end of the bridge's ramps, whilst he and the remainder of tanks and infantry attacked the British from the east. This assault was a slow probing advance, which resulted in ferocious house-to-house fighting. A few houses were captured and tanks began advancing towards the underpass



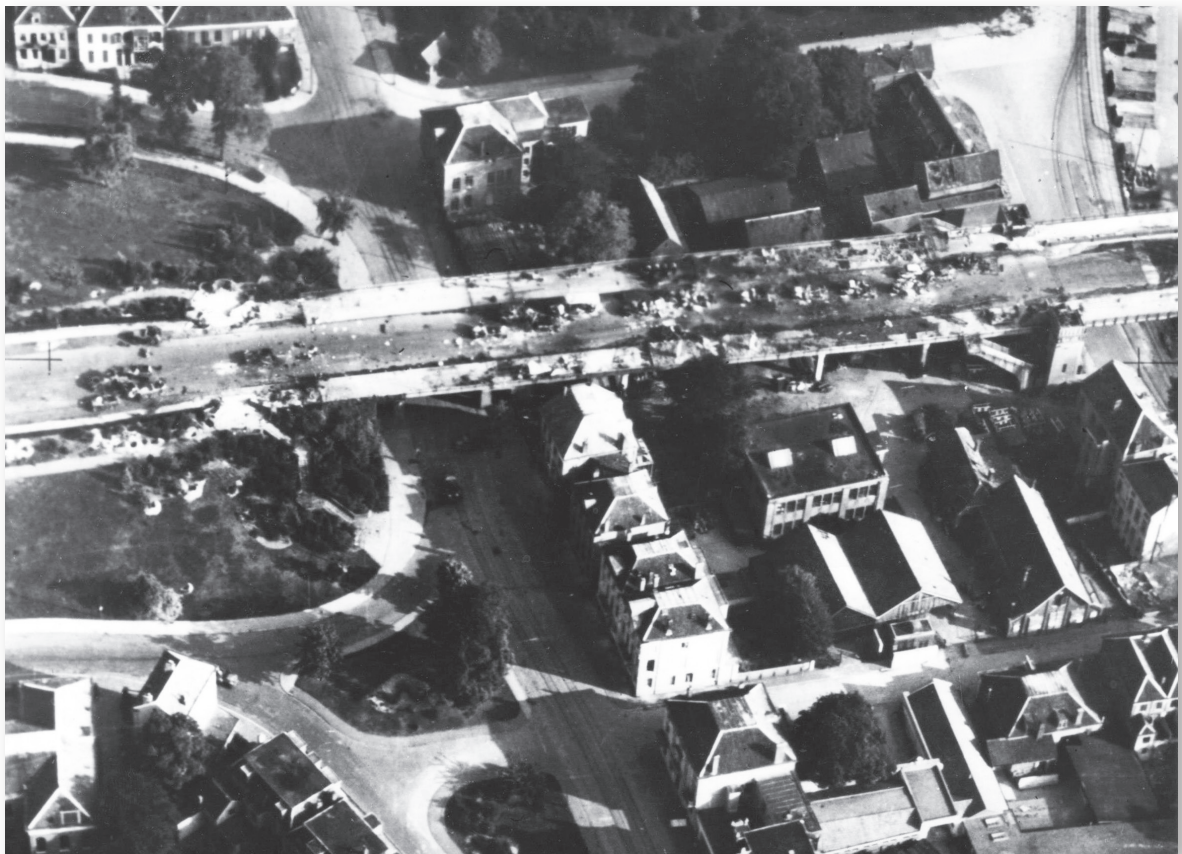
The remains of an original wartime Horsa glider at the Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop in Hampshire. Lying in the foreground is the 6-pdr anti-tank gun 'Gallipoli' that saw service at Arnhem with the 2nd South Staffordshire Regiment. (Ken Ford, with the Permission of the Museum of Army Flying)

beneath the raised section of the bridge, the attack beaten off with the aid of a 6-pdr anti-tank gun. The leading tank managed to drive forward as far as the tunnel under the ramp, but was knocked out and its supporting infantry were killed. The survivors then withdrew.

Later that morning lookouts at the top of the houses overlooking the ramp warned of a German column approaching the southern end of the bridge. SS-Hauptsturmführer Graebner's reconnaissance battalion from the 9. SS-Panzer Division was returning to Arnhem and chose to do so over the bridge that was dominated by the British. As the German column approached the far end of the structure, fire from the 75mm guns of the airborne division's light regiment descended on them – these guns back near Oosterbeek had been registered on this target earlier that morning. The barrage caused some casualties, but Graebner's leading group pressed forwards onto the bridge. The armoured cars and half-tracks gathered speed and made a dash for the far end, swerving round the burned-out lorries and debris that littered the roadway.

The paratroopers held their fire until almost point-blank range, then opened up with two anti-tank guns. Men closer to the ramp fired Projector Infantry Anti-Tank (PIAT) bombs at the nearest vehicles. The half-tracks were carrying Panzergrenadiers and these unfortunates spilled out onto the road only to be cut down by small arms fire from the buildings. There was no escape from the high ramp which ran between the houses held by Frost's men. The paratroopers looked down on the stalled and flaming vehicles and shot each German that

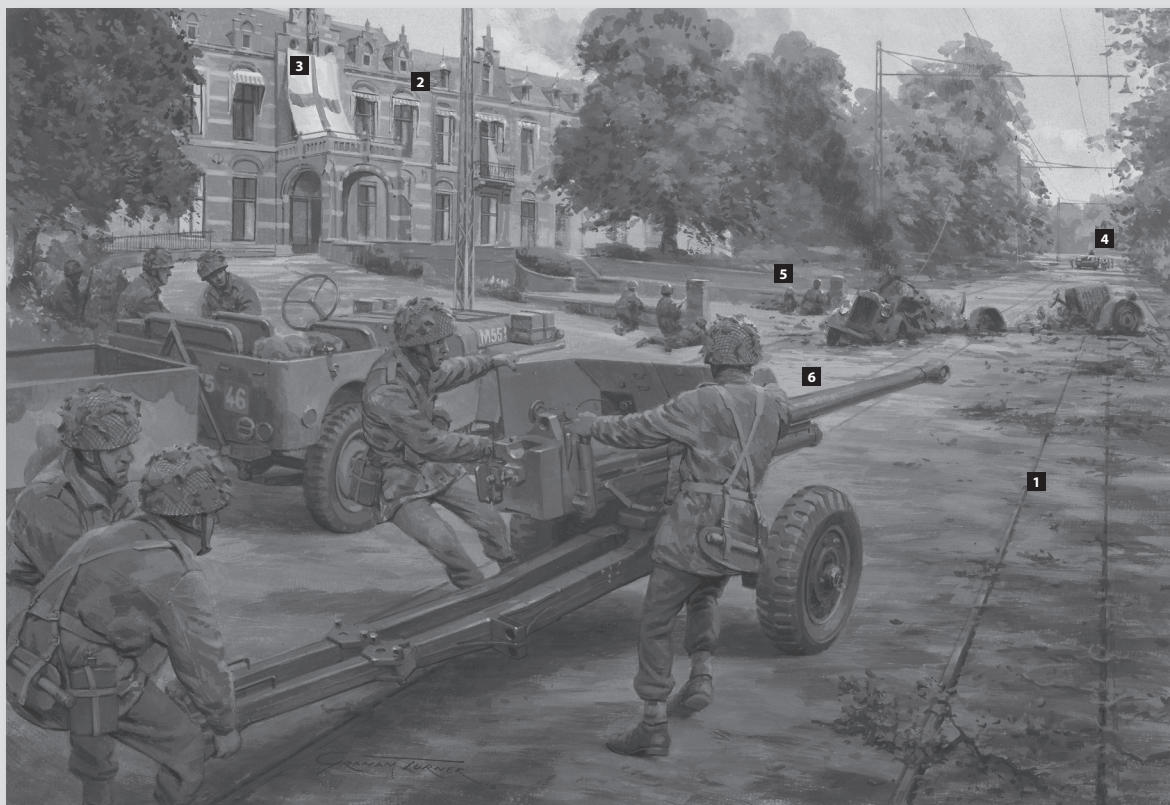
Aerial photograph of the Arnhem road bridge taken on 18 September soon after the attack across the bridge by SS-Hauptsturmführer Graebner's reconnaissance battalion from the 9. SS-Panzer Division. Wreckage from the abortive German attack covers the road between the buildings held by Lt. Col. Frost's battalion. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF017)





GRAHAM TURNER





STREET FIGHTING IN ARNHEM OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL (PP. 62–63)

The road from Oosterbeek to Arnhem, the Utrechtseweg (1), passed in front of St Elizabeth Hospital (2) and was the scene of much fighting as the ebb and flow of attacks by both sides moved along the road and around the hospital's perimeter. The road was the central route from the landing and drop zones to the road bridge at Arnhem, 'Tiger' Route.

On the first day of the landings, the 16th Parachute Field Ambulance moved into the hospital and was dealing with wounded paratroopers by 2200hrs that night. Two operating theatres were commandeered by the British, with Dutch doctors and nurses volunteering to help tend to casualties. The next day a large Red Cross flag was hung from a first-floor window (3). Before long the fighting outside became intense. The Germans managed to move past the hospital from the Arnhem direction and get amongst the 1st and 3rd Parachute Battalion, halting their moves to get to the bridge. Major-General Urquhart got mixed up in this action and was forced to take shelter at No. 14 Zwarteweg, which overlooked the western wall of the hospital. Whilst the fighting was going on, jeeps laden with casualties continued to drive up to the hospital even with German troops inside. The British once more overtook the hospital the next day as they resumed their drive to the bridge. Advancing along the Utrechtseweg they managed to restore the building to the airborne division's control. Unfortunately, on the third day of the battle, the Germans once again captured the building. Medical

officers and surgical teams were allowed to continue their work, but all other personnel, including the walking wounded, were led away into captivity.

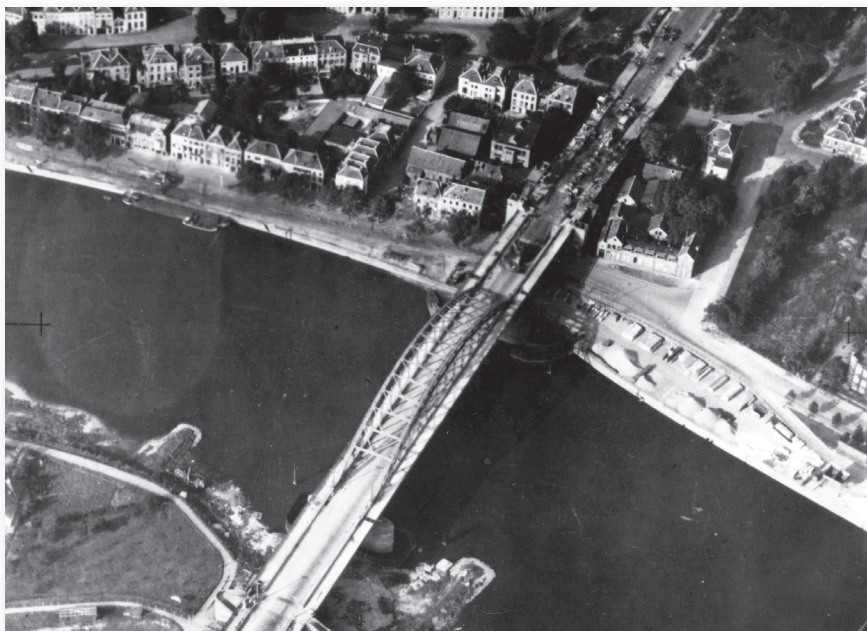
The battlescene illustration shows fighting outside the hospital on 19 September. During the early part of the day the South Staffordshires had advanced past the hospital as far as the museum, but were halted by enemy fire. The Germans then counter-attacked and virtually surrounded those troops that had got forward. After suffering heavy losses the battalion gradually withdrew back towards the hospital. The enemy then continued to push westwards supported by self-propelled guns (4). The presence of armour moving down the road hurriedly forced anti-tank guns forward to counter the enemy move. They have been moved into a firing position whilst infantry hastily takes up positions by the side of the road (5).

