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**DECISION MAKING IN ALLIANCE WARFARE:
OPERATION MARKET GARDEN – A CASE STUDY**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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This paper is an examination of how national politics affected the decision by General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery to conduct Operation MARKET GARDEN in the northwestern European Theater in September 1944. It is proposed that there was an unbroken chain that linked grand strategy to military strategy to campaign design, all of which ultimately influenced the decision to execute Operation MARKET GARDEN. It is further argued that these cascading influences contributed to one of the greatest Allied operational failures of the campaign in Europe. Military leadership at the strategic and high-operational level is also examined as a critical variable in the MARKET GARDEN decision. Differences in personality, temperament, past experience and individual competence all added complexity to a decision making process already made cumbersome by British and American attempts to apply a controlling hand from their national capitals.

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DECISION MAKING IN ALLIANCE WARFARE: OPERATION MARKET GARDEN – A CASE STUDY

This is a study of military decision making. It is not an examination of process, but rather of influences— political and strategic— that motivate senior leaders to make decisions based not exclusively upon operational merit, but rather on conditions and circumstances as they exist far from the battlefield. In many ways, this paper is a contemporary validation of Carl von Clausewitz's assertion that war is a continuation of policy by other means. But there is a logical extension to Clausewitz's famous dictum that is more applicable here. Specifically, Clausewitz also believed that there are strong political pressures, some subtle and some obvious, that can affect operational decisions by field commanders. He summarized this view writing that while "...political considerations do not determine the posting of guards or the employment of patrols, they are nevertheless influential in the planning of war, of the campaign, *and often even the battle*"¹ (emphasis added). Clausewitz believed this state of affairs to be both correct and necessary if the outcome of the war was ultimately to reflect national purpose and objectives.

This paper is an examination of how national politics affected the decision by General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery to conduct Operation MARKET GARDEN in the northwestern European Theater in September 1944. It is proposed that there was an unbroken chain that linked grand strategy to military strategy to campaign design, all of which ultimately influenced the decision to execute Operation MARKET GARDEN. And while Clausewitz would have approved of this linkage, it will be further argued that these cascading influences were contributing factors in what was one of the greatest Allied operational failures of the campaign in Europe. Military leadership at the strategic and high-operational level is also examined as a critical variable in the MARKET GARDEN decision. Differences in personality, temperament, past experience and individual competence all added complexity to a decision making process already made cumbersome by British and American attempts to apply a controlling hand from their national capitals.

Planning for MARKET GARDEN was clearly characterized by a host of operational miscalculations and tactical errors. Tactical mistakes, miscalculations and simple misfortune contributed greatly to mission failure and for these, commanders must take responsibility. Indeed, if properly planned the operation could have been successful. Questionable tactics, however, are not within the scope of this paper. Rather it is the underlying purpose and operational concept that are proposed as defective and those defects are judged to be a reflection of the influences of politics and leadership within the Anglo-American Alliance.

THE SITUATION IN THE NORTHWEST EUROPEAN THEATER: EARLY SEPTEMBER 1944

By early September 1944, a string of victories by the combined forces of the Grand Alliance had forced the Axis Powers to a strategic defense on all fronts.² As a result of five years of continuous warfare, the German navy was powerless and the air force reduced to limited defense of key industrial centers.³ Intelligence officers at nearly every level of command were forecasting an end to large scale German resistance by December. Even battle-hardened commanders felt that final victory over the Reich was within their grasp. On 26 August, the SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) G-2 summary stated "Two and a half months of bitter fighting...have brought the end of the war in Europe within sight, almost within reach. The strength of the German Armies in the West has been shattered."⁴ General Omar N. Bradley, 12th Army Group Commander, wrote that in early September "...optimism pervaded even the headquarters commands where staffs talked of getting home by Christmas."⁵ The growing certainty that victory was at hand also extended back to Washington. On 13 September U.S. Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall sent a message to his field commanders on the subject of redeployment of army forces to the Pacific noting that a cessation of hostilities in the war against Germany could occur "at any time."⁶ In early September the question facing Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower was how best to bring the campaign in Europe to a hasty conclusion.

The Germans too recognized that their situation was dire and even Hitler understood that he would be forced to consolidate his defenses. Hitler accepted the probability that the Balkans were lost and began pulling his armies out of the southeast.⁷ On the Eastern Front, the Russians were achieving spectacular gains with leading elements less than 100 miles from the Fuhrer's field headquarters at Rastenburg, East Prussia. Hitler's army in Holland and eastern France was in total disarray. Allied gains following the Normandy breakout had also essentially forced Hitler to write off France and the Low Countries— at least until the opportunity for the December counter-offensive in the Ardennes presented itself. In southern France, the forces of Operation DRAGOON landed nearly unopposed near Frejus and were quickly reinforced. The subsequent northern movement of the Sixth Army Group completed an Allied front that stretched unbroken from the Mediterranean to the English Channel.

The best that the Reich's most experienced generals could do was to conduct a hasty defense with whatever forces they could reconstitute along the West Wall— a series of crumbling fortifications that had been unmanned and stripped of their guns since 1940. Sixty-nine year old Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, recently recalled from a brief forced retirement and

reinstated as *Oberbefehshaber WEST (OB WEST) Commander*, thought the situation appalling. "To von Rundstedt the situation was no longer merely ominous. It was cataclysmic."⁸ From a military standpoint, defeat was inevitable. "Von Rundstedt saw nothing to stop the Allies from invading Germany, crossing the Rhine and ending the war in a matter of weeks."⁹ General Siegfried Westphal, Von Rundstedt's Chief of Staff, agreed writing after the war that "The overall situation in the West was serious in the extreme. A heavy defeat anywhere along the front, which was so full of gaps that it did not deserve this name, might lead to catastrophe, if the enemy was to exploit his opportunity skillfully."¹⁰

However bright the Allied picture in early September 1944, the Supreme Commander nonetheless had a problem. The problem was a result of the extraordinary success enjoyed by his Allied Expeditionary Force following the Normandy landings in early June. Simply stated, the defeat of the Germans at Normandy and the spectacular sweep across France had caused a logistics crisis. The distance between the only serviceable port at Cherbourg and the lead elements of Allied ground forces- now greater than 400 miles- was slowing momentum. The other deepwater ports, except for the destroyed facilities at Dieppe, were firmly in German hands and would remain so for some time. Eisenhower's difficulty was not a shortage of supplies; they were flowing uninterrupted across the Channel and placed in vast stockpiles where they were prepared for transport to the front. The troublesome equation was one of time, distance, consumption rates, and available transport. The four vast ground armies were especially short of fuel which was being used at an unsustainable rate. The fuel shortage was particularly severe in the south where lines of communication were longest. The American 12th Army Group under Bradley was at a virtual halt with George Patton's seemingly unstoppable Third Army was practically brought to a halt by dry gasoline tanks.¹¹ On August 30, Patton received only 32,000 gallons of the 400,000 gallons he had demanded.¹² Eisenhower's immediate need then was to gain use of the port at Antwerp in order to shorten critical supply lines.

