

Arnhem

1 Airborne Division

by Major Ernest Watkins, ...

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[Ed. Note: For ease of reading the various parts were defined as chapters. Illustrations were not included.]



Foreword

The British take great pride in heroic failure. Thus Arnhem is one of those episodes in twentieth-century British military history that takes its place alongside Gallipoli in 1915, the Somme on 1 July 1916 and Dunkirk in 1940. Although Churchill warned in the immediate aftermath of Dunkirk that ‘wars are not won by evacuation’, Dunkirk proved to be vital both psychologically and materially to the British war effort.

Arnhem, four years later, formed part of an operation code-named Market Garden, an ambitious two-part action in which three airborne divisions were to seize key bridges in the Netherlands, cross the Rhine, advance into Germany before the winter of 1944 and bring the war to an early conclusion. Market Garden was the brainchild of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, the victor of the second battle of El Alamein, and it required a greater level of risk-taking than one would

associate with the normally careful and cautious Montgomery. Indeed, it was so completely out of character for him that Omar Bradley, his American colleague, observed in his memoirs published in 1961, 'Had the pious teetotaling Montgomery wobbled into SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces] with a hangover I could scarcely have been more astonished than I was with the daring adventure he proposed.'

In *War and Shadow* (2002) General Sir David Fraser, Vice-Chief of the General Staff in the early 1970s, contended that Market Garden was 'a thoroughly bad idea, badly planned and only tragically redeemed by the outstanding courage of those who executed it.'

The prolific military historian Max Hastings in *All Hell Let Loose: The World at War 1939-1945* (2011) claims that 'even had Montgomery secured a Rhine bridge, it is implausible that he could have exploited this to break through into Germany.'

However, the late Richard Holmes, Professor of Military and Security Studies at Cranfield University and the Royal Military College of Science, in his *Battlefields of the Second World War* (2001), offers a radically different and more upbeat assessment:

While it was not done as well as it could have been, most involved judged it better to have tried and failed than to let the opportunity slip away. [Major-General] Roy Urquhart [the commanding officer of the 1st Airborne Division] spoke for most when he concluded his after battle report with words: 'There is no doubt that all would willingly undertake another operation under similar conditions in the future. We have no regrets.'

In his memoirs Montgomery stated, 'If the operation had been properly backed ... it would have succeeded in spite of my mistakes.' Arnhem was his only military defeat.

The courage and endurance of the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem ranks high in the annals of the British army and constitutes one of the greatest feats of arms in the Second World War. Five British servicemen, four members of the Airborne force and one from the RAF, were awarded the Victoria Cross for their gallantry at Arnhem.

Arnhem Lift, the first book to be published about Arnhem, appeared as early as 1945. It was written by Louis Hagen, a Jewish refugee from Germany and a British army glider pilot who was present at the battle. However, it was the publication in 1974 of Cornelius Ryan's book *A Bridge Too Far* that brought the Battle of Arnhem to the attention of a world-wide audience, followed by Richard Attenborough's film of the same name three years later.

Gordon Lucy

WAR

The Landing and the Bridge

ABCA 'War' Pamphlet No. 83, December 9th, 1944

A Tribute to the Men

THIS tribute from the people of Holland by the Dutch writer Johan Fabricius was broadcast in the B.B.C. Home Service on 27 Sep., 44. It is printed by permission of the Corporation.

“For ten cruel days and nights the thoughts of the whole of Holland have been with your men west of Arnhem. And it was not only because of the military advantages a quick crossing of the Rhine would involve for all of us—no, it was because of the men themselves, who were fighting in the heart of our little country for an ideal which is ours as well. We know what they must have been going through; we know what we owe them; we think of them as if they were our own boys.

“This is what I want to say to you. Your men are no foreigners to us. Maybe they never saw Holland before they floated down over it on a sunny afternoon to liberate her people and the world; maybe they do not speak our language, not one of them, and find it difficult even to pronounce the names of the places where they are fighting, suffering, dying. But they are no foreigners in Holland, and we hope they realise that.

“Some of these brave young men will stay behind in our country for ever. They shall not rest on cold foreign soil. The soil of Holland, which, in the course of our long and glorious history, received so many heroes for their eternal sleep, will proudly guard your dead as if they were the deeply mourned sons of our own people. The word ‘heroes’ has been heard so often during this long and grim war that it is in danger of growing trite. But here it takes tangible shape, before the eyes of our people, who stand in awe and bare their heads.

“That is what I wanted you, in this country, to know.”

Chapter 1

Airborne Div at Arnhem

This is the operation of which the waiting period was described by Major Cotterell in issue No. 79. Major Cotterell was with the troops at Arnhem Bridge, was captured and subsequently severely wounded in an escape attempt.⁽¹⁻¹⁾

Airborne Attack

By Major ERNEST WATKINS, R.A.

WAR Staff Writer

This account is not an official history of Arnhem. There are many gaps in the story, some of which can only be filled when men who are now prisoners return. It is a general account of the nature of the operation and of its course, based on narratives from some of the men who came back.

THE Siegfried Line is not an impassable barrier, but it is a considerable obstacle. Its major section extends from the Swiss frontier, just north of Basle, along the German frontier northwards as far as a point in the neighbourhood of Cleves, a few miles east of Arnhem.

The Rhine is also a considerable obstacle. This, too, runs from Basle northwards to the German-Dutch frontier just east of Arnhem, from where it flows west into the sea. Beyond it to the north there is no comparable barrier on the road into the Ruhr and Central Germany itself.

Arnhem is, therefore, a point of some importance.

Carrying the Road From Eindhoven

From the Escaut Canal, over which we had by 16 Sept. a small bridgehead, to Arnhem is 60 miles. There are two stepping stones on the way, Eindhoven (15 miles on), and Nijmegen (50 miles on). Eindhoven is a road centre, Nijmegen more important, in that it possesses a fine modern bridge over the Maas as it also flows west to the sea. Arnhem itself has two road bridges over its river, one, an old pontoon bridge, with a movable centre to allow the barge traffic of the Rhine to pass, the other a new and modern bridge of steel carrying northwards the road from Eindhoven and Nijmegen.

