Analysis of operation: market garden

On September 17, 1944, the Allied forces commenced an enormous airborne attack code named “ Market Garden” from southern England airfields. The operation landed over 34, 600 men of which 20, 011 landed by parachute, 14, 589 by glider. Gliders dropped a further 1, 736 vehicles and 263 artillery pieces. The operation, 1st Allied Airborne Corps paratroopers, mainly consisted of the first British Airborne Division, the US 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. The aim was to seize several strategic bridges over the Rhine River in the Netherlands and the 2nd British Army (led by General Dempsey), in particular, XXX Corps commanded by General Sir Brian Horrock to join the airborne units by ground. The intention was to create a “ by-pass” or “ corridor” to be used by the Allied armies to press forward and force the Wehrmacht out of Holland. The Allies army would then push further into Germany and attack Hitler’s soldiers.

For a nine-day period, the Allied forces engaged the remnants of a retreating Nazi army in and just about the towns of Eindhoven, Arnhem and Nijmegen, in Holland. The plan though backfired when Horrock’s XXX Corps were not able to advance to support the airborne army and the Nazi in Arnhem decisively overpowered the paratroopers. The Allies eventually withdrew the remaining troops on September 26 after suffering about 17, 000 casualties and having about 7, 000 men captured.

This paper analyses the Market Garden operations planning and capabilities and analyses the possible lessons that were learned and are to be learned for future military operations.

Introduction

Operation Market Garden, the largest airborne operation of its time[1], was a joint military operation intended to end the World War II with a decisive strike in Holland and Germany. On 17 September 1944 thousands of paratroopers descended either using parachute or glider up to miles behind enemy lines. The tactical aim was to seize a succession bridges across the Meuse River and the Rhine (both the Waal and the lower Rhine) together with several canals and tributaries to enable swift movement by armored units. To Cross the Lower Rhine would enable the Allies to outflank the Siegfried Line and surround the Ruhr, Germany’s industrial heart. The strategic idea was to enable the Allied forces to cross the Rhine River, the last major natural hurdle before advancing into Germany. If the operation were executed according to its plan, the Second World War II would have ended by the end of December 1944.

The operation was a success in the initial stages with a good number of bridges between Eindhoven and Nijmegen being captured. Nonetheless, the advancement of the ground force was held up by the Wilhelmina Canal bridge demolition at Son hence delaying the seizure of the main road bridge over the Meuse seizure until 20 September. At Arnhem, the British First Airborne Division met a far stronger opposition than expected. In the subsequent combat, only a tiny force was able to hold one end of the Arnhem Bridge. After the failure by the ground force to help them, the Nazi overran them on 21 September. The reminder of the division that was ensnared west of the bridge in a small pocket had to be rescued 25 September. The Allies failed to go over the Rhine in adequate strength and

the river continued being an obstacle to their advancement. This ended the operations hopes concluding the war in 1944.

The operational level of the joint campaign

Planning

British General Montgomery’s plan was to employ the use of four parachute divisions to grab hold of crucial bridges over various rivers in Holland. On achieving this, he would move armored ground forces up the road that connected the bridges. After going the Lower Rhine at Arnhem, Montgomery would then strengthen his forces and force into Germany, possibly concluding the war December. His senior, Major General “ Ike” Eisenhower, agreed to the plan. He sought to defeat the Germans and these plans appeared to hold promise.

The operation plan was for a joint attack by air and ground military forces along a constricted but extended battlefield so as to take control of strategic bridges at Son, Veghel, Grave, Nijmegen and, finally Arnhem. The assaults’ plan of action was made up of two operations. These were coded Market and Garden. Market, code name for parachute operations, was executed by the First Allied Airborne Army led by Lieutenant General Lewis H. Brereton and was to seize bridges and other terrain. These airborne attackers were under Lieutenant-General Frederick Browning led I Airborne Corps tactical command. Garden operations, code name for the ground operations, were carried out on the ground by the forces of the Second Army led by XXX Corps commanded by Lieutenant-General Brian Horrocks and were to move north[2].