To add to Eisenhower's woes, the infighting between his army commanders, each seeking priority of limited supplies and the glory of being the first to enter Germany, had reached an intolerable level. The relationship between America's senior military leaders and the tactless 21st Army Group Commander Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery was continuing to deteriorate. From North Africa to Sicily to Italy and finally into northern France, Montgomery had been a thorn in the side of the Americans: principally Eisenhower, Bradley and Patton. And in early September, though the great feuds over strategy for the European Campaign had been put to rest, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in particular attempted to push Allied

commanders in directions that reflected his national strategic objectives. Political considerations, both domestic and international, that had largely been pushed aside when victory was in question, were now allowed to reassert their influence on military decisions. Clauswitz would have approved. This renewed political pressure was a factor when on 10 September Montgomery proposed the largest airborne operation in history; an operation that ultimately resulted in more Allied casualties than the D-Day landings.¹³

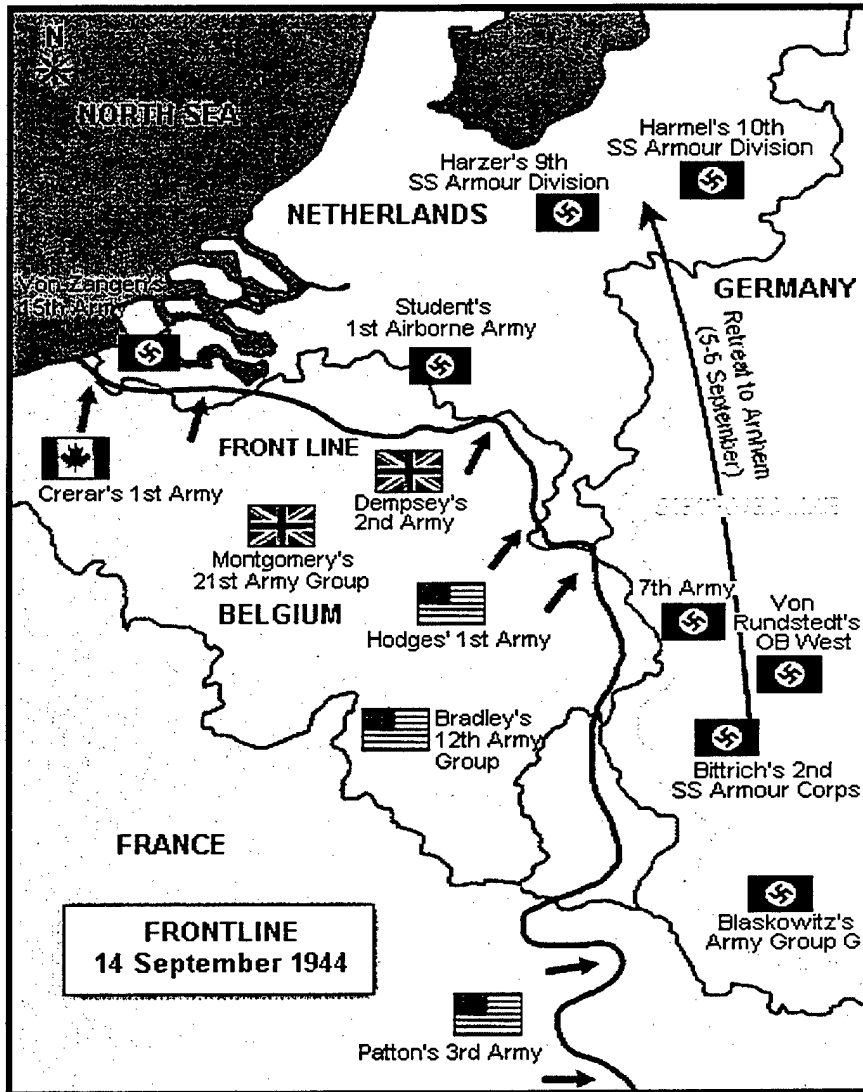


Figure 1: The Northern European Theater; September 1944. Montgomery's 21st Army Group, consisting of the First Canadian and Second British Armies, had driven through Belgium and was poised to begin the liberation of Holland. On Montgomery's right flank, General Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group with Hodge's First Army on the left and Patton's Third Army on the right was driving across eastern France toward the Saar. Forces of the Dragoon landing, now reinforced, were driving north to complete the uninterrupted north-south Allied front trace.

GRAND STRATEGY AND THE EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN

Military theorist Liddell Hart defined grand or higher strategy as "The coordination and direction of all the resources of a nation towards the attainment of the political object of the war—the goal defined by national policy." He continued by noting that whereas strategy is only concerned with the problem of winning military victory, "...grand strategy looks beyond the war to the subsequent peace."¹⁴ In the European Theater, British and American ideas of the proper strategy for the defeat of the European Axis differed widely, and the course actually followed was inevitably a compromise.¹⁵ But late in 1944, as victory was assured and after most of the contentious strategic issues of how to defeat the Axis had been decided, it was Liddell Hart's longer view of the postwar world on which the British and Americans could not agree. This was particularly true with regard to the immediate importance placed upon the role of Soviet Russia in Europe and the Middle East.