If these bridges could be taken intact and held, a tank could drive from Brussels into Germany without needing the assistance of a bridging coy RE. The Siegfried Line would be turned at its northern end and the second German defensive position in N.W. Europe, the last outside Germany itself, would be destroyed.

It was decided to attempt such an operation, and to do it by the use of three airborne divs. One would be dropped at Eindhoven, one at Nijmegen (both to be U.S. Army divs), and the third (1 Airborne Div, British) at Arnhem. At the same time 2 Army would drive out from their Escaut Canal bridgehead to consolidate and exploit the success achieved from the air. It would join up the three blobs ahead of it like a raindrop on a window pane links three smaller drops lower down into a continuous stream.

In Normandy the Distance Had Been Less

Sixty miles beyond a forward position is a long way to drop an airborne div. It has only been exceeded once in this war, in the German capture of Crete in 1941. But Crete was rather a special case. The Germans knew that the troops opposing

them in Crete were ill-equipped and still somewhat disorganised after the evacuation from Greece and, what was more important, having air superiority, that there was no possibility of the British receiving any substantial reinforcements. Even so, Crete was touch and go for the Germans for some days, partly because their seaborne reinforcements were intercepted by the British Navy and never came.

In Tunisia and Sicily, under different conditions, the distance ahead of ground support had not been so far. In Normandy the distance had been much less.

The trouble with airborne troops is that they can take with them, at their present state of development, nothing heavier than a 75 mm. field gun and a 17-pdr⁽¹⁻²⁾ ATk⁽¹⁻³⁾ gun and very limited supplies and reserves. They can land a very light type of tank from gliders, but that would be useless against any heavy armour, so useless that the weight could be better employed in carrying other men, equipment and supplies.

Arnhem is a Quiet Dutch Town

To push men out as far as Arnhem was something of an experiment, but, since success would place 2 Army in the Ruhr within a fortnight, the saving of time, and so of casualties in the Army as a whole, was a prize worth risking a great deal to win.

Arnhem itself is a quiet Dutch town lying on the northern bank of the river, there about 150 yards wide, with a fast flowing current. Normally, it has a population of some 94,000. The town itself lies on the flat lands alongside the river, but immediately to the north the ground rises sharply. Nowhere is the rise more than 250 feet, but the contours are steep and this ridge of high land along the northern bank of the Rhine is broken by little valleys and quite different from the flat, empty fields of southern and western Holland.

Their Objective was the Road Bridge

Arnhem is something of a spa. Both to the east and the west are suburbs of solid, detached houses and hotels, standing in their own grounds, the countryside around them well wooded. Out to the west it resembles parts of the lowlands of Scotland, with plantations of firs and open pastures and folds of rough ground covered with a scrub not unlike broom. On the 16 Sept. it was a quiet and peaceful town, a little excited at the approach of the liberation of Holland in the south but with no presentiment of the events of the following week.

The main road from Utrecht comes in from the west. A little farther north, running south-east, is the road from Ede. Roughly parallel to this road is the main railway line. As the line enters Arnhem it is joined by a branch line from the south, on an embankment and crossing the Rhine on a high steel bridge. It is with this area (see map) that we are concerned, for 1 Airborne Div all landed to the west of the town.

This Was the Area Held

Their objective was the road bridge carrying the main road from the south across the river into the centre of the town. This bridge was of steel girders, flat, and protected by strongpoints at either end and with an 88 mm. posted to the south with a field of fire straight down the bridge.

The roadway on the bridge was above the level of the river bank and was brought down into the town by a ramp ending, at its northern end, in a small oblong open space. Before reaching this, two arches carried the bridge road over two subsidiary roads running at right angles to it. Grouped around this ramp and the open space were various houses and buildings. This was the area held by that portion of the Div that did get into Arnhem.

1 Airborne Div consisted of two Parachute Bdes,⁽¹⁻⁴⁾ each with a Bde HQ,⁽¹⁻⁵⁾ three Bns⁽¹⁻⁶⁾ of the Parachute Regt, a Parachute Sqn RE⁽¹⁻⁷⁾ and a Parachute Fd⁽¹⁻⁸⁾ Amb,⁽¹⁻⁹⁾ and one Airlanding Bde with Bde HQ, a Bn from each of the KSOB,⁽¹⁻¹⁰⁾ Border Regt, and South Staffordshire Regt, a Fd Coy⁽¹⁻¹¹⁾ RE and Fd Amb. In addition, there were div troops, including an Independent Parachute Coy, a Reconnaissance Sqn, two ATk Btys⁽¹⁻¹²⁾ RA,⁽¹⁻¹³⁾ a Lt⁽¹⁻¹⁴⁾ Regt RA, Divisional Signals, Pro⁽¹⁻¹⁵⁾ Coy and elements of RASC⁽¹⁻¹⁶⁾ Supply Coy, REME⁽¹⁻¹⁷⁾ Workshops, RAOC⁽¹⁻¹⁸⁾ and Field Security Police. Finally, the pilots of the gliders of the Airlanding Bde constituted a Bn of the Glider Pilot Regt.

A Polish Para Bde Gp⁽¹⁻¹⁹⁾ was under command of the Div for the operation.

The Plan was Simple

For the first lift there were two DZs⁽¹⁻²⁰⁾ (marked 1a and 1b on the map). The KOSBs were to protect the more northerly, the Borders the more southerly. The S. Staffs, of which there were only two coys landed the first day, were to be in reserve. "A" Para Bde was to land on the first day, "B" Para Bde to come in on D+1. The Polish Bde was to follow on the third day and its gliderborne element was to land on the third DZ, nearer into Arnhem (2 on the map).

Arnhem: The Plan for D-Day

The plan was simple. The Recce Sqn was to attempt the immediate seizure of the bridge, relying on surprise and speed, using their jeeps to drive as fast as possible into the town. "A" Para Bde was to move off as soon as it could, to add weight to the drive. Of the three Bns in the Bde, "Y" Bn was to follow the most southerly road along the river bank, turning south from the main Utrecht road at Heelsum. "Z" Bn was to push into the town down the Utrecht road, approaching the bridge from the north. "X" Bn was in reserve and it was planned that it would move across country to the road leading north-west out of Arnhem and follow that in, to seize the high ground immediately to the north of Arnhem itself.