Market

From the six divisions of the First Allied Airborne Army, Market was to utilize four. Major General Maxwell D. Taylor’s, U. S. 101st Airborne Division was to drop in two locations. This was in order to seize the bridges at Son and Veghel (northwest of Eindhoven), situated north of XXX Corps. Brigadier General James M. Gavin was to lead The 82nd Airborne Division, as it dropped northeast of the first division to take control of the bridges at Grave and Nijmegen. The third division, comprising of the British First Airborne Division, commanded by Major-General Roy Urquhart and Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade led by Brigadier General StanisÅ, aw Sosabowski would drop at the far north end of the route. This division was to capture the bridge at Arnhem (road) and the one at Oosterbeek (rail). The last Market division was the 52nd (Lowland) Infantry Division. It was to be flown to the seized Deelen Airfield on D+5.

The First Allied Airborne Army had been formed on August 16 following the British requests for a harmonized command center for airborne operations. On June 20, General Eisenhower approved the idea. The Britons had wanted a British officer, and in particular Browning be chosen the commander. Browning was appointed and brought his full staff with him on the operation. Together with his staff he was to institute his field Headquarters. For the reason that majority of both the troops and the airplanes were American, a U. S. Army Air Forces officer, Brereton, was appointed by SHAEF. Though Brereton was inexperienced in airborne operations, he had broad experience in air force command and this, which gave him a practical understanding of the IX Troop Carrier Command operations.

Landing over 34, 600 men, Market would turn out to be the hugest airborne operation ever. Market landed 20, 011 troops by parachute and a further 14, 589 by glider. Gliders dropped 1, 736 vehicles and 263 artillery pieces. A further 3, 342 tons of ammunition and extra supplies were dropped using glider and parachute[3]. Under its operations control, the First Allied Airborne Army had the command of the 14 groups of IX Troop Carrier[4], the 16 squadrons of 38 Group, a converted RAF bomber group, and 46 Group, a transport outfit[5]. This was in order to enable it deliver its 36 battalions of airborne infantry and their support troops to the continent. The Market had 321 converted RAF bombers and 1, 438 C-47/Dakota transports. After Normandy, the Allied glider force had been revamped so as it boasted 2, 160 CG-4A Waco gliders, 64 General Aircraft Hamilcars and 916 Airspeed Horsas by September 16. Since the U. S. could only avail just 2, 060 glider pilots, none of its gliders would have a co-pilot. Instead, each would carry an additional passenger[6].

The C-47s were to serve as both the paratrooper transports and the glider tugs. For this reason, coupled with the fact that IX Troop Carrier Command would carry the two British parachute brigades, market could only transport 60% of the ground forces in one lift. This limit led to the decision to split the troop lift program into consecutive days. Ninety percent of the transports on day one would drop troops on parachute, with an equal percentage delivering gliders on day two. Brereton threw out the idea of having two airlifts on day one. This, though, had been achieved during Operation Dragoon[7].

17 September fell on a dark moon; days following this day had the new moon set ahead of dark. Since the Allied airborne policies forbid major operations in total absence of light, this operation would have to be undertaken in daylight[8]. The possibility of Luftwaffe interception was calculated minute due to the cruising air supremacy of Allied fighters. Nevertheless, concerns rose about the escalating figure of flak units in the Netherlands, particularly around Arnhem. With his understanding of tactical air operations, Brereton evaluated that flak repression would be adequate to allow the troop carriers operate devoid of excessive loss. The offensive in the South of France had showed that large-scale daytime airborne operations were practicable. Day operations were judged to have the capability of enabling a greater navigational precision and time-compressed by the resulting waves of aircraft. This would triple the number of troops possibly delivered per hour. It would also cut the time required to assemble units after landing on the drop zone by two-thirds[9].

IX Troop Carrier Command’s aircrafts were tasked with towing gliders and dropping paratroopers – tasks that could not be executed simultaneously. Even though every division commander called for two drops on day one, Brereton’s staff only planned only one lift. This decision was based on the need to get ready for the first drop by attacking German flak positions for half a day and a forecast, which proved incorrect, that the area would be having clear weather conditions for four days, hence permitting drops during those days[10].

The preparations were declared complete just after one week. (Sicily and Normandy airborne drops took months to plan and prepare) Gavin, the U. S.