The 6-pdr gun was the main British anti-tank weapon of the war (6). A hinged split-trail version for airborne use reduced its length and made it manoeuvrable enough to be transported by air. The gun was light enough to be towed by a jeep and manhandled into position by its crew of six. The 6-pdr had a 57mm calibre capable of firing both solid shot and HE rounds. When firing APDS (Armour Piercing Discarded Sabot) rounds the gun's anti-tank performance was almost doubled, which made it capable of penetrating 150mm of armour at 1,000m (1,100 yards). This made it more than a match for most German tanks.

tried to flee. The carnage complete, those vehicles at the end of the column that were able to reverse quickly retreated back to the far side of the river, leaving a tangled block of dead men and burning metal strewn across the road. SS-Hauptsturmführer Graebner, so recently the recipient of the Knight's Cross, was amongst those that were killed.

The next attack came, as before, from the eastern side of the perimeter, again supported by tanks. The enemy managed to get close to the ramp and within the British positions, but were steadily beaten back by anti-tank fire and artillery fire from the Oosterbeek 75mm batteries. Another attack later in the day caused two of the houses on the eastern side to be abandoned by the paratroopers. A slight adjustment to the perimeter was then made to seal the gap. After these attacks the enemy decided to try to wear down the resolve of Frost's men through shell and mortar fire, whilst they organized a more concerted effort to remove the British. Bittrich now ordered that the problem of capturing the bridge should be given exclusively to 10. SS-Panzer Division so that the formation could then drive south against the Americans at Nijmegen. The 9. SS-Panzer Division would meanwhile concentrate on clearing the British from Arnhem and the landing areas to the west.

By the end of the second day of Operation *Market-Garden*, it was becoming clear that things were also not going completely as planned on the route up to Arnhem from the south. German opposition was gathering all along the way and progress by British XXX Corps had slowed down. The bridge at Son in the US 101st Airborne Division's area had been blown and progress northwards was impossible until the engineers of XXX Corps could be brought forward to bridge the Wilhelmina Canal. In the US 82nd Division's sector the bridge over the river Maas at Grave had been captured by the Americans, but the bridge over the river Waal at Nijmegen was nowhere near being taken. With Operation *Garden* slipping behind schedule, it appeared that the British 1st Airborne Division would have to hold on for a little more time than had been anticipated.



The town side of the road bridge at Arnhem showing debris from abortive German attacks. The closeness of the houses to the ramps leading up to the bridge enabled Frost's men to fire on the Germans from upper windows at almost point-blank range. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF020)

THE THIRD DAY, TUESDAY 19 SEPTEMBER

Major-General Urquhart had spent the night cooped up in the loft of the house at 14 Zwarteweg, a road close by St Elizabeth Hospital in Arnhem. He and two fellow officers had spent the night in hiding, with a German self-propelled gun parked outside and Germans running up and down the street. Unable to move for fear of capture, the general could only wait and hope that the area would soon be overrun by the men of his division; flight was impossible.

At first light 156th Battalion resumed its attack along a line south of the Amsterdam road towards the high ground, once again coming up against Kampfgruppe Spindler barring the way. Spindler's positions were perfect for defence, situated in woods on top of a ridge looking down on the British. In front of the position, running parallel to the defence line, was the Dreijenseweg road. As the parachute battalion attacked, German armour burst from the woods and began machine-gunning the infantry caught in the open. Then the armour roared up and down the road shelling the rear companies' positions. More attempts were made by Lt. Col. des Voeux's men, but none could break the German line. By early afternoon, with casualties approaching 50 per cent, Hackett called a halt to the advance.

Attacking on the left of 156th Battalion was Lt. Col. Smyth's 10th Battalion. Its axis of advance was the Amsterdam road. Like its sister battalion, the 10th ran headlong into Kampfgruppe Spindler, the defence line of which stretched across the road. Despite taking serious casualties, Smyth's battalion failed to make any progress. The wooded area and the closeness of the two sides made artillery support almost impossible. Machine guns and mortars were the only offensive weapons and the enemy was too well dug-in for these weapons to make a substantial impact. After five hours of battering away, the attack was called off. The division was most certainly not going to get into Arnhem via the northern route across the high ground.

A British paratrooper on guard in a ruined villa in Oosterbeek. He is armed with an American M1 carbine, rather than the normal Lee-Enfield Rifle No. 4. (TS Collection)



On the western edge of Arnhem, preparations had been made during the night for another concerted effort to try to reach the beleaguered forces at the bridge along the central route. It fell to Lt. Col. Dobie of the 1st Battalion to organize it. The plan was for the South Staffords to attack along the main road past St Elizabeth Hospital with the 11th Battalion following behind and for the 1st Battalion to move along the road close by the river. There was some delay in starting the attack because divisional headquarters had received a false report that Frost's hold on the bridge had been lost.

It was still dark when the two separate advances got under way that morning. Lieutenant-Colonel Dobie's force along the river road soon made contact with remnants of Lt. Col. Fitch's 3rd Battalion retreating through its advance. Dobie was told that the area between them and the bridge was blocked by a very effective German defence. There was no possible way forward along that route. Undaunted, Dobie pressed forward, supported by those stragglers from 3rd Battalion. The result was as predicted. The attack got to within 750m (800 yards) of the bridge, but could get no farther. Enemy fire whittled away at the paratroopers until just the colonel and 40 men were still moving. Then Dobie was slightly wounded in the head and the attackers spread out to find shelter in whatever house or building was close by. Movement forward was no longer possible; retreat was the only option. This was the end of all attempts to move along the riverbank road to the bridge.

Farther inland, the progress of Lt. Col. W. McCardie's South Staffordshires started well. Opposition was slight and the leading troops moved along the Utrecht road past the hospital and almost reached the museum. It was a false start for the Germans had moved their defences farther east and the ground the Staffordshires moved along was relatively free of the enemy. During the night the 9. SS-Panzer Division had formed a formidable stop line close by the open area near the museum which ran south down to the river and up and over the railway line to the north. Here SS troops fortified houses and laid out areas criss-crossed with lines of fire. They bolstered the line with tanks, armoured cars and artillery. The troops were ensconced in well-protected positions and well supplied with ammunition. The South Staffordshires now ran into this line just as it was getting light.



The Hartenstein Hotel at Oosterbeek today. Once the headquarters of British 1st Airborne Division, the old hotel now houses an excellent exhibition relating to the battle that took place in nearby Arnhem and within its grounds. (TS Collection)

Forced to a halt by the weight of fire aimed against it, the battalion spread out around the museum and the men took shelter in the nearby houses. The enemy opened up at almost point-blank range on the glider-borne infantry. Tank and machine-gun fire were intermixed with individual aimed fire from small arms. The South Staffords found it difficult to retaliate, for each time they showed their face at a window or doorway it attracted even more fire. The anti-tank guns supporting the advance were stuck back near the start line, unable to be towed forward because of small arms and mortar fire. It was therefore down to a few brave individuals to stalk the tanks with PIAT hand-held anti-tank weapons, with each man hoping to get lucky with one of his bombs. The battle raged for around three hours before ammunition ran low. Lieutenant-Colonel McCardie was expecting the 11th Battalion to come up and give support, but there was no sign of it. As the numbers dwindled the only party of any size was occupying the museum. This too was eventually flushed out by German tanks and infantry. Very soon the only possibility left to the men was death or capture. It was the end for the 2nd South Staffordshire Regiment.

The advance of the South Staffords did have one valuable success, for as the enemy retreated before it they evacuated the area of the hospital and the Zwarteweg road in particular. Major-General Urquhart saw the enemy leaving and took his chance to escape from the confines of the house at No. 14. He joined up with some men of his division and commandeered a jeep to take him to divisional headquarters at the Hartenstein Hotel. It was here that he was briefed on the chaotic nature of events in Arnhem. The battle had got out of control and Urquhart decided on a number of moves to try to stabilize

The house at 14 Zwarteweg, now called Urquhart House, in which Maj. Gen. Urquhart took shelter from marauding Germans during the advance into Arnhem. (TS Collection)



the operation. He realized from his own experience that a direct route to the beleaguered men at the bridge was no longer possible. He knew that it was too late to help the South Staffords and told the 11th Battalion to halt and prepare for another task.

Down by the river things were also going very badly. Having stalled the attack along the riverbank road by the 1st Battalion, the Germans switched from defence into attack, forcing back the paratroopers and evicting them from the houses they sheltered in. Tanks came forward to blast the British out of their hiding places. Machine guns swept the roads where they sought to escape. Those that fought back were killed and left where they lay. Those that decided to surrender were taken prisoner. The 1st and 3rd Battalions had been effectively destroyed. Lieutenant-Colonel Fitch had been killed and the wounded Lt. Col. Dobie was made prisoner.

Three battalions had now been virtually eliminated, with only a few survivors retreating to join up with the units behind, but Urquhart still had a sizeable part of 4th Brigade available for his next move. The 11th Parachute Battalion was now ordered to cross the railway line and take the high ground to the north so that the two stalled battalions of 4th Brigade could attack through into Arnhem via a different route.

Disaster struck the 11th Battalion just as it was forming up on its start line. The enemy had spotted movement and began mortaring and shelling Lt. Col. Lea's men. Then tanks moved round to the north of the railway and joined in the battle. Anti-tank guns could not engage the enemy armour as they were on the wrong side of the railway tracks beneath the embankment. The men were caught in the open as they moved across the railway and towards the high ground, suffering serious losses. The battalion began to lose shape as paratroopers tried to find cover where they could. Lieutenant-Colonel Lea was wounded and taken prisoner along with many of his men. Within a short space of time the 11th Battalion ceased to be a coherent unit. There was no possible way forward and once again retreat was the only viable option. Barely 150 men escaped death or capture to make it back into the relative safety of what was the start line. Another of Urquhart's battalions had disappeared from his map and Lt. Col. Frost's men at the bridge were no nearer being reinforced or rescued.