The issue was a critically important one, for at war's end the occupying powers would determine the political future of their occupied territories. Until mid 1944, Anglo-American higher strategy toward Russia assumed that "if treated honorably and generously, Communist hostility would be assuaged and Russia would continue to be a dependable ally after victory was achieved."¹⁶ But even if Soviet postwar intentions were not entirely benign, Roosevelt felt he had little choice other than to base his strategic decisions upon the pragmatic assumption that the Soviet Union could take what it wanted in eastern and central Europe whether Great Britain and the United States consented or not.¹⁷ Nevertheless, as Russian gains in the east came more rapidly, Stalin's postwar intentions became less clear and Churchill in turn became increasingly concerned for Britain's place in the postwar European power structure. The Americans meanwhile focused on the immediate task at hand – bringing about the unconditional surrender of the Nazis as quickly as possible. After all, there was much work still to be done in the Pacific.

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE SOVIET UNION

Regardless of the mostly Soviet-friendly public views expressed by "his good friend" the American President, in the spring of 1944 the British Prime Minister was worried about communist intentions for Eastern Europe.¹⁸ In his six-volume personal account of the war, Mr. Churchill made clear his early recognition that "Soviet Russia had become a mortal danger to the free world" and that the Allies should attempt to place troops "as far east as possible."¹⁹ This concern grew steadily through the end of the war. By September 1944, Stalin's Red Army had surged into Poland and was in position to take the fight directly to German soil. The implication

for British political power and their ability to dominate postwar policy on the European continent and the Mediterranean periphery was ominous. Once more, the window of opportunity for British action was rapidly closing. To Churchill's great frustration, his Italian strategy of 1943-1944 with a focus on the Axis "soft underbelly" and a possible occupation of the Balkans had been abandoned in favor of American insistence on a priority for Overlord. On 9 August 1944 in a meeting with Eisenhower, Churchill threatened to go to the king in a final effort to salvage the British Balkans strategy.²⁰ Eisenhower later noted that Churchill had practically wept, and in fact actually had tears rolling down his cheeks in arguing that the Americans were adopting a bullying attitude against the British "...In failing to accept their recommendations as to grand strategy."²¹ Despite his protestations, the British Prime Minister's ability to influence the strategic direction of the war in Europe had been waning for some time. By July 1944, American forces in the European Theater greatly outnumbered those of Britain, so Roosevelt, Marshall and Eisenhower felt increasingly comfortable in dictating the strategic direction for the campaign and the political terms for its conclusion. According to historian Charles Brower, "Allied grand strategy in the final year of the war in Europe was in effect American grand strategy—despite Churchill's best efforts to the contrary..."²² Churchill himself acknowledged that in terms of the Russian postwar situation "I could at this stage only plead and warn."²³

Because his plan for a sustained march up the Italian peninsula and into the Balkans had repeatedly been thwarted, Churchill was left with few alternatives if he was to counter the Soviet advance. But if British hope of retaining postwar influence in the Balkans and the Mediterranean was lost, perhaps an improved position in Germany, or at a minimum control of the German capital, could be gained. This meant taking significant risk in backing away from an earlier Anglo-American agreement with Stalin on zones of occupation. Since January 1944 the European Advisory Commission had been drawing zones of occupation for postwar Germany. By June it was agreed "the Soviet zone would extend westward via a line running from near Lubek on the Baltic Sea south to roughly the northern border of Bavaria."²⁴ Berlin itself was to be divided into separate zones although the city was within the Soviet zone. Though he had been party to the second Quebec conference where these terms were agreed, Churchill nonetheless attempted to convince Roosevelt and Eisenhower of the wisdom of a more aggressive Anglo-American military push to the east. As late as March 1945, Churchill emphasized the political importance of Berlin as a counter-balance to the imminent Russian occupation of Vienna by writing to his Chief of Staff that "The idea of neglecting Berlin and leaving it to the Russians to take at a later stage does not appear to me to be correct."²⁵ An operational concept calling for a rapid Allied push to Berlin and perhaps beyond would place

British and American forces inside the Soviet zone at war's end, thus establishing a position of strength from which the zones could be renegotiated.

MARKET GARDEN, if used as a stepping off point for a determined Allied thrust to Berlin, would clearly facilitate achieving this element of British grand strategy. For reasons reflecting both national and highly personal interests, Field Marshal Montgomery was very happy to be an advocate for Churchill's growing desire for Allied ground forces to accelerate their movement deep into Germany.

THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION

The British and Americans had agreed in 1941 that the unconditional surrender of Germany was the objective of the European Campaign, however, they had difficulty in agreeing on the best method to achieve that result. The disagreement had political and military components: First, restoring Britain's long-standing influence in the Balkans and the Mediterranean and thus her traditional link to empire was not an American priority. In fact, one of Mr. Roosevelt's pressing domestic political concerns was fear that Americans would perceive that their military forces were being used to help Britain regain her colonial holdings at the expense of a rapid defeat of the Nazis. Second, given the situation vis-a-vis the disposition and intention of Russian forces in spring 1944, Roosevelt believed there was no feasible means for the Western Allies to have retained substantially more postwar influence in southeastern Europe than they actually did.²⁶ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, most American military strategists thought that Churchill's indirect approach "toward the Danube by way of Turkey, Istria, the Ljubljana Gap, or some other Churchill hobbyhorse" was not operationally sound— in short, it simply would not work.²⁷ They were concerned that Allied forces would become bogged down in inhospitable terrain that favored the defending force. The considered opinion of the American Joint Chiefs was that a strategy requiring a major Allied thrust into the Balkans would produce no operational advantage, squander precious military resources, and ultimately delay the final German capitulation.

If they appeared to disregard the British preoccupation with colonial relationships and postwar influence, the Americans were not entirely unsympathetic to Winston Churchill's view of Soviet power in Europe following the war. As with Churchill, concern in some American quarters grew as victory over the Germans came nearer. Major Albert C. Wedemeyer of the War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff and one of Marshall's most highly regarded strategists was among those who very early identified the ominous potential for Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. While he fully supported the American push for a cross channel

invasion at the expense of an extended campaign in the Balkans, he nonetheless saw that "...it was vitally important that Anglo-American forces should get to Europe as fast as possible...in order to prevent the communists from winning control of the European heartland."²⁸