82nd Airborne Division commander, was skeptical of the strategy. In his diary he noted, “ It looks very rough. If I get through this one I will be very lucky.” He criticized Browning highly claiming that he lacked the standing, influence and judgment that is obtained only from a proper troop experience. He labeled his staff superficial and claimed that the British units fumble along and their tops lack the competence, which they never get down to learn the hard way[11].

Garden

The garden was primarily made up of XXX Corps. It was at first led by the Guards Armored Division, and the 43rd Wessex division in reserve alongside the 50th Northumbrian Infantry Division. They were projected, on the first day, to arrive at the south end of the 101st Airborne Division’s area, the 82nd’s by the second day and by the forth day latest to be at the 1st’s. The airborne divisions were scheduled to the link with XXX Corps in the Arnhem bridgehead breakout[12].

To have the airborne force fight for four days unsupported was not wise. Furthermore, the Allied paratroopers did not have sufficient anti-tank weapons. Allied intelligence pointed out that the enemy had sparingly manned the front. It appeared to the allied high command that the German resistance had receded before Operation Market Garden started. The German Fifteenth Army occupying the area seemed to be running away from the Canadians. Further, they were known not to have “ Panzer groups.” In truth, the Germans were re-arming and strengthening in the area. Two panzer divisions were furthermore placed in the Arnhem area. The high

command imagined that XXX Corps would face limited opposition on their way up Highway 69 and little armor. In the contrary German units, though weaker both in manpower and equipment still had several tanks and were forces to reckon with.

Seventeen days to the D Day

By September 1, General “ Ike” Eisenhower, after assuming the ground forces personal command from Montgomery, was faced with three problems. The first was the emergence of contradictory strategies on how best to attack the Nazi forces. The second problem was the overstretched Allied logistics and the broken lines of communication because of the hasty advances. The Allies were experiencing low supplies, especially the fuel whose supply was at critically low levels. Finally, Ike was faced with constant squabbling and opposition over strategy and resources that was the mark of his commanding Generals relations. Even though a general strategy for confronting the Germans had been discussed in the past by the operation leaders, the successful carrying out of Overlord had exposed a poor follow-on strategy. Victories in France had speeded up the operation; the pace of the Allied operations gave o room for the development of strategy.

Montgomery presented Eisenhower with a strategy to overpower Hitler in mid August. He (Montgomery) had been mulling over how the Allies should be handled after breakout. The plan he suggested involved a single massive thrust through Belgium and Netherlands and finally terminating at the Ruhr Valley. With expansion and redeployment of supplies from Bradley and Patton, he suggested that his 21st Army Group carry out his plan.

Additionally, he wanted three divisions of Eisenhower’s extremely well skilled reserve paratroopers, to carpet several cities in Netherlands. The paratroopers would seize strategic bridgeheads over the Rhine forming a “ corridor” which the British army could walk through. Once Ruhr was opened up, Montgomery reasoned, Germany would go down rapidly since the Allies would capture major German industries.

General Ike did not like Montgomery’s proposal of a single thrust. He favored a broad front attack similar to the one successfully used by Allied forces during the Normandy assault. Ike felt that one thrust as proposed by Montgomery would easily reveal the plans of the Allied forces. With a dual pronged approach, the Nazi would have to take a guess on where the next assault would be.

The second problem for Eisenhower’s, and perhaps more pressing was the logistical problem. Something had to be done about the long supply lines. The fuel shortages and insufficient transportation had to be dealt with first. The Allies were receiving supplies through the beaches of Normandy but there was a shortage of trucks to transport the necessities to the armies. The deteriorating weather was making unloading the supplies on the landing beaches almost impossible. Ike urgently required a deep-water port to move supplies to the battlefront. Additionally, as the Germans moved back they destroyed most of shipping infrastructure on the coastal harbors.

The regular wrangling and competition amongst Ike’s generals aggravated the situation. Other Generals profiled Montgomery as difficult. His pitch for a single thrust operation strengthened the animosity feelings. Montgomery

ceaselessly complained to Ike about the quantity of supplies his soldiers received. He was constantly pressing for precedence on fuel and ammunition.