The airfields back in England that morning were once again plagued by low mist, delaying the third lift which was to bring in the Polish Brigade and further supplies. Only the anti-tank guns and jeeps of the Polish Brigade could be flown in, for they were carried in gliders and their tug airfields were free of mist. The new landings were scheduled for Landing Zone L, which was under the protection of the KOSB, although the battalion's hold on the open area was precarious. The battle over to the right that was consuming 4th Brigade was close to the eastern edge of Landing Zone L. The KOSB were also having to deal with increasing pressure from the west as new enemy units of von Tettau's group pressed closer to the airborne lodgement.

The glider aircraft were not able to get under way until around 1200hrs, some four hours late. Thirteen of them failed to make it to Arnhem, either from tow rope failures or because of enemy action. The Germans knew exactly what was happening at Arnhem and waited expectantly for more landings and re-supply missions. They had by then replaced many of the flak batteries destroyed in earlier bombing. The glider landings were hardly a success, for only three of the Polish anti-tank guns arrived safely and could be unloaded. The bulk of the re-supply mission landed amongst German positions.

Major-General Urquhart at his headquarters situated in the Hartenstein Hotel in Oosterbeek. His headquarters was established during his absence. The picture was taken soon after his escape from hiding in No. 14 Zwarteweg in Arnhem. (TS Collection)





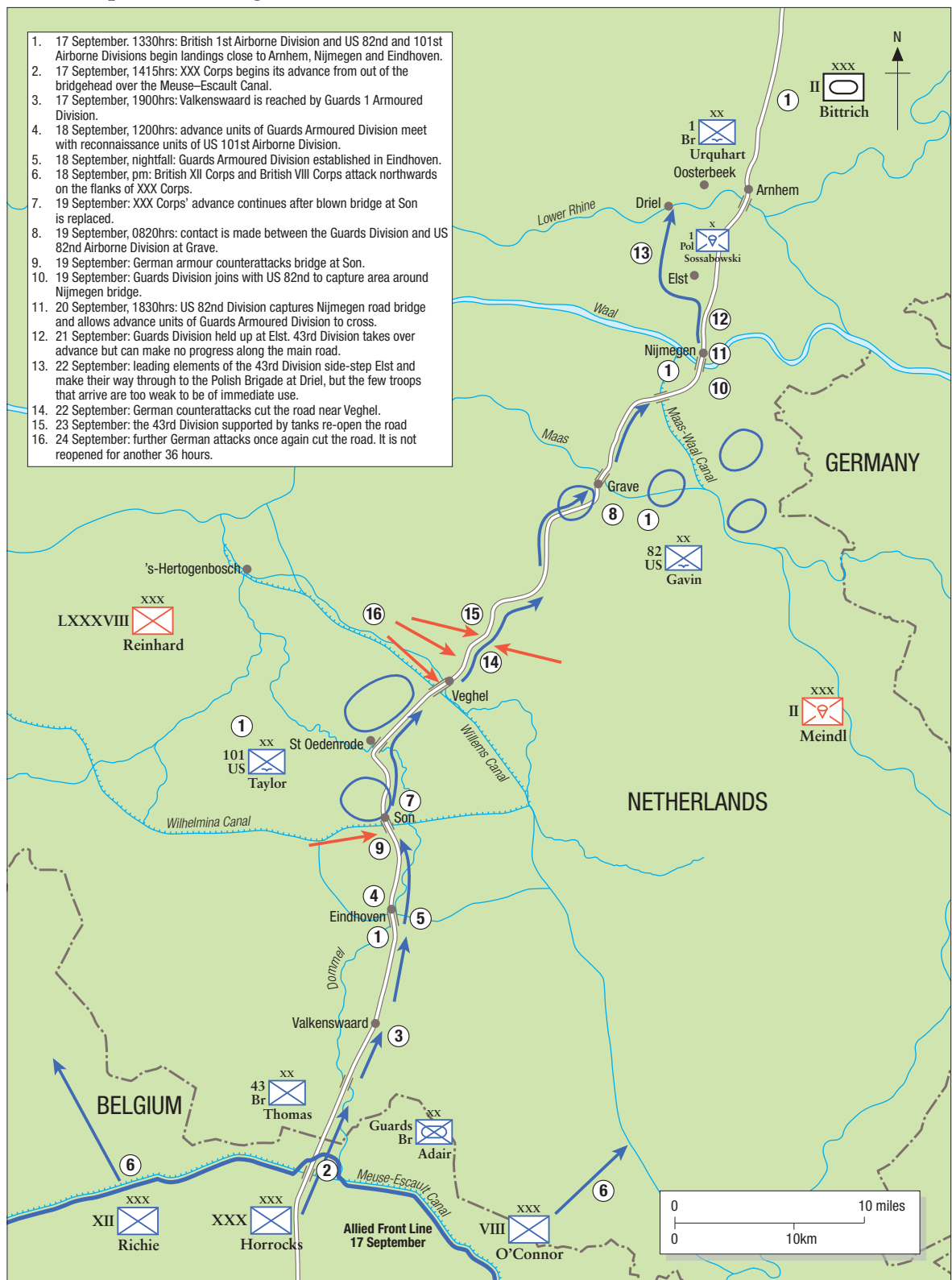
This supply canister was dropped sufficiently close to British troops to be photographed. A great many of the provisions and ammunition delivered on re-supply missions fell on German-held ground and into enemy hands. (TS Collection)

The KOSB had been placed under 4th Brigade's command after it had relinquished 11th Battalion and Brig. Hackett had moved his headquarters to a position close by the northern embankment of the railway line near Landing Zone L. During the early afternoon Maj. Gen. Urquhart came up to meet with Hackett and discuss their next moves. The failure of the 10th and 156th Battalions to make any progress along the high ground to the east and the pressure being resisted by the KOSB, dictated a shortening of the line to consolidate the brigade south of the railway embankment. Once concentrated, another attempt at Arnhem was planned. This plan was quickly abandoned, for it proved difficult for the brigade to disengage with the enemy as it withdrew. The SS attacked as the paratroopers pulled out causing serious casualties and some disorganization. Lieutenant-Colonel des Voeux was killed during the withdrawal as he fought bravely with the rearguard. By the time the bulk of the brigade was behind the embankment it was clear to Hackett that it would be impossible to go back on the offensive.

This latest turn of events was not immediately relayed to those men of Lt. Col. Frost's group at the Arnhem road bridge. They fought a tenacious defence to hold onto the northern end of the river crossing. The previous night had been long and terrifying, the daylight hours were proving to be just as bad. They had been told to hold on for two days, they were now into their third. There was, however, some expectations of an upsurge in fortunes, for the Polish Brigade was scheduled to land that morning on Drop Zone K on the south side of the river about 1.5km (one mile) from the bridge. Frost had even organized a group of men and a few jeeps to drive over the bridge and meet up with the Poles as they arrived. They did not know that bad weather in England had forced the drop to be cancelled.

SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel had taken over the problem of the bridge and was determined that the British should be eliminated as soon as possible to allow his 10. SS-Panzer Division to get across and deal with the Americans at Nijmegen. German attacks were gradually stepped up with those units Harmel had available. They consisted mainly of shelling, mortaring and machine-gun fire. Small groups of Germans began attempting to infiltrate buildings before setting fire to them and sniping the paratroopers who tried

XXX Corps's drive along the route to Arnhem





German troops prepare for another assault on the burning buildings around Lt. Col. Frost's positions at the northern end of the road bridge in Arnhem. (TS Collection)

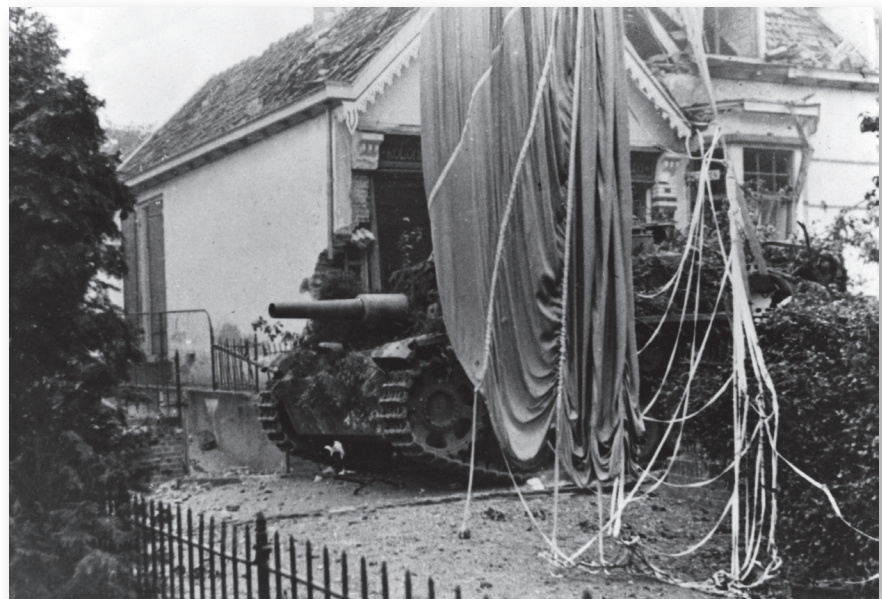
to escape. Little by little the SS chipped away at the perimeter of Frost's defences, gradually shrinking the ground that his force held. Casualties rose steadily, food and water were rationed and ammunition had begun to be conserved. Frost and his men were now under a complete state of siege, unable to influence any outside events.

During the day three tanks supported a German attack on the houses on the eastern side of the ramp. One house was captured and the defenders fell back. The tanks were then stalked by Frost's paratroopers using PIATs. One tank was knocked out, the other two withdrew and the house was retaken. Each time the enemy pressed forwards they were met with such determined resistance that they faltered and fell back. But each attack left a few more British dead and wounded. German attrition was gradually whittling down the numbers of the defenders.

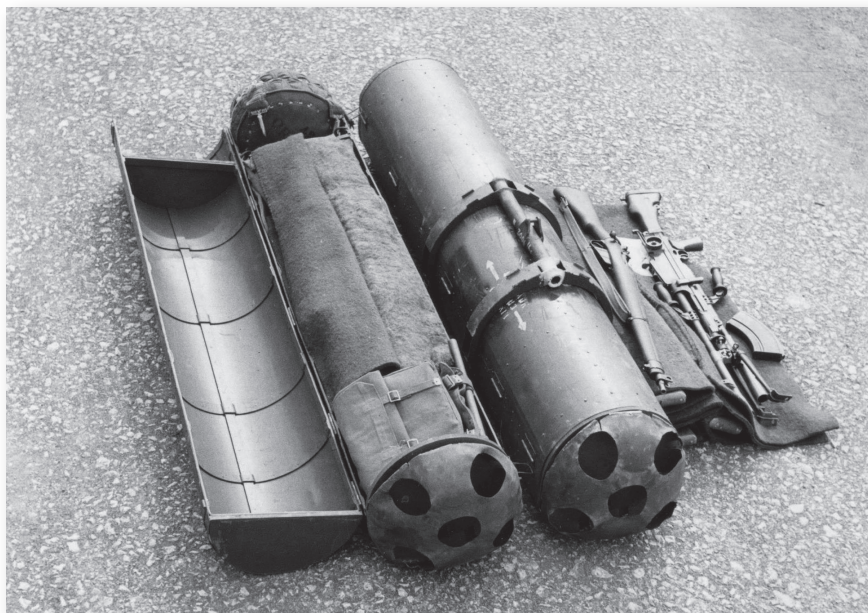
That morning Harmel tried to organize a truce to meet with Frost. Under a white flag a captured British prisoner, Sgt. Halliwell, was sent across with a message, which demanded that the British surrender as they were

completely cut off from their division with no hope of relief. Frost ignored the message and Sgt. Halliwell stayed with the paratroopers.