“B” Para Bde, and the Airlanding Bde as soon as it was released from holding the DZs, were to move into the town and form a defensive perimeter around the eastern and western sides. Finally; the Polish Para Bde was to hold the southern end of the bridge, across the river. It was hoped that 2 Army, arriving from the south in the course of two or three days, would find the Div in that position.

That was the plan and D-day for the operation was Sunday, 17 Sep. 1944.

Chapter 2

D-Day Was Sunday

The crossing and landing were remarkably successful. There was little wind, some sunshine, and only spasmodic enemy interference. There were only a very few casualties as they came in.

The first troops to land were the Ind.⁽²⁻²¹⁾ Para Coy. Their task was to drop 20 mins or so before the rest of the Div, put out ground indicators on the DZs for the rest of the Div and clean up any immediate opposition, all of which requires very accurate navigation by the RAF air crews and very fast work by the coy after they have dropped.

They were quite successful and the glider pilots who brought the gliders in later said they had no difficulty in knowing where to come down.

The Borders in Renkum

Once landed the various tps spread out on their tasks. The KOSBs went north-west, the Borders south-west. The Coy of the Borders in Renkum had an initial success. They reached the village after dark, unobserved by the German troops in occupation, and first thing the following morning were able to clean up the whole garrison by surprise.

And the Recce Sqn set out for the bridge in their jeeps.

Here is B.M.⁽²⁻²²⁾ “A” Para Bde on the first two or three hours:

“I landed at 1410 hrs, made my way to the R.V.⁽²⁻²³⁾ for Bde HQ, and sat there alone for some five minutes. I began to feel slightly apprehensive lest any German patrol investigating the activity in the DZ should cause unpleasantness but I decided that the Bn in the Heelsum area would deter them.

“There were some Dutch civilians around. In fact, quite a lot had come out post-haste to welcome us. I asked if any of them spoke English and two of them did. They offered to act as guides into Arnhem.

“By 1445 hrs all the Bns had come up on the W/T⁽²⁻²⁴⁾ and “Y” Bn had sent over a L.O.⁽²⁻²⁵⁾ to report that everything was all right with them. Bde HQ were coming in and by 1510 hrs I had sent an offr⁽²⁻²⁶⁾ over to chase the gliderborne tpt⁽²⁻²⁷⁾ up. It was important as the only W/T sets we carried were the No. 8 sets. It came over and we set up the 22 sets to maintain a proper Bde net.

Already Acquired 30 P.O.Ws

“The Bns moved off about 1500 hrs. Bde HQ group did not start until about 1545 hrs. I was to go fwd(2-28) with the Bn taking the most southerly of the three routes, that close to the river bank.

“Before the Bde HQ group moved off it had already acquired 30 P.O.Ws and we took them with us.”

Various small parties of Germans were met and eliminated. A sweep was arranged to clean up the German officers believed to be in the Wolfhezen area. An ambush was posted and the quarry was then flushed. They fled in cars and the cars drove straight into the ambush as planned. Among those killed was a German general.

Held Up on the Utrecht Road

It was not until about 1700 hrs. that the first of serious opposition began to show itself. “Z” Bn was held up on the Utrecht road and could not get through. They were compelled to leaguer in that area for the night. The only troops that did get to the bridge were, first, the remnants of the Recce Sqn, who had lost a high proportion in their ride through the town, two coys of “Y” Bn, with some Sappers, Bde HQ group and some miscellaneous details. The rest of that Bn were held up east of Oosterbeek.

For most of the Div troops it was a reasonably quiet night. Those to the west met only patrol activity and in the east, on the outskirts of Arnhem, while patrols were more frequent, no strong attack developed.

For the individuals that did not necessarily mean a night’s rest. Here is the first day of a Pte. R.A.S.C. the job of whose coy it was to establish defended Supply Points and to collect and distribute fresh supply drops.

We Established Our First Supply Point

“We established our first supply point in a large farm near our DZ. We started to collect the supply containers from all over the DZ. The farm people lent us horses and carts to help and some of them went out to collect and bring in the containers themselves.

“We worked at this for two or three hours, but at about 1830 hrs the sergeant detailed four men, including me, to take a load of amn forward to Bde HQ. We were to use a large German truck which we had already captured. The only trouble was that the position of Bde HQ was then rather indefinite, and we were unable to find it before dark. At about 2300 hrs we found ourselves on the outskirts of Arnhem, I should think on the most southernly road.

“At a railway bridge three men stopped us, the centre one holding a torch. The sergeant got out and the three men came up to the truck. As they did so I saw that they were wearing German helmets.

They Shot the Sergeant

“At the same time they recognised us. They shot the sergeant and we shot back, but did not stay to see the effect. There were a number of Germans on the railway embankment and they fired at us but we got away.

“From there we found our way on to the main Utrecht road and turned west. After going about a mile and a half we were fired at again, this time from both sides of the road. One of the three of us left was again hit and fell off the truck. I had an idea that they might be our own chaps but it was no place to stop, as we were in a German truck, with SS markings on it. So finally we pulled up off the road and turned in for the night.”

The Position at Midnight

The position at midnight was roughly as follows: Most of the Div was where it had been planned it should be. Airlanding Bde held the DZs and the remaining tps of the Div (save the other Bde) were concentrated in the Wolfhezen area. The MDS⁽²⁻²⁹⁾ had been established in Elizabeth Hospital Arnhem. But the way into Arnhem was not open. On the contrary, both main roads in from the west were strongly defended.

“X” Bn was held up in the wooded country north-east of DZ2. “Z” Bn was held up at Bilderberg and the Germans had restored their line across the southerly road in the area of Oosterbeek Station after two coys of “Y” Bn had broken through.

After Sunday night no unit was able to get into Arnhem as far as the bridge and in consequence there were two separate battles, that of the men already at the bridge and that of the rest of the Div.

It will be more convenient to tell the story of what happened at the bridge first.

Chapter 3

The First Day at the Bridge

The Railway Bridge Went Up

Bde. Maj. “A” Para Bde:

“About a mile beyond Heelsum crossroads the advance elements reported back that they were held up by slight enemy resistance at Oosterbeek Station. At the

same time I saw the G.O.C.(3-30) and C.R.A.(3-31) whizz past in their jeeps, going forward. While we waited a message came through from "Z" Bn that they, too, had met with some resistance but were continuing their advance.

