

4 November 1944

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R-11376

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Commanding General,
Command and General Staff School,
Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas

Subject: Narrative of MARKET Operation.

Following are extracts of a letter that I received from
General Brereton in which he outlines some of the difficulties
from the lessons learned and the recommendations he makes
regarding his Air Force operations in Europe.

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BY Qikew ON 5/20/2010

H. H. ARNOLD,
General, U. S. Arm,
Commanding General, Army Air Forces.

Incls:

Extracts from ltr to Gen. Arnold,
10/24/44, from Gen. Brereton.
Cy Narrative of Operation MARKET,
10/9/44.
Cy Directive to Gen. Brereton,
8/8/44, /s/ Col. E.C. Boehnke,
w/ Chart.

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15 NOV 1944

by authority of AC of S, G-2, WDGS

by

E. S. JOHNSTON
Colonel, Infantry
CUSTODIAN

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E. S. JOHNSTON
Colonel, Infantry

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The procedure for planning has been in general as follows: My planning staff prepares outline plans for operations, taking into account all ahead of the ground situation and to anticipate the requirements of the ground forces. In addition we receive from time to time requests from the ground forces, usually at the level of army groups, to consider various plans. If any outline plan is accepted by us and approved by Supreme Headquarters, we are invariably placed under the authority of one or the other of army groups for detailed planning at their level. This is faulty. Many of ground force commanders have indicated a desire for purely local and tactical employment of the airborne forces. In this respect their vision and education can be compared to that of the average senior ground commander concerning his conception of air support four years ago. Once placed at the level of lower echelons for planning, I am dominated by the scheme of maneuver of the ground force commander concerned. So far as 21 Army Group is concerned, I have been compelled to arbitrarily refuse to consider many of the projects submitted.

"MARKET operation in its original conception is a good illustration. The original plan as demanded by 21 Army Group, proposed a much further extension to the south of the drop of the 101st Airborne Division than I eventually agreed to. The 21 Army Group demanded originally that at least two drops should be made to the south of Eindhoven. The drop furthest south would have been within artillery range of our own forces along the general line of the Meuse-Escout Canal. I refused this and submitted a modification which would concentrate the 101st Airborne Division in the area generally from Veghel northeast to Grave with the 82nd Airborne Division dropping in its approved areas. I felt that the advance of the armor to Eindhoven was a simple task. As a matter of fact, I was assured by General Dempsey that they would be in Eindhoven about six hours after H-hour. The airborne drop could not be expected to do it any sooner. Concentration of the two divisions in the general area indicated would result in establishing contact with each other in a minimum of time and would furnish a strong combat force to assure the crossings of the Maas and Waal at Grave and Nijmegen and would establish in that general area a force of two divisions closely coordinated and capable of strong offensive action against any objective. I was not so optimistic as 21 Army Group concerning the enemy combat efficiency in the northern part of the salient, although I agreed that the advance to the general line Eindhoven-Helmond should be able to over-run any resistance encountered without delay.

"I had in my mind a conception of this operation which the results have shown are sound in principle. It is simply an application of the Principles of War, Economy of Force and Mass. A force adequate to accomplish its mission must be assigned the most vital mission and sufficient assistance must be given it to keep the enemy off its back while performing its task. An outstanding example occurred on the north of the Arnhem salient. We allotted the British 1st Div., Airborne, and Polish Brigade the task of securing the bridge and holding the bridgehead at Arnhem. We recognized the difficulty of the position and gave it a division and a half. However, the force was not adequate to secure a bridge and bridgehead too. As a result there was not enough force to hold off the attacking Germans on the perimeter and keep the bridge as well. Due to the weather and complete failure of communications which could report a change in position due to enemy action, the glider lift of the Polish Brigade and resupply were dropped in the German lines. At that we held the bridge for 72 hours, 24 hours after the time the 30th Corps of the 2nd Army had promised to establish contact.

"The necessity for establishing air fields or landing strips is clearly

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recognized and has been made an initial objective of all operations planned since I assumed command. In operation MARKET there existed three possible air fields in the zone of action of the airborne army. Two were at Eindhoven and one at Grave. Of the two at Eindhoven, one had been seriously damaged by continued air action that it was felt less effort would be required to build a new landing strip. It was assumed from information available that the remaining air field in the Eindhoven area had been prepared for demolition. The situation at Grave was not known. The plan called for the seizing of these air fields and the preparation of landing strips after the first two drops.