With the offer of a truce rejected, the Germans stepped up their assault on the lodgement, using overwhelming firepower, as attempts by infantry to gain the area house by house were proving expensive. To save casualties



A parachute canopy hangs from a tree alongside a German self-propelled gun. The parachute was most likely from a supply container that had been dropped somewhere outside the airborne perimeter. (TS Collection)



A supply canister of the type dropped by parachute at Arnhem. Most of these canisters fell amongst German-held positions, for it proved to be very difficult for the airborne division to contact the RAF in order to pinpoint new drop zones within the perimeter. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF003)

Harmel resorted to employing self-propelled artillery and aimed tank fire to blast their opponents out. Each building was now methodically assailed with a barrage of fire, which gradually reduced it to rubble. One by one the buildings around the bridge were systematically destroyed.

The drive northwards by XXX Corps to meet up with the airborne at Arnhem was also suffering. The use of the single road was proving difficult, for there could be no lateral movement to get round any obstacle of enemy resistance; every problem had to be faced head on. Engineers were working hard to get the Son bridge repaired, but, until it was open, the movement of ground troops northwards was stalled. Farther ahead the US 82nd Airborne Division was still fighting its way towards the great bridge over the river Waal at Nijmegen. The setbacks at Arnhem were mirrored by troubles in the south.

THE FOURTH DAY, WEDNESDAY 20 SEPTEMBER

During the night the realization that there would be no more attempts to reach the bridge gradually began to be accepted by Urquhart and his senior officers. Lieutenant-Colonel Frost and his men were now on their own. The airborne division's mission had been reduced to one of survival, waiting for relief by the advancing troops of XXX Corps. Frost and his men would have to hold on for as long as possible, hoping that the tanks of the Guards Armoured Division would come roaring up from the south to their rescue. For Urquhart, his task now was to hold onto his lodgement across the Lower Rhine so that it might be used as a bridgehead for an advance by 21st Army Group northwards.

The general decided to bring all of his outlying units into a perimeter based around his headquarters at the Hartenstein Hotel. Whilst Hackett's men manned the northern edge, those survivors of 1st Brigade, plus the 11th and 156th Battalions and all the various elements from the support groups

that were still east of Oosterbeek, were also pulled back to hold the eastern side of the perimeter. The west side was held by the 1st Border Regiment, which had stayed virtually in the same position since the start of the battle. The Borderers had been successfully resisting attacks from the west by a variety of German units, which had been ordered towards Arnhem to help eliminate the landings. On the right of the Border Regiment was the KOSB, which held the north-western end of the perimeter. This circle of defences, based around the Hartenstein, stretched for 3km (two miles) north of the river and around 1.5km from east to west. The airborne division was trapped in what was gradually to become a cauldron of fire, death and destruction.

At the bridge the numbers of dead and wounded increased steadily during the night. During the morning, contact was once again made with divisional headquarters over the unreliable radio net. There was no good news; XXX Corps advance was still bogged down at Nijmegen. There was to be no rescue, no relief, and no re-supply. This news was passed to Lt. Col. Frost and his men. The sounds of battle created by their comrades driving towards the bridge had died away until just a rumble of distant fire was discernable away to the west. The men at the bridge now realized that they were completely on their own and could look to no one but themselves.

Frost's defenders were confined to the buildings they sheltered in. Movement in the open was precarious if not impossible. Their main armament was reduced to just two anti-tank guns and these were impossible to bring into action for each individual trying to man them was cut down by machine-gun fire. Small 2in. mortars were their main weapons and stocks of mortar bombs were diminishing rapidly. Then Lt. Col. Frost was wounded. Still the men fought on, using small arms fire to discourage any of the enemy caught in the open, but they had no means of countering the tanks that began to mill around attacking buildings. Enemy attacks were small and precise, seeking to eliminate one building before the next, systematically reducing the paratroopers' hold on the area.



A wounded paratrooper is carried to a dressing station inside the besieged perimeter. (TS Collection)

During the afternoon a truce was called for the dead and injured to be dealt with. Then the action was renewed with new vigour, more buildings destroyed, more men killed and more of the lodgement taken. The Germans were everywhere and, because all ammunition had virtually expired, there was little or no retaliation. To all sane men this was the end; the situation was completely hopeless. During the night, white towels and sheets were gradually hung out and the last of the paratroopers still alive and uninjured filed solemnly out of the wrecked houses into captivity. The battle of the bridge was over.

Although it was a resounding defeat, Lt. Col. Frost and his men's actions at Arnhem had achieved much. Their hold on the bridge had lasted well beyond the expected time of their relief. They had also denied the use of the bridge to the enemy and thus prevented men and armour from being sent south against the American landings. They marched into captivity with pride and were recognized by their enemy as brave men.

With the bridge completely in German hands, the 10. SS-Panzer Division could move across and drive south against the American US 82nd Airborne Division and the ground troops of the British XXX Corps at Nijmegen. The 9. SS-Panzer Division and its associated units were now able to concentrate on eliminating Maj. Gen. Urquhart's forces within the perimeter around Oosterbeek. British 1st Airborne Division could now expect nothing but unrelenting pressure on its small lodgement and, to further the bad news, the arrival of the Polish Brigade had once again been cancelled as a result of bad weather over England.

Away to the south, GFM Model had mobilized his forces and regrouped them to attack not only the two American landings, but also the road and bridges that XXX Corps needed for its drive up to Arnhem. He planned to seal the Allied corridor at Nijmegen, Son and way back in Veghel, close to the original start line. The US 82nd Airborne Division at Nijmegen was attacked from out of the Reichswald Forest just across the German border. However, in the town of Nijmegen the division was able to capture, by a brilliant feat of arms, both sides of the great road bridge over the river Waal. This allowed the first tanks of the Guards Armoured Division to roll across. There were now just 14.5km (nine miles) separating XXX Corps and the airborne bridgehead.

German troops, thought to be from Krafft's *SS Kampfgruppe*, using a captured airborne jeep as a towing vehicle for their own PaK 37mm anti-tank gun. (TS Collection)



THE PERIMETER

The remainder of the Arnhem battle consisted of constant small-scale attacks on each side of the perimeter. SS-Obersturmbannführer Walter Harzer was well aware that the British paratroopers had nowhere to go. He had them surrounded, cut off from their drop zones and incapable of being relieved, except from the south where any such attempt would involve a risky river crossing. He knew that constant pressure could and would whittle away at their numbers without exposing too many of his men and this was the tactic which he now employed.

Throughout the next few days, the perimeter was subjected to constant shell and mortar fire. German infantry supported by tanks probed each side of the bridgehead. To start with, the British still had enough ammunition and a few anti-tank guns to resist these moves, but each hour saw supplies diminish. Inevitably the number of casualties also grew hour by hour. All around the airborne's defences acts of heroism and sheer bloody-mindedness saw off the German raids into their lines. The garrison of this small enclave amounted to just over 3,000 men. Now paratroopers, glider pilots, engineers, artillerymen and the men from a host of support services fought a battle of attrition, each side grinding down the manpower of their opponents. To describe the individual scenes of heroism would fill a book by itself. The British had been constricted into what had become an enclave of despair and were forced to endure their confinement without respite. Their determination was every bit as stoic as their comrades' had been on the bridge. Unfortunately, also enduring this horror were several hundred civilians caught up in the battle.

The Dutch people of Arnhem and the surrounding villages, especially those overtaken by the battle, had suffered considerably. Many had been killed in the fighting, trapped in their homes by fire from both sides. Scores of buildings had been destroyed and lives changed for ever. They gave unequivocal support to the British and suffered accordingly, for the Germans were not reluctant to punish anyone who had helped their enemies. And,



Troops display a parachute canopy in an attempt to attract supply aircraft to their presence at the Hartenstein Hotel. (TS Collection)

sadly, the expectations of liberation that rushed through the town and countryside with the arrival of parachutes and gliders were quickly dashed. Liberation was not at hand. It would take another nine long months before the people of Arnhem were free.

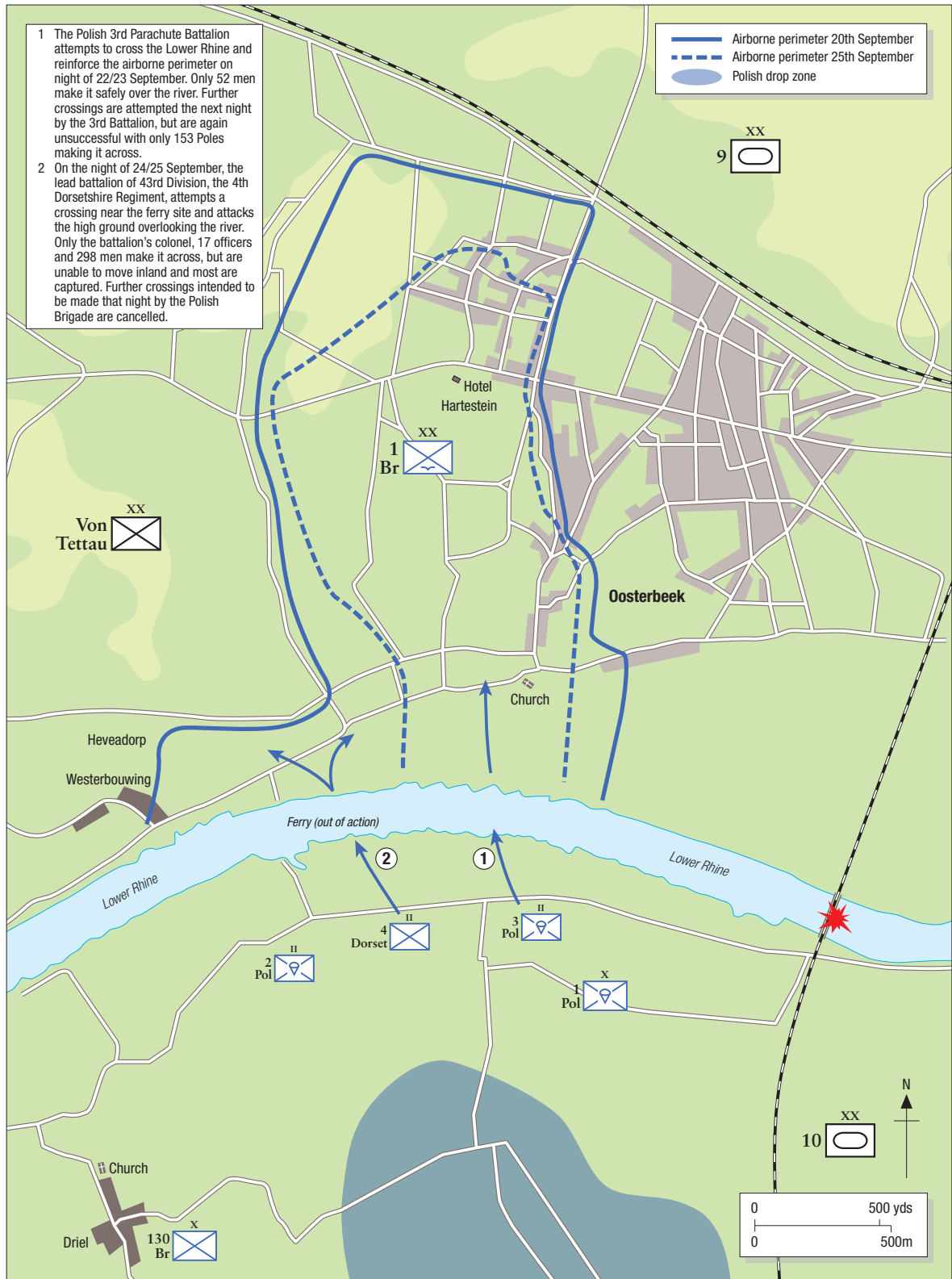
Re-supply missions to the British 1st Airborne Division were an important part of the original air plan. It was imperative that fresh supplies were delivered each day into the lodgement. This was, however, proving to be difficult, for the drop zone allocated for this re-supply had been overrun by the enemy and it was proving almost impossible to brief pilots and navigators on the situation that existed on the ground. Thursday 21 September's supply drops, like those before and indeed after, mostly went awry. The aircraft making the drops were hit by flak and enemy fighters and lost 28 of the 107 planes making the mission. Those that reached the air above Oosterbeek dropped almost all of their loads on the Germans who besieged the perimeter. Very little of the desperately needed provisions and ammunition made it into Urquhart's positions, even though the men on the ground made frantic efforts with white panels, streamers and Very lights to attract the aircraft to their positions.

