CAMPAIGN 270

OPERATION MARKET-GARDEN 1944 (1)

The American Airborne Missions

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Introduction

This book, part of a series on Operation Market-Garden, is focused on the role played by the two US airborne divisions of XVIII Airborne Corps in this controversial campaign. The mission of the 82nd Airborne Division and 101st Airborne Division was to secure the road network between the Belgian border and the bridges at Nijmegen to speed the advance of the British XXX Corps. This mission was eventually accomplished, though with critical delays. The defeat of the British 1st Airborne Division in Arnhem doomed the overall campaign, since, without the Rhine bridge at Arnhem, the overall objective of the campaign was meaningless.

The Strategic Setting

By September 1944, the German Army in the west had been routed and was in full retreat. At peak strength in the summer of 1944 it had consisted of five field armies in two army groups: Heeresgruppe B (Army Group B) controlled northern France and the Low Countries; Heeresgruppe G controlled central, western, and southern France. The two field armies in Normandy, 7. Armee (AOK 7) and Panzergruppe West (later 5. Panzerarmee) had been decimated in the Falaise Gap followed by further losses in the withdrawal over the Seine River in late August 1944 and in encirclements in Belgium in early September 1944. These formations lost most of the Panzer strength in the west. The armies’ best units were reduced to “torso divisions,” so-called since they had lost the muscle of their close-combat strength including infantry, Panzer, engineer and reconnaissance troops, but still retained an administrative and logistics core. They had little or no combat value until they could be rebuilt. Of the three field armies in Heeresgruppe B, only AOK 15 on the North Sea coast was still intact. Most of its best divisions had been shipped off to Normandy during the summer, and it was left with static infantry divisions, suitable only for coastal defense.

Heeresgruppe G had transferred most of its Panzer forces and many of its better infantry divisions to Normandy during the summer, leaving it with ten infantry divisions and one Panzer division to occupy most of central and southern France. When the Allies conducted the Operation Dragoon amphibious assault on the Riviera coast on August 15, 1944, Heeresgruppe G began to withdraw rather than suffer encirclement by the rapidly advancing US and French divisions. The two field armies lost about 150,000 troops in the ensuing retreat. In total, the German Army in the west suffered about
725,000 casualties in June–September 1944, consisting of about 55,000 killed in action, 339,000 missing, and 332,000 wounded. In addition, Hitler ordered army and naval personnel in several key fortified ports to remain in place, leaving a further 250,000 troops isolated and abandoned. The last two weeks of August and first weeks of September became known as “the Void” to German commanders, as the brittle Wehrmacht defensive positions in the west disintegrated.

In the wake of the failed assassination attempt against Hitler on July 20, 1944, purges hit the upper ranks of the army. Rommel had been wounded during a strafing attack in July, and in October was offered the opportunity to commit suicide rather than face a kangaroo court for his complicity in the coup. Günther von Kluge, Oberbefehlshaber West (OB West: High Command West) commander, took over Rommel’s command role but committed suicide himself on August 17 after his connection to the coup was suspected in Berlin. The heaviest blows fell on the Ersatzheer (Replacement Army) that had been central to the plot.

The Luftwaffe had been crippled by the Operation *Pointblank* strategic bombing campaign that had started earlier in 1944, aimed at the German aircraft industry. A far more debilitating campaign began in May 1944 when the US Army Air Force began bombing German synthetic fuel plants, depriving the Luftwaffe of vital aviation fuel. This had a ripple effect within the Luftwaffe, curtailing training, which in turn led to severe attrition amongst the inexperienced new pilots. With rare exceptions, Luftwaffe support of the field armies largely evaporated.

By early September, OB West had only 13 infantry divisions, three Panzer divisions, and two Panzer brigades rated as combat effective. A further 42 infantry divisions and 13 Panzer divisions had been reduced to torso divisions, and of the infantry divisions, seven were simply disbanded. There were barely a 100 tanks still available on the western front. On September 4, the new Heeresgruppe B commander, Generalfeldmarschall Model, warned Hitler that unless ten infantry and five or six Panzer divisions were available by September 15, “the door to north-west Europe would stand open.” A major concern was that the Allies would stage a bold thrust towards ’s-Hertogenbosch and Nijmegen in the Netherlands, where there were virtually no German forces at the time.

The Allies were well aware of the dire plight of the Wehrmacht from decrypted Enigma signals intelligence. The rout of the German Army in France and Belgium led many senior Allied commanders to compare the situation to the autumn of 1918 when the German Army collapsed.
There was euphoria at Eisenhower’s SHAEF headquarters, and the widespread expectation that the war would be over by Christmas. In mid-September, Montgomery proposed a bold scheme to accelerate the German collapse. Allied airborne divisions would land behind the German defense in the Netherlands, securing a path for an armored advance from the Belgian border to the Rhine River at Arnhem. The British tank columns would then be able to cross the Rhine, avoiding the Westwall defensive belt, and strike into Germany’s industrial heartland in the neighboring Ruhr.

The rapid pursuit to the German frontier created problems for the Allies. On September 11, 1944, the first day that US Army troops entered Germany near Aachen, the Allies were along a phase line that the Operation Overlord plans did not expect to reach until D+330 – May 2, 1945 – some 233 days ahead of schedule. Logistics had failed to keep pace with the unexpectedly rapid victories of August–September 1944. Allied supplies were being delivered to ports more than 500km to the rear of the front lines, including the Normandy beaches, Cherbourg, and Le Havre. The French railway system was a shambles due to Allied pre-invasion bombing. Expedient supply methods including the Red Ball Express and air delivery of critical supplies were adequate for some limited operations but could not sustain the seven Allied field armies in combat in the European theater. Until the nearby port of Antwerp was available, Allied operations along the German frontier would inevitably be constrained.
CHRONOLOGY

August 2  First Allied Airborne Army created to oversee Allied airborne operations.

September 3  Brussels liberated by British Second Army.

September 4  OKH orders WBN to begin to create Waalstellung defense line.

September 5  Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt returns to command OB West.

September 10  Eisenhower approves *Market-Garden*.

September 10  Irish Guards Group captures “Joe’s Bridge” over Meuse–Escaut Canal near Neerpelt on Dutch border.

September 11  First US Army penetrates Westwall near Aachen.

September 17  Operation *Market-Garden* begins with air landings in the Netherlands.

September 18  Eindhoven captured by 101st Airborne Division; first attempts to seize Nijmegen Bridge fail.

September 19  Son Canal Bridge rebuilt, Guards Armoured Division links up with 82nd Airborne Division.

September 19 (afternoon)  Battle for Nijmegen begins.

September 20  In the afternoon, 3/504th PIR crosses Waal River and captures north side of two Nijmegen bridges; meets tanks of Guards Group by dark.

September 21  Frost’s Para Battalion in Arnhem overwhelmed; Irish Guards Group is stopped on road to Arnhem.

September 22  Two German corps launch concentric attacks on Hell’s Highway, sever roadway between Veghel and Nijmegen; elements of 43rd Division reach Neder Rijn River across from Arnhem.

September 24  KG Chill cuts Hell’s Highway again for 40 hours.

September 24–25 (night)  Survivors of British 1st Airborne Division evacuated from Oosterbeek.

September 29  Nijmegen railroad bridge damaged by German frogmen.

October 2  First US Army resumes attacks north of Aachen.
OPPOSING COMMANDERS

GERMAN COMMANDERS

The Wehrmacht Befelshaber Niederlands (WBN: Armed Forces Command Netherlands) was headed by General der Flieger Friedrich Christiansen, former steam-tug operator, World War I fighter pilot, and ardent Nazi. A Luftwaffe crony of Herman Göring, his aide referred to him as “an old pirate (with) peasant cunning.” He showed little interest in military affairs and was preoccupied with political intrigues. As a result, most military issues were handled by his chief-of-staff, Generalleutnant Heinz-Hellmuth von Wühlisch, an experienced Luftwaffe commander. The Luftwaffe dominance of senior occupation posts was due to the unusually heavy presence of Flak, radar, and aviation units in the Netherlands, since it lay underneath the “bomber autobahn” between Britain and the Ruhr.

The Waffen-SS had its own administration in the Netherlands, the Befelshaber der Waffen-SS in den Niederlanden in the Hague under SS-Obergruppenführer Karl Demelhuber. Since the army had control of most old kasernes and military garrisons in Germany, the expanding Waffen-SS took over many old Dutch Army camps for their own needs. The SS also played a major role in occupation duties under Generalkommissar für das Sicherheitswesen (State secretary for security forces) Hanns-Albin Rauter.

Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt returned to command OB West on September 5, 1944, having been relieved of the same post on July 1 over disagreements with Hitler about operations in France. He was a widely respected commander of the old school, and grudgingly tolerated by Hitler due to his honest and pessimistic view of German military fortunes. His principal subordinate was Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model, who temporarily had held the dual posts of OB West and commander of Heeresgruppe B after the suicide of Günther von Kluge. Following Rundstedt’s reappointment, Model remained as the Heeresgruppe B commander, responsible for the forces in northwestern Germany and the Netherlands.
Model was a complete contrast to the gentlemanly and aristocratic Rundstedt; he was a brash and ruthless upstart, Germany’s youngest field marshal, and one of Hitler’s favorites for his uncanny ability to rescue the Wehrmacht from its most profound disasters. Model had been sent to the Russian Front in the summer of 1944 to restore the Wehrmacht after the crushing defeat of Heeresgruppe Mitte by the Red Army’s Operation Bagration, a miracle that helped stall the Soviet summer offensive in Poland. Now he was expected to do the same on the German frontier. Model’s headquarters were located in the Hotel Tafelberg in Oosterbeek near Arnhem, near the British drop-zone. As Operation Market-Garden began, Model evacuated the headquarters in haste, eventually moving to Wisch Castle in Terborg.

The formation most directly in the path of the American airborne divisions was Generaloberst Kurt Student’s 1. Fallschirm-Armee, with headquarters in Vught. Student had served as a fighter pilot in the Great War and in 1938 became the commander of the first Luftwaffe Fallschirmjäger division. He led the German airborne forces during their most famous operations including the capture of the Belgian fortress of Eben-Emael in 1940 and the Pyrrhic victory on Crete in May 1941. He served in Italy and Normandy prior to his appointment to the Netherlands front in September 1944.

The commander of II SS-Panzer-Korps was SS-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm Bittrich. He had served in the Great War as a fighter pilot and fought in the Freikorps after the war. He was an early member of Waffen-SS and served in a succession of divisional commands including the embryonic 2. SS-Panzer-Division in 1941, 8. SS-Kavallerie-Division in 1942–43, and 9. SS-Panzer-Division in 1944, prior to being elevated to corps command. Although an ardent Nazi, Bittrich grew increasingly disillusioned with the conduct of the war, and in 1944 he made many sarcastic remarks about Nazi Party leadership that nearly led to his relief from command.

SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel commanded the 10. SS-Panzer-Division “Frundsberg” at Nijmegen. He had joined the Reichswehr in 1926, and switched to the Waffen-SS in the mid-1930s. He held a number of infantry company and battalion command positions in 1941–42, serving under Bittrich in 1941–42. He was appointed to command SS-Infanterie-Regiment “Deutschland” in the summer of 1942 and was highly decorated for his leadership on the Russian Front. He took over command of the 10. SS-Panzer-Division in May 1944. He was a dynamic and capable leader, nicknamed “der alte Frundsberg” by his troops even though he was only 38 years old at the time.
ALLIED COMMANDERS

Planning of the airborne aspect of the campaign, Operation *Market*, was undertaken by the First Allied Airborne Army (FAAA). The establishment of the FAAA in the summer of 1944 was prompted by Eisenhower’s concern that a joint command was necessary to conduct large-scale airborne operations. Transport aircraft were in great demand to expedite supplies to the Allied field armies, and it would take an astute, politically savvy commander to win approval for the temporary removal of the transport aircraft from the vital logistics chain. Since the US was providing two-thirds of the airborne divisions and three-quarters of the troop carriers, on July 16, 1944, the new command was handed to an American officer, **Lt. Gen. Lewis Brereton**. Until that point, Brereton had been commander of the Ninth Air Force, the main tactical air force in the ETO, which also included the vital IX Troop Carrier Command. Brereton was not entirely convinced of the need for a combined airborne headquarters and he rightly pointed out that the US ground commanders would not be too happy. In spite of this, the new organization made its debut on August 2, 1944, directly subordinate to Eisenhower’s SHAEF rather than to Montgomery’s 21st Army Group or Bradley’s 12th Army Group.

Brereton was one of the US Army’s early aviation pioneers, serving as a squadron and wing commander in World War I. At the beginning of World War II, he was commander of the Far Eastern Air Force based in the Philippines. Surviving the early Pacific disasters, in June 1942 he was appointed to lead the US Army Middle East Air Forces, which took part in the North African campaign as well as strategic bombing operations such as the mission against the Ploesti oil fields in 1943. In the summer of 1943, he was assigned to lead the new Ninth Air Force, which controlled the medium bomber units based in the UK. Brereton’s role in *Market-Garden* was more closely connected with preparing and executing the aviation aspects of Operation *Market*, and he left planning of the actual paratroop and glider missions to his deputy, **Lt. Gen. Frederick Browning**.

Browning’s selection as the top Allied airborne commander was inevitable since Eisenhower insisted on sharing major commands between American and British officers. Browning had been a pioneer of British airborne forces, leading the formation of the 1st Airborne Division since 1941, and subsequently the British I Airborne Corps. In May 1943 he was assigned to lead the staff of Airborne Forces of Eisenhower’s Allied Forces Headquarters in the Mediterranean theater. His
relations with the senior American airborne commanders were strained at best. His disagreements with Brereton are discussed in more detail below. Although a talented administrator and organizer, Browning had no actual tactical airborne command experience until Operation Market. His assignment to lead Operation Market was resented by Lt. Gen. Matthew Ridgway, commander of the US XVIII Airborne Corps, who felt that the command should have gone to him since the majority of the airborne troops in the operation were American. Relations with the American division commanders were professional but not friendly. In the event, Browning’s role in Operation Market was primarily in the planning phase. When his corps headquarters was delivered by glider into the Groesbeek area, it proved largely irrelevant due to its inoperative radio network.

Brigadier-General James Gavin commanded the 82nd Airborne Division. He was a charismatic and accomplished commander, very popular amongst the elite paratroopers for his insistence that combat leaders must be “the first out of the airplane door and the last in the chow line.” He led the 505th PIR in the Operation Husky landings on Sicily in July 1943, decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross for his exemplary leadership in the defense of the Gela drop-zone against German counterattacks. By the time of the D-Day landings, he was the assistant division commander under Maj. Gen. Matthew Ridgway and led Force A of the 82nd Airborne Division during the night drops on June 6 near Utah Beach. When Ridgway was appointed corps commander, Gavin was his natural replacement in spite of his young age and junior rank.

Major-General Maxwell Taylor commanded the 101st Airborne Division during Operation Market. Taylor also served under Ridgway in the 82nd
Airborne Division, commanding the divisional artillery on Sicily and serving as the executive officer at the time of the Salerno operation in the summer of 1943. In September 1943, there were plans to drop the 82nd Airborne Division deep behind German lines near Rome with the understanding that the Italian army would switch sides. Ridgway volunteered for a secret mission to meet senior Italian commanders near Rome; he determined that the Italian generals were irresolute and the dubious “Giant 2” operation was aborted. Taylor was appointed to lead the 101st Airborne Division in time for the D-Day landings.

A pungent portrait of the three American airborne commanders was offered by an officer of the 82nd Airborne Division: “Ridgway would cut your throat and then burst into tears. Taylor would cut your throat and think nothing of it. Gavin would cut your throat and then laugh.” All three American commanders went on to play significant roles in the Cold War US Army, and their influence led to the era of the “airborne mafia.”

Major-General Maxwell Taylor, commander of the 101st Airborne Divisions, snaps a salute to a cameraman as he boards the lead C-47 of the 435th Troop Carrier Group at Welford on September 17 at the start of Operation Market. (NARA)

**BOTTOM LEFT**

James Gavin, commander of the 82nd Airborne Division. At the time of Market-Garden, he was still a brigadier-general, receiving his second star in October 1944. At age 37, this made him the youngest Army major-general during the war. (NARA)

**BOTTOM RIGHT**

The Allied airborne commander, Lt. Gen. F. A. M. Browning, meets Brig. Gen. James Gavin near the dairy factory at Overasselt on September 19, shortly after the Guards Armoured Division had linked up to the 82nd Airborne Division. (NARA)
OPPOSING FORCES

GERMAN FORCES

Through early September 1944, Wehrmacht units in the Netherlands were administered by the Wehrmacht Befelshaber Niederlands (WBN: Armed Forces Command Netherlands), which was primarily a military occupation command with some secondary defense responsibilities. Occupation duties were managed by the Feldkommandanturen at regional level with about 20 Ortskommandanturen in the smaller cities. So for example in the case of Nijmegen, Ortskommandantur 869, commanded by Hauptmann Ewald Linka, was responsible for military security forces in the city and the surrounding area, including Grenadier-Ersatz-Bataillon 337.

On September 4, 1944, Berlin instructed the WBN to begin to raise tactical defense units from the replacement, training, and security units in the Netherlands. The aim was to create a secondary defensive line called the Waalstellung, running along the Waal River from Moerdijk to Nijmegen. This was managed by General der Infanterie Hans von Tettau, the head of

One of the more common German armored vehicles in the Market-Garden campaign was the StuG III Ausf. G assault gun. This is a Luftwaffe StuG III Ausf. G of the under-strength Fallschirm-Sturmgeschutz-Brigade 12, which fought against the 82nd Airborne Division the Groesbeek sector. (NARA)
the WBN’s Führungs-und-Ausbildungsstab in die Niederlanden (Netherlands Command and Replacement Staff). This little-known effort in the first two weeks of September had profound implications for Market-Garden since the units mobilized by Tettau were later used as battlegroups in the first days of the fighting, and provided an embryonic core for the Division von Tettau that fought against the 1st Airborne Division in Arnhem.