"For the next hour and a half we moved in fits and starts. In my part of the column, somewhere about the middle, it seemed very like an exercise. We would move about 200 yds in a sort of crocodile, then be held up and go to ground in the ditches, while the junior offrs ran to and fro, organising flank protection and so on. We could hear firing in the distance to the north and north-west.

"The civilians were all very pleased to see us and brought out milk, water and fruit. Some I heard even got beer but we were unlucky.

"But about 1830 hrs we began to move without interruptions. We reached Oosterbeek and were on the road overlooking the river when there was a considerable explosion and the railway bridge over the river went up. I learnt afterwards that some of our Sappers had just got to it and were actually on it at the time but escaped without casualties. It was a great disappointment as having got so close to it we had hoped to capture it intact. Firing had now become more general. It was then just getting dark."

The Fd Amb Forked Left

The B.M. deployed his group until the forward tps(3-32) overcame the opposition. Then they moved forward again.

"As we entered Arnhem the Fd Amb in our group forked left for the Elizabeth Hospital, and there they stayed throughout the operation. It was something of a relief to dispose of them safely as their array of ambulances made us an unwieldy and somewhat noticeable column. I then halted the rest of the group about 500 yds short of our objective, the main bridge, and went forward myself to the bridge to see what the form was there. On arrival I reported to Lt. Col. Frost, CO of "Y" Bn.

"His tps were not very plentiful, and I decided to retain as few as possible of my men at Bde HQ itself, just enough to man the sets, and to make the rest of them into a fighting platoon for the defence of the area. In fact, their first task was to attempt to cross the river and seize the other end (the southern end) of the bridge, but this proved to be impracticable.

The Rest of the Column was Disposed of

We recced the houses around the northern end of the bridge and made our dispositions. An attempt to cross the bridge south had already been made, but had failed owing to the MG(3-33) fire and absence of cover. All resistance at our end of the bridge had been overcome, however, but there was still a lot of firing going on in the area and one or two houses were already on fire, so it was far from quiet. By midnight all the troops there were in position in the houses around the northern end of the bridge. Bde HQ was in a house to the north-west, overlooking the gardens at the northern end of the ramp leading down from the bridge.

“At first light, on Monday, the situation still looked pretty good. We held the bridge and denied it to the enemy. We had some 350 men there and although we knew that the rest of the Div had run into opposition, we thought they would reach us during the day and in any case 2 Army would be on the south bank of the river before very long. We therefore settled down to be as inconvenient to any Germans who came along as possible.

“The first lot were a column of armd cars and half-tracks that came over the bridge from the south. We had laid some mines in the carriageway. The first vehicle missed them all, the second went over one with its track. It didn’t wreck the vehicle, but it threw the solitary soldier in the back into the air and he landed rather heavily in the roadway. The next second he ceased to exist. Almost every MG that could see him, I should think, opened up on him and he was literally disintegrated. The rest of the column was then disposed of. It was a shambles. Still some Germans, even ration trucks, tried to use the bridge. They did not get through.

“But that was the morning. By the afternoon the Germans had started to bring up their arty⁽³⁻³⁴⁾ and it was obvious that we should need help as well as supplies.”

Chapter 4

Four Days in the School

Engaged It with a Flame-thrower

Here is an account of the fighting at the bridge during the next four days, from a Captain RE.

“We had constant skirmishes when once we reached the town, about dusk, but they were mainly with patrols as the troops ahead had broken through all the serious first resistance. When I arrived the area around the northern end of the bridge was being made secure.

“At the end of the bridge there had been a pillbox. It had resisted our attack, but my men had gone into a house close at hand, broken a hole in the wall nearest the pillbox and engaged it with the flame-thrower through the hole in the wall. By good fortune they set off either an amn dump or an amn truck alongside the pillbox, and that had gone up, taking the pillbox with it.

“We could not, however, cross the bridge. There were MGs and an 88 mm gun firing on fixed lines down it.

The Enemy Gained a Footing

“I took about 18 men into the Library north of a school on the east side of the ramp and started to organise it for defence, but hardly had we done so when an

attack came in. The enemy gained a footing in the building and hand-to-hand fighting followed. It was a hard quarter of an hour, but we finally dislodged them and cleaned up the garden with Sten guns and grenades. But it was clear that we could not hold the library. There were too many covered approaches to it, so I withdrew on the school building.

“The school was a good solid building, two stories high. The only weak point about it was the roof, which was timber and gave us a big fire risk. But by midnight we had got the defences well organised, and by morning had already beaten off two attacks. The school was U-shaped, the two wings facing west and finishing against the ramp of the roadway over the bridge.”

After a morning dealing with the enemy attempts to cross the bridge from the south, they spent that afternoon in mopping up MG and mortar positions in their vicinity. The enemy began to occupy the houses to the east. By drawing his fire on one window and observing the positions from which he was firing, they were able to bring down accurate fire from another window and eliminate the posts one by one.

The Germans Blew Away the South-west Corner

“That night they fired the library building and attempted to fire us by setting alight two half-tracks which that morning had crashed out of control against the western walls of the school. We had to cope with a number of small fires in our own roof, mostly caused by stuff carried by the wind from the library. The next stage opened, after a lull, with direct assaults on the north and east faces, all of which were repelled, but we had to board up the ground floor rooms owing to shortage of men.

“Then, at 0300 hrs, the Germans blew away the south-west corner of the building with an ATk projector. It wrecked the rooms at that point, and brought down that corner of the roof. It shook us all very considerably, but the Germans failed to follow up their success. They were too confident. They thought our resistance was over, with the result that an hour later about 60 of them surrounded the building talking and standing about as though it was all over, bar shouting.

“Every unwounded man lined the first floor windows, armed with Stens, Brens and grenades and I gave them the signal to fire. It was a shambles outside. Next morning we counted 30 enemy dead, all the result of about 30 seconds concentrated fire.

We had Built Strong Points in Every Room

“Daylight brought two Mark III tanks to the scene. They took up positions about 80 yds to the south of the building and for three hours, from 0900 to 1200, bombarded the southern face of the school. They were supported by infantry, but we picked off quite a number and kept the rest at a distance, under cover. That bombardment knocked the building about a bit, but it still stood pretty solidly. We

had built strong points in each room we occupied so we were fairly safe from fragments.