The morning saw two particularly strong attacks made on the west and northern sides of the lodgement. Both were beaten off with heavy loss on both sides. Then came a stroke of luck. Contact was made, via a Type 22 radio set, with the British 64th Medium Regiment Royal Artillery, which was supporting XXX Corps. Its guns were located some 6.5km (four miles) south of Nijmegen, just 21km (13 miles) south of Urquhart's positions. The No. 1 Forward Observation Unit detailed to make contact with XXX Corps artillery could now vector in support for the beleaguered airborne troops. The first few rounds fell short because of the range of the 5.5in guns. Undaunted, the 64th Medium Regiment moved its guns closer to Nijmegen and opened fire again. This time their shots fell amongst the German positions mapped out by the airborne artillery observers. From then on, the whole of



Two airborne prisoners are driven away in a captured jeep after surrendering during the final days of the battle. (TS Collection)

Polish paratroops and infantry from the 4th Dorsets attempt to reinforce airborne perimeter



the perimeter could be covered with medium shellfire. It was a great boost for Urquhart's forces; XXX Corps was getting closer.

The arrival of the Polish Brigade, already postponed twice, took place that Thursday, although not on Drop Zone K, the drop zone it had originally planned to use south of the river. The loss of the Arnhem road bridge and the shrinking of 1st Airborne's perimeter around Oosterbeek led Urquhart to request that the Poles drop on the far side of the Lower Rhine opposite the positions he held. The new drop zone would be close to the village of Driel. It was hoped that Maj. Gen. Sosabowski's troops could then cross over using the ferry at Heveadorp, although by that time, unknown to Urquhart, the ferry had been sunk and its cables cut.

The Polish Brigade drop did not go according to plan. Bad weather caused a recall signal to be sent but only 41 aircraft aborted the mission; 73 other C-47 transports continued to the drop zone. The mistake left Sosabowski's forces 30 per cent short of their full strength. The drop was relatively uneventful, receiving little opposition from the Germans, but the arrival of the Poles did sound alarm bells at Bittrich's headquarters. The landings on the southern side of the river led some staff to believe that the Polish Brigade could launch an attack to capture the southern end of the road bridge. A *Kampfgruppe* was hastily formed to guard against this possibility.

The brigade quickly split into battalion order, with the 2nd Battalion moving towards the ferry site, the 3rd Battalion towards the river opposite Oosterbeek and the 1st Battalion guarding the area of the drop zone. It was soon discovered that there was no possibility of using the ferry. The situation soon became even worse when it was found that no radio contact could be made between Urquhart's headquarters and Maj. Gen. Sosabowski. There was to be no liaison between the two camps about what to do next.

The impasse was resolved when a Polish officer with Urquhart, Capt. Zwolanski, swam across the river to make contact. He told the Polish general that engineers would try to prepare boats to ferry the Poles across. The Poles should also look for craft on their side of the river. Both attempts came to



German soldiers inspect a captured airborne 6-pdr anti-tank gun after an airborne position had been overrun. (TS Collection)

nothing; no boats were made nor craft found. With no means of crossing the river available, Sosabowski ordered his men back into the area around Driel to take up defensive positions and wait for XXX Corps.

The arrival of the Polish Brigade across the river lifted spirits inside the perimeter for a short while, that is until the next artillery barrage and the next German attack came in. The men within the perimeter were exhausted, almost at breaking point, yet each knowing that he had to endure to survive. The question continually asked again and again was, 'Where is XXX Corps'?

Urquhart was also becoming more and more anxious about the length of time it was taking XXX Corps to arrive. He was convinced that its commander, Lt. Gen. Brian Horrocks, did not understand the severe nature of his division's position. Relief that night was essential. The general decided to send his chief of staff, Lt. Col. Mackenzie, and his chief engineer, Lt. Col. Myers, across the river to see Horrocks and the corps commander Lt. Gen. Browning.

The two men crossed the Rhine in a rubber boat and joined up with the Poles on the far side of the river. They arrived in a barrage of fire, which was being aimed at Sosabowski's men. The enemy was attempting to prevent the Poles from moving against the Arnhem road bridge, which had actually never been part of the plan anyway. Just before Mackenzie and Myers arrived at Driel a momentous event had taken place. The first contact between XXX Corps and the airborne troops was made when a few armoured cars of the 2nd Household Cavalry arrived from the south. They had managed to make the advance from Nijmegen using minor roads, which twisted through isolated villages to the west. The main route north from the Nijmegen bridge, along which the armour of the Guards Division and the infantry of the 43rd (Wessex) Division were trying to advance, was barred by the 10. SS-Panzer Division at Elst.

Mackenzie and Myers were able to use the radios on the Household Cavalry's armoured cars to contact Lt. Gen. Horrocks at XXX Corps Headquarters. They relayed the urgent message from Urquhart and stressed



The ruined church at Oosterbeek around which there was so much heavy fighting. The picture was taken after the town was liberated in 1945. (TS Collection)

the need for reinforcements and supplies to be sent to the airborne division that night or all would be lost. Horrocks understood the gravity of their message and promised to get units from the 43rd Division up to the Rhine with amphibious DUKWs as a matter of urgency. There was a problem, however, for the route up to Driel was once again cut by the enemy.

Mackenzie now turned to Sosabowski with orders from Urquhart. It was imperative that Polish troops be ferried across to bolster the defences of the perimeter before they were overwhelmed. 'Even just a few men might make the difference,' Mackenzie pleaded. He explained that there were several two-man rubber dinghies with the airborne and these could possibly be used. Sosabowski agreed and made arrangements to start the operation at nightfall. The DUKWs from the 43rd Division might also have arrived by then.

The 43rd Division had one brigade, 129th Brigade, trying to advance along the Nijmegen–Arnhem road with the Guards Division and a second brigade, 214th Brigade, attempting to get forward along minor roads to the west. Both brigades were stopped by strong enemy forces backed by armour. Forward movement could be effected only by strong set-piece attacks. This was a slow and frustrating process. Brigadier Essame, commander of 214th Brigade, decided to send a flying column from Lt. Col. Taylor's 5th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry along side roads to try to make it through to the river. The column included two DUKWs loaded with supplies.

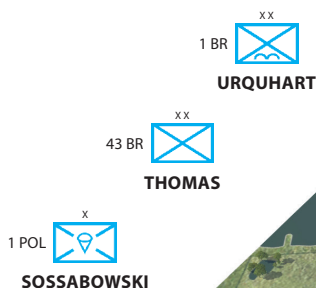
The journey by Taylor's group proved to be hazardous. It made it to the river, but only after having to deal with two Tiger tanks on the way. Now that there were DUKWs at Driel there was a means of ferrying Sosabowski's brigade across, but it proved to be difficult to find a suitable launching place. Then it started to rain. The area near the river turned to mud, immobilizing the cumbersome vehicles. In the end they had to be manhandled towards the river. It was all to no avail for they slid into ditches and were eventually totally bogged down. Strenuous efforts failed to dislodge them. With the DUKWs out of action, the Poles resorted to crossing the river on flimsy rubber boats, two men at a time. At the end of the night, only 50 men and no supplies had been ferried over the 400m-wide (440 yard-wide) river.



The old church at Oosterbeek has been rebuilt after its almost total destruction. It was situated near the eastern side of the perimeter a short distance from the Lower Rhine and the railway underpass and often took the full force of enemy counter-attacks. (TS Collection)

BRITISH FORCES

- 1 Detachments Glider Pilot Regiment
- 2 Units of 1st Polish Parachute Brigade
- 3 1st Border Regiment
- 4 9 Field Company Royal Engineers
- 5 7th Kings Own Scottish Borderers
- 6 1st Airlanding Brigade Reconnaissance Squadron
- 7 156th Parachute Battalion
- 8 10th Parachute Battalion
- 9 21st Independent Parachute Company
- 10 4th Parachute Brigade HQ Composite Platoon
- 11 Royal Army Service Corps
- 12 Lonsdale Force (elements of 1st, 3rd and 11th Parachute Battalions)
- 13 Divisional artillery
- 14 Division HQ troops



EVENTS

1 1030hrs, Monday 25 September: Maj. Gen. Urquhart holds a final conference with his senior officers at his headquarters to explain that Operation *Berlin*, the evacuation of the bridgehead, will commence that night at 2200hrs.

2 Morning, Monday 25 September: a strong attack by a *Kampfgruppe* of 9. SS-Panzer Division, which included Tiger tanks, was repelled by Lonsdale Force near the old church.

3 Midday: a counter-attack against the western side of the perimeter is repelled with sizeable losses to the enemy.

4 2050hrs: artillery from 43rd (Wessex) Division begin an artillery barrage against the Germans around the perimeter to mask the beginning of the evacuation. The shelling continues throughout the night.

5 2100hrs: units at the northern end of the perimeter begin pulling out of their positions. These are followed progressively by other units allowing the lodgement to collapse gradually towards the river.

6 2115hrs: withdrawing troops are fed down two marked routes to the crossing places at the river's edge.