As Allied armies approached the Dutch frontier, German combat units withdrew into the Netherlands from Belgium, requiring the establishment of tactical command boundaries. On September 16, 1944, a day before the Allied operation, Generalfeldmarschall Model divided the Netherlands into three sectors, with the boundaries somewhat resembling a “T.” On the north side of the “T,” the WBN remained in control of the rear areas. The west side of the “T” including the North Sea coast was the responsibility of Zangen’s AOK 15, while the eastern side towards Germany and the Reichswald was the responsibility of Student’s 1. Fallschirm-Armee (Fsch-AOK 1).

Student’s field army was the formation most directly in the path of the American airborne landings. Fsch-AOK 1 had originally been a training command in Germany, but on September 4, 1944, Hitler issued a directive to transfer it to the Netherlands to create a defensive barrier shielding the Ruhr industrial region in Germany. The intention was to use the headquarters as the nucleus of an elite Luftwaffe parachute force, eventually including three Luftwaffe parachute divisions (3., 5., and 6.). None of these divisions were ready at the time and Student’s command was filled out using the handful of available paratroop regiments, as well as paratroop training and replacement units from the Netherlands. The largest source of troops in the opening phase of the battle was Fallschirm-Panzer-Ersatz-und-Ausbildungs-Regiment “Hermann Göring” based near Utrecht. With so many Luftwaffe aviation units being grounded in the summer of 1944 due to fuel shortages, this training regiment became bloated to almost divisional strength with 12,000 troops in August 1944. Its commander, Oberst Fritz Fullreide, attempted to deploy the unit as an intact combat formation. Instead, it was fed into the battle piecemeal, many of its units serving as bits of Tettau’s Waalstellung. This has led to some confusion over the identity of German paratroop formations in the battle since many bore the name “Hermann Göring” (HG) but this had nothing to do with the combat division of that name.

The only major paratroop formation that was on hand was Oberstleutnant Friedrich von der Heydte’s Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 6. This unit had fought against the US paratroopers in Normandy in June 1944, and, after being decimated, it was withdrawn to Germany for reconstruction. Although nominally back to full strength by early September, Von der Heydte described the regiment’s readiness as low since about three-fourths of the troops were untrained new replacements, most of whom had not even received rifle practice. Another paratroop unit, Battalion Finsel (I./FJ.Rgt. 2) was also sent to the Netherlands at this time, but Von der Heydte regarded it as a “rotten apple” with low combat value, poor leadership, poor discipline, and “addicted to arbitrary action, looting and outrages against the civilian population.” These two units detrained in Tilburg along with a partially organized parachute regiment and they were amalgamated under a temporary command, variously designated as Kampfgruppe Walther or Division Walther after its commander, Oberst Erich Walther. Another three parachute training
The Hornet’s Nest: German dispositions in the Netherlands, September 16, 1944

German Army Occupation Units
1. Wehrmacht Befehlshaber Hilversum
2. Feldkommandantur 674 Groningen
3. Feldkommandantur 724 Utrecht
4. Kreiskommandantur 772 Almelo
5. Ortskommandantur 215 Breda
6. Ortskommandantur 778 Amsterd
7. Ortskommandantur 782 Zwolle
8. Ortskommandantur 783 Groningen
9. Ortskommandantur 784 Rotterdam
10. Ortskommandantur 686 Schiedam
11. Ortskommandantur 689 Nijmegen
12. Ortskommandantur 670 Venlo
13. Ortskommandantur 871 ’s-Hertogenbosch
14. Ortskommandantur 872 Dordrecht
15. Ortskommandantur 873 Leiden
16. Ortskommandantur 874 Leeuwarden
17. Ortskommandantur 875 Gouda
18. Ortskommandantur 876 Gorinchem
19. Ortskommandantur 877 Den Helder
20. Ortskommandantur 878 Roermond
21. Ortskommandantur 879 Venlo
22. Ortskommandantur 880 Amersfoort
23. Ortskommandantur 881 Tilburg
24. Ortskommandantur 938 Utrecht

Waffen-SS Training and Replacement units
A. Befehlshaber der Waffen-SS in den Niederlanden Den Haag
B. SS-Ausbildungs-und-Ersatz-Battalion 16 Arnhem
C. SS-Panzergrenadier Ausbildungs-und-Ersatz-Battalion 4 Ede
D. V./SS-Artillerie-Ausbildungs-und-Ersatz-Regiment Amersfoort
E. SS-Panzerjäger-Ausbildungs-Abteilung 2 Hilversum
F. SS-Infanteriegrenadier-Ausbildungs-Regiment 2 Apeldoorn
G. SS-Wachbatallion 3 Amersfoort
H. SS-Kraftfahrschule I Apeldoorn
I. SS-Unterfuhrerschule Arnhem Amsterd
J. Grenadier-Regiment 1 Landstorm Nederland

Luftwaffe Fallschirm Training and Replacement units
X. Fallschirm-Panzer-Ersatz-und-Ausbildungs-Regiment ‘Hermann Göring’ Utrecht

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regiments reached the Eindhoven area where they were hastily consolidated into Fallshirmjäger-Lehr-Division Erdmann under Gen. Lt. Wolfgang Erdmann. A parachute anti-tank battalion and about 5,000 Luftwaffe service troops arrived in ‘s-Hertogenbosch where they were assigned to a temporary Kampfgruppe.

Lacking the intended parachute divisions, Student’s Fsch-AOK 1 headquarters took over the units already in place in southeastern Netherlands and northern Belgium under the German military occupation command. Initially, its only significant unit was the 719. Infanterie-Division. This unit had originally been configured as a static division for coastal defense and had been deployed on the Dutch coast until August 1944. It was reorganized as a conventional infantry division after re-equipment with horses, some vehicles, and field artillery, and on September 9 it had a combat strength of 4,515 infantry. On September 4–5, the division was deployed along a perilously long defensive perimeter about 50 miles in width. The corps headquarters assessed its combat value (Kampfwert) as 3: suitable for defensive missions. Due to the extended front, Gen.Lt. Karl Sievers concentrated his forces on his western flank around Merksem, where he expected that the British 7 Armoured Division would strike next during its advance out of Antwerp. The division fought against British forces from September 6 to 12. The division’s forces on the eastern side of its perimeter were paltry and consisted of a number of strongpoints with undefended stretches in between. The only reinforcements came from a battalion of the Dutch Waffen-SS, II./Grenadier-Regiment Landstorm-Nederland, near Hasselt, and some improvised units created from idle Luftwaffe ground personnel.

Curiously enough, the strongest forces in the sector were not supposed to be there at all. Generalleutnant Kurt Chill’s 85. Infanterie-Division had been smashed in France. The remnants of this division, along with some stragglers from 84. and 89. Infanterie-Divisionen, reached Turnhout in early September and were ordered by AOK 7 to continue their withdrawal to the Rhineland for reconstruction. When Brussels fell to the Allies on September 3, 1944, Chill took it upon himself to establish a defense line along the Albert Canal. At the time, his troops numbered barely a thousand men. One of the main outcomes of this decision was that the canal defense line served as a collection point for numerous stragglers, mostly Luftwaffe ground personnel and Flak troops retreating from air bases in France. These brought the unit strength up to about 4,250 men. Within a few days, “Kampfgruppe Chill” had created a viable if spotty defense force along the canal.

Aside from these units, the Wehrmacht forces facing the Allies in Operation Market-Garden were a jumble of rear-area troops including military police, line-of-communications troops and occupation units. For example, the 156 German troops captured by the 82nd Airborne Division on September 17 came from 28 different units, hardly any from combat formations.

An important source of fresh units during Operation Market-Garden was the neighboring military district command in the Westphalia region of Germany, Wehrkreis VI. Homeland military units along the frontier had been subordinated to OB West’s tactical command on September 9. This district was responsible for refitting shattered divisions and creating new units. Its proximity to the Netherlands was a major advantage to the German defense
since units could be quickly sent to the battlefield. Many improvised units were sent into combat in the Netherlands a day after having been created. The desperate conditions of September 1944 forced it to convert its training units into improvised infantry divisions, sometimes called “shadow divisions.” General der Infanterie Franz Mattenklott recalled doing this “with a heavy heart,” fully realizing that it consumed the seed of future infantry divisions. Ersatz-Division-Stab 176 and 526 were sent into the field as Division Nr. 176 and Division Nr. 526 along the Westwall on either side of Aachen. The command staff and NCOs of the units were veterans, often with wounds that precluded them from frontline duty, but the divisions’ troops were inexperienced and partially trained recruits. On September 7, Division Nr. 176 was transferred to Student’s command to hold the eastern sector of the Albert Canal defense line.

In September 1944, Korps Feldt under General der Kavalerie Kurt Feldt was organized in the district to set up a hasty defense line along the German frontier using two improvised divisions – Division z.b.V.406 from Münster to Cologne, and Division Räßler from Cologne to Trier. After the Market-Garden landings, Korps Feldt was put in temporary charge of the attacks from Germany towards Nijmegen, using Division z.b.V.406. This unit was originally called the Special Administrative Division Staff 406 (Divisions-Kommando Stab zur besonderen Verwendung Nr. 406) and had directed regional militia forces including the Landesschützen militia and paramilitary engineer units in Wehrkreis VI. In the late summer of 1944, Gen.Lt. Gerd Scherbeningen was instructed to amalgamate an assortment of units into an improvised infantry division including district emergency alert units (Alarmineiten) from the Wehrkreis NCO schools (HUS: Heeresunteroffiziers-Schule) at the Wahn maneuver area near Cologne and Jülich, several “ear” and “stomach” battalions consisting of men with medical problems, a few Landesschützen militia battalions, and a Luftwaffe NCO school. The troops

The Netherlands had an unusually heavy concentration of Flak batteries due to its location under the “bomber autobahn” between Britain and the Ruhr. One of the most widely encountered German support weapons during Market-Garden was the 20mm Flak 38 auto-cannon like this one currently preserved at the Domain Raversijde Atlantikwall museum. (Author)
were short on infantry small arms and had few field guns; there were few
motor vehicles so the unit was largely immobile. The Luftwaffe personnel
were of good quality but with little or no ground training. Division z.b.V.406
was rushed into the field, first serving in a defensive role along the Westwall
in place of Division Nr. 176, but later being committed to the Market-Garden
fighting near the Groesbeek Heights.

The most significant German armored unit to face the US airborne
divisions was Panzer-Brigade 107. It was formed from the remnants of the
25. Panzergrenadier-Division in Poland in July–August 1944. Although
intended for the Russian Front, on September 15 it was assigned to OB West
and arrived in the Netherlands on September 18–19. It was close to full
strength with 2,117 troops and 36 Panther tanks.

The most important source of improvised firepower in the Netherlands
came from Luftwaffe Flak units. Since the Netherlands was under the
“bomber Autobahn” from Britain to the Ruhr, numerous Flak batteries had
been established against the Allied bomber offensive. In September 1944,
Student’s command was given control of 20 Flak batteries, mainly from Flak-
Brigade 18. These were attached to various units, with many divisions
receiving a battery or more of 88mm Flak guns for use in the field artillery
role. The 20mm auto-cannon batteries were used for direct fire support of
various infantry and paratroop units, sometimes in an improvised mobile
configuration, mounted on trucks.

A number of Waffen-SS units eventually became involved in the American
sector of Market-Garden. As in the case of the Luftwaffe, the Waffen-SS had
several training/replacement units in the Netherlands and these were used to
form temporary battlegroups. In addition, Dutch Waffen-SS volunteers had
been formed into a new Grenadier-Regiment 1 Landstorm-Nederland in
1943, with I./GR 1 assigned to the 85. Infanterie-Division, II./GR 1 assigned

German units made extensive use of self-propelled Flak
weapons for close-combat support against the Allied
paratroopers. This is a 20mm Flak 38 mounted on an SdKfz
11/1 3-tonne half-track, used in the fighting against the 82nd
Airborne Division around Mook. (NARA)
to the 719. Infanterie-Division and III./GR 1 along with headquarters units assigned to the Arnhem area.

The most important tactical Waffen-SS unit in the Netherlands was II SS-Panzerkorps headquartered in Doetinchem east of Arnhem at the time of Market-Garden with its two Waffen-SS Panzer divisions. These units were withdrawing through Belgium in early September with the 10. SS-Panzer-Division “Frundsberg” reaching the Maastricht area on September 5, followed shortly after by the 9. SS-Panzer Division “Hohenstaufen.” At first, the plan was to concentrate these two divisions along with the 2. Panzer-Division and 116. Panzer-Division around Eindhoven for refitting, but this scheme was abandoned due to the speed of the Allied advance. On September 10, the corps was instructed to leave one division in the Arnhem area for refitting while the other returned to Germany; the 10. SS-Panzer-Division was selected to remain in the Netherlands and was headquartered in Ruurlo to the northeast of Arnhem. The area northeast of Arnhem was selected due to the heavy concentration of Waffen-SS training and replacement units in this area.

Due to the advance of the First US Army into Germany around Aachen, the corps was instructed to keep a Kampfgruppe ready as a rapid-reaction force for contingencies around Aachen. Instead, Kampfgruppe Heinke was committed to the area near Neerpelt shortly before Market-Garden to reinforce Division Walther in its fight with the British Second Army along the Meuse–Escalot Canal. After the start of Market-Garden, elements of the 9. SS-Panzer-Division that had returned to Germany were recalled to the Arnhem area and played a central role in the fighting against the British 1st Airborne Division around Arnhem. The 10. SS-Panzer-Division formed a number of battlegroups that were dispatched to the Nijmegen area to fight against the US 82nd Airborne Division. As of September 5, 1944, the division had a strength of 7,142 troops of its nominal strength of 18,979. Of these about 3,800 were combat troops and the rest were divisional support troops; Harmel estimated its actual combat strength on September 17 to be barely 1,500 men. It had very few tanks left.

The Luftwaffe had minimal ability to provide any air cover for the army units in Belgium and the Netherlands. Luftflotte 3 had been pushed back to bases in Belgium and the Netherlands, but its forward bases were subjected to relentless air attack by the Allies. It had barely 175 serviceable combat aircraft by mid-September 1944. Fuel shortages and a lack of adequately trained aircrews limited air operations. Aside from fighter sweeps by units from neighboring airbases in Germany, ground-support missions were largely suspended in early September 1944, with a few rare exceptions such as the bombing attack on Eindhoven on September 19. On September 21, Luftflotte 3 was downgraded to Luftwaffen-Kommando-West under Luftflotte Reich.

| Major German armored units in the Market-Garden area, mid-September 1944 |
|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                            | Pzkwf IV | Panther | StuG | Jagdpz | Half-track | Car |
| 9. SS-Panzer-Division       | 5       | 21      | 58   | 5     |
| 10. SS-Panzer-Division      | 16      | 21      | 78   | 11    |
| Panzer-Brigade 107          | 36      | 11      | 157  |
| 1./s.PzJg.Abt. 559          |         |         | 6    |
| StuG-Brigade 280            |         | 10      |      |
| Fallschirm-StuG-Brigade 12  |         |         | 5    |
ALLIED FORCES

The two principal US units committed to Operation Market were the 82nd Airborne Division and the 101st Airborne Division. These divisions deployed three parachute infantry regiments (PIR) numbering about 2,020 men each and one glider infantry regiment (GIR), numbering about 1,680 men each.\(^1\) Fire support was provided by four parachute and glider artillery battalions each equipped with 12 75mm pack howitzers; some units were beginning to receive the larger 105mm pack howitzer around this time. Most of the division’s antitank firepower came from the airborne antiaircraft battalion, which had eight 57mm anti-tank guns in each of its three batteries for a total of 24. Motor transport was very limited during the airborne phase, aside from motor scooters and a small number of jeeps delivered by glider. Divisional supply trucks arrived only after the initial landings via seaborne delivery from Britain.

The 82nd Airborne Division was the more experienced of the two, with elements of the division fighting in three major campaigns prior to Market-Garden. It took part in the Operation Husky landings on Sicily in July 1943, Operation Avalanche at Salerno in September 1943, and Operation Overlord in Normandy in June 1944. The 101st Airborne Division saw its combat debut during the D-Day landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944.

82nd Airborne Division
- 325th Glider Infantry Regiment
- 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment
- 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment
- 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment
- 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion
- 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion
- 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
- 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
- 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion
- 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion
- 307th Airborne Medical Company
- 82nd Airborne Signal Company
- 782nd Airborne Ordnance Maintenance Company
- 407th Airborne Quartermaster Company
- 82nd Parachute Maintenance Company

101st Airborne Division
- 327th Glider Infantry Regiment
- 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment
- 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment
- 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment
- 321st Glider Field Artillery Battalion
- 907th Glider Field Artillery Battalion
- 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
- 463rd Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
- 81st Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion
- 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion
- 326th Airborne Medical Company
- 101st Airborne Signal Company
- 801st Airborne Ordnance Maintenance Company
- 426th Airborne Quartermaster Company
- 101st Parachute Maintenance Company

Although the primary focus of this book is on the US airborne divisions, the units of the British XXX Corps were inextricably linked to their operations. The unit most directly involved in the opening phase of Operation Garden was the Guards Armoured Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Allan H. S. Adair. The division was organized in the usual fashion with the tanks under the 5th Guards Armoured Brigade and the motor infantry under the 32nd Guards Brigade. In practice, the division fought in four combined-arms “groups” teaming tanks with infantry. So for example, the Irish Group included the 2nd (Armoured) Battalion Irish Guards and the 3rd Battalion Irish Guards. Typically the Grenadier Group and Irish Group served in the 5th Brigade and the Coldstream Group and Welsh Group in the 32nd Brigade. The division had seen its combat debut in Normandy in mid-July 1944 and was attached to XXX Corps on August 27 to take part in the pursuit into Belgium. Following the liberation of Brussels on September 3, 1944, the division was heavily involved in the fighting to breach the German defense lines along the Albert Canal and Meuse–Escaut Canal.