“When that was over the enemy started to occupy the houses on the other side of the road and attempted to set up MG posts there again. We disposed of these as before. In the late afternoon they attempted to fire the whole area and succeeded in burning down all the other buildings east of the ramp to the bridge, so that we were now completely isolated.

“In fact, we had been virtually isolated most of the time. Movement outside was quite impossible by day and patrols at night were not too easy. The remnants of “Y” Bn east of the ramp were then concentrated under the bridge which carried the main road over a street parallel to the river.

The First Shots Went Right Through

“About 1800 hrs, two Tiger tanks turned up. They came from the north and came up the ramp of the bridge. One engaged the houses to the west of the ramp and the other engaged us. It started on the northern and western faces of the school, using AP⁽⁴⁻³⁵⁾ shot to start with, and the first shots went right through the school, the outer walls and all interior walls, from end to end. It then switched to HE⁽⁴⁻³⁶⁾ and blew away the north-west corner. Both tanks retired as soon as it was dark and we had no chance of getting at them.

“Infantry attacks then followed, but fortunately they were half-hearted and we kept them off fairly easily. We spent that night in building up the defences inside the building again.

“In the early morning of the following day (the 20th) there was another half-hearted infantry attack, supported by a Mark III tank, but the enemy’s major preoccupation during the morning was clearing out the remaining Inf⁽⁴⁻³⁷⁾ from under the Bridge. They succeeded in this by midday. We were then left as the only force east of the bridge.

Blew Off the Top Story

“This time they started to reduce our building by artillery fire, systematically. They used Tiger tanks and 75 mm SP⁽⁴⁻³⁸⁾ guns and positioned them to the south east where we could not get at them. The building now was considerably weakened, particularly the roof, and this time their efforts were successful. More fires were started in the roof and by 1500 hrs these fires were out of control. The only place left to us was the basement, particularly as at 1530 hrs our store of explosives in the upper floor was exploded when the fire reached it and blew off the whole of the top story.

“It was obvious that we could not hold out much longer. The situation then was that out of our total strength, at the start of the action, of 50 men, three had been killed and 24 sufficiently wounded to be of no combatant use. Most of the others had been less severely wounded at one time or another.”

That was very near the end of the bridge. Of those Sappers the 10 who could move made a dash for it, each with a Bren and one magazine, the last left. All were killed or captured. This officer subsequently escaped.

For the last four days they had had no food, for the last three no water, and, for the last 72 hrs, no sleep.

In each house around the bridge the story was repeated. The B.M. concludes his account by saying:

“When we finished on the Thursday night, out of our 350 men, 280 were so badly wounded that they could not move, and I do not think it was physically possible for the remainder to have fought any more.

“Their morale, however, remained as it had been on the Sunday.”

Chapter 5

Holding the DZs

He Immediately Suffered Casualties

For the Div Tuesday was a day of confused fighting. Opposition was increasing, coming down from the north west. One coy of KOSB was completely overrun in a wood to the north of D22 and there were no survivors. But the DZs were held and “B” Para Bde came in safely.

On the east, German defence was very stubborn and successful. It was now that the main handicap of the Div began to show itself. The Germans had brought up tanks and SP guns into the western suburbs of Arnhem and the Div’s strength in ATk guns was neither strong enough nor mobile enough to knock them all out. Nor was it easy to attack over such ground. The house gardens and shrubberies were ideal for defensive fighting. They imposed delay on every minor attack, and if the urgent need to push on influenced any comd to take risks he immediately suffered casualties, which, from the nature of the operation, were irreplaceable.

The Div first tried to break through into Arnhem down the Utrecht road but failed. Then tried to by-pass the opposition by switching the main strength down to the southerly road along which two coys had passed the night before. The S. Staffs were put in there to strengthen the drive. Progress was laboriously made as far as the Elizabeth Hospital, by-passing opposition by using back gardens and rear lanes, but the units became split up and scattered until control was lost and finally the attack was halted.

No One Got Through

During the Monday night both Para Bns tried to get at least a coy through to the bridge. As the B.M. at the bridge says:

“Towards 0400 hrs the next morning we heard heavy firing to our north and the Divisional battle-cry not more than 300 yds away. But no one got through. We realised then that we should just have to hold on and that only 2 Army could help.”

In the afternoon the gliderborne element of the Polish Para Bde came in on DZ2 (see map). This time the enemy opposition in this area was much stronger and a counter-attack was necessary to clear the ground. But the gliders came in, although some were lost by flak, and were unloaded.

That night the Division began to withdraw on the final perimeter.

Try it Out This Way

HERE is a suggestion for converting the narrative in this pamphlet into a dramatic form. It is one of many alternatives, perhaps most appropriate where large numbers of troops only must be assembled, which makes discussion difficult, and where a suitable team can be got together. The cast might consist of a commentator and three readers.

The commentator starts with passages from the tribute by Johan Fabricius on page 1. He then proceeds to establish the main considerations leading up to the operation itself, as follows:

Commentator: "On the 17 Sep the German line after the Normandy defeat was at last firm."

Reader 1: "What was the next problem?"

Reader 2: "To get into Germany."

Reader 3: "In the way stood the Rhine, the Maas and the Siegfried Line."

Commentator: "There were two points at which the rivers could be crossed—one at which the Siegfried Line could be turned. They were Nijmegen and Arnhem."

Reader 1: "Three Airborne Divisions were used."

Reader 2: "Their job was to hold the two bridges, and Eindhoven, the stepping stone to them."

Reader 3: "It was the most ambitious airborne operation ever planned."

Commentator: "What are the difficulties in the way of an airborne operation?"

Reader 1: "Their weapons are light, their supplies are small."

Reader 2: "They can take only ATk guns and a light fd gun."

Reader 3: "They cannot take armour. This must reach them from the ground."

Commentator: "The plan, then, was that, as they dropped, 2 Army would strike out northwards to link up the three pockets of airborne troops. For complete success it was essential that this support should not be long delayed."

Reader 1: "2 Army got to Eindhoven, 15 miles on."