"As a matter of fact, the narrative account does not tell the whole story. On D plus 2, I arrived at Eindhoven after dark and about 6 hours before elements of the Coldstream Battalion of the Guards Armored established contact with 101st Airborne Division. We were bombed and counterattacked during the night and the following morning the Engineer Battalion, which had come in with the advanced armored and gone to the air field, were heavily attacked shortly after daybreak and forced to withdraw into Eindhoven. In Eindhoven itself, we had one squadron of the Guards Armored and 506th Regimental Combat Team from 101st Division, commanded by Colonel Sink. We were cut off during the major part of the day by enemy attacks from northwest, east and southeast, and had a very brisk little fight. It was not until 24 hours later that the Engineers could resume work on the field and even then it was under constant artillery and sniper fire. Weather intervened before the 878th Aviation Engineers, Airborne, could be dropped, and in the meantime, the landing field at Grave was secured intact. There was landed on this field immediately an Artillery Regiment to support the 101st Airborne Division and a considerable amount of supplies. However, the enemy air reaction was such that the 2nd Tactical Air Force preempted it as a forward fighter field immediately, even though it was under constant fire. In the face of increased enemy air resistance, any strips constructed must be given to the supporting air force as a first priority.

No. 20
"The situation on the Grave air field was an example: The resupply and reinforcing operations were of necessity mounted from England. Lack of adequate communication did not allow me to have an up-to-date picture of the air situation. The weather was such that while our fighters were locked to the ground by fog on the Antwerp, Brussels, and Louvain fields, the German fields and the Arnhem and Nijmegen area were open as was the northern supply route over the Dutch Islands. Consequently we were attempting supply in the face of enemy air opposition which could not be countered by our own air forces. It was the Grace of God and our own daring that permitted this to be done throughout the day in question with a minimum of losses. The air commander in the combat area must be the sole authority to direct or withhold additional drops and resupply, such decisions being based on his knowledge of the air situation. I realized this but it would have served no useful purpose for me to establish my command post at Coningham's Headquarters, because communications between the Continent and England were unreliable and intermittent.

No. 21
"This brings up another vital question affecting the success of such operations. Communications must be positive and well established between the bases from which operations are launched. On the day of maximum resupply losses, had the air commander on the spot been able to transmit his situation (due to weather he could not cover the operation) then the lift could have been delayed to a more favorable time. As it was, weather was flyable at the bases, deteriorated sharply over the channel and was foggy in the tactical area. While approximately one-third of the lift was delivered properly during this day, 23 gliders were ditched

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in the channel and at least 40 more landed at various air fields in Belgium, and we believe some in enemy territory.

"I would like to present a few of the conditions which must be fulfilled to increase the chances of success of a large scale airborne operation. The first has been mentioned above, "Don't send a boy to do a man's job," "concentrate the maximum force on the principal objective." This sounds trite, but the ground force planners persist in presenting a multitude of objectives. An all-out effort with everything that can fly must take advantage of the initial surprise by dropping the maximum of supplies and reinforcements before the enemy can muster his air, flak, and ground defenses. All troop drops and landings from the outset must be in combat teams, no matter how small the combat team is.

By this I mean that you cannot count on landing your parachutists today hoping to land their heavy weapons and transport in a landing lift today or tomorrow. Every serial launched must be reasonably capable of sustaining combat, even if a combat team is no larger than a company. This latter is important because it is going to have a bearing on the organization of the Troop Carrier Groups and the organization of the airborne troops. Studies on this are under way but with the scanty staff I have at my disposal, it will take a long time.

"Positive communications are absolutely essential between the airborne troops on the ground, the air commander, and the bases from which the operation is being launched. Two examples in MARKET operation emphasized this: When the First Airborne Division was forced away from the north end of the Arnhem bridgehead and took up its perimeter defenses, it lost two dropping zones due to enemy action. One complete resupply lift needed by this force was dropped in enemy hands. In spite of the fact that the First Airborne Division was out-numbered four or five to one, had the Task Force Commander, General Browning, received timely information, as to the direction of the withdrawal and their location, supporting forces from south of the river could, in all probability, have been so maneuvered as to give the assistance needed to allow them to have held their position or at least to have saved a much larger portion of the division.