After Ike assumed personal command of the ground operations in Europe, the state of affairs deteriorated. A divisive command problem arose out of this decision. Montgomery could not be appointed the Supreme Allied forces commander due to political reasons. This was despite the fact that he was a distinguished military leader with experience from not only North Africa but also in Overlord. Montgomery wanted to be appointed the ground armies commander and lobbied Ike hard for the same. Eisenhower chose to retain the duty and as such, he continually met open defiance from Montgomery and a few number of his British Generals. Montgomery imagined that he was a more qualified commander and for this together with the command and control issue, antagonistically opposed Eisenhower on almost all-tactical decisions. This explicit contempt created a lot more tension, distrust, and turmoil in the Allied camp. Up until now, a very patient Eisenhower never acted on Montgomery. It was after Market Garden commenced that he threatened to escalate the issue to Marshall and Churchill. Montgomery’s Chief of Staff at last settled the matter before Ike escalated it hence sparing Montgomery the sack.

General Eisenhower approved to the Montgomery plan on 4 September after review. This was in part an attempt to calm and tone down the belligerent Montgomery and chiefly as after realization that it was a chance for him to seize a deep-water port. The Market Garden plan was audacious and risky. It was uncharacteristic of the usually conservative Montgomery. After the

approval, Ike provided General Montgomery with semi permanent fuel and ammunition supply priority. He then moved the US 1st Army commanded by General Hodges to the British southern line, until Antwerp was secured by the Allies. He wanted the remaining Nazi resistance on the ports of Antwerp and Le Havre cleared. This would give his forces the vital deep-water ports, hence considerably reducing the time of delivery for important war reserve resources to the front line forces.

The sustainment essential for the next stage of the operations, that is, the march into Germany and the seizure of Berlin, had to be covered. This was dependent upon successful capture of a port with a capacity of supporting a force of over two million men. Antwerp was the only European port capable of that. Montgomery was incensed with the proposal of a double thrust, which incorporated the Saar valley. On September 4, Montgomery captured the port of Antwerp. Ike then, against the wishes of his staff, allowed Montgomery to move into Belgium without clearing the pockets of Nazi resistance in Scheldt Estuary. He was also convinced by Montgomery to permit Market Garden to go ahead as scheduled instead of delaying the operation to clear the port as was proposed by Bradley and Patton.

The Operation

On 17 September, in the afternoon, Operation Market Garden commenced. The American 101st airborne division parachuted on the southern end while the American 82nd Airborne dropped to the north and attacked the Waal River Bridge at Nijmegen. The British First Airborne division together with the Polish brigade attacked their target, the bridges at Arnhem, further north.

After all the three airborne divisions were on the ground, the British XXX Corps embarked on their assault and drove up the road. It was estimated that the XXX Corps would take no more than 3 days to arrive at the British at Arnhem. For the previous Allied airborne operations, drop zones for the paratroopers and gliders were as a rule of thumb as close to the target as could be so to elicit maximum surprise and to allow the enemy less reaction time to recover. The American drop zones for this offensive were no different. However, the British 1st airborne drop zones were far away from the target, i. e., the crucial bridges. They wanted to circumvent taking casualties to their planes by flying over what they imagined might be anti-aircraft guns concentration in the area. The bridges were in built-up zones so gliders could of course not land. Additionally the ground to the south of the bridges was imagined by the British generals to be too soft for gliders – entirely discounting the fact that the Polish paratroopers would be dropping in the very same zone later.

The drop zone selections led to the landing of some paratroopers of the First Airborne on top of the Nazi 10th SS Panzer Division. After landing, divisional radio sets were found to be tuned into the wrong frequencies. This made radio communication between units impossible. A small part of the British troopers' contingent took the main Arnhem highway bridge on the north end. However, intense battle barred reinforcement for this small force. On the southern end of the river, the ninth SS Panzer controlled the bridge's other end. Finally, the small British army at the bridge gave way to the superior Nazi forces. The rest of the division resiliently hung on in a small pocket on the river's north a few miles away from the bridge. The polish troopers who

parachuted on the south side of the river could not provide any significant backing. They merely fought to save their lives against the now fully alerted Nazi forces.