Reader 2: "2 Army got to Nijmegen, 50 miles on."

Reader 3: "But this left still another 10 miles to Arnhem, to cover which the Germans threw in everything they had. This is what happened at Arnhem."

This process of converting a narrative into a dramatic recital can be continued, without any great strain on your ingenuity, throughout. The facts are inside. You may wish to use only those points which are of greatest interest to your unit.

In any case, this is one way to re-create, in however less tense a way, eight days of some of the hardest fighting of the war.

WAR

Inside the Perimeter

ABCA 'War' Pamphlet No. 84, December 23rd, 1944

The Week in Oosterbeek

1 Airborne Div at Arnhem (Contd.)

By Major ERNEST WATKINS. R.A.
WAR Staff Writer

The first section of this account covered the original landing and the events at the main bridge in Arnhem, which only a fraction of the Div were able to reach. This section describes the events inside the area in which the main body of the Div were contained until the final withdrawal from the northern bank of the Rhine.

Chapter 6

The Perimeter Takes Shape

Under Direct Observation By Day

THE map ... shows the section of Oosterbeek that became the main battle ground for the ensuing week.

It was a position forced on the Division, as it was squeezed together from on all sides except from the south, and despite the casualties the Div continuously suffered, this perimeter remained virtually intact until the final retirement across the river. The only major changes were a withdrawal at the northern tip, to shorten the line, a dent made by the Germans at the north east, on to the crossroads where the two MDS had been established, and the loss of the ground covering the ferry on the south-western corner on the river bank.

Not that the ferry would have been much good. It was a barge drawn by wire across the river. It was under direct observation by day and within two days had been sunk by arty fire.

The Position Proved Very Suitable

Here is an account by the CO of the Ind Para Coy in the perimeter. It is typical of the fighting done by everyone in it.

“Until then the coy had been concentrated in a position north of the rly, one not ideal for defence, and during the night of the 19th I decided to move south to some higher ground in the grounds of a house known as ‘Ommershol’ which overlooked

the former position. Here we compelled any enemy attacking us to move uphill and then across a road lined with a wire fence. The position proved very suitable. During the next two days the coy, with its reinforcements from the RE Sqn. and the Glider Pilots, beat off all attacks with heavy loss to the enemy.

“Some of the attacks were flank attacks from our left, where the ground was more wooded. These were held, too, and we knocked out two SP guns, one with a PIAT,⁽⁶⁻³⁹⁾ the other by Sappers and my own men with grenades. On the evening of the 21st we were further reinforced with two 6-pdr ATk guns and a section of mortars from the KOSBs. So far as our own position was concerned we could have held out indefinitely.

“On the evening of the 21st it became necessary to shorten the line of what was becoming the area in which we were contained and we withdrew, by night and without difficulty, on the area known as ‘Hartestein.’ Later the same night we were moved across to the eastern perimeter, between the two MDS, and occupied some houses without being observed. These we put into a state of defence and here we remained for the rest of the operation.

We Held About a Dozen Houses

“We held about a dozen houses altogether on the eastern side of a road running north and south. These were substantially built affairs and fortunately with cellars. The grounds were extensive and wooded and there was a built-up area further to the east, giving cover for enemy SP guns and tanks. The enemy were well dug in about 400 yds from our front. One pl⁽⁶⁻⁴⁰⁾ was pushed a little further out, by necessity, to protect the MDS. The house they occupied was knocked to pieces by a Mark IV tank and two SP guns and they had to retire.

“During the day of the 23rd the enemy mostly were trying to feel their way forward under cover of MG fire. They suffered heavy casualties in doing so.

But on the 24th the position had deteriorated. The enemy had occupied the cross roads between two pl positions and had infiltrated through the gap, which meant that we had to stalk his snipers. At the same time the area was plastered with fire from 88 mm guns, 15 mm mortars and SP guns. It was very difficult to move out to cover by day.

To Lend Colour to the Threat

“By this time, too, our rations had been exhausted and water was scarce. We found some tinned food in cellars and a tin bath full of water. In addition we secured a number of tame rabbits and, once, a small goat which was reckless enough to run across the lawn of one of the houses and was promptly brought down. From all these sources we made up two meals of a sort each day and one brew of tea.

“I received a demand, backed by two tanks, that unless I vacated a house some 30 yds from the MDS at the crossroads I should be blasted out of the position. The house was a most important point in my position, so I sent a message back that I

would only agree if the German Commander would withdraw his men from the vicinity of the MDS and move his tanks back a mile. Further, that he should not attempt to advance in the MDS area until all casualties had been removed.

“I added that if he would not agree I would blow up his tanks.

“To lend colour to the threat, Pte. Dixon, A.C.C.,⁽⁶⁻⁴¹⁾ pl cook, sneaked out with a PIAT and destroyed one of the tanks, his shot fortunately hitting its rear where, presumably, the amn⁽⁶⁻⁴²⁾ was stored. The remaining tank withdrew and so did the enemy tps.

“By this time most of the houses were in ruins and some were on fire, but all attempts to infiltrate in this area were defeated.”

Chapter 7

Bde HQ in a Wood

Food was Something of a Problem

And an account of a Bde HQ:

“The final location of our Bde HQ was in a little wood close to a small lake. It was always under fire and we lived very much underground. In fact, in those circumstances, it is advisable to arrange for everything to be underground. Our cookhouse wasn't, to our great regret.

“Food was something of a problem towards the end of the week, and there were some ducks on the lake. It is surprising how difficult it is to kill a duck, even with a Sten, and even when they are dead they remain afloat with their legs up out in the middle and you aren't much better off. But the wind gradually carried some of the bodies ashore. We had found a hip-bath and some potatoes and apples, and if it was not to be roast duck and apple sauce it was to be a stew with the same ingredients. It was a nice stew, and just when it was ready a mortar bomb burst on the cookhouse roof and precipitated the roof into the stew. Fortunately no one was hurt on that occasion.

“But as a HQ we were unlucky. On the morning of the 20th, at 0830 hrs, they dropped a mortar bomb on a conference and killed the Staff Captain, the Bde I.O.,⁽⁷⁻⁴³⁾ Signals Offr and defence pl comd. Two days afterwards the Bde RASC Offr and the acting G.3 were wounded and later that day a major from the Lt Regt RA was killed while he was visiting me.