Mr. Roosevelt, however, was not willing to subjugate his vision for the postwar world to the push for Berlin advocated by American conservatives and the British Prime Minister. Placing occupying forces further east than previously agreed would inevitably bring with it a risk of war with the Soviet Union. It would also end any hope for establishing a world organization of united nations led by the great powers. According to W. Averell Harriman, Roosevelt's Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin from 1941 to 1946, "Roosevelt's primary political objective at Tehran was to get Stalin's agreement for the establishment of the United Nations at the end of the war."²⁹ Roosevelt, of course, was also concerned that he do nothing to dampen the Soviet leader's willingness to enter the fight against the Japanese once the European war was over. The price for this support was an American acknowledgement of Soviet postwar control over much of Eastern Europe. At no time did he expect Stalin to settle for anything less.³⁰ From the broader perspective, Roosevelt assumed that the United States would be given free rein in the Western Hemisphere. David Irving summarized Roosevelt's views on the matter by quoting him as saying in private "Trouble is, the Prime Minister is thinking too much of the post-war, and where England will be. He's scared of letting the Russians get too strong. Maybe the Russians will get strong in Europe. Whether that's bad depends on a whole lot of factors."³¹ So while Churchill and Montgomery saw MARKET GARDEN as a possible step toward increasing British postwar political stature, Roosevelt and Eisenhower saw only an operation of limited scope that was wholly consistent with American grand strategy and the work of the European Advisory Commission.

THE LAND CAMPAIGN: BROAD FRONT OR NARROW THRUST?

While Eisenhower's views about the strategic value of Berlin may have at times been unclear, in the spring of 1944 he wrote in an uncharacteristically blunt declaration to Stalin that "So far as I am concerned that place (Berlin) has become nothing more than a geographic location. I have never been interested in this. My purpose is to destroy the enemy."³² The Supreme Commander's plan for the final assault on Germany was fully consistent with this force-oriented strategy. The plan called for an advance on Germany's industrial heartland from both north and south of the Ardennes plateau with an objective of encircling and destroying German forces. The plan was seen by Eisenhower as providing the Allies with increased flexibility while forcing the Germans to defend the entire front against a main effort that could occur at several

places. This would be accomplished at the expense of rapid but more narrowly focused territorial gains. The fight between Eisenhower and Montgomery over a terrain versus force-oriented strategy continued until very near the end of the war. And while for very sound operational reasons, Montgomery's northern thrust was consistently given priority of resupply, it was in Monty's view never enough.

The broad front campaign plan was consistent with original plans predating the Normandy invasion. Eisenhower's Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Walter Bedell Smith noted, "...Our broad advance across France and into Germany followed the original pattern. ...Long before we stepped foot in Europe and tested the enemy's strength in battle, we had decided on the blueprint for his defeat."³³ An alternative idea for a single line of advance north of the Ardennes had been considered by the SHAEF planning staff and was rejected primarily because restrictive terrain along the northern approach provided limited maneuver space.³⁴ In the view of SHAEF planners, a narrow front bisected by numerous waterways clearly required an additional line of advance. If such mutually supporting lines were not established, then the Allies would be left with insufficient room to maneuver and any opportunity to exploit a German flank would be forfeited. Conversely, the more balanced approach minimized risk, focused on defeating the enemy's army, and made available to both the armies of Great Britain and the United States opportunities for headline-grabbing victories. This campaign design was entirely consistent with the American president's grand strategy.

Montgomery was never shy about making clear his view that he not Eisenhower should be commanding all ground forces in theater. Other than for reasons of self-confidence and vanity, Montgomery's frustration was a result of having an operational concept that was significantly different from that of his American superior. Three months after the Normandy landings, he saw the situation as fundamentally changed from that which originally called for the broad front strategy. Given the imminent collapse of the German defenses, Montgomery proposed what Eisenhower later referred to as a "pencil like thrust at Berlin."³⁵ This, he believed, was sure to bring the war to a more rapid conclusion. British reasoning was sound; the fall of the German capital, they believed, would result in the political collapse of the Reich which would in turn lead to military capitulation. The debate rages today with views driven in large by on which side of the Atlantic one resides. It is clear, however, that Montgomery's narrow front strategy offered the best hope for rapid territorial gains and with it potential for salvaging the remnants of Churchill's plan to improve the British postwar position relative to the Russians. Churchill knew that an aggressive push to the east by Montgomery at the expense of all other land operations was necessary if "the prime and true objective of the Anglo-American armies" was to be taken before the Russians.³⁶

Operation MARKET GARDEN as proposed by Montgomery and backed by Churchill reflected such an aggressive push. It would also create an opportunity to establish a single northern single line of advance as official SHAEF strategy. But whereas Montgomery visualized the operation as a potential knockout punch, Eisenhower saw it as simply an extension of the original broad front plan.³⁷ Even though Eisenhower's approval was based a strictly limited operational objective, Montgomery and Churchill must have secretly hoped that in seizing a British bridgehead over the Rhine, Eisenhower would be compelled to reinforce this success at the expense of Bradley's 12th Army Group. Ironically, this was exactly the tactic used by Patton in his attempt to gain priority of supply during his drive on the Saar. Unfortunately, Montgomery's MARKET GARDEN gamble became victim to precisely the thing that most concerned the SHAEF planners. Simply put, the proposed salient was terrible tank country. The main Allied strength, overpowering mobile firepower, was ultimately negated by restrictive terrain that favored even a significantly weakened defending enemy.

LEADERSHIP AND THE DECISION FOR MARKET-GARDEN

In addition to entirely appropriate pressures from their respective national political leaders and differing operational concepts, individual personality and relationships between the most senior ground commanders in Europe clearly influenced Anglo-American operational decision making. Important decisions made by General Eisenhower and Field Marshal Montgomery have been the source of continuous and contentious debate since war's end. Kent Greenfield notes "The facts are known. Interpretations of them differ, and will continue to differ as new generations approach these facts with new questions and different prepossessions."³⁸ Even after more than fifty years, the argument over their decisions of strategy and operational maneuver rage as hot as ever. In any case, what is clear is that divergent strategic and operational concepts, driven not only by legitimate political and military judgments but also by intense personal rivalries, presented the Supreme Commander with one of his greatest challenges. In addition, the issues of appointments to important command and staff positions were among the most contentious and politically charged of the war. Domestic politics driven by national pride demanded that the leaders and armies of both Great Britain and the United States be provided with opportunities to claim great victories. This was necessary even if the decisions providing such opportunities did not always support the optimum strategic and operational concepts. These leadership variables were clearly at play in the decision to execute MARKET GARDEN.

