

MARKET GARDEN

Dutch memorial of a tough time

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Historical decisions

In September 1944 after the successful invasion in Normandie and military victory on the German army in Northern France and Belgium, a decision had to be made in how Germany could be defeated. The US wanted to attack Germany along a substantial part of the border to create a long front line. The British fieldmarshall Montgomery could convince the Americans avoiding the heavily armed Siegfried Line to focus on the Netherlands first and settle east of the IJselmeer and then invade Northeast Germany from there. It proofed to be a terrible mistake in which many soldiers lost their lives.

Airmen from the sky

Operation Market objected massive para droppings of the 1st Allied Airborne Army with the mission to recover the main bridges between the towns of Eindhoven and Arnhem. Operating from Belgium the 2nd English Army commanded by General Dempsey should bring in under the codename operation Garden the main force of troops and armour. They were depending on the results of operation Market and especially if the bridges should be conquered. Many dakota's flew from England to the Netherlands and formed massive waves in the air. Between 13:00u and 14:00u on 17 september 1944 the American 101st Airborne Division 'Screaming Eagles' landed at Son en Veghel, the American 82nd Airborne Division 'All American' at Grave and Nijmegen and the 1st English Airborne Division in Arnhem. Elements of the Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade were involved in several support missions using Horsa Gliders. However, there were difficulties ahead. The withdrawing Germans sabotaged a crucial bridge and a new bridge had to be created by the allied forces. At that time, the troops were delayed 36 hours, but there were other factors which were underestimated. Pour or non-operating radio equipment caused a communication bug especially in the Arnhem region. The units could not inform each other about the progress they made. Bad weather disturbed operations for supply and last but not least Two heavily armed German Divisions situated on the Veluwe, north of the Allied Forces became a high threat. The Southern region of the Netherlands was liberated but the Arnhem location proofed literally a bridge to far which became the title of a famous World War two movie. The impact of this phase of the war was tremendous for those who were there and survived.

Veteran central in memorial day

This year on the Ginkelse Heide there were as usual several festivities to remember 'the battle of Arnhem' now 62 years ago. One of them is the droppings of paratroopers. Combined Dutch and English aircraft try to compose a formation in the air to symbolize the air operations in the first phase of Market Garden. Off course many parachutists are landing, mostly from English or Dutch airmobile brigades. For

this purpose Dakota's, Hercules aircraft and even a Dornier aircraft dropped the parachutists. In between, the Klu (Royal Dutch Air Force) gives demonstrations with helicopters followed by the main event of that day. Some veterans would jump again as they try to do every year. They always jump together with an accompanying younger parachutist but nowadays the amount of veterans capable of doing this is rapidly decreasing. Those who are sharing memories of the battle, those who were there, in the heat of the fight, they see every year how the days of their fellows are numbered due to their high age. The jumping of veterans will soon be history. Nevertheless, as long as they are there the Netherlands try to give them a memorial day in the way they deserve.

The story of John Frost

On 17th September we flew from England and landed by glider or Parachute in the neighbourhood of Wolfheze. The Germans were completely taken by surprise and we almost succeeded to capture the German Commander fieldmarshall Model. It was that close John Frost assured to me that one of my companions could even finish the lunch of commander Model in hotel 'de tafelberg' shortly after his escape. The Dutch people were welcoming us on our march to Arnhem but the German Command understand what was going to happen and blocked the roads. In their hurry they forgot one road from the south and me and my battalion managed to enter just before dark the area north of the Rhine bridge which was our mission to recover. We had to try to go on the bridge to secure it from German sabotage. This is what they did with the trainbridge in nearby Oosterbeek, they let it explode. When entering the bridge fire came from the southern part and Germans were shooting at every human being. We fired back and we battled from Sunday until Thursday. Our radio equipment was working barely and we could not transmit. We had a carrier-pigeon which flew back to England where they understood we secured the north part of the Bridge which was absolutely not the case because we were constantly under fire. The Pigeon even was decorated for his courage behaviour! The Germans attempted to shut us off the bridge but we stayed there and fought back from the north entrance of the bridge and occupied a few buildings. Even a sudden attack with armed vehicles did not succeed for them. We prayed constantly that we should get reinforcements from Oosterbeek and from the 2nd British army from Nijmegen but nobody came only more German soldiers appeared.

Courage until the end

Finally, heavy equipment like tanks were opposing us and we had no chance. We had no supplies of ammunition and the casualties were increasing. The wounded were in the cellars of the houses and there was lack of water. Germans set fire on the houses. In the night from Tuesday on Wednesday most houses were destroyed. On Wednesday morning, I was wounded but this had no influence on the leading part. This was already beyond the possibilities. A big building played a key role and almost 200 wounded people were in the cellar. When the building started to burn I could not save the wounded without water. I ordered our doctors to go outside and contact the Germans. There were wounded German soldiers in the cellar as well. They agreed in a cease fire and strange enough our enemies and us were working alongside each other to save the wounded. After this the shooting started again but because almost

al the houses were destroyed there was no shelter. We did not sleep for four days. On Thursday the survivors of the 29th parachutist battalion were captured. After I was recovered of the injuries I was sent to Colditz as a prisoner of war. In spring 1945 we were liberated by the Americans and we flew back to England. When we passed the English coastline the pilot shouted; look at that, the white cliffs of Dover. I felt happy to come home.

Will John continue in future?

John is one of few who jumps and will honour his companions who did not survive as long as it is possible for him. Of course his condition will be the master in this game. Parachutists consider it an honour to jump together with the oldies. The Dutch authorities are proud they could offer him that for years and still can offer him that now. Heroic actions like this in 1944 should earn our proud comments to those who did their duty.

This article is a tribute to the veterans who took part in this Dutch 2006 dropping:

Les Frater – Harry Herbert – Tom Hicks – Les Lockett – Bernard Murphy – Ron Pearce – Ray Sheriff (blind) – Tom Smithson – Arthur Winstanley

Wim Das & Kees Otten