Life in the Perimeter

“It is not easy to give a picture of life in the perimeter during the operation. Once we were closed in it was very different from a normal operation. For one thing there was no movement to plan or organise. It was a case of everyone staying put. Nor was there much opportunity of building up any reserves. There was a

continual drain on every section of the front and we became, even within our small perimeter, very thin on the ground. You had to adjust your mind to the fact that when you thought of a Bn you might in fact be thinking of no more than 50 men of all ranks, sometimes even less.

“Even when things looked very bad somehow miracles seemed to happen. A coy of Borders was overrun at Heveadorp. The 2 i/c⁽⁷⁻⁴⁴⁾ organised an immediate counter-attack with the stragglers of the overrun coy and one fairly fresh pl of the S. Staffs and, with that force only, succeeded in re-establishing a position which a coy could not hold a short time before.

They Would Have Mopped Us Up

“But try as we would, we could not keep the Germans from infiltrating into our positions. They established an SP gun about 150 yds from Bde HQ. If they had come on further they would have inevitably have [sic] mopped us up, but they did not and we had not the strength to push them out. For two days we lived on those terms of proximity. The snipers were as difficult. HQ lost a JLO⁽⁷⁻⁴⁵⁾ and several very good NCOs⁽⁷⁻⁴⁶⁾ in attempts to clean up the area, but again we had not sufficient men to hold what we could temporarily win back.

“Without the support of the mediums from south of the river, I do not think we could have held on as long as we did.

“I think that greater resolution on the part of the Germans could have finished us off completely. They could fire into us from the three sides of the oblong. They had all the space around in which to assemble their strength at any one point and they had great tank and arty support. Yet they never broke the perimeter.”

Chapter 8

In the Ruins of the Houses

Commanded by an ATk Gunner Sgt

A Sgt in the Intelligence Section, Bde HQ:

“By this time there were only about 100/120 of the whole Bde left. We had been reinforced with glider pilots, who fought magnificently, ATk gunners, whose guns had gone, and RASC from Div HQ. The Bns had suffered terribly. For example, one Bn was down to a strength which could only hold three houses and, one night, the centre house was overrun and the C.O. captured. That left the Bn with no officers at all and for some of the time it was commanded by an ATk Gunner Sgt, assisted by a Gunner Captain with a badly broken arm, and finally by a HQ LO.

“We were in weapon pits in the gardens of the houses as the houses themselves were badly knocked about. We stayed there during the day and at night posted sentries and moved the remaining men into the ruins of the houses to try and get

some rest. Food and men were now very short and water was quite a problem. We found a well, but with all the calls on it, the water was drained in about two hours and we had to wait till the next day for it to fill up.

“We got one or two of the tanks and SP guns that were shelling us with PIATS and grenades, but, on the whole, they kept their distance. The RSM⁽⁸⁻⁴⁷⁾ of one of our Bns was wounded when killing a tank.

He Didn't Like Fighting at Night

“At the end of the time all our Sten amm had gone, and the rest was very short. But we were still on top. The Germans never attempted a large-scale attack in our sector but relied on wearing us down. On our night patrols we had the better of him every time. He didn't like fighting at night.

“Signals worked desperately the whole time, maintaining the lines where they could. I don't think the linemen had any rest, for as soon as they came in from one job there would be another line broken by mortar or shell fire, and they would have to go out on that. One lineman went out to lay a line and found that he had not enough line to complete it into the house. He moved into the enemy area and found some of their line and cut enough of it for his needs under their very noses.”

Remember Your Wives and Sweethearts

A Captain, RE:

“We had a strong point in one corner of the position in the grounds of a big house and armed it with 2 PIATS and 3 Brens. The rest of us were in weapon pits, except that we maintained plenty of patrols.

“During that day we had nine attacks, all of which were beaten off before the enemy could reach our position. One attack was supported by an 88 mm SP gun, but a cpl⁽⁸⁻⁴⁸⁾ knocked it out with his sixth shot from his PIAT. He was lucky. They were firing back, and one bullet struck the PIAT projectile in its rest before it was fired, knocking the weapon out of his hand and chipping a piece out of the bomb without setting it off.

“Later the enemy called on us to surrender, and brought up a propaganda machine. It must have been a recently recorded speech, for it started off by saying: ‘Gentlemen of the First Airborne Division, remember your wives and sweethearts at home. If you surrender now it will be an honourable surrender.’ It then went on for another four minutes to tell us how bad our position was, and how many of our senior officers had already been taken prisoner.

“It did quite a lot of good. The men were furious with it, and answered back with catcalls and worse. Their morale went bounding up as a result.

The Germans Had Posted a Sniper

“Six of our men had been killed there, and before we left we buried them. The man who lived in the house was very good. I asked him where we might put the graves, and he showed me a place in the grounds. He promised that the men would not be disturbed there.”

A Pte, RASC:

“We spent the whole day out collecting supplies that had been dropped. It was not easy, as often enough the Germans had posted a sniper to cover the place where the container lay. But we only lost one chap wounded. We collected a fair amount, and I thought the supply situation then seemed O.K.

“During the day the enemy began to mortar the area where the pl HQ was, but it was not heavy. The next day it was much worse. He fairly plastered the place.

“That day I spent on the same job, which was getting more and more difficult, as the area we occupied was so small. I had one run down to Oosterbeek Church with a supply of grenades as a tank attack was expected there, and all our arty was there. That night we were sent to reinforce Oosterbeek area. From then on I fought as an infantryman—a Bren gunner.

The Dutch People Were Very Good

“We mostly just had to keep our heads down while the Germans knocked the houses to pieces. We rarely saw anyone to fire at. Usually they sent out small patrols. I only remember one attack of coy strength.

“We were in a house facing the hospital gardens, and our garden was an orchard. The Germans occupied the hospital, and it was very annoying to see two German orderlies standing at the back door in full view all day and not be able to fire at them.

“The Dutch people were very good. Those that had not cleared out in time lived in their cellars, but they shared all they had with us, weekly joint included. Otherwise we weren’t getting much to eat by then.”