One of the less-heralded aspects of Allied forces in Market-Garden was the role of the Dutch resistance. The Allies had an active hand in encouraging the Dutch underground movement, and had assembled special operations teams, the Jedburghs, to serve as the intermediary. Each of the Allied airborne divisions along with the British 52nd Lowland Division (Air-portable) had an assigned Jedburgh team, which included Dutch nationals, often recruited

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from existing Commando units. The 82nd Airborne Division was assigned Team Clarence, with an additional dozen Royal Dutch Commandos assigned to provide interpreters and liaison down to battalion level. The 101st Airborne Division was assigned Team Daniel II, as well as ten Royal Dutch Commandos for interpreter support. The US divisions also recruited Dutch-speaking Americans to assist in the liaison role. Besides the Jedburgh teams, the OSS (Office of Special Services) had deployed the Melanie Mission into the Netherlands to conduct deep reconnaissance. The Dutch resistance proved to be an invaluable asset for the American airborne divisions. With the assistance of the Jedburgh teams, the Dutch resistance was able to provide timely tactical intelligence. In addition, there was extensive ad hoc support including the collection and guarding of prisoners, security patrols, and other armed support. On instructions from the Dutch government-in-exile, the resistance staged a national railroad strike for ten days that severely compromised the use of Dutch railways for the transport and supply of German troops in the Netherlands during the first weeks of fighting. 

The spearhead of the XXX Corps advance was the 2nd Household Cavalry, the divisional reconnaissance element of the Guards Armoured Division. Here, a Daimler Dingo scout car leads some Daimler Mk. 1 armored cars past a column of Bedford QL lorries at Overasselt near the Heuman Bridge on September 19. (NARA)
GERMAN PLANS

By early September 1944, Hitler had recovered from the physical effects of the July 20 bombing, but he remained psychologically scarred by the coup by senior Wehrmacht generals. He remained determined to impose his will on German military planning, and became even less willing to listen to the advice of army commanders. Hitler focused on two primary goals in early September. The unexpected loss of Antwerp on September 4 posed a significant threat to Germany since it provided the Allies with a major port near the German border to provide logistics support. The port was of little value unless the Allies seized control of the Scheldt estuary leading to the harbor. Hitler was adamant that Armeeoberhommando 15 concentrate its efforts on retaining control of the Scheldt. The AOK 15 was the only field army of Heeresgruppe B not to have been decimated in France, and its forces managed to create a firm defensive foundation on either side of the Scheldt in September 1944 with little Allied interference.

Hitler’s main offensive gambit in the west in early September 1944 was a large offensive operation to cut off American advances against Heeresgruppe G by staging a Panzer attack from the Vosges Mountains in Alsace. The initial version of the plan envisioned the concentration of seven or eight Panzer divisions under the direction of Manteuffel’s 5. Panzerarmee to cut off Patton’s rapidly advancing Third US Army, while at the same time preventing a link-up between the northern tier of Allied armies in northwestern France and Belgium, with the Allied armies advancing from the Mediterranean coast from the Operation Dragoon landings. Hitler’s delusionary scheme was undermined by the threadbare Panzer strength of the army in the west, and petered out later in September in a series of futile and inconsequential attacks in Lorraine. Although the Vosges Panzer offensive had desultory results, it had a pernicious effect on efforts to reinforce the German frontier defenses in September 1944 since it drained away most of the meager armored reserves available in the west.

In spite of Hitler’s fanciful schemes, the German army did manage to perform the “Miracle on the Westwall” in September 1944. Towards the middle of September 1944, German defenses in the West gradually stabilized;

3 For further details on the planned Panzer offensive, see: Steven Zaloga, Campaign 75: Lorraine 1944, Osprey Publishing, Oxford (2000).
the demoralized rout from France subsided as German troops reached home soil. There were a variety of reasons for this dramatic change. To begin with, the Russian Front stabilized in August 1944 after the Red Army ran out of steam. Although operations continued in the Balkans, the main Soviet front in Poland halted for nearly six months until resuming offensive operations in January 1945. This permitted the Wehrmacht to shift some of its reserves back to the west. For example, the newly formed Panzer brigades, specifically organized for the Russian Front, were deployed instead on Germany’s western frontier, mainly the ill-conceived Vosges Panzer offensive.

The Ersatzheer (Replacement Army) managed to create a huge number of new, albeit poor quality, infantry divisions that were used to plug the line. One of the provocative explanations for the rapid rejuvenation of the army in September was that the Ersatzheer, the soul of the anti-Hitler coup, had retained an unusually large number of replacement units in Germany in the summer of 1944 as part of the Operation Valkyrie mobilization to take over the German government. After the coup failed, these half-million men suddenly became available to reconstitute the divisions that were mangled in the summer 1944 fighting. The German army created 54 new divisions in the west, Hitler brought in his stalwarts. Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model, to the left, was his miracle worker, able to retrieve Germany’s fortune in the face of catastrophe as he had demonstrated earlier in the summer after the rout of Heeresgruppe Mitte on the Russian Front. In the center is Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt and to his right is Gen. Hans Krebs, chief of staff of Heeresgruppe B. (MHI)

4 This idea was first raised in a little-noticed study, though it has never been conclusively documented. Walter Dunn Jr., Heroes or Traitors?: The German Replacement Army, the July Plot, and Adolf Hitler, Praeger (2003)
six weeks after the failed coup. The Ersatzheer also benefited from the fuel shortage that crippled the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine in the summer of 1944. The grounding of numerous Luftwaffe squadrons and the cessation of most surface fleet deployments left tens of thousands of high-quality Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine troops available for hasty conversion into infantrymen.

German commanders in the Netherlands were fully expecting a major British drive towards the Rhine. The advance of the British Second Army out of Antwerp and across the Albert Canal and Meuse–Escaut Canal was a clear harbinger of further actions into the Netherlands. Model’s Heeresgruppe B headquarters issued a string of warnings on September 9–14 that British forces were massing for an offensive operation on the axis Nijmegen–Arnhem–Wesel with an aim of reaching the Rhine. On September 16, Model’s headquarters issued an order insisting on a more rigorous effort to defend key bridges in the Netherlands and as well as preparation for their demolition.

German intelligence sources predicted a major Allied airborne operation in mid-September, but felt that the most likely locations would be in the Aachen area in front of the First US Army or the Wissembourg Gap in the Saar in support of either Patton’s Third US Army or Patch’s Seventh US Army. Due to these warnings, Rundstedt’s OB West headquarters ordered the formation of a Luftwaffe Anti-Airlanding Brigade on September 10, 1944, to be positioned in Belgium. At the September 16 meeting at Hitler’s Wolfschanze headquarters, the commander of the OKW (Oberkommando Wehrmacht), Gen.Obst. Alfred Jodl, warned of the likelihood of an Allied airborne operation in the Netherlands, Denmark, or northern Germany in the near future. In spite of these expectations, Market-Garden achieved tactical surprise.

**ALLIED PLANS**

Following the Normandy airborne landings, SHAEF and the airborne staffs considered numerous future airborne operations. When the German army in the west began collapsing in mid-August, the First Allied Airborne Army plans involved efforts to conduct a deep envelopment of retreating forces by dropping airborne forces in their path of retreat in Belgium. These schemes fell by the wayside for two principal reasons. Some of the plans were overtaken by events due to the rapidity of the Allied advance. However, many of the plans proved difficult to implement since much of the Troop Carrier Command was committed to fuel and supply missions between Britain and the Continent due to the logistics problems created by the rapid Allied advance.

Aside from the large operations, there were a number of disputes between Brereton and British commanders over the issue of conducting small-scale operations involving a division or less of airborne forces to accomplish tactical missions. For example, on August 25, 1944, Montgomery’s 21st Army Group headquarters wanted to stage an immediate drop around Doullens, 25 miles north of Amiens, to help facilitate their advance. Montgomery had conducted small airborne missions of this type on Sicily in July 1943, but Brereton refused. He had discussed this issue with Eisenhower, who agreed that the First Allied Airborne Army should be reserved for mass operations with strategic significance.
On September 3, 1944, the First Allied Airborne Army received tentative approval for Operation Linnet II, a plan to seize Meuse River crossings in the Aachen and Maastricht areas in advance of the Allied armies. Brereton suggested that the decision had to be made no later than September 4, which caused a furious row with his deputy, Lt. Gen. Browning, who argued that this did not provide enough time. Brereton replied that the disorganization of German forces in Belgium would not be indefinite and that risks had to be taken. Browning threatened to protest the decision with the support of “his division commanders.” Brereton consulted with the senior American airborne commander, Matthew Ridgway, who indicated that none of the US division commanders would protest the execution of any decision handed them. In the event, Linnet II was cancelled by Montgomery, and Browning backed down from his resignation threat.

On the evening of September 3, Montgomery raised the issue of a landing in the Arnhem or Wesel area three days later. Airborne Army HQ ruled out Wesel due to the density of the Flak in the area, and settled on Arnhem, with a scheme to seize the bridge by a coup de main using 18 gliders with the British 1st Airborne Division and Polish Airborne Brigade landing nearby, followed by landings at nearby airfields by the air-portable 52nd Division. Codenamed Operation Comet, the mission was planned for September 7, but postponed for a day due to weather. It was postponed again the following day due to reports of stiffening German resistance along the Albert Canal; it was cancelled on September 10. Montgomery also raised the possibility of an airborne mission against Walcheren Island at the mouth of the Scheldt Estuary in hopes of rapidly freeing up the port of Antwerp. Brereton adamantly opposed this mission due to the nature of the terrain on the island and the intensity of the Flak.
Through August 1944, Montgomery had been the principal Allied ground force commander in northwest Europe, but with three Allied army groups now in action, Eisenhower moved the SHAEF headquarters to the Continent in September to assert more direct control. On September 10, Eisenhower flew to Brussels to consult with Montgomery over future operations. Montgomery insisted that the Allies’ growing supply problem mandated a shift from a “broad front” approach to a “dagger thrust”. He insisted that his own 21st Army Group be assigned priority for Allied supplies, idling the two American army groups. He argued that a focus on the Ruhr would be “the last chance to end the war in 1944.” The discussion became so heated that Eisenhower finally had to warn Montgomery, “Steady, Monty, You can’t speak to me like that. I’m your boss.”

Eisenhower was unwilling to change his operational approach, but he did approve of a revised version of Operation Comet. The new airborne mission, codenamed Market, resembled Comet in its objectives, but added a larger airborne element including two US airborne divisions. It also included a more methodical implementation of the ground element of the mission utilizing the British Second Army, codenamed Garden, which would consolidate the corridor originally secured by the airborne forces.

Several factors accounted for the hasty decision in favor of Market-Garden. Eisenhower’s approval helped to mollify Montgomery. In addition, Eisenhower had been under pressure by senior American commanders
including chief-of-staff George C. Marshal and air force commander Hap Arnold to employ the new airborne force on a mission of strategic significance. The plan reflected the prevalent view in early September that the German Army was on its last legs, and would probably collapse if given a good, hard push. On the negative side, the decision inevitably diverted attention away from the need to open the port of Antwerp. If Eisenhower had a more pessimistic view of the German threat, an emphasis on clearing the Scheldt Estuary to open Antwerp would have been a more prudent use of Montgomery’s 21st Army Group than a race to the Rhine. Eisenhower’s choice of a focus on Market-Garden rather than Antwerp was heavily influenced by the overly optimistic assessment of the imminent disintegration of the Wehrmacht.

American popular perceptions of the Market-Garden decision have been distorted by Bradley’s misleading account in his memoirs: “Had the pious tee-totaling Montgomery wobbled into SHAEF with a hangover, I could not have been more astonished than I was by the daring adventure he proposed. For in contrast to the conservative tactics Montgomery ordinarily chose … Monty’s plan was one of the most imaginative of the war.” While Montgomery may have been relatively conservative in Normandy with his mechanized tactics, he often had displayed considerable enthusiasm for using airborne and other special forces in both the Sicily campaign and in his planning for D-Day. Furthermore, Market-Garden had not originated with Montgomery. The objective of the operation, the Rhine bridges, was certainly Montgomery’s goal. But the configuration of the operation was only the most recent iteration of the schemes by Brereton’s First Allied Airborne Army to influence the conduct of the European campaign by using a massive airborne operation behind German lines and were a further evolution of the cancelled Linnet II and Comet plans.
In contrast to the Normandy airborne landings, the Dutch mission would be flown in daylight. This was in part due to the view that neither the Luftwaffe fighter force nor Flak posed major problems, but also due to lingering night navigation problems displayed in Sicily and Normandy, and the lack of moonlight on the night of the planned mission. The British 1st Airborne Division and the Polish Paratroop Brigade would be landed in the Arnhem area to seize the Arnhem Bridge. The 82nd Airborne Division was assigned to secure the bridges from Grave to Nijmegen, while the 101st Airborne Division secured those south of Grave. Horrocks’ instructions to his XXX Corps was to reach the Arnhem Bridge “if possible in forty-eight hours” (D+2), while Browning’s I Airborne Corps expected the link-up on D+3 or D+4.

The airlift operation was constrained by the need to fly from bases in England since bases in France were being used by tactical aviation. This was somewhat ameliorated by Brereton’s arrangement to borrow 250 B-24 bombers to conduct a major re-supply effort on D+2, but it weakened the strength of the initial landings during the first few days of good weather. Another means of accelerating the landings, the use of twin-towing of the CG-4 gliders by the C-47 transports instead of the usual single tow, was ruled out by Brereton due to the distance from Britain to the Netherlands.

The first objection to the initial plan came from Maj. Gen. Taylor of the 101st Airborne Division, who argued that the 30-mile dispersion of the 101st Airborne Division was excessive. Taylor met with the British Second Army commander, Lt. Gen. Miles Dempsey on September 12, and Dempsey agreed that his forces could secure objectives up through Eindhoven, leaving it up to the 101st Airborne Division to secure the bridges north of Eindhoven in the 16-mile stretch to Veghel.

The 82nd Airborne Division had three principal objectives. Although the ultimate objective was the Waal River bridges at Nijmegen, the city presented few good drop zones and was heavily defended by Flak. Browning and Gavin quickly appreciated that the Groesbeek Heights to the east of the city were an absolutely vital terrain feature since they were the only elevation in this sector and the dominated the bridge site. Occupation of the Groesbeek Heights was deemed essential since it would block direct advances from Germany towards Nijmegen. Browning insisted that the bridge at Nijmegen would be captured only after Groesbeek Heights was secured. The bridge at Grave was absolutely critical, so the plan was to land forces close to both sides of the bridge to ensure its rapid capture.
The Market-Garden plan was based on the intelligence premise that “once the crust of resistance had been broken, the German army would be unable to concentrate any other troops in sufficient strength to stop the breakthrough” and that “the capture of the bridge objectives was more a matter of surprise and confusion than hard fighting.” Allied intelligence had a good, but not flawless, appreciation of the German order of battle. Ultra decryptions were not complete, and in many cases, were clouded by the chaotic conditions faced by the German army. By September 12, the two Waffen-SS Panzer formations were suspected to be in the Arnhem area. Allied intelligence was weakest in its failure to appreciate the ability of the rear area commands such as the WBN and Wehrkreis VI to rapidly create tactical formations from local replacement and training units. These units would be instrumental in preventing the early capture of the Arnhem and Nijmegen bridges.

In the week before the operation, the intelligence continued to grow more alarming, leading to calls for changes to the plans. The I Airborne Corps intelligence officer, Maj. Brian Urquhart, was concerned by the reports of German Panzer units and ordered a photoreconnaissance mission near Arnhem that took place on September 15. The few photos showing tanks were dismissed as irrelevant by Browning and others; the existing evaluations acknowledged the presence of 50–100 tanks in the Netherlands but assessed that they were not part of a coherent force. The September 16 SHAEF weekly intelligence summary concluded that the 9. SS-Panzer-Division and 10. SS-Panzer-Division were in the Netherlands for rebuilding; another intercept identified Oosterbeek as the location of Model’s Heeresgruppe B headquarters. These accumulating reports were worrisome enough that Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, the SHAEF chief-of-staff, received Eisenhower’s permission to bring them to Montgomery’s attention along with the suggestion that a second airborne division be dropped at Arnhem or that one of the American divisions be moved up closer to Arnhem. Montgomery “ridiculed the idea and waved (Smith’s) objections airily aside.” The British Second Army commander, Miles Dempsey, was also aware of the changing intelligence assessment and suggested that Market-Garden be redirected towards Wesel rather than Arnhem, a suggestion that was quickly dismissed by Montgomery. Wesel would be the site of Montgomery’s actual Rhine crossing, Operation Varsity/Plunder, on March 23, 1945.

The 82nd Airborne Division intelligence evaluation on September 12 anticipated a tough fight. “There is no doubt that the enemy has made a remarkable recovery within the last few days, at any rate in the 21 Army Group Area... A captured document indicates that the degree of control exercised over the re-grouping and collecting of the apparently scattered remnants of a beaten army were little short of remarkable. Furthermore, the fighting capacity of the new Battle Groups formed from the remnants of the battered divisions seems unimpaired.”
THE SOUTHERN SECTOR: 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION LANDING

The initial 101st Airborne Division force was carried to the Netherlands in 436 C-47 transports and 70 gliders, and began around 1300hrs on September 17. In order to ensure accurate drops, four special Pathfinder detachments landed 15 minutes in advance of the main force. Due to the dispersion of the objectives, Maj. Gen. Taylor felt that it would be more prudent to land the division together in a central area, and then proceed to the objectives rather than to employ dispersed landing sites. Jump casualties were less than 2 percent of the 6,809-man force and most battalions were able to assemble within an hour of landing. In comparison to the Normandy night drops, it was a textbook example of navigation and planning.