EISENHOWER

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, as with all coalition military leaders, was required to balance his strategic and operational vision with the practical limits of coalition warfare. Unlike his subordinate commanders, he was also required to view the European Campaign in the larger context of the total war effort. For these tasks, he was ideally suited. It was in Eisenhower's nature to seek consensus and compromise, even on the most important issues of theater strategy. He worked extraordinarily hard, had an orderly if not brilliant mind, and perhaps most importantly, was completely trustworthy. His unpretentious manner helped him gain the confidence of all of those with whom he worked. Even Montgomery acknowledged that Ike was "... a very great human being...and the very incarnation of sincerity."³⁹

Though he was just about everyone's second choice to lead Overlord behind General George Marshall, he was highly regarded by virtually the entire SHAEF staff and, with one or two notable exceptions, his subordinate commanders. Eisenhower in particular enjoyed the consistent support of President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill; a factor critical to his personal success and to that of the European Campaign. Nonetheless, almost every difficult decision he made inevitably brought fire from some quarter. Stephen Ambrose described the situation this way: "Doing something to satisfy Montgomery might make Patton angry; a decision that pleased Marshall would leave Brooke unhappy; bowing to the President's wishes could mean opposing the Prime Minister. The Supreme Commander would have to be able to maintain a balance and still defeat the Germans."⁴⁰ So, while remaining focused on his mission, Eisenhower carefully measured his actions in light of the big picture. This, he realized, required compromise at nearly every turn.

A command approach balancing mission against compromise was the foundation behind Eisenhower's relationship with the notoriously difficult Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery. Relations between the two had never been good and in mid-September 1944, Montgomery was still smarting over what he viewed as his unfair removal as commander of all OVERLORD ground forces. Though the move had been planned from the beginning, and he had been somewhat placated by his largely symbolic promotion to field marshal, Montgomery viewed his appointment as Commander, 21st Army Group as a personal embarrassment and a professional tragedy.

Eisenhower, though much less confrontational and much more discreet in expressing his personal views, could not be counted as one of Montgomery's strong supporters. Where Montgomery saw a Supreme Commander wholly out of touch with the details of the land campaign, Eisenhower saw an army commander who either refused or was unable understand

the subtle political underpinnings of the Allied operation. Even the Chief of the Imperial Defense Staff Alan Brooke, one of Montgomery's most reliable backers and an Eisenhower critic, noted in his diary that "He (Montgomery) requires a lot of education to make him see the whole situation" adding that he is "liable to make untold errors due to a lack of tact and a lack of appreciation for other people's outlook."⁴¹ Nonetheless, Eisenhower understood that Montgomery (and the British) had to be appeased from time to time with decisions that may not wholly support his strategic or operational concepts. Though Eisenhower supported the limited operational foundation upon which MARKET GARDEN was built, the idea of giving Monty the opportunity for a personal win and the British a military one was among the factors influencing his decision.

Also influencing Eisenhower's approval of the operation was word from Washington that General Marshall and General Henry 'Hap' Arnold, commander of the Army Air Forces, were anxious for him to use the airborne reserve to "exploit the fluidity of the pursuit."⁴² General Marshall had long supported the concept of using airborne forces to strike deep to "break the tactical deadlock that had so often stultified modern war."⁴³ The cost of maintaining a large standing airborne army at a time when highly skilled infantry was in short supply almost demanded that a suitable use be found. For his part, Arnold wanted assurance that the precious AAF air transport assets would not be wasted.

MONTGOMERY

The fact that his preferred title was Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein speaks volumes about the man's view of himself. Beyond any simple British fondness for titles, it speaks to his core. Montgomery cherished the spotlight, perhaps more so than any of his American counterparts— a remarkable claim of itself. Combine this with supreme self-confidence, an eccentric personality, and a brilliant mind and his place as one of modern military history's most intriguing characters is secure. Though he was practically friendless, his troops and the British people adored him; Montgomery's ability to lead his soldiers and rally the civilian population has never been questioned. And while Omar Bradley after the war described Montgomery as "a third-rate general...who never won a battle that any other general could not have won as well or better,"⁴⁴ he also recognized that he was an absolute master of the set-piece battle and brilliant when time permitted methodical planning and the application of overwhelming force.⁴⁵

Despite his popularity at home and with the troops, the field marshal was disliked by many; often with a public intensity seldom seen among senior general officers and political

leaders. Most of his British peers and virtually every American senior leader found him extraordinarily vain and arrogant. Aside from his natural feelings of superiority, Montgomery's overwhelming personal success in North Africa in 1943 had much to do with shaping the way he operated within the alliance for the remainder of the war.⁴⁶ Britain needed a hero, a role Montgomery was very happy to play. But Montgomery's victory carried with it the unfortunate result of reinforcing his already high opinion of himself. In addition, El Alamein had been a private battle. Montgomery was the singular master of the operation and had not been required to work within the political framework of the Grand Alliance. It was his blindness to the political dynamic when making operational judgments in 1944 and 1945 that was often the cause of nearly nonstop personal battles with his American peers (he would, of course, admit to having none). His spectacular inability to work effectively with Americans in general and Eisenhower in particular had a significant influence on the efficiency of military decision making within the alliance.

Montgomery was exceedingly smart and simply did not tolerate "fools or muddled thinking." He tended to surround himself with very bright and capable officers who performed or were quickly sent packing. Unfortunately, Montgomery viewed Eisenhower as indeed a muddled thinker, particularly when it came to operational matters. Eisenhower's refusal to unequivocally back Montgomery's repeated single thrust proposals in favor of a more balanced offensive, confirmed the British field marshal's opinion that Eisenhower may have been a fine military statesman but he was certainly not a "great soldier in the true sense of the word."⁴⁷ In Montgomery's view, this weakness was amplified by a lack of clarity or outright inconsistency that characterized many of the Supreme Commander's personal directives. This fed Montgomery's frustration.