7 2145hrs: 16 assault boats manned by 260 Field Company Royal Engineers (43rd Division) and 21 stormboats manned by 23 Canadian Field Company prepare to cross the river opposite the airborne perimeter.

8 2145hrs: 16 assault boats manned by 553 Field Company Royal Engineers (43rd Division) and 20 stormboats manned by 23 Canadian Field Company prepare to cross the river near the ferry site.

9 2200hrs: ferrying operations begin.

10 2300hrs: alerted to the movement on the river, the Germans sweep the Lower Rhine with gunfire from both flanks.

11 0500hrs, Tuesday 26 September: the gathering light of dawn signals the end of the evacuation as more and more men are killed and wounded by enemy fire.

12 0530hrs: in broad daylight the last stormboat makes its crossing. Nearly every man on board has been hit.

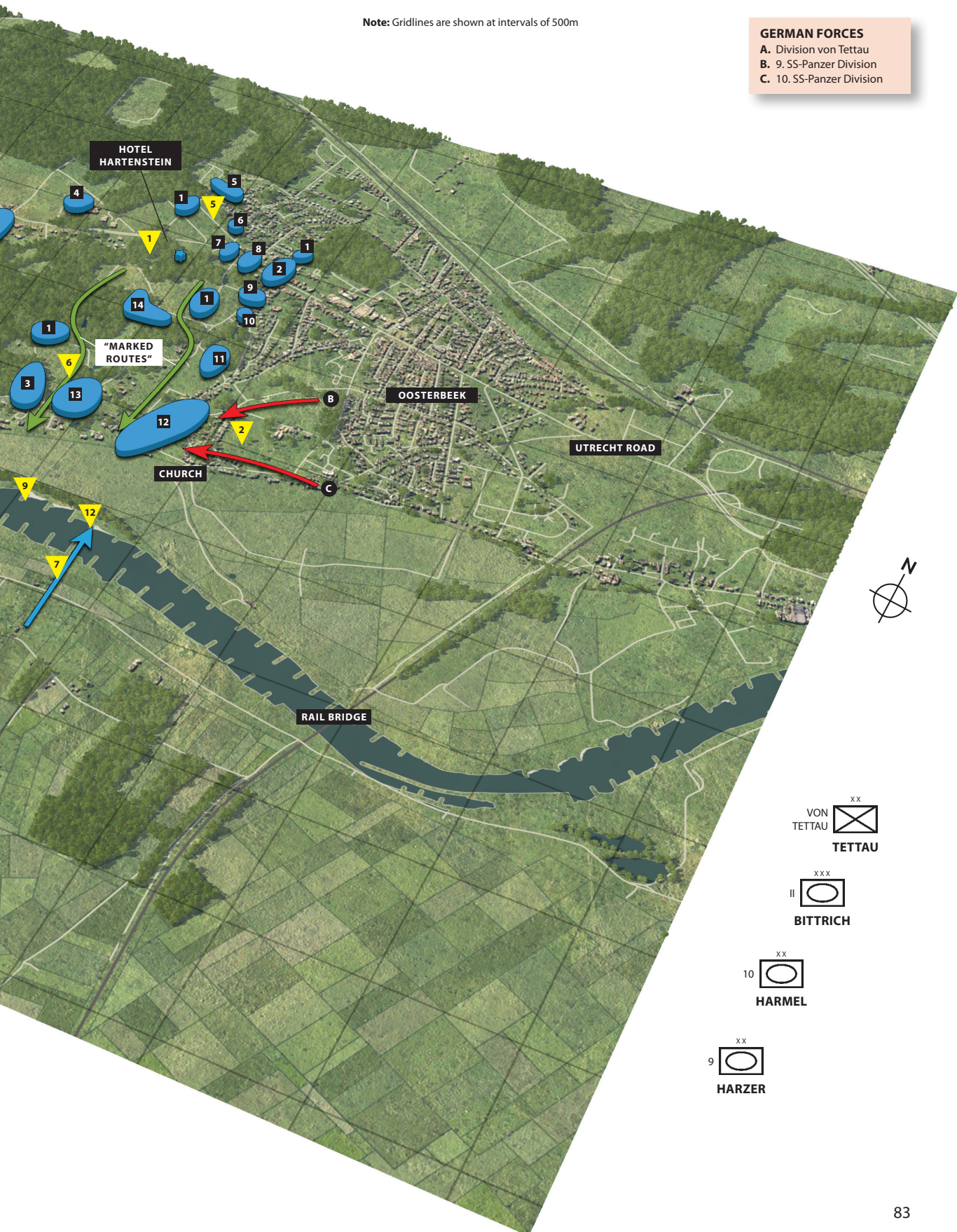
OPERATION *BERLIN*

The withdrawal of 1st Airborne Division across the Lower Rhine.

Note: Gridlines are shown at intervals of 500m

GERMAN FORCES

- A. Division von Tettau
- B. 9. SS-Panzer Division
- C. 10. SS-Panzer Division



THE END OF THE 1ST AIRBORNE DIVISION

The next day it was more of the same within the airborne perimeter. Enemy attacks continued to come in, casualties continued to mount, ammunition became more and more scarce and the re-supply drop by the RAF went mainly to the Germans. The 43rd Division persistently tried to push northwards, albeit at a very slow pace, for even it was plagued with considerable problems. The single road up which it and all of its supplies and reinforcements were brought forward had been cut near Veghel by the enemy. The highway was to remain closed for 40 hours.

The following day the bulk of Wessex Division's 130th Brigade made the tortuous journey through the back roads up to Driel. It was dark before the three battalions arrived and they were too late to organize a river crossing. However, during the night, Sosabowski made an effort to get his men across in several assault boats that had been brought up from Nijmegen. The crossings were covered by an artillery barrage from the guns of 43rd Division, but faced constant retaliatory fire from the enemy. Progress was slow and losses were high. By first light only around 250 men had made it across and only 200 of these reached the perimeter. Their arrival was of only marginal help to the airborne division, which was now clinging on desperately to its small lodgement; it could do so for only a few more hours.

XXX Corps's commander, Lt. Gen. Horrocks, still had not given up using the airborne bridgehead as an offensive base and suggested that the 43rd Division make a crossing farther downriver to attack the Germans surrounding Oosterbeek from the west. As a start he ordered Maj. Gen. Thomas to send a battalion of the division across to widen the base of the perimeter bordering the river by taking the high ground of the Westerbouwing. Thomas selected the 4th Dorsetshire Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. Tilly, for the task, but events were changing fast and by the time that the crossing was actually ready to be made, the sheer hopelessness of the situation in the perimeter had begun to be realized farther up the chain of command.

The 4th Dorsets were being sent on a mission that would not see an enlargement of the bridgehead. They were being shipped across to reinforce an already hopeless position. The attack by the 4th Dorsets proved to be totally unsuccessful. Only two companies, just 315 men, were able to get across the river. Enemy fire, hurried organization and damaged boats prevented many others from reaching the far side. Those that did land on the far side fought their way onto the high ground and briefly held it, only to be gradually forced off by Kampfgruppe von Tettau. The battalion lost 140 men that night, killed or captured, including Lt. Col. Tilly.

Horrocks' assessment of the situation was at odds with reality. The perimeter was on the verge of being overwhelmed and common sense dictated that the airborne forces would have to be pulled out. This was recognized by the Airborne Corps Commander Lt. Gen. Browning and the Second Army Commander Gen. Dempsey. They held a meeting and came to the same conclusion; Urquhart's perimeter would have to be evacuated. Montgomery agreed with this assessment and the order was given for the pull-out.

During Sunday 24 September, Lt. Gen. Horrocks, Maj. Gen. Thomas and Maj. Gen. Sosabowski met at the top of the church tower in Driel to discuss the situation. From there they could see across the Lower Rhine to the airborne perimeter. A pall of smoke hung over Oosterbeek from the pounding

the area was receiving from German and British artillery fire. The three senior commanders all agreed that Urquhart's men should be pulled back across the river as soon as possible. Arrangements were made for the disengagement to start the following night. Codenamed Operation *Berlin*, the paratroopers would be brought back across the river during the hours of darkness in a move organized by Thomas's 43rd Division.

The news that his division was to be evacuated was carried over the river to Maj. Gen. Urquhart. Early on the morning of 25 September, he briefed his commanders on the difficulties to be expected. A withdrawal by any military unit in close contact with the enemy is a difficult manoeuvre. It has to be made to a strict timetable under a deceptive cover. The enemy must never know until the last moment that his opponent was pulling out. That day Urquhart and his staff made meticulous arrangements to keep their enemy in the dark. The plan proposed that, all along the perimeter, groups of men would be gradually pulled out whilst a few others kept up constant fire to deceive the enemy. Starting from the north, piece by piece, the line was gradually to be emptied of troops and shortened. Men would then be passed down to the riverbank and onto boats following a strict timetable. Doctors and medical orderlies, together with the wounded, would have to stay behind.

Operation *Berlin* began at 2100hrs with a heavy barrage fired by the guns of XXX Corps and the 43rd Division. Forty-five minutes later the paratroopers began to disengage from the enemy and gradually filter down to the riverbank. The evacuation took place in high winds and heavy rain, which helped to mask the movement across the Lower Rhine. Canadian engineers manned the motorized stormboats that carried the men across, with each craft capable of taking 14 men at a time. Three DUKWs and a number of canvas and plywood assault boats manned by the Wessex Division's engineers helped with the evacuation. The Germans along the riverbanks could see the criss-crossing of the river by boats and retaliated with mortar and machine-gun fire, seeing the moves as a reinforcement of the perimeter rather than an evacuation. Throughout the night the engineers took their craft back and forth across the river under heavy fire. A few boats were hit and sunk, several others capsized tipping their loads into the cold water. By early light the fleet of small craft had almost been destroyed. A smokescreen was laid to cover the remaining boats.

Groups of men still waited on the far shore for their turn to cross, but full daylight made further evacuation impossible. Some took their chances in the water and attempted to swim to safety. A few of them made it, others did not. Those that stayed behind tried to hide in the woods; most were eventually captured. The heroic last stand by the 1st Airborne Division and the Polish 1st Parachute brigade had come to an end.

Maj. Gen. Urquhart's mission had been a failure. Of his 10,000-man force only 2,163 airborne troops, plus 160 Poles and 75 men of the Dorset Regiment made it back across the river that night. Urquhart's casualties amounted to almost 1,200 killed and 6,642 missing, wounded or captured. His division had held out for nine days even though he was promised relief within two to four days. The actions fought by the British 1st Airborne Division in and around Arnhem became one of the British Army's most famous battle honours.





GRAHAM TURNER



THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE 1ST AIRBORNE DIVISION ACROSS THE LOWER RHINE (PP. 86–87)

On 24 September 1944, Lt. Gen. Horrocks (XXX Corps), Maj. Gen. Thomas (43rd Division) and Maj. Gen. Sosabowski (Polish Brigade) held a meeting inside the tower of Driel Church (1) to decide on the fate of Maj. Gen. Urquhart's airborne division. It was decided amongst the three senior commanders that the airborne perimeter across the Lower Rhine should be evacuated the following night.