The 502nd PIR landed on Drop Zone B without enemy opposition. The 1/502nd PIR set out for St. Oedenrode and seized the bridge over the Dommel River after a short skirmish. Co. H of 3/502nd PIR was assigned the highway bridge at Best and secured the bridge without initial resistance. However, in the early evening the bridge site was attacked by Kampfgruppe Rink, an improvised formation including the remnants of Maj. von Zedlitz’s GR 723, 719. Infanterie-Division, bits of the 245. Infanterie-Division and the Tilburg military police battalion. The remainder of 3/502nd PIR was ordered to reinforce Co. H and to take back the bridge the next morning. The divisional command echelon landed with the 502nd PIR and set up a command post in Son. The initial glider force followed an hour behind the parachute landings.

The 506th PIR landed at Drop Zone C without opposition and elements of the 1/506th PIR immediately set out for the three bridges over the Wilhelmina Canal.
near Son without formal assembly. As it transpired, German engineers had already blown two of the bridges up. The third bridge was held by II./Fallschirm-Panzer-Ersatz-und-Ausbildungs-Regiment “Hermann Göring,” which kept control of it long enough to finish its demolition before the arrival of the American paratroopers. The 506th PIR began crossing the canal by expedient means and created a bridgehead south of the canal, about 4 miles north of Eindhoven.

The 501st PIR landings on either side of Veghel were not entirely accurate, but the main objectives of the four bridges over the Aa River and the Willems Vaart Canal were quickly seized. Accompanying engineer troops assembled a second bridge over the Willems Vaart Canal. Resistance in the area was sporadic and light.
Bridge captured, September 17–18, 1944
Bridge demolished, September 17–18, 1944
Allied defensive perimeter, evening September 17, 1944

101st Airborne Division landings September 17–18, 1944
LEFT
A patrol from the Headquarters Company, 506th PIR, receives the help of local Dutch teenagers during movements on September 18. The paratroopers found the local Dutch populace to be extremely helpful during Operation Market. (NARA)

BELOW
On September 18, Operation Market was supported by the Eighth Air Force’s Mission 639 with heavy bombers dropping supplies from at low altitude. Of the 248 bombers participating, seven were lost over the targets to Flak, six damaged beyond repair, and 154 suffering damage. This B-24H of the 466th Bombardment Group, 96th Wing, 2nd Bomb Division is seen dropping supplies. (Patton Museum)
The paratroopers had landed in the rear area of the German defenses, where they were light or non-existent. This was not the case along the forward edge of the battle area, where the British Second Army began its advance on Eindhoven. Horrocks’ XXX Corps had spent the previous four days in penetrating the German defenses along the Albert Canal near Beeringen to reach to the Meuse–Escaut Canal closer to the Dutch border. The main opposition had been Von der Heydte’s Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 6 and other elements of the improvised Division Walther. British artillery began a preliminary bombardment at 1400hrs and lead elements of the Irish Guards Group began the attack at 1435hrs.

The Eindhoven road was such an obvious objective that Division Walther had reinforced the defenses there with their usual hodgepodge of units. The eastern side of the road was manned by two understrength battalions of Kampfgruppe Heinke (III./SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 19 and II./Pz.Gren.Rgt. 21); the west side was covered by Von der Heydte’s FJR 6; blocking the road was the newly rebuilt FJR 18.

In the wake of the rolling artillery barrage, the Irish Guards’ Sherman tanks advanced quickly through the German infantry defenses. About ten minutes after the advance began, the lead tanks ran into Lt. Finke’s 14./FJR 18, an anti-tank platoon of about 30 troops equipped with Panzerfaust anti-tank rockets and supported by several war-booty Soviet 76mm divisional guns used in an anti-tank role. Nine Shermans were knocked out in quick succession. Typhoon fighter-bombers were called in to soften the opposition. The advance resumed at 1630hrs, and the town of Valkenwaard was reached around 1930hrs, a distance of about 7 miles from the start line. Rather than press on to Eindhoven 6 miles further, XXX Corps remained in the town for the night. The decision to halt the armored advance short of Eindhoven has remained controversial, especially since the Guards column contained the bridging equipment needed to rebuild an essential canal crossing at Son.
The 101st Airborne Division captured Eindhoven the following day. The 506th PIR set out for the city at first light. The 3/506th PIR skirmished with Division Walther near Woensel on the north side of the city so 2/506th PIR moved to the east. First contact with British reconnaissance patrols was made around 1215hrs, and by 1300hrs the 2/506th PIR began securing the town. The paratroopers made the link-up with the main body of the Irish Guards around 1800hrs on the south side of Eindhoven. The original expectations were that XXX Corps would have reached Veghel by this time. British engineers began bridging the Son Canal around 2100hrs and it was ready for vehicle traffic at 0615hrs on September 19, D+2. The timetable to reach Arnhem was already slipping badly.
In contrast to other sectors of the 101st Division, the 502nd PIR continued to experience a far heavier level of German resistance in their attempts to re-capture the bridge at Best. On September 18, the understrength 59. Infanterie-Division arrived by train in the Tilburg area. In the afternoon, two weak battalions from GR 1036 were sent to reinforce Kampfgruppe Rink near the Best Bridge. German troops demolished the bridge at 1100hrs on September 18. Unaware of this, the 101st Airborne Division headquarters continued to commit forces to this mission, including 2/502nd PIR. The fighting around Best was the most intense in the 101st Airborne Division sector.

With the bridge at Son open, XXX Corps began a rapid exploitation out of Eindhoven on September 19. Lead elements of the Guards Armoured Division reached St Oedenrode and Veghel by 0645hrs, heading for a link-up with the 82nd Airborne Division later in the morning.

**THE NIJMEGEN SECTOR: 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION**

The 82nd Airborne Division was carried into action by 482 C-47 transports and 50 gliders, including 7,277 paratroopers and 209 glider infantry. The main mission was preceded by a pair of C-47s carrying Pathfinder teams which landed at Drop Zone O at 1247hrs. Ten paratrooper transports were lost during the mission; one glider transport was lost.

Most of the 504th PIR landed in Drop Zone O near Overasselt, and fanned out in multiple directions to seize crossings over the Maas–Waal Canal and to take the eastern side of the Grave Bridge (Bridge 11) from the Heuman side. Company E, 2/504th PIR, landed in Drop Zone O-1
82nd Airborne Division landings, September 17–18, 1944

US defensive perimeter, September 17, 1944
Bridge captured, September 17–18, 1944
Bridge demolished, September 17–18, 1944

82nd Airborne Division landings, September 17–18, 1944

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immediately to the west of the Grave Bridge while the rest of 2/504th PIR landed in Drop Zone O and marched to the bridge. The bridge had been prepared for demolition on September 7, but on September 17 before the airborne landings, one of the main fuzes was found to be inoperative. The commander of the demolition detail and another soldier went to Nijmegen to get a replacement. During the American attack, only a single soldier from the demolition party was present at the bridge, and unable or unwilling to activate the demolition charges himself. Even though the bridge was protected on both sides by pre-war Dutch bunkers, the German troops guarding the bridge were quickly overcome.

The 504th PIR was also tasked with capturing the west side of four other bridges along the Maas–Waal Canal in conjunction with other units of the division from the eastern side. The southernmost bridge (Bridge 7) was captured, the ones north of Malden (Bridge 8) and Hatert (Bridge 9) were blown by the Germans and the damaged bridge at Honinghuyje (Bridge 10) was seized the following day.
The 505th PIR landed further east around Groesbeek in two drop zones, established a defensive perimeter towards the Reichswald to the southeast and linked up with the 504th PIR along the Maas–Waal Canal. The rail bridge on the northwest side of Mook had already been demolished by the Germans.

The 508th PIR landed northeast of Groesbeek in Drop Zone T and its principal mission was to seize and control the Groesbeek Heights west of Berg-en-Dal, including Hill 95.6, which dominated the flat Dutch landscape in the area. Once the area was secure, Browning’s I Airborne Corps headquarters landed, consisting of 105 troops in 32 Horsa and six CG-4A gliders; 28 arrived safely.
Serial 17, consisting of 45 C-47 Skytrains (1) of the 99th and 100th Troop Carrier Squadrons, 441st Troop Carrier Group, departed for the Netherlands from Army Air Force Station No. 490 (RAF Langar), arriving over Drop Zone T at 1328hrs. The first two “Chalks” consisted of pathfinders from the 325th GIR. The following aircraft consisted of troops from the 1/508th PIR and the regimental HQ of the 508th PIR. Of the 45 transport aircraft, three were lost to Flak. The rest of the 441st Troop Carrier Group consisting of the 301st and 302nd TCS made up serial A-19, which dropped the 2/508th and elements of the regimental HQ company starting around 1334 hours; this serial lost two aircraft to Flak. The various squadrons could be distinguished by the alpha/numeric code painted on the nose: 99th TCS (3J); 100th TCS (8C); 301st TCS (Z4) and 302nd TCS (2L).

The usual load for a combat jump was 15 men per aircraft, with the senior officer usually jumping first. As the static line opened up the T-5 parachute pack, the olive drab canopy began to deploy (2). The large surface of area of the deploying canopy tended to swing the paratrooper around again, and within seconds, the shroud lines cleared the pack and the canopy blossomed, giving the paratrooper a hard jolt. US paratroopers also carried a reserve chute on their chest (3). The standard weapon for paratroopers was the normal M1 “Garand” rifle, though of course other weapons were carried depending on the table of equipment such as the .45 cal. Thompson sub-machine gun (4). The paratroops carried a good deal of equipment into combat. Under the parachute harness was a yellow “Mae West” life vest, a musette bag was hung under the reserve chute, an ammunition bag and an assault gas mask in waterproof bag off the hips. Fighting knives were often strapped to above the jump boots, and a .45 cal automatic in a holster on the hip with a folding knife in its scabbard in front of this. The paratrooper’s M1C helmet resembles the normal GI helmet, but has a modified liner and chin-strap to absorb the shock of parachute operations. A first aid packet is taped to the front of the helmet for ready access (5). Many paratroopers wore gloves to protect their hands during the jump.
The airborne landings caught Model by complete surprise at his headquarters near the British landing zone in Oosterbeek. Once it had become clear that the British paratroopers had failed to secure the Arnhem Bridge, Model declared the *Schwerpunkt* (focal point) to be the southern sector from Nijmegen to Eindhoven. The 9. SS-Panzer-Division was tasked with pushing the British force away from the north end of the Arnhem Bridge; once this was accomplished the remaining British force around Oosterbeck would be eliminated by 9. SS-Panzer-Division supported by Tettau’s improvised division from the WBN. The 10. SS-Panzer-Division was instructed to ferry across the Waal, and take control of the key bridges at Nijmegen.

Although Student had been one of the pioneers of airborne operations, the Operation *Market-Garden* landings on Sunday afternoon came as a
complete surprise to him. Student’s headquarters had been overwhelmed trying to deal with the threat of British ground operations from their bridgehead over the Meuse–Escaut Canal. About two hours after the landings, Student was delighted to receive a set of Allied operations orders that had been recovered from a glider that had landed near Vucht. These were quickly translated and a set immediately dispatched to Model’s temporary headquarters. This greatly aided in planning counterattacks.

Model instructed Student’s Fsch-AOK 1 to deal with the XXX Corps advance out of the Neerpelt bridgehead and the 101st Airborne landings. Kampfgruppe Chill was assigned to seal off the British penetration at Valkenswaard. Model ordered AOK 15 to route the 59. Infanterie-Division from the Tilburg area to act as the main counterattack force against the 101st Airborne Division. As mentioned previously, one of its regiments arrived on the afternoon of Monday, September 18, and took part in the violent struggle around the Best Bridge. Efforts by AOK 15 to interdict the Allied advance from the western side were constrained by Hitler’s admonition to hold the Scheldt Estuary at all costs.

Panzer-Brigade 107 was in transit to the Aachen area at the time, but was routed instead to Student’s sector. It did not reach the area in strength until Tuesday, September 19. Early on September 18, Model transferred the 86. AK (LXXXVI Korps) headquarters under Gen. der Inf. Hans von Obstfelder to Student’s command to direct Division Erdman and Division Nr. 176.
Since Student’s forces were so heavily concentrated along the forward-edge of battle on the Dutch border, Model instructed Wehrkreis VI to take over the battle against the 82nd Airborne Division around Groesbeek using Korps Feldt. Its Division z.b.V.406 was ordered to seize control of Groesbeek Heights.

The Luftwaffe instructed IX Fliegerkorps to provide air support to army units to defeat the Allied airborne landings. The first attack on the night of September 18 was directed against the British bridges over the Meuse–Escaut Canal at Neerpelt. Due to the chaotic conditions at the bases in neighboring Germany, only about a dozen Do-217 bombers of I./KG 2 departed from Münster-Handorf, of which several failed to find the target. The bombing results were negligible. Berlin insisted on a major assault against Eindhoven but fuel shortages limited the attack force to 78 bombers. The attacks began around 1930hrs on the night of September 19, killed about 190 civilians, but had little impact on the British advance.

NIJMEGEN BRIDGE: THE FIRST ATTEMPT

One of the most controversial aspects of the 508th PIR’s missions was the issue of the Nijmegen bridges. Prior to the mission, Gavin had authorized the regiment’s commander, Col. Roy Lindquist, to commit a battalion to a rapid seizure of the highway bridge at Nijmegen via the open terrain along the Waal River once it was clear that the Groesbeek Heights were secure. In the afternoon, members of the Dutch resistance met elements of the 1/508th PIR who were moving to the west of Drop Zone T to establish their defensive

This post-war aerial photograph shows the city of Nijmegen from the south looking towards the suburb of Lent on the northern bank of the Waal River. The highway bridge can be seen in the upper right and the railroad bridge in the upper left. (MHI)
perimeter. They informed the Americans that the city was very lightly held and that the bridge was theirs for the taking. Disregarding Gavin’s instructions to advance on the bridge via the open river edge, Lindquist instructed the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Shields Warren, to dispatch two companies to the headquarters of the Dutch resistance in Nijmegen through the congested town. This was in part due to the mistaken Dutch view that the demolition controls for the bridge were located in the city post office.

On September 17, the German defense of Nijmegen was chaotic, though much stronger than the Dutch resistance appreciated. On September 15, Student’s headquarters had dispatched the staff of its Erdkampfschule d.Lw. (Luftwaffe Ground Combat School) under Oberst Günther Hartung to take charge of the various training, reserve, and security units in the city. The core of the defense was Kampfgruppe Henke, led by Oberst Fritz Henke, commander of Fallschirmjäger-Lehr-Regiment 1. This battlegroup of about 750 troops was based around elements of the Fsch.Pz.Ers.-u.Ausb.Rgt. HG including its Unteroffiziers-Lehr Kp 29 along with replacement troops from Ersatz-Bataillon 6 from Wehrkreis VI. The city had a variety of police and security units that were gradually incorporated into the defenses. In the days before the landing, they were reinforced with about 300 walking-wounded from the convalescent hospital in town. The 4./Flak-Abt. 572 stationed around the city had four 88mm Flak guns and eight 20mm automatic cannon. On September 17, Hauptsturmführer Viktor Gräbner led a motorized detachment from SS-Aufklärungs-Abt. 9 to the city to determine the state of its defenses. After finding the defenses in order, the detachment returned to Arnhem later in the day, only to be ambushed on the Arnhem Bridge by Maj. John Frost’s 2nd Parachute Battalion.

Lieutenant-Colonel Warren and the Co. A of 1/508th PIR did not set out for Nijmegen until 2100hrs while waiting for Co. B to arrive. By the time they arrived in the city, it was already dark and there was scattered skirmishing with German patrols. One patrol reached the Belvedere Tower at the southern end of the highway bridge. There were confused skirmishes with KG Henke in the dark. By dawn on September 18, the two paratrooper companies in Nijmegen requested the dispatch of the battalion’s remaining company to reinforce a planned attack on the bridge. In the meantime, Gavin had arrived at the 1/508th PIR headquarters to inquire about progress. When it was evident that the bridge was not yet in American hands, Gavin ordered Warren to withdraw his two companies back to the Groesbeek Heights due to the Korps Feldt attack on the perimeter that morning. The division’s frontage of over 25,000 yards was far in excess of what could be adequately defended and the battalion was badly needed on the Groesbeek Heights. Gavin was unwilling to leave an inadequate force at the bridge that would be hard pressed to defend itself, never mind secure both sides of the bridge. The two companies withdrew around 1100hrs.

In the meantime, Co. G, 3/508th PIR, had also sent out patrols towards the bridge along the river’s edge and around 0745hrs on the morning of September 18, the battalion commander instructed the company to capture the bridge. Company G reached to within small arms range of the bridge and began sniping at German positions, including the use of 60mm light mortars. The German defenses were too substantial to be overcome by a single company, and Co. G was forced back. It was eventually ordered to return to Berg-en-Dal in the afternoon, so ending the first half-hearted attempts to seize the bridge.
THE DEMOLITION OF THE NIJMEGEN BRIDGES

One of the mysteries of Market-Garden was why the Germans did not blow-up the bridges to prevent their capture by the Allies. The Nijmegen highway bridge had been configured for demolition almost from the time of its construction, with the Dutch army having an electrical detonation circuit built into the bridge, and connected to neighboring bunker on the north side of the bridge. During the German occupation after 1940, the preparation for bridge demolition was undertaken by the Sonderkommando der Pionertruppen (Special Engineer Command) based in Utrecht. The German system was designed to drop the bridge using about 1,000kg of high explosive located in a chamber inside the second stone pier from the north end. A supplementary Abdämmung (blocking) charge could be placed on the road surface to create a temporary breach in the bridge as an alternative to dropping the whole span or to supplement the main charge.