Montgomery's caution as a commander is legendary. Even the circumspect Eisenhower noted in private correspondence to Marshall in 1943 that "...He will never willingly make a single move until he is absolutely certain of success— in other words, until he has concentrated enough resources as that anybody could guarantee the outcome."⁴⁸ In Montgomery's defense, this natural inclination to caution was probably reinforced by a constant reminder from the British War office of the army's "inability to absorb the casualties of a major offensive effort against strong defenses."⁴⁹ This would appear to make his push for the high-risk MARKET GARDEN a curious inconsistency. But he and the British public were desperate for a grand victory; a victory that would project British forces across the Rhine and carry with it the potential for even greater glory. Also at work in influencing his MARKET GARDEN proposal was Monty's lackluster performance since the OVERLORD landings. Of the operation in Normandy and France through

September 1944, David Irving commented that "The success of the Americans...and the comparative slowness of the British operations left a sour taste in England. There was little in the war bulletins about Montgomery and the British and Canadian forces. For Britons, it was hard to take."⁵⁰ So MARKET GARDEN was at least partly born for reasons of personal and national prestige. These must indeed have been powerful influences. After the war, Omar Bradley observed "Had the pious teetotaling Montgomery wobbled into SHAEF with a hangover, I could not have been more surprised than I was by the daring adventure he proposed."⁵¹

OPERATION MARKET GARDEN

THE PLAN

The concept for MARKET GARDEN was deceptively simple. The extraordinarily bold plan called for a daylight assault by three airborne divisions to seize ten key bridges over eight major waterways. The purpose of the airborne assault, code named MARKET, was to open a corridor which would enable the British Second Army to race to Arnhem and then over the Rhine and into Germany. The capture of Arnhem would also make it easier for the Second Army to advance to the *Zuder Zee*, thus cutting off Germany from Holland and eliminating the threat to Britain from the V2s.⁵²

The British 1st Airborne Division with an attached brigade of Polish paratroopers was tasked to secure the northernmost objective and the main prize— the massive bridge at Arnhem. The American 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions would secure intermediate objectives along the length of the corridor connecting the Allied front line to Arnhem. That the British 1st Airborne was assigned the riskiest and most highly valued operational objective was a political necessity given that this was in essence a British operation supported by American forces. The plan reflected classic airborne doctrine; the surprise use of airborne forces for envelopment followed by a rapid link-up of ground forces. The ground force then applies decisive combat power to defeat the enemy in detail. Due to the immense number of men and equipment required and limits on available transport aircraft, airborne drops would take place over a period of three successive days. This was certainly not doctrine. The inability to mass his forces early in the operation was the greatest concern of Major General Robert Urquhart, Commander of the British 1st Airborne. In his memoirs Urquhart wrote, "This meant that the effective offensive strength of the division in the first day against the main objective was reduced to one parachute brigade. I had no choice."⁵³ The division commander and his corps commander did, however, have a choice on the selection of drop zones. Drop zones designated for use by the 1st Airborne

while ideally suited to large-scale air-drops and air landings were 8 miles from the Arnhem Bridge objective. This was deemed necessary to minimize the potential for injuries that more restrictive terrain closer to the objective would inevitably bring. Both LTG Browning, commander of the British 1st Airborne Corps and commander of all participating airborne forces, and MG Urquhart would later regret this tactical decision.⁵⁴

The link-up between LTG Brian Horrocks' XXX Corp leading the 2nd Army ground thrust from the south (Operation GARDEN) and the northernmost 1st Airborne Division was judged to be no later than D+3.⁵⁵ Reflecting the optimism of the day, Horrocks was convinced that the timeline could be met even though his mechanized corps of 20,000 vehicles would advance and be supplied along a single narrow elevated road surrounded by wooded and marshy terrain wholly unsuitable for tracked vehicles.⁵⁶ LTG Browning estimated that the Arnhem Bridge could be held for four days given the uncertain but generally favorable intelligence picture.⁵⁷

Given what he perceived to be an irresistible opportunity, Montgomery deferred the Antwerp task "out of the hope that the war might yet end promptly enough to make the port capacity unnecessary— or at least that the Allies could cross the Rhine and enter the Ruhr before having to pause to develop the port."⁵⁸ Though the city and its port were firmly in Allied hands, without control of the approaches along the 54-mile *Schelde* Estuary, the superb port and its intact facilities were useless. On 4 September as the concept for MARKET GARDEN was being developed, there had been a brief opportunity for the British 2nd Army to advance 30 additional kilometers beyond Brussels in order to seize the 2-mile wide neck of the South Beveland Peninsula. Such an operational maneuver against light and disorganized German resistance would have effectively cut off the German 15th Army. This in turn would have led to their destruction or likely surrender, secured the entire northern bank of the estuary, and opened the port for immediate use. Instead, the halt granted by Montgomery to refit and resupply after seizing the city of Antwerp permitted Von Rundstedt sufficient time to evacuate the 80,000 man 15th Army from the peninsula to positions from which they could establish a viable defense along the canals in the southern Netherlands. This would heavily influence the optimistic MARKET GARDEN timetable for the advance of Horrocks' XXX Corps.

THE OUTCOME

At mid-morning on Sunday, September 17, 1944, after less than one week of detailed planning, the largest airborne operation in history began. The massive glider and para-drop operation required virtually the entire available airlift in the theater to insert 20,000 troops, equipment and supplies. On the first day alone, some 4,700 aircraft were involved including

over 1,000 bombers used to reduce German air defenses around MARKET GARDEN objective areas.⁵⁹ Airborne operations on the first day went essentially as planned. However, on the days that followed, scheduled drops of reinforcing troops and equipment landed at the wrong location or worse, did not arrive at all. As the operation progressed and the situation in the 1st Division objective area deteriorated, pre-planned resupply was often dropped at the correct location, but those spots had frequently been overrun by the Germans. The fact that internal and external communications with Urquhart's division were practically non-existent complicated the faltering aerial re-supply effort around Arnhem. The reason (bad weather, bad tactics, and bad communications aside) that the 1st Division found itself in such a precarious situation was the previously unknown, or in some cases ignored, presence of the German *2nd Pantzerkorps* in and around Arnhem. The corps, consisting of the depleted but still potent 9th and 10th SS Panzer divisions had been recently repositioned from France to recuperate and refit with personnel and equipment. LTG Horrocks observed with classic British understatement that "This was our first bit of bad luck."⁶⁰