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ORIGINAL MARKET GARDEN

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"Throughout a large part of this campaign a considerable demand has been made on the Troop Carrier units for air supply. This is a proper commitment for the Troop Carriers in periods of emergency. For example; we have lifted ammunition, surgical supplies, fuel and lubricants and winter clothing continually when not actually engaged in airborne operations. There will undoubtedly arise in the future the necessity for supplying the highly mobile armed forces with the means to continue their penetration and maintain their momentum. The great danger is that relying to a maximum extent on this aid, when it stops the logistic arrangements of the ground forces may be found inadequate. The ground force commander in this situation when presented with the probability of an airborne operation will frequently prefer to continue his air supply, and indeed may be forced to do so, due to improper logistic planning.

"George Patton has been exceedingly audible in his appreciation of the air supply assistance given him, and there is a definite and determined reluctance on the part of Bradley not to favor airborne operations in front of his armies at the expense of air supply. He has recently stated that with the exception of the NAPLES 2 operation, which seems to be the most probable project to be undertaken next, that he can see no further use for an airborne operation between the Rhine and Berlin. However, he feels that the cargo lift available to him by air would be a great help.

"Although the technique shown in the MARKET operation does not bear this out, I am convinced that continued cargo carrier will render the Troop Carrier Command increasingly unfit for an efficient airborne operation. The technique and procedure for cargo carrying not only do not maintain a standard of proficiency for troop carrier combat requirements, but in many respects definitely lower efficiency. If, as a result of the necessity of continuing the troop carrier forces on resupply missions, a later operation deep into Germany is foreseen, both troop carrier units and airborne troops will have deteriorated seriously in their combat efficiency due to lack of training together.

"One last blast before I close, providing you have read this far. The development of the airborne army to its maximum capabilities will require drastic changes in equipment. More attention should be given to developing the potentialities of parachute drops for heavy equipment and the development of an aircraft suitable to this type operation. On the resupply operations only about two-thirds of the cargo capacity of the C-47 can be utilized due to the means which must be employed to drop. The British have successfully dropped the six-pounder gun and jeep from a special rack under the Halifax. This is an example of what we should aim for among other things. The glider, while valuable, has a limited application. If made large enough to carry the bulkiest of the equipment it requires a heavier tug than the C-47. It is extremely uneconomical because it frequently cannot be used more than once in one operation. The same applies to the pilots and crews who must operate them. In turbulent air and bad weather their usefulness is very limited. I have convened a board which is now studying these questions and I hope that some of our ideas will be brought back by Giffin, Carlson and the other officers.

"The Troop Carrier Group organization must be more closely tied in to the organization of the airborne troops in order that tactical homogenous lift may be accomplished by complete tactical units. For example, my Corps Commander, Matthew Ridgway, favors a group strength of 90 aircraft in order that he can

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dispose of tactical lift in two serials in each group of 45 aircraft each. Obviously there are advantages and disadvantages to be considered. I do not believe that the present troop strength of the Troop Carrier Groups need be changed if the initial equipment is established for each group of 90 aircraft of the C-47 type. At present we are attempting to maintain 111 in each group. However, recent losses, and a failure to receive adequate replacements, bring my present strength down to 85. This will, I hope, be approximately 91 on November 21. (This does not include 50 pathfinder aircraft.) Other types requiring more maintenance will require study."

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C O P Y

HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES FORCES
EUROPEAN THEATER
APO 887

Office of the Theater Historian

17 July 1945

Chief of Staff
82d Airborne Division
APO 469, U. S. Army

Dear Sir,

A complete history of Operation Market is now being prepared in the Theater Historical Section. We have available to us your After Action Report, all of your Journals and Supporting Documents, and Major O'Sullivan's interviews and narrative. However, questions are constantly arising which are not to be explained by the documents and it will be necessary to bring them directly to you. If it meets with your approval, I would prefer to send them four and six at a time every few weeks. A simple penciled answer on the back of the letter would certainly be sufficient for my purposes. If this procedure is not satisfactory to you, would you suggest a satisfactory channel? Here are some initial needs.

- (1) I need a definition of the initial objectives of the 82d Abn Division. Was the capture of Nijmegen and the highway bridge considered a part of the initial objective?
- (2) What person, Staff or Headquarters made the decision to apportion the weight of the 82d Abn Division to the high ground rather than the bridge at Nijmegen? Why was more emphasis initially placed on the bridges across the Maas River and the Maas-Waal Canal rather than the bridge at Nijmegen? Who made the decision to send the 1st Bn, 508th, into Nijmegen on the evening of 17 September? Was Co "G", 508th Regt, ordered to move on the bridge or merely to set up road-blocks outside the town?
- (3) I need a copy of the T-O and T/E under which your division operated last September, a roster of the key personnel of the Division through battalion commanders and their staffs, and the code names of the 376th, 320th, and 456th Field Artillery Battalions, the 82d Signal Company, the 82d Recon Platoon, the numbers of your Ordnance and Quartermaster Companies, and the code name of the Quartermaster company.