This blocking charge was left in the bunker on the northern Lent side of the bridge until needed, under the control of the city’s Ortskommandant. It was supposed to be placed on the roadway by a Schutzgruppe civilian militia directed by a team from the Utrecht Pionertruppe. On August 25, 1944, Himmler instructed SS police chief Rauter that he would be held personally responsible for ensuring that the Waal and Rhine bridges be blown at the right moment. Rauter met with Gen. von Wülisch of the WBN staff and they...
agreed to have a team of engineers from the Waffen-SS command examine bridge preparations. As a result, by September 8, the bridge charges at Nijmegen were inspected and found to be in working order with both a primary and secondary fuze, but the supplementary road charge was left in the Lent bunker to permit use of the highway bridge by retreating German forces. On September 17 following the airborne landings, Oberst Fullriede of the Fsch.Pz.Ers.-u.Ausb.Rgt. HG drove to Nijmegen to check on the deployment of his units in the city. He was shocked at the apparent lack of provisions to demolish the bridge, and noted the wiring but the lack of charges for the supplementary road charge. Guards on the bridge indicated that the Pioner team from Utrecht had not arrived and they could not detonate the charges. Following the changes in tactical command on September 17–18, Model personally insisted on making the final decision to demolish the Waal Bridge. Several senior officers telephoned Model’s headquarters on September 18 and 19 urging a prompt demolition. Model refused permission to do so, insisting that the bridge was vital for future counterattack. In spite of this, Harmel ordered his divisional engineers to ensure that the bridge was ready for demolition and they moved the road charges from the bunker back to the road surface prior to the renewed combat on September 19–20.

GROESBEEK ATTACK BY KORPS FELDT

By Monday September 18, Korps Feldt had arrived on the scene and began its spoiling attack from the Reichswald towards Groesbeek Heights starting around dawn. The 82nd Airborne Division was very thinly spread since it still had to defend the glider landing zones until later waves of reinforcements arrived. Company I, 3/505th PIR held Landing Zone N while Co. D, 2/508th PIR defended Landing Zone T. Feldt later admitted that he “had no confidence in this attack since it was an almost impossible task for Division z.b.V.406 to attack elite troops with its motley crowd. But it was necessary to risk the attack in order to forestall and enemy advance to the east and to deceive him in regards to our strength.” Feldt had been promised that the 3. Fallschirmjager-Division and 5. Fallschirmjager-Division would be arriving later in the day to reinforce the attack.

Division z.b.V.406 at this stage had about 3,400 troops organized into four infantry battlegroups and supported by Hptm. Freiherr von Fürstenberg’s small mobile battlegroup with five armored cars and three Flak half-tracks with quad 20mm auto-cannons. The German force outnumbered the defenders about ten to one. Kampfgruppe Göbel, built around an engineer battalion and the two battalions of the Wehrkreis VI NCO school from Wahn, made the most progress. This battlegroup pushed into the Kiekberg woods southeast of Mook. The other battlegroups consisted mainly of district alarm units manned by old World War I veterans, as well as improvised battalions of Austrian Luftwaffe ground personnel. Kampfgruppe Kretzisch and KG Stargard attacked Landing Zone N. By late morning, Division z.b.V.406 had overrun most of Landing Zone N and Landing Zone T, and had captured the ammunition dump of the 508th PIR.

Gavin responded by personally leading a counterattack with Co. D, 307th Airborne Engineers. In the early afternoon, Warren’s 1/508th PIR had
returned from their short-lived attempt to seize the Nijmegen Bridge. This battalion struck the northern side of the German force, at Landing Zone T around 1310hrs and “rolled them up like a piece of tape, capturing 149 prisoners, and killing approximately 50, and knocking out 16 dual 20mm (Flak) guns.” To the south, two platoons from Co. C, 1/505th PIR, swept across Landing Zone N shoulder-to-shoulder, firing from the hip. “It looked like a line of hunters in a rabbit drive and the Germans looked like rabbits running in no particular pattern.”

Adding to the momentum of the paratrooper’s counterattack was the delayed arrival of the next wave of glider reinforcements. The plan had been to bring in the division’s artillery at 1000hrs, but the arrival had been delayed until 1400hrs after fog had closed the runways in Britain that morning. The D+1 lift included 454 gliders with three field artillery battalions, an anti-tank gun battery, and a medical company totaling 1,899 troops, 206 jeeps, 123 trailers, and 60 guns. By this stage, German Flak units were better prepared and they damaged many gliders and transports during the approach flight. In total, 385 gliders landed within the divisional lines. Some overshot the landing zones for a variety of reasons and ended up in Germany or away from the intended landing zones. In total, the day’s drops brought in 1,341 troops, but only 40 percent of the division’s guns.

The droning sound of the approaching transports alarmed the German troops, already hard pressed by the American counterattack. The gliders began flying into the contested landing zones while the fighting was still going on. Division z.b.V. 406’s attack collapsed into a panic-stricken rout.
Feldt later recalled that “It was with the greatest difficulty that Gen. Scherbenning and I managed to halt our troops in the jump-off positions. I barely managed to avoid being captured myself in the area of Papen Hill.”

Later in the afternoon, Feldt was informed that the promised *Fallschirmjäger* divisions had finally arrived at Emmerich. He was shocked to discover that the two airborne divisions were in fact little more than two battalion-sized battlegroups, KG Becker (3. Fallschirmjäger-Division) and KG Hermann (5. Fallschirmjäger-Division). These were hasty improvisations made up of divisional rear service troops who had survived the Normandy fighting. They had few heavy weapons and no vehicles. On his return to the corps HQ near Kranenburg, Feldt was met by Model and the commander of the newly arrived II Fallschirm-Korps headquarters, Eugen Meindl. Feldt expressed his displeasure at the arrival of so measly a force after having been promised two divisions, and indicated he planned to consolidate both units into Kampfgruppe Becker and use them the following morning. Model insisted that they be sent straight into battle, but Meindl agreed that the troops were not ready after their road march and Model relented.

**CUTTING HELL’S HIGHWAY**

Student’s headquarters made continual efforts to interdict the highway from Eindhoven to Nijmegen in the several days after the airborne landings. The road was eventually dubbed “Hell’s Highway” for the continual fighting
along the route over the course of the following week, although the British Second Army officially called it the “Cab Route.”

The 59. Infanterie-Division finally arrived from AOK 15 and was sent to attack the perimeter of the 101st Airborne Division north of Eindhoven on September 19. Of its six infantry battalions, two were judged of average strength and the rest were weak or exhausted. The 59. Infanterie-Division was reinforced by assorted HG Fallschirmjäger replacement units from Division Walther, about six battalions in strength, consolidated into Kampfgruppe Ewald.

The division was instructed to conduct a broad attack against the American perimeter from Son northward to St. Oedenrode and Veghel. In most cases, these made little or no inroads. On September 19, the heaviest fighting continued around Best. The 1/502nd PIR received a tank squadron from the 15/19th Hussars and at 1415hrs, launched another attack to capture the Best Bridge. The support of the British tanks proved instrumental in finally overcoming the German defenses, and by 1800hrs, the bridge site had been captured, though the bridge had been previously demolished. A total of 1,056 prisoners were captured and there were a further 300 dead from the battle. A total of 15 88mm guns were found in the defense perimeter.

The lead elements of Panzer-Brigade 107 arrived in this sector in the afternoon and at 1700hrs launched a tank attack from Helmond against the Son Bridge site along with an HG Fallschirm battalion. The attack was
supposed to be supported by the 59. Infanterie-Division, but this unit contributed little to the ensuing fighting. That afternoon, a major glider reinforcement occurred which included the divisional 57mm anti-tank guns. A few of these were rushed to Son and helped repulse the German tank attack by knocking out two tanks. After the Guards Armoured Division passed along the highway to Nijmegen, some British tank squadrons were detached to support the 101st Airborne Division defenses. While these reinforcements were welcome, Taylor’s paratroopers still were stretched in a perilously thin line. His tactics were to use aggressive raiding by paratrooper battalions against German troop concentrations to pre-empt German attacks.

Around 0630hrs on September 20, Panzer-Brigade 107 attacked the Son Bridge area again, which was being held by the newly arrived 327th GIR and divisional engineers. In the meantime, a tank squadron of the 15/19th Hussars with 2/506th PIR riding aboard made a tank raid against the rear of the German force, leading to a sharp skirmish around Nunen. The fighting in the Son sector continued through the day. Aggressive assaults by combined teams of British tanks and US paratroopers continued the following day with 2/506th PIR again joining in attacks with tanks from the 15/19th Hussars and 44th RTR. The strong Allied defenses around Son prompted Student’s headquarters to order Panzer-Brigade 107 to break off its attack in this sector on September 21, and move up to the Veghel area for a major new counterattack.

REINFORCING THE NIJMEGEN BRIDGE
DEFENSES: SEPTEMBER 18

The German garrison in Nijmegen continued to increase after September 17 since the Waal River bridges were the most obvious route to relieve the beleaguered British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem. On Monday, September 18, Bittrich instructed Harmel that his Kampfgruppe Frundsberg would be responsible for blocking the Waal River crossings at Nijmegen while 9. SS-Panzer-Division crushed British resistance in Arnhem.

Harmel dispatched SS-Pioneer-Battalion 10 to Pannerdern on the Waal and Neder Rijn (Lower Rhine) east of Nijmegen to establish ferry crossings, since access to Nijmegen via the Arnhem area was impossible. Sturmbannführer Leo Reinhold from II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 10 was assigned to command the Nijmegen defense, and he established a command post on the north bank of the river in Lent with a small battlegroup formed from tank crews lacking vehicles.

The defenses of the two bridges was shaped by the topographic features. The south side of the highway bridge was located on the site of the old medieval walls that had been demolished at the end of the 19th century and rebuilt into the Hunnerpark. The streets from the neighboring residential blocks fed towards the bridge through the Keizer Lodewijk Plein, a large traffic circle on the southwest corner of the park. Combined with the open spaces of the park, this created an open field of fire on the bridge approaches. There were fortified remnants of the wall still in place, a fortified chapel from the Charlemagne era, tower ruins located on the wooded Valkhof mound overlooking the west side of the park, and the medieval Belvedere Tower.
overlooking the bridge. The area surrounding the railway bridge on the west side of the city was dominated by the railroad marshalling yard and the high embankment leading to the bridge. As in the case of Hunnerpark, this layout provided the defenders with a clear field-of-fire against the bridge approaches.

The first major reinforcement to arrive in the city was another Frundsberg battlegroup under Hauptsturmführer Karl Euling from I./SS-Panzergrenadier-Regt. 22 which took up positions in front of the main highway bridge. Euling set up his headquarters in a house next to the Valkhof mound with an observation post in the Belvedere Tower. The Valkhof ruins were occupied by KG Baumgärtel, the engineer team from SS-Pio.Bn. 10 that was assigned to plant demolition charges on both Nijmegen bridges. Several 20mm autocannons and 88mm Flak guns from 4./Flak-Abt. 572 were moved to provide supporting fire on both sides of the bridge. Antitank defenses in Hunnerpark consisted mainly of four 50mm PaK 38 anti-tank guns, and there was at least one 75mm PaK 40 anti-tank gun on the north side of the bridge along with additional 20mm anti-aircraft guns. Four StuG III assault guns from SS-Panzer-Regt. 10 were present in the area during the fighting on September 19, but appear to have moved over the north side of the bridge before the final battle. Divisional artillery was positioned on the north side of the Waal, including SS-Pz.Art.Rgt. 10 and various infantry guns; forward observers from 21. Batterie, V./SS-Ausb.u.Ers.Rgt. in Nijmegen were able to direct the artillery fire with considerable precision. By September 19, there were more than 3,000 German troops in the Nijmegen area, divided between the railroad bridge, the highway bridge, and the north side of the river.
Gavin had planned to use the 325th GIR for the Nijmegen mission, but its expected arrival on Tuesday, September 19, had been postponed again by weather. The Guards Armoured Division finally arrived in the 82nd Airborne Division sector around 1000hrs on September 19 (D+2), ready to press on to Nijmegen. A hasty battle plan was created, based in part on the mistaken view from the Dutch resistance that the town was not strongly held and ... a display of force in the shape of Tanks would probably cause the enemy to withdraw.” A battle group set out at 1100hrs consisting of the tanks of the 2nd Grenadier Guards, a British infantry company from the 1st Grenadier Guards, and Lt. Col. Ben Vandervoort’s 2/505th PIR. The plan was to proceed into Nijmegen and then break into three task forces. The main force, Column A, headed for the highway bridge, Column B aimed at the railroad bridge, and the Column C went to the main post office which the Dutch resistance mistakenly had identified as the location for the bridge demolition controls.

The Allied task force reached the outskirts of Nijmegen in the late afternoon of September 19. Column A was led by Guards Captain John Nivelle and included five Sherman tanks of the 2nd Grenadier Guards, a mounted infantry platoon from the 1st Grenadier Guards and Co. D, 2/505th PIR. The size of the German defense force around the railroad bridge was
750 to 1,000 men, about two to three times the size of the attacking force. A tank was located in the railroad marshalling yard that dominated the bridge approach, and there were several 20mm automatic cannon and at least one antitank gun. The first attack towards the railroad bridge was quickly stopped in a hail of fire. Neville sent the infantry and paratroopers over the massive railroad embankment while the tanks tried to access the approach through a tunnel. The two lead tanks were quickly knocked out, and the infantry was forced to withdraw to a small church in the area.

Column A was led by Lt. Col. Edward Goulburn and included about 30 Sherman tanks of the 2nd Grenadier Guards, a mounted infantry company from the 1 Grenadier Guards and the rest of Lt. Col. Vandervoort’s 2/505th PIR. This headed towards the Keizer Lodewijk Plein traffic circle. Kampfgruppe Euling had set up its forward defenses in the large traffic circle. Antitank guns in Hunnerpark had clear fields of fire against the British Shermans and knocked several out in quick succession.

Instead of facing a token defense, Goulburn realized he was facing a solid and determined opponent. One paratroop platoon commander recalled that “The troops within this enemy position, consisting of SS and parachutists, fought with a fanaticism never before witnessed by our veterans of Sicily, Italy, and Normandy.” The attack halted at dark around 1900hrs with plans to make a more determined attack once reinforcement arrived. Column C quickly discovered that the demolition controls were not in the post office, and this force joined Column B near the highway bridge.
1. "Column B," a combined force from the Grenadier Guards and 505th PIR, reaches the rear-yard feeding into the railway bridge around 1615hrs on September 19. They come under very heavy fire from prepared German defenses and eventually fight their way to the west side of the embankment. The troops and tanks of Column B gradually clear the buildings, reaching the block immediately south of Krayerst Park after nightfall where they take up defensive positions. Sporadic fighting continues through the night.

2. Col. Tucker, commander of 504th PIR, reached the river area around 1130hrs on September 20 to oversee preparations; the main body of the paratroopers arrived around 1230hrs.

3. The 2/504th PIR is assigned to take up positions on the south bank to provide covering fire over the Waal River with machine guns and 81mm mortars. The Irish Guards provide two troops of Sherman tanks to provide covering fire during the river assault.

4. The arrival of the assault boats is delayed until 1440hrs due to traffic congestion. Launch point is between the PGEM power plant and the NYMA textile factory. With insufficient time to train on boats in the neighboring harbor, paratroopers prepare to launch boats with support of Co. C, 307th Airborne Engineers.

5. RAF Typhoon fighter-bombers begin strafing and rocket attacks against landing area around 1445hrs, artillery preparation by the 376th PFAB and a battalion of Sexton 25-pdr self-propelled guns of the 153 Field Regiment RA follows at 1455hrs, mainly using smoke rounds.

6. River crossing begins at 1457hrs. The small flotilla is brought under intense fire from the northern shore including Fort Beneden-Lent. The heaviest fire comes from the railroad embankment where there are 34 machine guns, two 20mm Flak auto-cannons, two anti-tank guns, and an 88mm Flak gun.

7. Of the 26 assault boats, only 13 reach the north bank. Of the roughly 340 troops in the first wave, about half are killed or wounded. The first teams reach the northern end of 1520hrs and begin assaulting the German trench line along the dike road.

8. Around 1600hrs, about a dozen soldiers from 3rd Platoon, Co. H, approach Fort Beneden-Lent, and crossed the moat via the causeway. One of the two 20mm guns had already been disabled and they knocked out the other with a Gammon grenade. As allied artillery fire was still striking, they withdrew from the fort after having forced the garrison into the central keep. Tucker orders artillery to stop firing on Fort at 1600hrs.

9. A small group from 2nd Platoon, Co. H, reaches the railroad embankment around 1600hrs and come under heavy machine-gun fire as well as sporadic fire from a pair of assault guns in the Lent area to the east. There are heavy casualties in this group during the fighting, many from a self-propelled 20mm Flak autocannon that staged a counterattack before being disabled by hand-grenades. Reinforcements from Co. G arrive along the railroad embankment around 1730–1800hrs.

10. A group from Co. I proceeds as planned to set up a western defensive perimeter near the Groote Wiel pond. After coming under heavy fire from a 20mm Flak tower to the northeast, they knock out the Flak position with rifle grenades. Co. I commander, Capt. Moffat Burriss, leaves a dozen troops in this position and sets off along the dike road with 20 men towards the railroad bridge.

11. A group under Lt. Richard La Riviere, 2nd Platoon, Co. H, advances along the dike road, engaging numerous German defensive points along the way. They eventually join up with the Burriss team and head to the railroad bridge. Their approach leads the Germans to abandon the 88mm Flak gun located on the western side of the railroad embankment, and they knock out the gun position on the east side of the embankment with Gammon grenades. Lt. Sims leads a squad to knock out the 20mm Flak autocannon at the base of the bridge.

12. A mixed group from the La Riviere and Burriss groups proceeds to assault the bridge approach. They join another group from Capt. Kappel’s Co. H team and assault the bunkers built in the bridge abutments. A group of 19 paratroopers forces the northern end of the bridge by 1630hrs, reinforced with two German MG42 machine guns. Due to radio issues, Maj. Cook’s report that the north end of bridge is in American hands is delayed until 1740hrs; he requests tank support.