The withdrawal operation was carried out under the command of the 43rd (Wessex) Division. Several types of craft were used to ferry the airborne troops across the river. The most practical, fastest and safest would have been amphibious DUKWs, but there were no suitable sites for launching these craft and only three took to the water that night. There were sufficient assault boats, but these were constructed of wood and canvas and had to be paddled across. Finally, there were the stormboats (2). These were more substantial, they were made from wood and plywood and powered by an Evinrude outboard motor, but they were unwieldy and cumbersome to manoeuvre and required a full platoon of men to move them down into the water.

Lieutenant-Colonel Henniker, CO 43rd Division Royal Engineers, decided that the evacuation would take place using two ferry sites. Each would use engineers from both the 43rd Division and the Canadians. The most easterly location was opposite the airborne division's perimeter near Oosterbeek church and would be entrusted to the Canadian 23 Field Company CRE and 43rd Division's 260 Field Company RE. The site 1.5km (one mile) downstream to the west was manned by 43rd Division's 553 Field Company RE and Canadian 20 Field Company CRE. The Canadians

provided 21 stormboats at each crossing, whilst the British sappers started with 16 assault boats at each site. The three lone DUKWs used the western site.

The Canadian engineers (3) were part of the engineering supply pool which had been brought forward to a position just south of Nijmegen. When it became clear to Allied commanders that the bridge at Arnhem was lost, it was envisaged that an assault crossing to reinforce the bridgehead would have to be undertaken. The Canadian engineers had Class 9 assault rafts and stormboats with them for that exact purpose. They were to join up with the 43rd Division's engineers already at the Lower Rhine, to man the craft needed for the attack. With the demise of the airborne lodgement this operation was changed from assault into withdrawal and the Canadians were ordered up to Driel with their stormboats.

The night of 25–26 September was dark, stormy and very wet. The southern sky was lit by the barrage of supporting fire from the guns of XXX Corps and the 43rd Division as they bombarded the German units around the airborne lodgement (4). The enemy responded with mortars, machine-gun and shellfire as they tried to interdict all movement on the river. Very lights probed the darkness hoping to silhouette exposed stormboats chugging noisily across the lower Rhine. Throughout the night until first light the engineers continued to travel back and forth across the wide waterway extracting the tired survivors from their shrinking perimeter. Casualties on the river were considerable. By the end of the operation 2,163 airborne troops, 160 Poles and 75 men of the Dorset Regiment had been carried back across the river to safety that night.

THE AFTERMATH

The end of the battle of Arnhem left a very unsatisfactory situation. The drive northwards by British XXX Corps had produced a long salient through enemy territory with German forces on both flanks. The ensuing weeks saw much heavy fighting as the enemy attempted to cut off the salient. North of the river Maas at Nijmegen, the 43rd Wessex Division and the US 82nd Airborne Division strove desperately to hold onto the area between the river and the Lower Rhine. This area became known as the 'island' and the Allied lodgement there was subjected to intense enemy fire from over the Lower Rhine and by Panzer forces striking from the east, the west and from the north. The bridge at Arnhem was a conduit for German armour moving against the 'island'. On 7 October USAAF bombed and destroyed the bridge to help prevent its use by the enemy.

After the 1st Airborne Division had pulled out across the river, groups of men and individuals who were not able to make the crossing by the time the evacuation was stopped were left behind. Some of these were captured by the Germans and became prisoners of war. Others made contact with the Dutch underground and were assisted to escape over the Lower Rhine to safety. A few, notably Brig. Hackett, evaded capture for months before he made his escape to freedom. Hackett had been seriously wounded in the perimeter and it was feared he was close to death. He was operated on in the German hospital by Capt. Kessel of the Royal Army Medical Corps and began to make a slow recovery. When he could be moved, he was spirited away by the Dutch underground and over the ensuing months was nursed back to almost full health by civilians. He eventually made it across to Allied lines in February 1945, after an adventurous journey fraught with danger.

One senior officer who made his escape much sooner was the wounded Brig. Lathbury. When he was able to move he simply got up and walked out of the hospital. He managed to meet up with other airborne escapees being sheltered by a group of Dutch civilians. Over the next few weeks more and more airborne survivors were contacted.

This PzKpfw IV from 10. SS-Panzer Division was photographed after the battle. The tank had been knocked out during the fighting around the road bridge. (TS Collection)



Eventually their numbers reached over one hundred, including Lt. Col. Dobie of the 1st Parachute Battalion. Contact was made with the Allies across the river and arrangements were made to evacuate the group in an operation codenamed *Pegasus*. On the night of 22–23 October, 139 men were ferried across the Lower Rhine in craft manned by XXX Corps Royal Engineers. Another mass escape was attempted in November, but this failed, although several individuals did make the crossing. During the winter many paratroopers who had been sheltered at great risk by the Dutch also made the escape.

The civilians in and around Arnhem suffered dear from the fighting that took place amongst their community. Around 450 of them died during the battle. Once the airborne division had retreated from the area, the Dutch residents from the town and the surrounding villages were forcibly removed by the Germans. Arnhem and the line of the river were then fortified to prevent the Allies from trying to force another crossing. The civilians were left destitute, unable to return to their homes or collect their possessions until after the war. In the meantime the Germans systematically looted or destroyed all their dwellings.

The actions and endurance of the airborne at Arnhem has gained a deserved place in the annals of military history. General Eisenhower was right to say that ‘the courage, fortitude and skill of the gallant band of men at Arnhem were unsurpassed by the actions of any other single unit in the war’. The division was pulled out of the line after Arnhem for refit and reinforcement. It had lost virtually half of its strength and most of its officers. The 1st and 4th Parachute Brigades had to be merged into a single brigade. The Division returned to the war only at its end when it was flown to Norway in May 1945 to disarm the 400,000-strong German occupation force.

At the end of Operation *Market-Garden*, Montgomery’s rapid advance northwards had come to an abrupt halt confronted by the Lower Rhine and determined enemy opposition. There was to be no further movement forwards along this route; it had become a dead-end road, a salient leading to nowhere. Nor was there was to be a quick end to the war and it was most definitely not going to be over by Christmas. The winter advance by the British Second Army now had to switch eastwards, moving directly towards the main defended stretch of the river Rhine and industrial areas of the Ruhr. This brought it into confrontation with the defences of the Siegfried Line and the forested Rhineland. Eisenhower resorted to his earlier master plan of advancing on a broad front. All his armies on the continent were to be in contact with the enemy in unison with none of them getting additional resources to continue its own particular advance. Arnhem was then left in German hands until eventually captured by Canadian troops seven months later in April 1945.

The blame for the eventual failure of Operation *Market-Garden* ultimately rested on FM Montgomery. What was deemed to be eminently possible during the German collapse of the first week of September became almost impossible by the time the operation was launched on the 17th. The objective of capturing

Survivors of the evacuation of the airborne bridgehead enjoy a joke in the safety of XXX Corps’ lines. (TS Collection)



the road bridge at Arnhem is now seen as a 'bridge too far', the phrase symbolizing Montgomery's attempt to demonstrate that he was not just a slow methodical commander, but one who could, where necessary, be bold and take risks. History has decided that he was probably overreaching himself.

The actions by British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem were plagued by unforeseen circumstances and bad decisions, the most notable of which was the distance between the drop zones and the bridges. The proximity of German II SS-Panzer Korps to Arnhem was also a major factor. The presence in the area of GFM Model also added to its misfortunes as he was on the spot to organize a very thorough response to the landings. The slowness of XXX Corps to make the advance along its single highway to Arnhem was a failure that severely impacted on the ultimate outcome of the battle and has often been cited as the reason why *Market-Garden* was unsuccessful. There were many other aspects which hindered the airborne division, from the piecemeal way it was transported into action, to the failure of radio communications. Despite all this, the road bridge was captured and held and a lodgement was secured for all of the 'two-to-four days' that was set out in the original plan. There were too many bridges and too much enemy opposition to be overcome for the speed of the advance that was required. If the corps had made the journey within the two-to-four days as expected, the result at Arnhem could have been an unqualified success.



Men of the 1st Airborne Division captured by the Germans after the battle. They have all discarded their weapons, webbing and helmets (although the dispatch rider on the right has kept his motorcycle helmet and gloves) and are waiting to be taken into captivity as prisoners of war. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF008)



Major-General Urquhart is met by men from the Glider Pilot Regiment on his return to England from Arnhem. (Museum of Army Flying, MAF014A)

THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Seventy years on from the battle for the Arnhem bridges, it is difficult to believe that brutal conflict took place amongst its prosperous and orderly streets. The centre of the town has been rebuilt along with the great road bridge, which was the main objective of Operation *Market-Garden*. It is fitting that the new structure should be called 'John Frost Bridge' in memory of the gallant officer who led his men against overwhelming odds trying to preserve it for the British. All the buildings around the bridge were swept away during the battle. They have been replaced by modern buildings, which now reflect the thriving ambitions of the inhabitants of the town.

Several museums in the area depict the actions at Arnhem, the most significant of which is the Airborne Museum situated at the Hartenstein Hotel. The building has been restored with additional features, which allow the visitor to have a complete understanding of the actions and objectives of British 1st Airborne Division. During the battle, the hotel was the location of Maj. Gen. Urquhart's divisional headquarters. Significant decisions relating to the fighting were taken here and it is fitting to recount those decisions in



A British 25-pdr field gun overlooks the new John Frost Bridge at Arnhem which replaced the earlier one so valiantly held by the troops of the 1st Airborne Division. (TS Collection).

the actual location in which they were made. Also worth noting are the displays which show the suffering endured by the Dutch civilians of Arnhem both during and after the battle. Over the road from the hotel is the main airborne memorial to all the troops that took part in the battle.

Few scars from the battle remain on the surface. The fields that were once full of broken gliders and deflated parachutes have once again returned to farmland or open heath. There are scattered memorials around the sites in memory of the units and men who passed by. The three routes taken by 1st Parachute can be followed from the landing grounds into the town, although they now mainly pass through urban areas rather than leafy glades. Almost unchanged are the few roads near the old St Elisabeth Hospital, which witnessed successive failures of 1st and 3rd Parachute Battalion's attempts to penetrate into the town. No. 14 Zwarteweg, the house which sheltered Maj. Gen. Urquhart when he went missing for 40 hours, still stands as it did in 1944, facing the old hospital.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery at Oosterbeek holds the dead of the battle and those killed locally in the later fighting. There are 1,680 British and Commonwealth men buried or commemorated at Oosterbeek, together with 73 Polish and three Dutch. Three men who were posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for acts of valour during the battle – Flt. Lt. David Lord, Lt. John Grayburn and Capt. Lionel Queripel – are buried in the cemetery.

The banks of the Rhine over which the airborne division retreated remain much as they did in 1944. The old church at Oosterbeek, so long a site of heavy fighting, has been much restored and stands proudly looking over the meadows towards the viaduct carrying the railway bridge. A little farther downstream, beneath the high ground of the Westerbouwing, the Heveadorp ferry continues to carry foot passengers across the river. In the background, on the far bank of the Rhine, the church at Driel dominates the skyline. Its tower commands the view across the river as it did when Lt. Gen. Horrocks, Maj. Gen. Thomas and Maj. Gen. Sosabowski met together to hold a conference to decide on the fate of the airborne division.