Our staff artists are completing four illustrations of your sector near Nijmegen and I shall be glad to send you photo copies of these if you desire them. Please let me know.

Respectfully,

JOHN G. WESTOVER,
Captain, F.A.

JGW/drc

C O P Y

25 July 1945

Dear Captain Westover:

Your letter of July 17th to my Chief of Staff, regarding operation MARKET, has come to my attention. First, let me say that I am very glad to find the Theater Historian's Office taking a close interest in this operation. Those of us who participated in the operation consider it a model airborne show. I have had the good fortune to be present at the planning of most of our operations in the ETO and to have participated in four of them. 82d Airborne Division's participation in MARKET was well conceived and very well planned considering this short time available (6 days). The mechanics of its execution were almost perfect. The entire operation was conducted on an extremely marginal scale. I do not believe that one battalion less could have done the job, and if the Germans had committed one good battalion more at any point of our perimeter we would have been in serious difficulty. We, therefore, appreciate your interest in the operation and any of my Staff will be only too glad to try to answer any questions you may have at any time.

For the objective of the 82d Airborne Division, I advise you to check the Operations Order of the British Airborne Corps. I quote the 82d's mission:

"The 82d Airborne Division will seize and hold the bridges at Nijmegen and Grave (with sufficient bridgeheads to pass formations of the Second Army through). The capture and retention of the high ground between Nijmegen and Groesbeek is imperative in order to accomplish the division's task."

This mission, of course, was discussed at great length with the British Airborne Corps Commander. About two weeks prior to receipt of the mission by the 82d Airborne Division, it had been planned that General Urquhart's British Airborne Division would do the job. They had, therefore, devoted considerable study to intelligence reports and to the terrain. The Nijmegen-Groesbeek high ground was the only high ground in all of the Netherlands. With it in German hands, physical possession of the bridges would be absolutely worthless, since it completely dominated the bridges and all the terrain around it. The understanding was therefore reached with British Corps Headquarters that it would be absolutely imperative that this high ground be seized. It is a basic concept of airborne tactics that an airhead must first be established from which further tactical operations can be conducted. This high ground provided ideally such an area. I personally considered it the key to the accomplishment of the entire mission and thought that even if we were driven off the low ground around the bridges, if the high ground could be held, ultimately the Second Army could accomplish its mission.

The Grave bridge was considered initially the most important and one regiment was committed to it. There was where the first link-up would be made, and of course was made on the third day after our landing. The bridges over the Maas-Waal Canal were to me an obvious necessity, based on my experience in the past, particularly the bridges over the Merderet River in Normandy, when I lost a major part of the 507th Parachute Infantry because of my lack of foresight in seizing bridges that would enable us to maintain some tactical integrity within the division. It was obvious that we had to get bridges across the Maas-Waal Canal. Our G-2 estimate of the situation indicated that the major German reaction would be from the Reichswald, up the main highway via Mook and Molenhoek to Nijmegen. If the Germans succeeded in driving in here

we were in serious trouble. Seizure and retention of the bridges in strength on the Canal would add to the defensive strength opposing such an enemy effort.

The importance of the Nijmegen bridge was, I believe, appreciated by all concerned from the outset. Due to the tremendous sector that the division was to hold, it was first considered best to not attack the Nijmegen bridge until all other objectives had been captured and the division well reorganized and well in hand. About 48 hours prior to take-off, when the entire plan appeared to be shaping up well, I personally directed Colonel Lindquist, Commanding the 508th Parachute Infantry, to commit his first battalion against the Nijmegen bridge without delay after landing, but to keep a very close watch on it in the event he needed it to protect himself against the Reichswald. The glider landing zone was between Wyler and Groesbeek and the Reichswald. Here all of the division artillery was due to land on D-plus-1. It had to be secured. Considerable latitude was therefore given to the Commanding Officer of the 508th Parachute Infantry on how far to commit himself in the direction of the Nijmegen bridge, and he appreciated the fact that the bridge was to be seized immediately if this was practicable. So I personally directed him to commit his first battalion to this task. He was cautioned to send the battalion via the flat ground east of the city.