13. The noise of the fighting at the north end of the bridge prompts German defenders in Nijmegen to start retreating northward along the bridge around 1625hrs. One observer estimates the group totals around 500 men. When they reach within small arms range of the north end, La Riviere’s group begins to engage them with rifle and machine-gun fire. A total of 267 dead are found on the bridge the next day, but many more jumped or fell into the river. About 200 German troops eventually surrender.

14. Around 1855hrs, Column B is ordered to begin final push on south end of the bridge. The first British Sherman tank arrives on north side of the bridge around 1915hrs, and by 2000hrs there is a strong force over the river including several tanks.

15. Co. C proceeds westward after landing to set up a defensive perimeter along the dike road on the Oosterhout flood plain.

16. With the arrival of Co. B, 1/504th PIR, the elements of the 3/504th on the bridge including Cook and Kappel head to the highway bridge where the 2nd and 3rd Platoons, Co. H, had been sent to reinforce Burriss. Co. A clears out the defenders at Fort Beneden-Lent and it is occupied by Col. Tucker’s headquarters around 1900hrs.

17. The group under Burriss reached the highway bridge around 1938hrs and overwhelm the small German detachment at the end of the bridge.
THE WAAL RIVER CROSSING SEPTEMBER 19–20 1944

The 504th PIR forces a crossing of the Waal River under intense German fire.
BATTLE FOR THE NIJMEGEN RAILROAD BRIDGE: SEPTEMBER 20

That evening, at a meeting of the senior Allied commanders, Gavin suggested that rather than try to grind through the German defenses on the south side of the bridges, it would be better to conduct a simultaneous attack on both sides of the bridges by sending a force of paratroopers over the Waal River. The 82nd Airborne Division had no assault boats, so the mission was dependent upon finding boats in the British columns south of Nijmegen and getting them to the bridgehead as quickly as possible. Gavin hoped the attack could occur that night under the cover of darkness, but the boats could not be moved forward in time.

The site of the crossing was from the city powerplant west of the railroad bridge. Although German defenses in this sector were less formidable than the areas closer to the bridges, the opposite shore was covered by Fort Beneden-Lent, a 19th-century fort with a battery of 20mm Flak automatic cannon on its earthen walls. The unit assigned this daunting task was Col. Reuben Tucker’s 504th PIR, starting with two companies from Maj. Julian Cook’s 3/504th PIR and then with following waves from the other companies as boats returned. The boats were operated by troops of Co. C, 307th Engineers. The attack time was set for 1500hrs on September 20.

To assist the landing, supporting artillery was organized from the 376th PFAB and a battalion of Sexton 25-pdr self-propelled guns; the 2nd Irish Guards provided two troops of Sherman tanks to conduct direct fire against targets on the north side of the river.

As the paratroopers prepared the boats behind the dike, Typhoons began a preliminary airstrike against the far bank, followed by the artillery preparation and smoke. Company H and Co. I, 3/504th PIR, ran forward and placed the boats in the water. The slow passage over the Waal took some 15 to 25 minutes, during which the fragile craft were pummeled by machine-gun, mortar, and Flak guns from Fort Beneden-Lent and the railroad bridge. Half of the troops in the first wave were killed or wounded. Once the boats
landed, engineers in the boats paddled back to the other side to pick up subsequent waves of troops. In total, there were six waves sent over the river from 1457 to 1900hrs. No precise casualty figures were ever tallied for the crossing but the 3/504th PIR and 307th Engineers that day lost 36 killed, one missing, and 104 wounded. Companies H and I were down to about 90 men out of an original strength of about 240 men by the end of the day.

On reaching the far bank, the paratroopers fanned out towards three principal objectives – a blocking position west of the landing site, Fort Beneden-Lent in the center, and the approaches to the railroad bridge to the east. After overrunning German trenches along the dike road, a small detachment fought their way into Fort Beneden-Lent, silenced the 20mm Flak guns, and forced the surviving garrison into the keep in the center of the fort to be dealt with by subsequent waves. The largest groups of surviving paratroopers headed for the railroad bridge. The initial attacks through underpasses at the base of the bridge embankment were quickly stopped by German machine-gun defenses. However, Lt. La Riviere and five soldiers managed to reach the junction of the bridge and embankment, killing 14 German troops and capturing 20 more. The 88mm gun, anti tank gun, and bunker on the northern end of the bridge were overrun and the German defenses on the north side of the railroad bridge collapsed.

By 1630hrs, the north side of the railroad bridge was controlled by a small detachment of paratroopers. The German defenders realized that their means of escape from Nijmegen had been cut off, and Nivelle’s Column B began attacking the south side of the railroad bridge. An enormous mass of about 500 German troops began fleeing over the bridge in hopes of escaping the trap. The paratroopers set up a pair of captured MG42 machine guns on
The assault over the Waal River on the afternoon of 20 September was delayed due to the late arrival of the assault boats caused by the traffic congestion on Hell’s Highway. The type used in the crossing was the British Assault Boat Mk. III (1), a collapsible design made from a plywood bottom and folding canvas sides. The boat was 16’ 8” long and 5’ 5” wide and weighed 350 pounds. After delivery to the launch site, the sides were erected and locked into place using folding struts hinged to the floor. The usual complement was eleven troops and two crew and standard equipment was eight paddles and a steering oar. Many of the assault boats that arrived on September 20 lacked paddles and so the paratroopers used their rifle stocks. The usual crew for the crossing consisted of three engineers from Co. C, 307th Engineers, and ten paratroopers from Company H, Company I, or the battalion headquarters company. There had been plans to train the boat crews in an inlet near the PGEM Gelderland power station, but due to the late arrival of the boats at 1440hrs, only 20 minutes before the planned start of the operation, this scheme was abandoned. This proved to be unfortunate as many of the boat crews were completely inexperienced in handling such ungainly craft in the water, and during the first few minutes of the crossing, the crews floundered around until they became accustomed to paddling and steering the boats.

Major Julian Cook had been told to expect 33 boats but only 26 arrived, reducing the side of the initial assault force. Around 1450hrs, the crews of the first wave lifted the boats on their shoulders, and carried them between the PGEM power station and the NYMA textile plant, over a dike, and into the Waal River where they were launched.

At first, there was no German reaction from the north shore, but after the boats were about a hundred yards from shore, “all hell broke loose”. The boats were targeted by the 20mm cannon on the neighboring fort, small arms fire and mortars (2). The preliminary artillery bombardment had engulfed the north shore in smoke, but the coverage was spotty and soon dissipated. The launch site was close enough to the railroad bridge that German troops on the bridge began to engage the boats as well (3). The weapons on the railroad bridge included an 88mm Flak gun, several 20mm Flak autocannons and numerous machine guns. The 20mm Flak auto-cannons had particularly gruesome effects on the unprotected paratroopers in the boat.

The river at this point was about 1,200ft wide with a strong current of about 8 miles per hour. It took the boats 15 to 25 minutes to cross the river by which time about half the troops in the first wave were killed or wounded. For example in boat No. 3 containing the Co. H commander, Capt. Carl Kappel, three were killed, five were wounded, and only three remained unscathed. Of the original 26 boats, only 11 reached the north bank and only eight returned to the south bank. By the time they reached the northern bank of the Waal River, the assault force was down to only about 120 men.
the bridge along with some BAR automatic rifles and began firing on the escaping German troops. After the initial carnage, the German attacks subsided, Capt. Kappel sent a German prisoner over the bridge to encourage the remainder to surrender. He was shot down by other German troops. As a result, the paratroopers resumed firing across the bridge. Many Germans tried to escape the slaughter by jumping off the bridge or swimming across the Waal. When the gunfire ended, the paratroopers counted 267 dead on the bridge as well as large numbers of wounded. A further 250–300 Germans were killed on the northern bank during the fighting. The British detachment counted 417 dead when they mopped up from the south side of the railroad bridge. The 504th PIR collected about 200 prisoners around both bridges that night.

While the railroad bridge battle was raging, a group of about 20 paratroopers from the 504th PIR headed for the north side of the main highway bridge. After skirmishing in the suburbs near the bridge, they reached the bridge around 1915hrs and found it weakly defended. The south bank of the Waal was hardly visible due to the extensive smoke from burning buildings around Hunnerpark and the dim light at dusk.
GERMAN UNITS
A KG Frundsberg (10. SS-Panzer-Division)
B KG Reinhold (II./SS-Panzer-Regiment 10)
C KG Euling (I./SS-Panzergrenadier-Regt. 22)
D KG Baumgärtel (SS-Pionier-Bataillon 10)

EVENTS

1. As Phase 1, at 0930hrs, No. 4 Company with a troop of Sherman tanks begins to clear remaining German pockets in area southwest of Hunnerpark to establish start points for the afternoon attack.

2. As Phase 2, No. 2 Company with one troop of tanks clears out remaining German pockets in the area southwest of the Kelfkensbosch square. This operation involves about five hours of street fighting.

3. As Phase 3, King's Company clears the area to the southwest of the Valkhof mound east to Lindenberstraat.

4. Through the morning and early afternoon, while the Grenadier Guards are clearing the area southwest of the German defenses, the 2/505th PIR clears out the buildings south and southwest of the Keizer Lodewijk Plein traffic circle and Hunnerpark.

5. At 1430hrs, Capt. Rosen of Co. F, 505th PIR, leads a premature attack against the traffic circle and park; Rosen is killed and the attack is immediately repulsed.

6. At 1530hrs, main attack begins. Co. E, 505th PIR supported by two Guards Sherman tanks attacks out of Graat Van Roggenstraat, assaulting the Keizer Lodewijk Plein traffic circle and the southern section of Hunnerpark.

7. Co. F, 504th PIR, now under the command of Lt. James Smith, moves out for the three streets leading into Hunnerpark, 1st Platoon from Derde Wallstraat, 3rd Platoon from Gerard Noodstraat, and 2nd Platoon from Canisius Singel.

8. No. 4 Company attacks across the open Kelfkenbosch square towards the Voerweg at the base of the Valkhof mound and into the built up area at the northwest corner of Hunnerpark near Euling's headquarters.

9. King's Company, supported by a platoon from No. 2 Company, moves through narrow side streets near the police station and hits the flank of the Valkhof mound, fighting through the German defenses towards the old chapel and fortified ruins. After a reserve platoon is thrown into the fray, the attack carries to the edge of the Valkhof mound within 50 yards of the bridge.

10. No. 4 Company reaches the KG Euling HQ in the Haus Robert Janssen. The 150 German defenders substantially outnumber the two British platoons trying to clear the house, so the British infantry set it on fire with phosphorus grenades. Unbeknownst to them, Euling and about 60 German soldiers are holed up in the basement.

11. By 1830hrs, patrols from No. 4 Company and the 2/505th PIR attack through the German defenses and reach the bridge embankment. No. 3 Company is brought up from reserve to reinforce the forces at the bridge.

12. The 1740hrs radio report from Maj. Cook of the 3/504th PIR is misunderstood to mean that US paratroopers have captured the northern end of the highway bridge. Maj. John Trotter, 1 Squadron, 2 Grenadier Guards, is ordered to send tanks over the bridge. A troop under Sgt. Peter Robinson makes an initial attempt, but Robinson's Sherman Firefly is almost immediately hit by German antitank fire and the attack is temporarily halted while repairs are made.

13. A second attempt by Robinson's tank troop begins at 1830hrs with Sgt. Pacey's tank in the lead. The two tanks in the rear of the formation are hit by German fire, but Sgt. Lacey gets his tank back into operation and follows the two leading Shermans. They arrive on the north end of the bridge around 1915hrs where they meet Capt. Burriss' small detachment from Co. I/504th PIR that had been part of the Waal River crossing.

14. SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel, standing atop a pre-war Dutch bunker overlooking the bridge, sees the British tanks racing across the bridge and orders his aide to activate the demolition circuit to demolish the bridge. Nothing happens.

15. Following behind Robinson's troop is the Humber light reconnaissance car of Lt. A. G. C. Jones of the 14th Field Squadron RE. Jones inspects the bridge and finds the main demolition charge in the chamber in the second pier from the north end of the bridge. Jones disarms the charge and the explosives are carefully removed over the next several hours along with about 80 German prisoners.

16. Reinforcements from the 3/504th PIR as well as the Sherman tank of the assistant commander of 1 Squadron, Capt. (Lord) Peter Carrington, gradually arrive at the north side of the bridge and set up a defensive perimeter. Brig. Gen. Gavin arrives at 2030hrs.

17. After dark around 2230hrs, Hauptsturmführer Euling and about 60 men escape from the basement of Haus Robert Janssen and manage escape towards Groesbeek.
The Grenadier Guards Group, supported by the 504th and 505th PIR, manage to capture the highway bridge.
BATTLE FOR THE NIJMEGEN HIGHWAY BRIDGE: SEPTEMBER 20

Goulburn’s Column A on the south side of the highway bridge had few details about the plan to send paratroopers across the river. As a result, they made their own plans to take the highway bridge on September 20 regardless of the river-crossing operation. Instead of attacking straight up the exposed fields south of Hunnerpark, Goulburn broke up his Guards force into three teams each based around an infantry company supported by a tank troop. Starting on Wednesday morning, September 20, they began to methodically clean out German defenses to the west of Hunnerpark to gain control of start points for a planned afternoon attack against the bridge itself. In the meantime, Vandervoort’s 2/505th PIR paratroopers cleared the area around the traffic circle and established firing positions in the buildings overlooking Hunnerpark from the south.

The final Allied attack started at 1445hrs, about the same time as the river-crossing operation to the west. The initial attack into Hunnerpark by the 2/505th PIR took heavy casualties, but eventually the paratroopers were able to overrun the trenches in the traffic circle and Hunnerpark with the vital support of the Grenadier Guards tanks. King’s Company, 1st Grenadier Guards, infiltrated through the barbed wire at the base of the Valkhof mound and was soon locked in hand-to-hand combat with the engineers of SS-Pio. Bn. 10 in the fortified ruins. No. 4 Company of the 1st Grenadier Guards assaulted the Haus Robert Janssen, the *Kampfgruppe* headquarters. The British infantry set fire to the house with phosphorus grenades, killing or capturing 90 troops. In the smoke and confusion, Hauptsturmführer Euling and about 60 men remained hidden in the basement and managed to exit the building and escape around 2230hrs. By nightfall, organized German defenses had collapsed, though many isolated groups continued to fight well into the night.

Around 1800hrs, 2nd Grenadier Guards tried to send some tanks over the bridge in response to a radio call from Maj. Cook near the railroad bridge requesting tank support. This was misunderstood to mean the highway bridge, but in the event, the attempt was quickly halted by antitank fire from the north bank. Around 1820hrs, about an hour before sunset, a troop of four Sherman tanks under Sgt. Peter Robinson made another attempt. The tanks ran a gantlet of fire from artillery on the north bank, German troops near the bridge armed with Panzerfausts, and a pair of antitank guns on the north end of the bridge. Two of the tanks were damaged in the charge and one was stopped on the bridge.

Allied officers on the south bank watched in grim fascination as Robinson’s tanks raced across the bridge, anticipating that at any moment, the Germans would detonate the bridge. It was not from lack of trying. Sitting in a bunker on the north side of the bridge was the commander of the 10. SS-Panzer-Division, Heinz Harmel. Model had expressly forbidden the detonation of the bridge without his explicit orders. Harmel decided to do so anyway, assuming he would face an unpleasant court-martial in Berlin if he failed to try. On seeing the Sherman tanks on the bridge, he ordered the engineers in the bunker to detonate the charges. Nothing happened.

Why the demolition charges failed to detonate remains a mystery. Jan van Hoof, a young member of the Dutch resistance group GDN (Geheim Dienst
Nederland: Dutch Secret Service), claimed to have cut the wires leading to the charges on September 18. This has remained a popular legend, supported by a local commission after the war. But this explanation has been viewed with skepticism by surviving German officers and many historians. It is more likely that the detonation cabling leading from the bunker to the bridge was severed by the numerous artillery and mortar rounds that struck the bridge over the two days of fighting. It is also possible that German troops sheltering in the chambers below the bridge disconnected the cabling to avoid being blown up.

The first tank across the bridge was Sgt. Pacey’s Sherman, followed by Sgt. Robinson’s Sherman Firefly, which crushed one of the German anti-tank guns under its track. The bridge was enveloped in smoke from burning houses in nearby Nijmegen, and the scene at the end of the bridge was chaotic, with German troops firing on the Shermans from the girders above. A fifth Sherman, that of the squadron second-in-command Capt. Peter (Lord) Carrington, arrived and “some strange troops appeared and started to attack the tanks with gelignite.” Fortunately, the Gammon grenades failed to damage the British tanks. The “strange troops” were paratroopers from the 504th PIR who in the confusion, smoke, and darkness thought the tanks were German. This linkage between the British tanks and the American paratroopers occurred around 1940 hours. The next vehicle to reach the end of the bridge was a Humber light reconnaissance car of Lt. A. G. C. Jones of the 14th Field Squadron RE, who began gathering volunteers to hunt out and disarm any remaining explosive charges. Fighting continued in the chambers under the bridge after nightfall, and eventually a further 80 German troops were captured in the clean-up operation below the bridge.

Mopping up in Nijmegen continued well into night. About 60 German prisoners were captured in the Hunnerpark area; German casualties in this sector were over 400. Precise Allied casualties in the fighting for the southern approaches of the highway bridge are lacking but totaled about 200 American paratroopers and 100 British infantry and tank crewmen.

DEFENDING THE GROESBEEK PERIMETER:
SEPTEMBER 20

Although the senior Allied commanders were focused on the attempts to seize the Nijmegen bridges, intense fighting nearly overwhelmed the 82nd Airborne Division’s eastern perimeter again on Wednesday, September 20. Due to the delayed arrival of the 325th GIR, Gavin’s command was trying to defend a perimeter nearly 14 miles in length with an understrength division of 8,580 troops instead of 13,035.