Memorial marking the area of Landing Zone S near Wolfheze station. (TS Collection)



Those who died in the battle of Arnhem are now laid to rest in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's cemetery at Oosterbeek. (TS Collection)

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READING

The subjects of Operation *Market-Garden* and the battle of Arnhem have produced a vast library of books over the 70 years since the conflict. One of the earliest to grab the headlines was Cornelius Ryan's *A Bridge Too Far*. The book is still one of the best regarding first-hand experiences and opinions from the men who took part in the operation, including senior officers such as Urquhart, Hicks, Hackett, Frost and Sosabowski. Another title rich in eyewitness accounts is *Arnhem 1944: The Airborne Battle* by Martin Middlebrook, which includes a very thorough narrative of the Arnhem operation. A title that is both original and thought-provoking is *Arnhem 1944* by William F. Buckingham. The author is very critical of Lt. Gen. Browning and of many decisions made at Arnhem. It is very interesting to read exactly where he lays the blame for the failure of the operation. The German side of the action is expertly told in *It Never Snows in September* by Robert J. Kershaw. A selection of other titles of interest are shown below.

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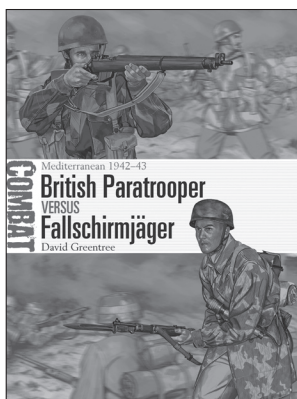
INDEX

Page numbers in **bold** refer to illustrations and their captions.

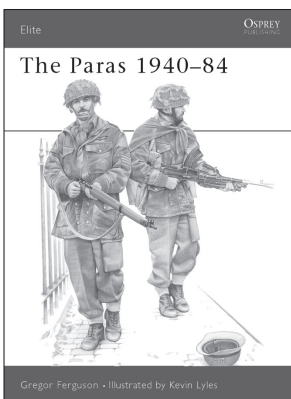
- Arnhem 8, 16, 25–26
 battlefield today 92–93
 bridges 5, 8–9, 11, 18, 24, 26, 26, 36
 pontoon bridge 24, 26, 43, 48
 rail bridge 24–25, 27–28, 35, 41–43, 47, 48
 road bridge 5, 24–28, 36–37, 41–43, 48–49, 48, 50, 59, 60–64, 61, 65, 72
- Bittrich, SS-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm 14–15, 23, 44, 52–53, 65
- Brereton, Lt. Gen. Lewis 8, 11–12
- Browning, Lt. Gen. Frederick 11, 12, 14, 17, 53, 80, 84
- Christiansen, Gen. der Flieger Friedrich 28, 29, 45
- chronology 9–10
- Dempsey, Gen. Miles 8, 11, 21, 84
- Dobie, Lt. Col. David 46–48, 50–51, 66–67, 68, 89
- Dover, Major 41, 43, 47, 52
- Eisenhower, Gen. Dwight D. 5, 6, 8, 9, 24, 90
- Fitch, Lt. Col. 41, 47–48, 49, 67, 68
- Frost, Lt. Col. John 13, 17, 41–43, 48–49, 49, 50–53, 60, 66, 69–75, 72
- Germany
 German Commanders 14–15
 German forces at Arnhem 22–23
 German plans 28–29
 Order of Battle 23
- Graebner, SS-Hauptsturmführer 48, 61, 65
- Grayburn, Lt. 48, 49
- Great Britain 6, 11, 12–14, 16–20
 1st Airborne Division 5, 8, 12, 15–19, 23, 25–28, 32, 45, 50, 56, 65, 75, 89–91, 91
- 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron 27, 32, 37
- 1st Airlanding Brigade 13, 17, 17, 27, 32, 36, 38–40, 45, 49, 50
- 1st Border Regiment 49, 74, 82
- 7th King's Own Scottish Borderers 49, 54, 56, 58, 60, 69–70, 74
- 2nd South Staffordshires 49, 53, 54, 57–58, 57, 58, 60, 60, 66–68
- 1st Airlanding Light Regiment RA 17, 36
- 21st Army Group 7, 11, 73
 First Allied Airborne Army 11–12, 19, 53
 Second Army 8, 11, 21, 24, 28, 90
- British and Polish Order of Battle 20
- British Commanders 11–14
- 1st Independent Para Brigade, Polish 13, 17–18, 28, 69–70, 75, 78, 78–80, 85
- 21st Independent Para Company 32, 82
- 52nd (Lowland) Division 18–19, 28
- 1st Para Brigade 12, 17, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34, 36, 36, 42, 53, 56, 57, 59
 1st Para Battalion 26, 34, 36–37, 41, 42, 46–47, 50–52, 54, 57–58, 66, 68, 90, 93
- 2nd Para Battalion 13, 17, 34, 36, 42, 41–43, 47, 48–49, 49, 50–53, 54, 60, 66, 69–75, 72
- 3rd Para Battalion 34, 36, 41, 42, 43–44, 47–52, 54, 58, 59, 64, 67–68, 78, 93
- 4th Para Brigade 2, 17, 32, 49, 53, 54, 6, 58, 68
- 10th Para Battalion 54, 58–59, 66, 82
- 11th Para Battalion 53, 54, 57–58, 60, 66, 68–70, 73
- 156th Para Battalion 54, 58, 60, 66, 70, 73, 82
- RAF 20, 30, 32
- Glider Pilot Regiment/glider pilots 19, 33, 40, 52, 53, 56, 76, 82, 91
 38 and 46 Group 13–14, 19
- XXX Corps 8–9, 11, 24–25, 28, 45–46, 65, 71, 73–75, 77, 79–81, 84–85, 89–91
- Hackett, Brig. John 12–13, 28, 56–58, 66, 70, 73, 89
- Harmel, SS-Brigadeführer Heinz 15, 15, 23, 44, 52–53, 70, 72–73
- Harzer, SS-Obersturmbannführer Walter 15, 23, 44–45, 53, 76
- Hicks, Brig. Philip 13, 13, 27, 28, 53, 57–58
- Hitler, Adolf 5, 15, 21, 28
- Horrocks, Lt. Gen. Brian 24, 80–81, 84
- Krafft, SS-Obersturmbannführer Joseph 'Sepp' 15, 22–23, 36–37, 44, 46–47, 60
- Kussin, Generalmajor Friedrich Kussin 15, 22, 44, 44
- Lathbury, Brig. Gerald 12, 13, 27, 36, 43, 46–48, 50–53, 89
- MacKenzie, Lt. Col 53, 80–81
- McCardie, Lt. Col 53, 67–68
- Model, GFM Walter 6, 7, 14, 21, 23, 29, 33, 44–45, 48, 75, 91
- Montgomery, Field Marshal Bernard 6, 7, 8, 11, 18, 84, 90
- Operation *Biting* 13, 17
- Operation *Comet* 8, 20, 22, 24, 27
- Operation *Market-Garden* (1944) 4, 22, 24
 aftermath 89–91
 assessment of Operation *Market-Garden* 90–91
 escape of survivors /Operation Pegasus 89–90, 90
- Allied plans 9, 11, 24–28, 42
 landing plans/zones 16, 25–26, 27, 27, 28
 routes to Arnhem 26–28
 scope and size 24, 27

- the campaign *see* Operation *Market-Garden* (1944): the campaign
origins of 5–9,
Arnhem bridges as main objective 9, 11
August 1944 5–6
September 1944 6–7
Operation *Market-Garden* (1944):
the campaign 30–88
Operation *Berlin*/withdrawal of 1st Airborne across Lower Rhine 82–88
end of 1st Airborne Division 84–86
evacuation 85, 86–88
the perimeter 76–82
events 82
Polish Brigade 78–81
17 September (first day) 30–37
bombing enemy airfields/anti-aircraft positions 30–32
dash for the bridges 37–49
events 34
first wave 32–34
initial moves into Arnhem to capture bridges 34–37
18 September (second day) 50–65
British hold on road bridge, German attacks on 60–65
events 54
German counter-attacks/shrinking of airborne lodgment 54–65
19 September (third day) 66–73
British defence of road bridge 70–73
end for 2nd South Staffordshires 66–68
20 September (fourth day) 73–75
surrender of Frost's men 74–75
Rundstedt, GFM Gerd von 14, 29, 45
Sosabowski, Maj. Gen. Stanislaw 13, 14, 18, 28, 79–80, 81, 84
Spindler, SS-Obersturmbannführer 47, 50, 60, 66
Student, Gen. 23, 28, 46
Tettau, GenLt. Hans von 22, 23, 45, 50, 56
Thomas, Maj. Gen. 84–85, 88, 93
United States
airborne divisions 6, 11, 24, 25
82nd Airborne Division 2 5, 45, 65, 73, 75, 89
101st Airborne Division 25, 45, 65
USAAF 13, 20, 89
Eighth Air Force 20, 32
Ninth Air Force 20, 32
52nd Troop Carrier Wing 14, 19
Urquhart, Maj. Gen. 'Roy' 12, 12, 25, 27, 33, 43, 47–48, 50–53, 56, 66, 68–70, 69, 73, 80–81, 85, 91
Voeux, Lt. Col. des 60, 66, 70

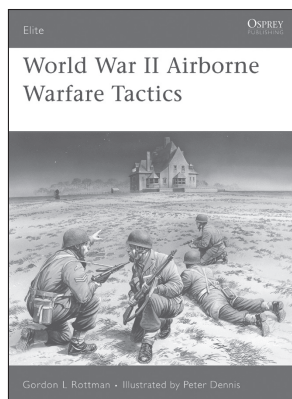
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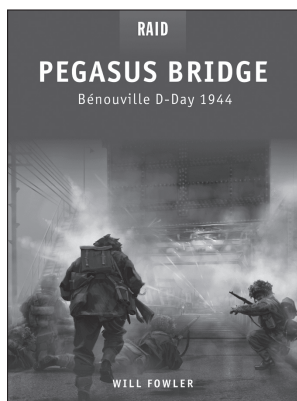
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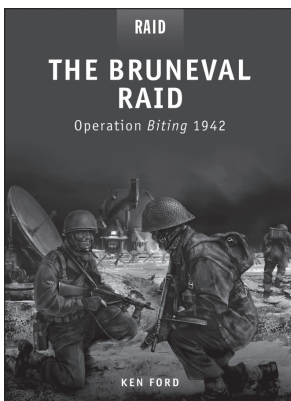
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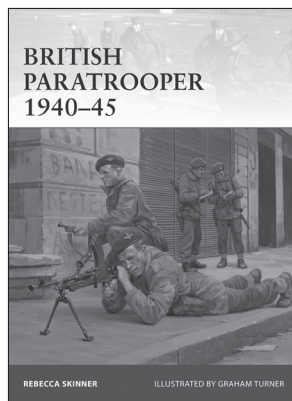
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