Shortly, after landing, through an agent in the Dutch underground, he was led to believe that the battalion could be successfully led through back streets of the city to close proximity with the bridge, where it could be seized. An effort was made to do this and, as a result, the battalion became very heavily engaged at close quarters in city streets under very difficult circumstances. At daylight I talked to the Battalion Commander in the city and directed that he withdraw from close proximity to the bridge and reorganize. In the meantime, in order to take advantage of what we believed was a tactical opportunity, "G" Company was directed to move by the right, advancing from the high ground along the road towards the bridge, and grasp the southern end of it. From intelligence reports we had just received, this appeared practicable, and although it would normally be well beyond the capabilities of a company, the Battalion Commander of the third battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, Colonel Mendez, was an especially fine combat leader and "G" Company was an unusually good parachute company. If the coup could succeed they could do the job. Of course, as the situation developed, by mid-morning on D-plus-1, the German reaction from the Reichswald was so violent, intense and strong that the forces committed towards Nijmegen had to be withdrawn. The 508 made an attack toward the Reichswald and cleared the landing zone. They just succeeded in doing this in time for the gliders to land. This particular maneuver, I believe, has few parallels and could have been executed only by extremely capable troops and unusual combat leadership on the part of the regimental, battalion and company commanders involved. The regiment was being attacked by superior numbers from several directions, but it managed to disengage in Nijmegen and attack and drive the Germans from the landing zone area. At the same time, it was attacking and seizing the northern bridge over the Meas-Waal Canal, as well as providing contact with other units and security of its entire perimeter, which as now approximately eight miles long. The

answer to your questions, specifically, therefore is the capture of Nijmegen and the highway bridges was considered part of the initial objective, if after arrival on the ground, I considered it possible. This much latitude was given me by British Airborne Corps. Whether or not it was possible I could only determine after attempting it. This was done, and as the operation has shown, it took the combined efforts of the 504th Parachute Infantry, one battalion of the 505th Parachute Infantry, a considerable number of the Dutch resistance, which I had armed, and two battalions of the British Guards Armored Division.

Your next question - What person, Staff or Headquarters made the decision to apportion the weight of the 82d Airborne Division to the high ground rather than the bridge at Nijmegen? This decision was made by myself and approved by my Corps Commander.

And the next question - Why was more emphasis initially placed on the bridges across the Maas River and the Maas-Waal Canal rather than the bridge at Nijmegen? If the bridge at Nijmegen were seized and held, and the opposition were tough enough, it would have been a division operation in itself, such as developed at Arnhem. If the high ground were not held, it would have to have been captured before the British could succeed in establishing contact in force with the Nijmegen bridge forces. Since the high ground had to be captured, the bridges over the Maas River and the Maas-Waal Canal had to be captured so that the British could gain contact with our troops on the high ground. I do not believe there is any doubt in my mind or in the mind of any of the participants of this engagement as to the relative importance of our objectives. I want to again emphasize the necessity of seizing and holding dominating terrain in close proximity to the bridges. Physical possession of the bridges themselves is nothing if the terrain dominating these bridges is completely held by the enemy. In fact, he could have destroyed the bridges by shellfire or at least denied their use constantly if we permitted him to hold the high ground. This concept becomes elemental and very clear on the ground, although I suppose from this distance and from the map it needs some explaining.

Your next question - Who made the decision to send the first battalion of the 508th into Nijmegen on the evening of September 17? I made the decision. Sufficient latitude was given the Commanding Officer of the 508th that he could have held back this battalion if it appeared necessary in order to maintain the integrity of his own portion of the division area. Was Company "G" ordered to move on the bridge, or merely set up roadblocks outside of town? It was ordered to move on the bridge. It was then ordered to set up roadblocks on the high ground dominating the southern and eastern edges of the city and the flat land to the east of the city.

The answers to paragraph 3 of your letter are attached as inclosures 1, 2 and 3.

I will be very pleased to receive any illustrations you prepare of the Nijmegen sector. As I said, to most of us who participated in a number of

airborne operations, this has been a model of planning and execution, and we are appreciative of any interest shown in it by the Theater Historian's Office or higher headquarters.

Sincerely,

JAMES M. GAVIN,
Major General, U. S. Army
Commanding

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Capt. John G. Westover,
Office of the Theater Historian,
Hq, USFET,
APO 887, U. S. Army

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