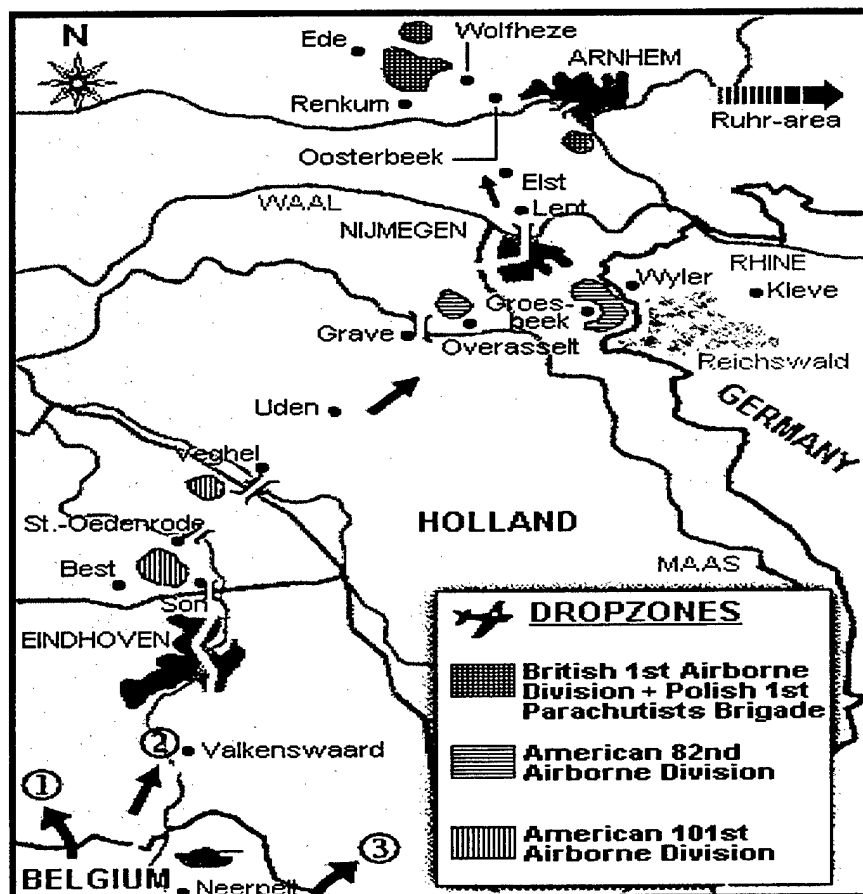


Figure 2: Operation MARKET GARDEN

While the British 1st Airborne fought for their lives around Arnhem, the Americans maintained a tenuous hold on their objectives. The 101st Airborne Division under Maxwell Taylor held the road from Eindhoven to Grave while Major General James Gavin's 82nd Airborne secured the Grave Bridge and the rail and highway bridges over the River Waal at Nijmegen. Both divisions were under continuous pressure and the portions of corridor were surrendered and recaptured several times. Meanwhile, the British XXX Corps continued their methodical march up "Hell's Highway." As predicted during SHAEF planning the previous spring and confirmed in advance by the Dutch Underground, movement along the narrow corridor was a nightmare for mechanized forces. Horrocks wrote "...the country was almost impassable for tanks; all the narrow roads ran along the tops of embankments, with wide ditches on either side, and any vehicle on an embankment was a sitting duck for the German anti-tank gunners hidden in the orchards...one knocked-out tank could block a road for hours."⁶¹ Rather than the estimated 48-hours for link-up, it took five days for lead XXX Corps reconnaissance units to establish contact with the 1st Airborne and another three days before sufficient combat power was in position to cover their withdrawal. Horrocks summed up the entire operation by noting quite simply that "Nothing seemed to go right."⁶²

After over a week of continuous fighting the 1st Airborne Division was forced to abandon the northern bank of the Rhine River and relinquish control of the massive bridge at Arnhem to the Germans. During the night of 26 September, of an original force of 10,005, the remaining 2163 soldiers of the British 1st Airborne Division crossed the Rhine in small boats to finally link-up with a struggling ground force that was no longer capable of sustaining offensive operations. MARKET GARDEN was a failure. The nine-day operation resulted in combined losses—airborne and ground forces— in killed, wounded and missing, of more than 17,000 men.⁶³ Due to the extensive losses, the Chief of the Imperial Defense Staff decided that reconstitution of the 1st Airborne would not be possible. The division was disbanded and the remaining soldiers reassigned. Though a 70-mile salient had been created, it was operationally useless as it terminated short of the Rhine. Arnhem at the Rhine became the new front line, and remarkably, Allied troops would not enter the city again until March 1945. In a final irony, Allied bombers destroyed the Arnhem Bridge in October to prevent a German counter-attack.

If this defeat were not bad enough, a fleeting opportunity to seize the approaches to the port at Antwerp without a fight was squandered. Montgomery had gambled on his conviction that German resistance was crumbling so fast that the Allies could win the war without the use of the Antwerp ports and he had lost.⁶⁴ Liddell Hart called this "...a multiple lapse by four commanders from Montgomery downwards..."⁶⁵ At the conclusion of MARKET GARDEN Allied

operations to clear the north bank of the *Schelde* and the subsequent de-mining operation required a sustained effort of over two months. The first Allied ship did not enter Antwerp harbor until November 27, well after the German defenses had stiffened, the weather had turned, and the opportunity for an Allied exploitation of their late summer successes had passed. The result of the Allies' inability to establish ports forward of the original landing area provided the German Army with the thing they most desperately needed: time.

To the end, Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein would in his words "remain an unrepentant advocate of MARKET GARDEN" claiming to all who would listen that "the operation was a "90% success."⁶⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Given differing Anglo-American views of grand strategy, military strategy and campaign design, what were the specific factors that influenced General Eisenhower to accept Field Marshal Montgomery's proposal for Operation MARKET GARDEN? I propose four: First, in a general way the plan supported Eisenhower's operational concept. Though risky and perhaps premature, MARKET GARDEN if successful would have established an Allied foothold across the Rhine. This was necessary in any case. Second, as a practical matter given the supply constraints of early September 1944, there were few other options if the enemy was to be kept off balance and the Allied momentum of August was to be regained. Third, the Supreme Commander had at his disposal the tremendously capable and costly First Allied Airborne Army consisting of the British I Airborne Corps and the American XVIII Airborne Corps. He had been seeking an appropriate mission for these strategic reserve assets. Montgomery's proposal was a timely and doctrinally perfect fit for this significant warfighting capability. Finally, Eisenhower needed to give Montgomery a personal and political win. If it was not the narrow single thrust and total priority of effort that Montgomery had been demanding, MARKET GARDEN was at least a chance for the field marshal to reestablish himself as Britain's pre-eminent war hero. The British Army would also be provided with a well-deserved chance to gain a highly visible and psychologically important victory.

