

# A bridge too far essay



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On September 17th 1944 operation Market Garden began. First Allied Airborne Troops landed near Arnhem, Nijmegen and Eindhoven to seize a number of bridges in Holland (market) and allow the British 2nd army to enter Germany in an attempt to bring a quick end to the war in Europe (Garden). Strategy There were three main rivers with bridges to secure to allow the 2nd army to cross, River Maas at Grave, River Waal at Nijmegen and the River Rhine at Arnhem. This project looks at the Arnhem battle “ a Bridge Too far”. There were 35, 000 men committed to market and approximately 11, 000 were dropped at Arnhem Bridge.

There were 6, 500 paratroopers (1st and 4th parachute brigade and 1st independent Polish parachute brigade) and 5, 500 soldiers from Air landing brigade (landing by gliders). There were 519 aircrafts, 161 C47 Dakotas (for the paratroopers) and 358 gliders (air landing). The RAF would only drop the men away from Arnhem because of crew risks and gliders could only land away from Arnhem because of ground conditions. Also the U. S flying pilots couldn't fly at night so drops had to spread over 3 days.

The paratroopers had got food and ammunition for 2 days, to last until 2nd army's support arrived. The Battle The Paratroopers began to assemble into Dakotas (some of the army got into gliders) and they were transported to Arnhem. Some gliders crashed, some parachutes failed to open and German soldiers shot at them on decent but enough survived to carry out the necessary task. The remaining men headed off to town to secure the bridge. Bill, Harry (two soldiers) and some others set off on a road into town.

Suddenly a Tank crashed through a near by building onto the same road and turned to face them! The tank was unknown to the commanders and not meant to be there. It was a German tank regiment camouflaged in Arnhem and there purely by chance. Bill and Harry jumped over a neighbouring wall in an effort to try and escape. However the weight of Harry's kit snapped his trouser buttons and he ran all the way to a wood desperately trying to hold up his trousers! Throughout the next few days there were house to house close quarter battles going on with the German army. The soldiers now had no communications because the walkie-talkies weren't working so nothing could be organised and therefore groups of soldiers were fighting small battles all over town.

The commander, Major General Urkhart went around to see what was going on for himself, he got cut off and stranded in a house. When he returned to take charge communications never really improved but some use of landlines was eventually made. The soldiers held out for much longer than required, the reinforcements never came and they ran out of ammunition and food. The Germans had discovered the plan of attack from a dead soldier in a crashed glider.

The Germans took over the drop zones and all food and ammunition parachuted in from the British went into enemy hands. Communications were so bad that they were unable to get the message across to the British Mainland's. The British Commanders ignored the 'Dutch resistance' messages that a German Panzer Tank Division was moved from Arnhem to the woods between the British parachute drop zone and Arnhem. It wasn't

seen as a major problem. In fact the German troops and tank division were a seasoned 'crack' outfit recuperating from recent battles of the front line.

In the event all surprise was lost after the 1st drop day as further days 2 and 3 were delayed due to bad weather. Paratroopers travelled light but still had to leave food and carry little so they were able to escape from the 2 panzer divisions in Arnhem. The food was left because they were told 'You cannot eat when you are dead, bullets are more important.' The bridge was held for several days but lack of support and supplies meant that there was eventually nothing left to fight with and the only option was to escape which however way they could. Unfortunately many couldn't and became prisoners of war.

In Bill and Harry's troop Bill was the most senior sergeant at 21 most of the others were aged at about 18. They were all shot and wounded so decided that at night they would try to cross the Rhine but they were unable to discover a boat and the weakest were unable to swim so they returned to the town and took shelter in a cellar of a huge building. The cellar to their luck was filled with food and wine! There they waited for reinforcements to arrive. Nevertheless to their great disadvantage the Germans developed a Headquarters On the next floor above! Several times the soldiers came down into the cellar for food and drink but they hid and were not discovered until an inquisitive German came down and caught them but for some reason (perhaps because Bill bravely told him not to shoot) unexpectedly he didn't shoot them and they were took as prisoners of war. As the British advanced the Germans retreated Ferrying the prisoners back and forth on one long march.

They had no food, little water and people died because of that and loss of strength. They finally reached a prison camp and were thankfully released safe at the end of the war.