Since the airborne landings on Sunday, Korps Feldt had continued to receive reinforcements. On Tuesday morning, September 19, two more improvised replacement divisions began arriving, Division Nr. 180 and Division Nr. 190 from Wehrkreis X. The only forces ready in the Groesbeek area on September 20 were the battered Division z.b.V.406, and the two improvised Fallschirm battlegroups that had arrived as reinforcements on September 18. The dawn attack was intended as a simultaneous action from three battlegroups against three sides of the 82nd Airborne Division perimeter. In the north, KG Becker was assigned to attack the northern portion of the Groesbeek sector, supported
by the light armored vehicles of KG Furstenberg. In the center, KG Greschick, consisting of about three battalions of infantry, was assigned to attack the Groesbeek sector from two directions. In the south, KG Hermann was assigned the mission of pushing into Mook and destroying the main canal bridge near Heuman. Although of poor quality, the German battlegroups substantially outnumbered the small paratrooper detachments they were facing.

Kampfgruppe Becker launched their attack against positions of the 508th PIR in Wyler and Beek on the northeast side of the Groesbeek Heights to recapture the international highway there. Both towns had been seized by the paratroopers the evening before. Kampfgruppe Becker first attacked Co. B, 1/508th PIR in Wyler around 0845hrs. The company held out until 1500hrs. Low on ammunition, they withdrew to a small village on the hills above Wyler. After another attack later in the afternoon, Co. B requested permission to withdraw back into the main regimental defenses, and the remnants of the company arrived at the main defense line early the next morning.

In the meantime, the main body of KG Becker pushed on to Beek, held by Co. I, 3/508th PIR, and Co. D, 307th Airborne Engineers. After the town was hit by German artillery, KG Furstenberg brought up half-track-mounted 20mm Flak cannons and began raking the town with fire. The paratroopers had no weapons to counter this, and withdrew to Berg-en-Dal about 1,000 yards in the forested hills above Beek. They knocked out one of the half-tracks on the winding road up the slope, blocking further half-track attacks. Gavin appeared on the scene and was told by the commander of the 3/508th that the company would have a hard time defending their new positions. German capture of this site would allow access to the east side of Nijmegen, which was in the midst of the fighting for the highway bridge. Gavin felt that his troops had an advantage over the German in night attack, and so waiting for nightfall around 1840hrs, he ordered Co. H, 3/508th, to take the town that night. The company made repeated attacks into the town that night and through the following day, with KG Becker finally withdrawing on the afternoon of September 21.

Other detachments of KG Becker also attacked the defenses of Cos. A and G, 508th PIR, who were dug in on Duivelsberg (Devil’s Hill) between Beek and Wyler. The initial German attack reached to within grenade range, but was repulsed. The fighting for this hill continued for four days until September 23, with KG Becker finally giving up.

Kampfgruppe Greschick attacked the 3/505th PIR on the Groesbeek Heights near De Horst. The attack was beaten up by artillery fire from the nearby 456th PFAB and finally stopped when the battalion reserve was thrown into the line. This proved to be the least effective of the three main German attacks.
The most dangerous attack was in the south by KG Hermann that was intended to sweep through Mook and then capture and destroy the main bridge over the Wilhelmina Canal at Heuman that was supporting the XXX Corps drive into Nijmegen. Fighting had been going on since the previous evening for the control of Riethorst on the approaches to Mook, defended at the time by two platoons from the 1/505th PIR. The fighting for Riethorst continued through the afternoon of September 20 when German paratroopers finally reached the top of the hill at the center of the American defenses. The American paratroopers called in artillery fire on their own positions that blasted the Germans off the hill. While the fighting was going on at Riethorst, the main attack on Mook began on the morning of September 20 with a heavy, three-hour artillery preparation. The town was defended by two platoons of the 1/505th PIR and KG Hermann captured it around 1500hrs after about an hour of fighting. The 1/505th PIR commander, Maj. William Ekman, requested tank support from the Coldstream Guards, and a task force consisting of a tank squadron from the 1st Coldstream Guards and Co. B, 505th PIR counterattacked into Mook and retook it after dark following several hours of fighting.

The failed counteroffensive of September 20 was the swansong of Korps Feldt in this battle. This headquarters was only an improvisation, and with the arrival of the Gen. Eugen Meindl’s II Fallschirm-Korps headquarters, Feldt’s headquarters withdrew to its original defense role on the German frontier.

**ON TO ARNHEM?**

By the morning of September 21, the Guards Armoured Division had only a weak contingent on the north side of the Waal consisting of Robinson’s Sherman troop, reinforced by elements of the Irish Guards Group. Armored car patrols from the Household Cavalry were already over the river and reported that the Germans were establishing defenses on either side of Elst, the main town on the road from Nijmegen to Arnhem. News from the British airborne force in Arnhem to the Allied commanders was obscure due to a debilitating series of radio failures. A sapper from the 1st Airborne Division managed to infiltrate out on the night of September 20 and reach the Nijmegen bridgehead on Thursday, September 21, with news that two of the brigades were fighting hard in the Oosterbeek suburbs but that Maj. John Frost’s 2nd Parachute Battalion near the bridge was being hard-pressed by German counterattacks. Radio contact was finally established through an artillery unit that morning. It was not known at the time by Allied commanders, but by noon that day, Frost’s battalion had finally been overwhelmed and Arnhem Bridge was firmly under German control.

On the late morning of September 21, the remainder of the Irish Guards Group began moving over the Nijmegen highway bridge in anticipation of the afternoon attack into the Betuwe towards Elst. This column from B Squadron, 2nd Irish Guards, is led by a Sherman Vc Firefly named “Buncrana,” its front covered in shrimp netting for camouflage. (NARA)
Horrocks did not press the lead elements of the Guards Armoured Division to renew the attack in the morning, much to the chagrin of Gavin and Tucker, who felt that a greater sense of urgency was needed. The German commander of the Nijmegen defense, Heinz Harmel, later argued that there were no German tank forces between Nijmegen and Arnhem and that an opportunity was lost. This was not Horrocks’ perspective. In his view, the countryside north of Lent, called the “Betuwe” (Island) by the Dutch, was poorly suited to tank operations. The terrain was mainly polder, low-lying farmland that had been drained but was still too soft for cross-country tank movement. Tank traffic would inevitably be obliged to use the main roads, which were elevated above the polder and very vulnerable to interdiction by German guns. One British tanker later called it “suicide skyline.” Horrocks felt that terrain was better suited to infantry and he had already ordered the 43rd (Wessex) Division forward for the main effort. The 130th Infantry Brigade of the 43rd Division began taking over defense of the Nijmegen bridgehead from the Guards Armoured Division shortly after noon. While Horrocks was probably not aware of it, Dutch army staff college exercises before the war included a test exercise to reach Arnhem from the Nijmegen area. Candidates proposing to use the Nijmegen–Arnhem road were failed; the correct response was to advance on Arnhem from the west, as the 43rd Division eventually did.

The Grenadier Guards Group that had spearheaded the capture of Nijmegen had become burned out in the fight for the city, and the division’s Irish Guards Group took over the role of divisional spearhead to push up the highway to Arnhem that afternoon. The push out of Nijmegen began at 1330hrs but about 2 miles from the start point it ran into an improvised German antitank screen consisting of a few StuG IIs. The first three tanks of No. 1 Squadron were knocked out in quick succession, bringing the column to a halt short of Bemmel station. An effort to push out of the Nijmegen via the railroad bridge by the Welsh Guards Group was even more short-lived.

It was equally chaotic on the German side. A planned Frundsberg counterattack from the Pannerdern ferry-crossing site became bogged down. The reduction of the Frost’s battalion at the Arnhem Bridge freed up German troops to send down the Arnhem–Nijmegen road. By late afternoon, elements of KG Knaust including a few tanks had reinforced the defenses around Elst, further blocking the road. As Horrocks correctly had assessed, this was a task for infantry, and the 43rd Division began their assault across the Betuwe on Friday, September 22.

**BLACK FRIDAY: CUTTING HELL’S HIGHWAY**

Even after the Allies had taken the Nijmegen Bridge, Model was convinced that their hold of the narrow corridor from Eindhoven to Nijmegen was tenuous and vulnerable to entrapment. The two British corps on either side of Horrocks’ XXX Corps had made insignificant progress in covering its flanks and the scale of German attacks on Hell’s Highway began to increase. On Thursday, September 21, Model ordered Reinhard’s 88. AK on the west side, and Obstfelder’s newly arrived 86. AK on the east, to sever the highway at Veghel. The principal forces in this attack were KG Huber from 59. Infanterie-Division on the western side and KG Walther with Panzer-Brigade
107 from the east. Model also ordered Meindl’s newly installed II Fsch.Korps to stage a simultaneous attack on the Nijmegen area around the Groesbeek Heights, but the diversion of fresh units such as Division Nr. 190 delayed a large-scale attack.

The defenses of the 101st Airborne Division were strung out along the highway from Son to Grave. Taylor tried to keep the Germans at bay by aggressive thrusts against any signs of German action. On the night of September 21, the 501st PIR pushed out the defense perimeter west of Veghel by seizing Schijndel, with plans to continue southward and meet up with the 502nd PIR north of St Oedenrode. This effort progressed well enough until the afternoon of September 22, at which point the German attacks east of Veghel forced the abandonment of this attack and the contraction of the 501st PIR back to the Veghel area to defend the key road-junction.

The German attack started at 0900hrs, with Panzer-Brigade 107 in the lead. Its Panther tanks crossed the highway between Veghel and Uden and began shelling British convoys and the town itself. After destroying several lorries, the tank column turned southward and headed into Veghel along the road. On the outskirts of town, the lead Panther was hit at close range by a 57mm anti-tank gun. Without infantry support, Panzer-Brigade 107 showed little enthusiasm for a close-quarter skirmish inside the town. In the meantime, KG Walther began its attack on Veghel from the south. This consisted of two columns. On the northeast side of the Veghel–Erp road was KG Richter led by SS-Hauptsturmführer Friederich Richter, based on SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 21. On the southwest side of the road was a battlegroup from the...
The first elements of Panzer-Brigade 107 had reached the Netherlands by train on the evening of September 18 near Venlo, and were immediately sent into action against the Allied bridgehead over the Son Canal. After several costly days of fighting, the brigade was ordered north to Gemert on September 21 where it was attached to Kampfgruppe Walther for the next day's attack on Veghel. The brigade commander, Maj. Berndt-Joachim Freiherr von Maltzahn, tried to keep the brigade intact, but instead elements were broken off to reinforce weaker elements of KG Walther. So for example, the brigade's engineer troops, Panzer-Pionier-Kompanie 2107 and the Jagdpanzer IVs of the 4./Pz.Abt. 2107 were detached to the battle-group of Div. Nr. 180 attacking Veghel from the south.

The attack on September 22 started at 0900hrs, with Panzer-Brigade 107 in the lead. At first, the brigade encountered little opposition since the countryside away from the highway was essentially a no-man's-land. Panzer-Abteilung 2107 eventually moved to the right flank of the KG Walther, and attacked towards the road between Uden and Veghel around 1100hrs. The Panther tanks (1) encountered a column of British lorries from the 123rd LAA Regt., towing 40mm anti-aircraft guns towards Nijmegen. Several of Bedford trucks were hit and burned (2). Having overwhelmed the British column, the Panther tanks followed the road southward towards Veghel. By this time, Allied forces had reinforced the town including 57mm anti-tank guns from Battery B, 81st AAA Bn., anti tank guns and bazookas from the 327th GIR and Sherman tanks of the 44 RTR. The lead Panther tank was hit by a 57mm gun and then pummeled in rapid succession by other anti-tank guns and Sherman tank fire. The Panzer-Abteilung 2107 spearhead had second thoughts about pushing directly in to the town in view of the strong defense and its own lack of immediate infantry support. Additional attacks were launched during the course of the day, with little effect.

The fighting around Veghel continued through Saturday, September 23. During the fighting that day with Sherman tanks of the 44th RTR, the Panzer-Abteilung 2107 commander, Maj. Hans-Albrecht von Plüskow was killed as was the Panzergrenadier-Abt. 2017 commander, Hauptmann Kurt Wild. Kampfgruppe Walther was forced to retreat back towards Gemert later in the day. On September 25, Panzer-Brigade 107 was ordered to establish a defensive line Venray–Overloon–Oploo. By the end of the month, the brigade had lost 19 of its original 36 Panther tanks and about 300 troops.

The attacks were repulsed by the 2/501st PIR, which received a steady stream of reinforcements during the course of the day both from other elements of the 101st Airborne Division as well as British units transiting through the town towards Nijmegen. The 327th GIR was sent to the area from Son along with elements of 501st and 506th PIR. Two squadrons from the 44th RTR provided tank support. The Coldstream Guards Group, on its own mission to clear the Volkel airfield and secure the towns of Boekel and Erp, skirmished with elements of KG Walther to the northeast. Kampfgruppe Walther committed other units to the brawl including Festung-Batalion 1409 and elements of GR 959.

To the east of Veghel, KG Huber skirted around Schijndel, aiming for the highway by way of Eerde. A section of four Jagdpanthers of the 1./s.Pz.Jg. Abt. 559 supporting this attack came in range of the highway and began firing on British armored cars traveling along the road. Kampfgruppe Huber entered the village of Eerde near the highway and began firing on the bridge over the Willems Vaart Canal around 1400hrs. Company D, 506th PIR, supported by a squadron of British tanks, was sent instead to deal with KG Huber. The Allied attack forced KG Huber to back away from the road, but they moved further down the highway in another attempt to cut it. This time, they bumped into the 327th GIR, which repelled their attack. As the weather cleared, the RAF sent in Typhoon fighters to rocket any visible German
### EVENTS

1. 1/501st PIR crosses Willems Vaart Canal at 0915hrs on September 21, attacks Schijndel starting at 2100hrs and is in control of the town at 0200hrs on September 22.

2. 2/501st PIR in defense of Veghel on September 21.

3. 502nd PIR in defense of St Oedenrode on September 21.

4. 1/501st PIR pushes from Schijndel towards St Oedenrode at 1130hrs on September 22 with the intention of clearing the area and joining the 502nd PIR near the monastery. Due to German attacks, it is ordered to reverse and occupies Werbosch.

5. 3/501st PIR pushes from Eerde to the Schijndel–St Oedenrode road. In response to German attack, the battalion is ordered to reverse course and defend Eerde and Koevering.

6. The German attack from the eastern side starts at 0900hrs. With Panzer-Brigade 107 in the lead, the Panther tanks and assault guns began shelling the town. The Panzer spearhead crosses the road about 400 yards beyond Veghel.

7. KG Walther does not reach the outskirts of Veghel until 1100hrs. As Kampfgruppe Richter (I/SS-Panzergrenadier-Rgt 22) gradually arrives, KG Walther makes several attempts to capture Veghel during the rest of the day but attacks are repulsed by the 2/501st.

8. To reinforce the Veghel defenses, the 327th GIR is sent to the area from Son along with elements of 506th PIR. Two squadrons from the 44th RTR provide tank support, and additional fire support comes from two self-propelled batteries of the 86th Field Regiment.

9. Detachment of 506th PIR reaches Uden but is cut off by German attack.

10. The Coldstream Guards Group, on its own mission to clear the Volkel airfield and secure the towns of Boekel and Erp, clashes with elements of KG Walther.

11. On the western side of Hell’s Highway, KG Huber skirts around Schijndel to avoid the paratroopers. A section of Jagdpanthers of 1./s.Pz.Jg.Abt. 559 supporting this attack begins engaging British armored cars along the road. KG Huber enters the village of Eerde near the highway and begins shelling the bridge over the Willems Vaart Canal around 1400hrs.

12. By afternoon, 2/506th PIR is strung out on the road heading to Uden and Co. D, 506th PIR supported by a squadron of British tanks is sent to deal with KG Huber.

13. KG Huber begins withdrawing after an encounter with Co. D/506th PIR, but moves further down the road and attempts to cut the highway again. This time, they bump into the 327th GIR, which repels their attack. KG Huber is eventually surrounded and decimated.

14. By end of the day, the 501st PIR defends northwest Veghel, 327th GIR defends center of town Veghel, 506th PIR defends Uden.

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**BLACK FRIDAY ON HELL’S HIGHWAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1944**

The German attack, spearheaded by Panzer-Brigade 107, manages for close the vital route for nearly two days.
Note: Gridlines are shown at intervals of 1km

ALLIED UNITS
101st Airborne Division
1 1/501st Parachute Infantry Regiment (morning September 22)
2 2/501st PIR (afternoon September 22)
3 3/501st PIR (evening September 22)
4 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment
5 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment (evening September 22)
6 327th Glider Infantry Regiment (evening September 22)
Guards Armoured Division
7 Coldstream Guards Group

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vehicles. Kampfgruppe Huber was eventually surrounded and decimated. Even though the attack on September 22 failed to capture or destroy the key bridges, it interrupted vital road traffic for almost 25 hours at a critical time when XXX Corps was attempting to push out of Nijmegen to relieve the 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem.

Model was unhappy with the lack of progress of the Black Friday attack and ordered the attack resumed the following day. Since KG Huber from the 59. Infanterie-Division had been smashed, KG Chill was brought up to take its place. This division bore little resemblance to the unit that had fought on the Albert Canal at the beginning of the month, aside from its administrative core. On September 24, it consisted of two regiments, FJ-Rgt. 6 with 2,660 troops, and KG Dreyer consisting of FJ-Battalion Jungwirth, Battalion Finsel (I./FJ.Rgt. 2) and Battalion Ohler with a combined strength of 1,585 troops. Fallschirmjäger-Battalion Jungwirth was a new addition to the battlegroup and was made up of the remnants of two battalions from the Herman Göring training regiment. Fire support came from Art.Regt. 185 with 13 105mm field guns, two 150mm howitzers, as well as 19 20mm and 15 88mm Flak guns used as field artillery.