There were also at least two reasons that were not factors in Eisenhower's approval of the operation. First, as we have seen the Americans unlike the British had no interest in Berlin as a strategic objective. Eisenhower had received no pressure from President Roosevelt to modify his broad-front strategy in favor of a more focused push to the east. In fact, this would have been contrary to Roosevelt's postwar aim. Second, some have proposed that Eisenhower suspected all along that Montgomery's gamble would fail. Failure of the operation would benefit

Eisenhower in that it would put an end to Montgomery's constant pressure for a single thrust operational scheme. Failure would also weaken Montgomery's political influence thereby marginalizing him as a factor in Allied decision making for the remainder of the war. These things were in fact outcomes of the failure. However, given General Eisenhower's extraordinarily personal strength and depth of character, there is no reason to believe that he would approve an operation that would not support his larger operational concept.

There were three reasons for Montgomery to break character and propose the high-risk plan. First, both Churchill and Montgomery saw that MARKET GARDEN was perhaps their last best chance to translate to action their desire to get to Berlin ahead of the Russians. This would in turn create a position of military strength from which negotiations over the future of the city and eastern Germany might follow. Second, Montgomery saw the rapid seizure of a bridgehead over the Rhine as the only practical way forcing Eisenhower to provide him with the sustained and unequivocal priority of resources he had been so desperately seeking. He reasoned that the Supreme Commander, by default, would be forced to accept his single thrust approach. Third, and fitting his character, Montgomery saw this as a way to regain the personal success that had been eluding him since Alamein. A bold and stunning victory would go far in balancing the injustice of not retaining command of all OVERLORD ground forces through the end of the Northern European Campaign.

The political and military leaders of the Grand Alliance were ultimately able to win a great victory despite their many differences. However, their ability to achieve a common good was less a reflection of their enthusiasm for compromise than it was of their acceptance of the practical constraints of decision making within the Alliance. They knew that Alliance solidarity was the key to victory. They also understood that at the same time each nation was obligated to pursue a sometimes divergent course that would promote their individual national objectives over those of their partners. This will almost certainly be the case in alliance and coalition warfare of the future. Working through such issues will require leaders who are aware that we will seldom have the luxury of making strategic and operational decisions that are entirely independent of political influences.

WORD COUNT= 8,011.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁴ Russell F. Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 255.
- ⁵ Omar N. Bradley, A Soldier's Story (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951), 407.
- ⁶ Stephen E. Ambrose, The Supreme Commander- The War Years of General Dwight D. Eisenhower (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 510.
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- ⁸ Cornelius Ryan, A Bridge Too Far (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 33.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ¹⁰ B.H. Lidell Hart, History of the Second World War (New York: Perigree, 1982), 566.
- ¹¹ Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants, 282.
- ¹² Ambrose, 508.
- ¹³ Ryan, 599.
- ¹⁴ B.H. Lidell Hart, Strategy (New York: Meridian, 1991), 322.
- ¹⁵ B.H. Lidell Hart, History of the Second World War, 122.
- ¹⁶ Samuel Morison, Strategy and Compromise (Toronto: Little, Brown & Co., 1958), 11.
- ¹⁷ Herbert Feis, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 444-45. See also: Vojtech Masney, Russia's Road to the Cold War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 97-110.
- ¹⁸ Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 331-32.
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- ²¹ *Ibid.*

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- ²³ Churchill, 456.
- ²⁴ Remi Nadeau, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt Divide Europe (New York: Praeger, 1990), 148.
- ²⁵ Churchill, 461.
- ²⁶ Weigley, The American Way of War, 332.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Albert C. Wedemeyer, Wedemeyer Reports! (New York: Holt, 1958), 73-74.
- ²⁹ W. Averell Harriman, Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-1946 (New York: Random House, 1975), 279.
- ³⁰ Warren F. Kimball, "FDR and Allied Grand Strategy, 1944-1945: The Juggler's Last Act." In World War Two in Europe- The Final Year, ed. Charles F. Brower (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), 27.
- ³¹ Irving, 23.
- ³² Richard Lamb, Churchill as War Leader (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1991), 304.
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- ³⁴ G.E. Patrick Murray, Eisenhower Versus Montgomery- The Continuing Debate (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1996), 33.
- ³⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1948), 306.
- ³⁶ Churchill, 456.
- ³⁷ Robert E. Urquhart, Arnhem (Los Angeles: Royal Publishing Co., 1995), 3.
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- ³⁹ Bernard Law Montgomery, The Memoirs of Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein (New York: World Publishing, 1958), 484.
- ⁴⁰ Ambrose, 323.
- ⁴¹ Richard Lamb, Montgomery In Europe 1943-1945; Success or Failure? (New York: Franklin Watts, 1984), 24.
- ⁴² Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants, 288.

- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Irving, 268.
- ⁴⁵ Bradley, 208.
- ⁴⁶ Irving, 41-42.
- ⁴⁷ Montgomery, The Memoirs of Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, 540.
- ⁴⁸ Murray, 58.
- ⁴⁹ Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants, 288.
- ⁵⁰ Irving, 234.
- ⁵¹ Bradley, 416.
- ⁵² Lamb, 214.
- ⁵³ Robert E. Urquhart, Arnhem (Los Angeles: Royal Publishing Co., 1995), 7.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 186-87.
- ⁵⁵ Montgomery, The Memoirs of Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, 143.
- ⁵⁶ Brian Horrocks, Corps Commander (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1997), 99.
- ⁵⁷ Urquhart, 4.
- ⁵⁸ Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants, 350.
- ⁵⁹ Ryan, 188.
- ⁶⁰ Horrocks, 104.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 117-18.
- ⁶² Ibid., 126.
- ⁶³ Ryan, 599.
- ⁶⁴ Lamb, Montgomery In Europe 1943-1945; Success or Failure?, 201.
- ⁶⁵ Hart, History of the Second World War, 565.
- ⁶⁶ Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, 153.

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