The first day was aeronautically splendid for an airdrop. As the days went on, the weather conditions deteriorated. The second wave was unable to drop for a further four more days. To the south, the first gains of the 82nd and 101st divisions Grave and Nijmegen seized bridges with minimal losses. The American 82nd Airborne took the Nijmegen Bridge the execution of an audacious river crossing in collapsible boats to assault and seize the bridge from the back. However, the XXX Corps joined them after number of days had passed. The highway connecting the bridges up to Arnhem steadily under counter attack by the Nazi forces and this caused many delays. Sections of this highway, to make matters worse, resembled an island on a dike and had with no maneuvering room. A single shot that took out the lead tank in a column could lead a delay going on for hours. Adequate infantry was not allocated to escort the tanks that were in the leading columns. It was taken that the American paratroopers would take up this task. However, the Americans had their own worries of keeping the corridor free of the Nazi attacks. This compromised the progress of XXX Corps after they crossed the Nijmegen Bridge and came to deal with the “ island road”. More infantry was required; however, it was just not obtainable. As a result, XXX Corps assault stalled. The British First Airborne, on their part, just a few miles away across the river, was being chewed to bits. In time, the British First Airborne had to be withdrawn and evacuated from their front on the Lower Rhine through an audacious night rescue operation.

The intention to oust the Nazi and perhaps end the Second World War by charismas had gone up in smoke. After nine days of fierce battle, the Allies withdrew. Incapable of rescuing their captured personnel, a large number of casualties and prisoners had to be forsaken.

The Final Analysis

The outcome rendered the Market Garden a nonviable operation. The objective was attainable but the strategy was full of flaws. For starters, the idea ended up to be hard one. The planners imagined that seizing the bridges would be as easy the seizure of the French bridges. Montgomery and the Allies, however, misjudged the incredible tenacity of Hitler and his Nazi army. Intelligence reports that Hitler soldiers along the Alhert Canal in Belgium, the Siegfried Line and in Arnhem had re-armed were received but disregarded by Montgomery. Additionally, Eisenhower was informed about the Nazi fortification; however, he did not personally challenge the plan on the bases of the intelligence reports. Alternatively, he opted to send Bedell Smith to Montgomery. Montgomery laughed of the idea of the aim was difficult simply for the reason that there were reports of Nazi tank potency at Arnhem. He would hear nothing about revising Market Garden[13]. Montgomery did not realize that there was a terrain and topography variation between the lower Rhine and France. This meant the fact that a similar operation succeeded in France did not imply it would succeed in Holland. Roads were usually constricted and constructed on top of dikes. Road sections that were not raised flooded regularly slowing movements due to the clay mud. Additionally, the swampy, muddy land made maneuvering of the heavy gear hard. Ignoring his staff’s counsel and Dempsey’s

apprehension for a well-timed meeting with the paratroopers, Montgomery stubbornly pushed forward.

Had intelligence report been paid attention to, the operation may perhaps have been discontinued or at least deferred. The narrow corridor did not afford Dempsey much room for maneuver and restricted his flexibility and ability to pull a surprise. In addition, the strategy was devoid of any air component except fighter escort and gliders transports. Modest coalition coordination was exercised in the preparation for operation Market Garden. Montgomery simply passed on the plan to his men for implementation. When Major General Maxwell Taylor voiced his oppositions to the landing zone for his men, Montgomery replied that was too late for the plan to be changed. Major Gen Roy Urquhart met the same lack of cooperation[14]. The strategy employed presumed that enough petroleum and ammunition would be available to carry out the plan. Montgomery was interested more in Bradley and Patton’s fuel instead of taking the time to drive out the Nazi from the Scheldt Estuary. Seizing Scheldt would have opened up Antwerp to supplies for the Allied. Further, Bradley and Patton’s to the south could have diverted the Nazi manpower and resources and that would support Ike’s extensive front approach.