Kampfgruppe Walther continued its attack of the Veghel but was hit by a joint US–British counterstroke along the Veghel–Uden highway. The 506th PIR pushed up the road from Veghel while the 32nd Guards Brigade moved down from Grave through Uden, meeting the paratroopers by late afternoon. Although KG Walther managed to get tanks to within 500 yards of the bridges, the late afternoon Allied attacks threatened to surround the unit. The losses suffered by KG Walther in the two days of fighting compelled their withdrawal towards Gemert. The commanders of both the Panzer battalion and Panzergrenadier battalion of Panzer-Brigade 107 were killed that day. To the west, KG Chill’s attack fizzled out because Von der Heydte’s depleted regiment was exhausted after enduring two night marches to reach the launch point at Schijndel.
On Sunday, September 24, KG Chill resumed its attempts to cut the road from Schijndel, reinforced by the Jagdpanthers of 1./Pz.Jg.Abt. 559. The armored vehicles provided a major boost to the attack, and KG Chill was able to cut the highway between St Oedenrode and Veghel near Koevering, shooting up about 30 British lorries in the process. A troop from 44th RTR attempted to counterattack the German force, but all three Shermans were quickly knocked out by the accompanying Jagdpanthers. Companies C and H of the 502nd PIR finally arrived on the scene, reinforced by two squadrons of the
52nd Recce Regiment that was transiting to Nijmegen. They were unable to dislodge the German battlegroup before nightfall. After dark, KG Chill’s detachment on the highway was reinforced by Von der Heydte’s FS-Rgt. 6 and the remnants of KG Huber.

The following morning, two battalions from the 506th PIR moved out from Uden to clear the highway. The advance stalled when the paratroopers were brought under heavy artillery fire from Artillerie-Regiment 159. From the other direction, the British 7th Armoured Division was moving up the highway along with elements of the 50th and 52nd Divisions. At 1400hrs, a combined force from the British divisions plus 1/502nd PIR attacked from St. Oedenrode while the 506th PIR continued their attack from the Veghel direction, meeting around 1940hrs. However, at nightfall, isolated detachments from KG Huber still clung on near the road, preventing traffic flowing. When the assorted Allied units returned the next morning, the Germans had vanished. The battered KG Chill had managed to close Hell’s Highway for 40 hours.

**GERMAN RE-ASSESSMENT**

Adding to Model’s dismay after the failure of the September 22–23 counteroffensive, word arrived that the Americans had conducted yet another wave of airborne reinforcement. Another glider serial brought in the rest of the 327th GIR and 907th GFAB to the 101st Airborne Division near Veghel and finally reinforced the 82nd Airborne Division with the badly needed 325th GIR, as well as other divisional troops.

In the Groesbeek sector, Meindl’s II Fsch.Korps finally received its long-promised reinforcements including Division Nr. 190, and Gruppe Fiebig, a partially reconstructed formation based on the shattered 84. Infanterie-Division. There had been plans to launch an attack in this sector towards the Maas–Waal Canal, but shortage of artillery ammunition and the airborne reinforcement of the Groesbeek Heights on September 23 convinced Meindl to postpone the attack.

Model was profoundly spooked by the continual airborne reinforcement of the American sector and the knowledge that the Allies had at least two more airborne divisions in Britain that could be deployed. In his assessment to Rundstedt, he argued that the September 23 reinforcement marked a shift in Allied intentions, with the likelihood that the Allies would reorient the direction of their thrust from trying to push over the Rhine at Arnhem, to a thrust over the Rhine from the Groesbeek heights. He was also concerned that the British drive to relieve the 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem by the 43rd Division portended a deeper strike towards the
IJsselmeer that could cut off AOK 15 on the North Sea coast. He secured Rundstedt’s approval to transfer Panzer-Brigade 108 to the eastern side of Hell’s Highway to act as a blocking force around Goch. The OB West situation report on September 24 concurred with this view and accepted that the threat of a renewed Allied push towards the Ruhr from the Market-Garden sector, including additional possible air-landings inside Germany, “was the point of acute danger, all other sectors having receded in importance by comparison.” This meant that the Netherlands had priority for reinforcements as they became available.

One immediate result of the fighting for Hell’s Highway was Model’s decision to straighten out the confused and improvised command structure in the Netherlands to better manage the forthcoming battles. The tactical command roles of the Wehrmacht Befelshaber Niederlands and Wehrkreis VI were ended. Reinhard’s 88. AK was shifted to the command of AOK 15, which now controlled the western side of the Market-Garden corridor, while Student’s Fsch-AOK 1 took over control of all units on the eastern side.

RELIEVING THE 1ST AIRBORNE DIVISION

Attempts to reinforce the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem with a delayed landing by the 1st Polish Airborne Brigade on September 20 proved to be a fiasco, leaving the Polish troops pinned down near Driel on the south bank of the Neder Rijn (lower Rhine) and unable to cross the river in force.

On September 23, glider serials from the 907th Glider Field Artillery Battalion were delivered to Landing Zone W in the late afternoon, and several of their Waco CG-4A can be seen on the ground. Overhead, the 315th Troop Carrier Group can be seen dropping the long-delayed parachute serial from the Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade over Drop Zone O near Overasselt. The extensive air drops on September 23–24 convinced Model that the Allies were shifting the focus of their attacks. (NARA)
The relief of the trapped British airborne force depended on the XXX Corps drive out of Nijmegen. The 43rd (Wessex) Division moved across the Betuwe further to the west, and by late on September 22, the 214th Brigade had reached the Poles along the river. Attempts to reinforce the 1st Airborne Division using assault boats across the river failed after the Germans secured the crossing site on the opposite bank. It was becoming increasingly clear that Market-Garden’s ultimate objective was no longer realistic. With the Germans in firm control of the Arnhem Bridge, it would probably be demolished if the Allies were to make a determined push. Horrocks visited Driel on September 24, and consulted with the British Second Army commander, Miles Dempsey, later in the day. They agreed that in the event the 43rd Division could not execute a quick relief of the 1st Airborne Division, that the paratroopers should be withdrawn. This proved to be the case, and on the night of September 25–26, about 2,400 British and Polish troops were brought back to the southern banks of the Neder Rijn, effectively ending Operation Market-Garden.

**HITLER’S COUNTEROFFENSIVE: SEPTEMBER 28–OCTOBER 2**

On the morning of September 25, a new Führer directive outlined Hitler’s appreciation of the situation in the west. He described the main threat coming in the Netherlands since he believed that additional airborne landings would continue either in the Nijmegen–Arnhem sector, or even into Germany around Wilhelmshaven or Emden. As a result, Rundstedt was instructed to crush the Allied force in the Netherlands by securing the Nijmegen–Grave highway as the means to strangle the British forces on the Betuwe across
Market-Garden concludes: September 26, 1944
from Arnhem, while at the same time wiping out the American positions on the Groesbeek Heights. Besides offering some modest tank reinforcements, he instructed Rundstedt to shift the 9. Panzer-Division and the 116. Panzer-Division from their current mission against the First US Army around Aachen to the high-priority mission in the Netherlands.

Model sent an immediate response to Rundstedt indicating that these missions were impossible due to weakness and exhaustion of the units in the Netherlands. To placate Hitler, he outlined a fanciful three-phase operation, starting with a preliminary operation on September 29 to gain the necessary start-lines for the main offensive, followed by the main offensive by II SS-Panzer-Korps and the two other Panzer divisions with concentric attacks by the infantry divisions on either side of Hell’s Highway. Model knew that the chances for such an operation were non-existent due to the lack of forces. In the event, the German ground offensive that started on September 28 quickly flittered out with few results.

The Luftwaffe was ordered to make a concerted effort against the two Nijmegen bridges. On the night of September 26/27, 19 Ju-87 Stuka bombers of the night attack group NSG 2 bombèd the Nijmegen bridges with little result. The main attack in the early morning hours was conducted by 42 Fw 190 fighter-bombers of III./KG 51 supported by Bf 109 fighters. By the end of the day, British fighters had claimed 45 German aircraft in one of the most intense air battles of the Market-Garden campaign. The following day, Sonderverband Einhorn, a specialized “self-sacrifice” attack unit equipped with Fw 190F-8s modified to carry bombs of 1,000kg or more, were directed to attack the Nijmegen bridges. Dive-bombing at high speed through a squadron of Canadian Spitfires, both bridges were hit but with without critical damage.

The Kriegsmarine was more successful by sending frogmen from Marine-Einsatz-Kommando 65 down the Waal River to lash special torpedoes against the Nijmegen Bridge. The pre-dawn attack in the early morning hours of September 29 managed to drop one span of the railway bridge, but the other frogman teams were discovered by sentries, and the highway bridge suffered only minor damage.

In early October, the First US Army had renewed its attack on Aachen, the first German city to be besieged by the Allies. Hitler shifted his attention to this new threat and the Nijmegen counteroffensive faded from his view. Nevertheless, the Allied positions in the Netherlands were so tenuous, and the German counterattacks so persistent, that plans to withdraw the two US airborne divisions at the conclusion of Operation Market were continually frustrated. The 82nd Airborne Division remained in the line until November 11–13, and the 101st Airborne Division until November 25–27.

US Airborne casualties, Operation Market: September 17 – October 16 1944

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<th>Missing</th>
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<td>336</td>
<td>1,912</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>2,909</td>
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<td>573</td>
<td>1,987</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>2,938</td>
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<tr>
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<td>909</td>
<td>3,899</td>
<td>1,039</td>
<td>5,847</td>
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</table>
The failure of Operation Market-Garden can be traced to numerous factors, but intelligence misjudgments were at its heart. The central intelligence question was the assessment of whether the German Army was still in the chaotic condition of early September when Market-Garden was planned, or whether the German Army’s situation had stabilized. Montgomery argued that the German situation was still so fragile that Market-Garden was worth the risk. His subordinate commanders in British Second Army and XXX Corps doubted this was still the case after having seen first-hand evidence of the increasing German resistance along the Albert Canal and Meuse–Escaut Canal during early September. Montgomery dismissed these assessments, as he did similar warnings from SHAEF. This was a commander’s prerogative; bold commanders often have to ignore the anxieties of the naysayers and the timid and take necessary risks. The most charitable interpretation that can be made of Montgomery’s intelligence mistake was that he genuinely believed that the German Army was on the brink of collapse and that a risky operation
held enormous potential to end the war in 1944. A less charitable interpretation was that Montgomery craved a successful Market-Garden operation to bolster his argument with Eisenhower over the proper strategic approach in the European theater. Had Market-Garden succeeded, it would have validated his “dagger thrust to Berlin” approach. The intensity of his conviction about the shape of future Allied operations in northwest Europe blinded him to the significant changes in German capabilities from the beginning of September to the middle of September. Market-Garden was not only “a bridge too far” but “two weeks too late.”

The unexpected presence of II SS-Panzer-Korps in the Arnhem area has often been cited as the principal reason for the failure of Market-Garden. Yet Allied intelligence did have some inkling that the two Panzer divisions were in the area, and they were discounted due to their weakened state. In the event, the presence of these units near Arnhem was not the immediate cause of the initial Allied setbacks. Rather, Allied intelligence had failed to understand that the threat of a British ground attack into the Netherlands from the Meuse–Escaut Canal had prompted the Germans to begin the activation of large numbers of improvised battlegroups and shadow divisions during the first weeks of September in the Netherlands. It was these unrecognized battlegroups that stymied the initial Allied efforts.

In the case of the US airborne divisions, the underlying premise of Market-Garden was that they would only face minor “line-of-communication” troops. The gross over-extension of the two airborne divisions from
Eindhoven to Nijmegen was only plausible if facing minor enemy forces. In fact, by D+1, they were already facing elements of three divisions, and by D+2 they were facing significant enemy tank forces as well. As the timetable slipped, the situation became markedly worse due to continued reinforcement of the German units along Hell’s Highway. This might have been alleviated by a more vigorous attack by the two corps on either side of Horrocks’ XXX Corps that would have pushed the Germans away from the highway. In the event, both corps were largely exhausted from the Normandy campaign and the race through Belgium, the Dutch terrain did not favor mechanized advances, and so they were very slow in coming abreast of Horrocks’ harried XXX Corps.

There were significant tactical misjudgments in the Market-Garden plan. Earlier plans for operations in the Netherlands had included a coup de main against the key bridges using gliders; unfortunately these tactics were dropped from the Market-Garden plan. The most serious shortcoming of the troop carrier operation was the time it took to deliver the forces. The delivery of the three divisions was extended over a period of three days due to the weather and the inherent limits of aircraft and aircrew. Combined with the German resistance, this seriously compromised the operation. The need to guard the landing areas and drop zones for later waves of troops forced the ground commanders to divert as much as a third of their forces to this secondary task, weakening their effectiveness. This was most evident in the case of Nijmegen where the weather led to the postponement of the landing
of the 325th GIR from D+2 to D+6, leaving Gavin with insufficient forces to seize the Nijmegen bridges.

Yet even if the bridge at Arnhem been seized and held, it is by no means clear that the strategic objective of the mission would have been attained since the Rhine crossing was merely the means to inject Montgomery’s 21st Army Group into the Ruhr industrial area to outflank the Westwall. With the Wehrmacht rapidly recovering from the summer disaster, and the Allies’ logistical links overstretched, a deep penetration into Germany before the onset of winter was doubtful, whether the Arnhem Bridge was captured or not.

For the Germans, September 1944 would later be called “the miracle along the Westwall.” After the disasters of the summer, the western front was finally stabilized by means of the slap-dash creation of a significant number of new divisions and battle groups that helped to finally blunt the Allies’ race to the German frontier. The Germans suffered their fair share of blunders, especially the inattention paid to the demolition of key river and canal bridges. Model could breathe a sigh of relief when the Allies failed to clear the Scheldt Estuary. This saved AOK 15 and left Antwerp bottled up until November. Market-Garden had been crushed, leaving Montgomery’s 21st Army Group holding an awkward corridor from which to conduct future operations.

A third bridge was recently constructed over the Waal in Nijmegen on the spot where Cook’s battalion crossed. It is called the Oversteek (Crossing) and was opened in early 2014. (Alex van Riezen)
THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

There are numerous memorials to Operation Market-Garden dotting the Dutch countryside. The largest military museum in the Nijmegen area is the Nationaal Bevrijdingsmuseum 1944–1945 (National Liberation Museum) located in Groesbeek, which contains many exhibits and artifacts from Market-Garden. Both the highway and railroad bridge in Nijmegen are still intact, though the railroad bridge has been extensively remodeled due to wartime damage. A new Nijmegen bridge, “De Oversteek” (The Crossing) was being completed at the time this book was written; it is located at the site of 1944 river assault by the 3/504th PIR. The Hunnerpark area has been extensively remodeled since the war due to the extensive damage from the fighting; the Valkhof mound is now the home of a museum. Hell’s Highway has been extensively modernized since the war.

This Panther Ausf. G (chassis number 128427) of II./Panzer-Abt. 2107, Panzer-Brigade 107 took part in the battles along Hell’s Highway and was knocked out by a PIAT of the East Yorkshires, 3rd Infantry Division, in the fighting near Overloon on October 13, 1944. It is preserved in the Oorlogsmuseum Overloon.

(Author)
FURTHER READING

Operation Market-Garden has been the subject of numerous books, with a preponderance oriented towards the Arnhem fighting. The US airborne divisions have been a source of considerable fascination, with many unit histories and memoirs in print. The German side of the fighting has not been covered as thoroughly, though books like those of Kershaw and Diddens have started to redress the balance.

There are extensive records for the First Allied Airborne Army, 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, and other units available at the US National Archives and Records Administration II at College Park, MD. NARA II also has extensive German records available in the RG242 microfilm collection, but these are extremely spotty. Some units such as Korps Feldt and LXXXVIII Korps contain very useful records including a Kriegstagebuch (war dairy) but records for other units for September 1944 are largely missing. The Foreign Military Studies program conducted by the US Army Center for Military History with the aid of German officers after the war is useful in filling some gaps. A valuable though little known summary of the operation from the German perspective was compiled by Lucian Heichler in connection with the US Army official history. The US Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, also has extensive documentation on the battle.

One of the most comprehensive concentrations of resources can be found in the Cornelius Ryan Collection at the Alden Library at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. In the preparation for his famous book “A Bridge Too Far,” Ryan conducted hundreds of interviews with American, British, German, and Dutch combatants, as well as collecting an extensive array of original reports, maps, and photographs dealing with the battle. The collection totals more than 50 archival boxes and contains many rare gems.

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AUTHOR’S NOTES
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For brevity, the traditional conventions have been used when referring to units. In the case of US units, 2/506th PIR refers to the 2nd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment. The US Army traditionally uses Arabic numerals for divisions and smaller independent formations (82nd Airborne Division, 781st Tank Battalion); Roman numerals for corps (VI Corps), spelled numbers for field armies (First US Army) and Arabic numerals for army groups (12th Army Group).

In the case of German units, 2./GR 1038 refers to the 2nd Company, Grenadier-Regiment 1038; II./GR 1038 refers to the 2nd Battalion, Grenadier-Regiment 1038. German corps have two accepted forms, the formal version using Roman numerals (LXXXIX. Armeekorps) or the shortened 89. AK, which is the preferred form here for clarity. Likewise, the German field armies are contracted in the usual fashion, (e.g. 15. Armee for Fifteenth Army)

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GLOSSARY

AOK: Armeoberkommando: army high command, common abbreviation for a German field army
FJR: Fallschirmjäger Regiment
Gen.Feldm.: Generalfeldmarschall
GIR: Glider Infantry Regiment
GR: Grenadier Regiment
KG: Kampfgruppe: battlegroup, extemporized formation a few companies to a regiment or more in size
OB West: Oberbefehlshaber West: High Command West (Rundstedt’s HQ)
PFAB: Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
PIR: Parachute Infantry Regiment
RTR: Royal Tank Regiment
SHAEF: Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (Eisenhower’s HQ)
WBN: Wehrmacht Befehlshaber Niederlands: Armed Forces Command Netherlands

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