Not only was the strategy flawed, the resources were inadequate too. First, it was tactically naÃ¯ve and logistically erroneous to move through Antwerp without weakening pockets of Nazi resistance. The Nazi fight back proved heavy more so in the Scheldt Estuary, the key North Sea access. This barrier was not removed until November 1944. The failure to do so deprived the Allies of the badly required deep-water port. This reduced logistics lines and

it was a blow to any more operations in Germany’s interior. The inability to get rid of resistance also hindered Dempsey’s movement since he had to reroute combat troops to guard his flank.

The airdrop was logistically hindered by having inadequate aircraft (transport and glider) to make a single jump as Montgomery’s plan called for. The First Airborne even lacked sufficient radios for communication within themselves. When the second wave finally arrived, it was ill equipped to deal with the Panzer SS toughened threat. Bad weather caused the second wave delay foiling their plans of landing on D-Day. Though the weather conditions were fine for the first drop, it caused resupply and reinforcements delays for the Arnhem troops. The Germans took advantage of the poor weather exploiting the time to reinforce their manpower and other resources to respond to the Allies. As such, the aspect of Market Garden considered being the operation strength, the crack paratroopers, ended up limiting the Allied success severely. Montgomery’s casual outlook toward the opposition meant the failure of the most effective tool available to the Operation. It is incomprehensible why Montgomery chose to pay no attention to his brilliant and experienced men. He casually dismissed justifiable issues raised by experienced infantry and airborne officers. Major General Stanislaw Sosabowski articulated his fears to Montgomery that the plan to land his troops at Arnhem was catastrophic and that higher-ranking officers were culpable of reckless overconfidence[15]. Officers could do nothing to change his position and only sat in quiet frustration and follow orders. The only officer reputed to be capable of swaying Montgomery, Major General Freddie De Guingand, was outside Europe.

It is important to point out that even though Montgomery was seen to be arrogant, it might have been with a good reason. He had been commanding ground forces during triumphant North African operation and Operation Overlord. To be fair to Montgomery, the Allies as a group exhibited this same overconfidence. They had been calmed into this joint cockiness and arrogance due to the swiftness with which their conquest came. The excitement of the operation led men to calm down extremely. Exhaustion and loss of focus started creeping on the mission. As evidenced by the consequent preparation and logistical shortfalls of the operation, the intelligence was misleading and gave the impression that the Nazi were severely weakened. With no sense of pressure, acute fatigue, and the consequent loss of focus, situations came up where troops moved with insufficient resources. The impetus and thrilling buoyancy by the Allied victories changed the force from what would have been a success, into an exaggerated and unfocused bunch thereby sustaining major and avoidable losses of gear and personnel.

The strategy demanded the army to grab the initiative and hit speedily and surprise the worn out and inadequately prepared Nazi. Hitler, in hindsight, had correctly expected that Montgomery would head north to the Zuider Zee. He countered by placing Field Marshall Walter Model, his strongest general, in that front. Model at once lined up troops and started efforts to re-arm for the expected battle. He coordinated strategic barricading of highways and canals, and took the advantage of the weather and the Allies lack of the capacity to resupply and reinforce. He not only was able to hold

the Arnhem Bridge, but also the city. His vigor and organizational brilliance were the reason the Nazi was able to hold off Market Garden.

To sum up this misadventure, the timing required to scheme a speedy thrust was uncoordinated due to the unanticipated fight back by committed Nazi soldiers; the failure to drop the second batch of paratroopers owing to bad weather; the utter disregard with which intelligence reports were met with; and the poor communication. A combination of these factors created the worst Allied defeats of the time.

Lessons from the defeat

Operation Market Garden, without a doubt the biggest paratroop drop of its time, was also one of the most terrible operational failures. What strategy, or lack of it, could have resulted to such an unbelievable failure for the Allies? What lessons learned can apply to the contemporary and future military operations? Some timeless lessons are evident from the operations' analysis:

The first lesson applies at the strategic level. That it is necessary for military planners to stay focused on the political causes of a war. They must by no means lose sight of the political motivation of the primary conflict. The states political will and national interests will always play a major role in the coalition strategy development. For the reason that the US contributed the greater part of machinery, manpower, and finances to the Allied war effort, Eisenhower's appointment ahead of Montgomery as the ultimate Allied Commander was logical. He was always sensitive to political and higher-ranking milit