Chapter 9

Each Fought as an Infantryman

It would be giving a false picture to suggest that the basic role of any of the men of Division differed. Each of them was trained to, and did, fight as an infantryman. But they had other tasks in addition.

Here are personal accounts from three:

(a) The Gunners

Bde Maj, RA:

“Practically the whole of the Div arty landed intact. It consisted of two ATk Btys, with both 6-pdr and 17-pdr guns, and a Lt Regt with 75 mm fd guns. This was later augmented by the ATk guns of the Polish Para Bde which came in by glider.

“The btys suffered various fates. About one and a half troops of one ATk Bty went with “A” Para Bde into Arnhem and some of them later extracted themselves back into the perimeter. The ATk Bty with the other Para Bde lost half of its equipment when the Bde was overrun moving into the Div area on the Tuesday. The close country was a big help to the enemy’s armour. The remainder of these came into the perimeter, with the Polish guns, and were positioned around the sectors by C.R.A. We finished up inside the perimeter with about 12 ATk guns.

Much More Vulnerable in Consequence

“The gunners fought magnificently. Often a tank or an SP gun could get within 100 yds of their position under cover and with the infantry support, and the gunners would have to fight off the infantry with small arms while engaging the armour with the piece itself. They were mortared continuously, and although they dug in they had to leave their pits big enough to give them a wide arc of fire, and were so much more vulnerable in consequence.

“When their guns were knocked out they fought on as infantry, and some of the sectors and units finished up with gunner offrs and NCOs in command of the remaining infantry.

“The fd guns stayed together as a whole throughout the operation, in the area of Oosterbeek Church. There they held part of the line as well as giving supporting fire all round the perimeter. Their guns were more use to other parts of the sector than they were immediately to their own front. They were handicapped by amn shortage, and by the Thursday were down to 40 rds⁽⁹⁻⁴⁹⁾ a gun, so fire had to be husbanded.

“Until the Thursday they were the only field arty we had.

We Directed Their Fire

“From the Thursday onwards we had the support of 30 Corps arty and without it I don’t think we could have held out as long as we did. They were magnificent. The mediums were in range first, and finally the 25 pdrs were pushed far enough forward to reach our side of the river. We got on to the Corps Arty net and directed their fire. It was amazing how accurate they were, even at extreme range, when firing solely from the map.

“They broke up concentrations of armour and infantry before an attack, put down fire when the attack was coming in and harried it when we had beaten it back. It made all the difference and helped the morale of everyone a lot.

“As an instance of what they could and did do, our C.R.A. directed a shoot of mediums, firing at extreme range, on a wood inside our lines only 200 yds square and only 200 yds away from the dugout on the steps of which he was standing.

“Another shoot came down just on an attack which was forming up without, apparently, anyone having ordered it.

“The shoots were directed to the man on the spot, gunner or anyone else, using Inf channels to Div HQ Command Post and W/T from there. One thing did stand out. Everyone should be able to take a shoot. They may have to.”

(b) Sappers

Capt, RE:

“Our final Sapper task was the ferrying of the Poles across from the southern bank on the Saturday night.

“We had six recce boats. The river was something of a problem. Close inshore a series of groins checked the current but in midstream it was running very fast, so fast that when some men tried to cross in an RAF rubber dinghy they were carried two miles down stream by the current while they rowed from one bank to the other, about 150 yds.

“Incidentally, that carried them well into the German lines but they were not observed and reported back later that night.

The Current was so Strong

“Our first plan was to tie signal wire to either end of the recce boat and pull it across from one side while those on the other bank paid out. As the boats held only two men each it meant that twice as many could cross than would be the case if one man had to be in the boat to row. But the current was so strong and the bottom of the river so stony that in each case the signal wire was severed before we could get a boat back with a load.

“So we had to row the Poles over individually. One officer rowed back and forth 23 times, which, coming on all that had been already done that week, was quite a feat of endurance.

“There was mortar and MG fire during the night as the Germans were near enough on either side to put down crossfire. By day we could not cross as the fire would be observed and be too deadly.

“The next day we rested and had our first real sleep since landing. But it rained and there was no head cover so we were all pretty miserable. But I found a wrecked German QM⁽⁹⁻⁵⁰⁾ truck and in it some coffee and sugar and we made a brew. It brought us to life again.”

(c) The Services

S/Sgt⁽⁹⁻⁵¹⁾ (Armt Artfr Tels),⁽⁹⁻⁵²⁾ REME:

“On the whole we had plenty of work.

“On the wireless side, we had to do a good deal of improvisation. One thing of which we were called on to do pretty frequently was the repair of battery leads.

Perhaps the most unusual job we did was to improvise a choke for a No. 76 set by scraping down a piece of wire until we got the resistance right.

“Altogether the wireless artificers did 37 repair jobs while we were there.

“The armourers were even busier. Their QMS⁽⁹⁻⁵³⁾ went out with a jeep round the units in their various positions collecting damaged equipment and taking out the repaired stuff. This repair work was very important, for there were no replacements and there was a lot of damage done to the small arms and automatics by the kind of fighting that was going on.

In the Grounds, or in the Cellars

“Div HQ was in a large hotel and we were in the grounds, or in the cellars. It had been an attractive place, a holiday resort, I should think, with tennis courts and a running track in the grounds at the back and plenty of trees. There was an orchard, too, and an ornamental garden alongside it and in front plenty of flower beds. The building itself was of two storeys, with a lot of verandas and big windows.

“It was gradually blown to pieces by the shellfire and mortaring.

“We had not much food. The sgt-major at Div HQ got some potatoes from a cottage just outside the grounds and kept things going and there was a well there from which we drew water.

I Had to Go Out for Them Myself

“The mortaring became more intense as the week progressed. There was a morning hate which at first lasted for half an hour. On the last morning it started at 7 a.m. and went on until 11 a.m. But you could tell if they were coming close.

“Some of the men were a little nervous as it was the first time they had been in action, but I found that if you kept them busy they were quite cheerful. One man went to a blazing jeep loaded with ammunition and jacked it up to take off the front wheel before it burnt as he knew we wanted a spare wheel for another job.

“Snipers were a nuisance towards the end. I had to go out for them myself. I got one, too, when he broke away to try and get back to his own lines.”

They Continued Their Work

So with the remainder of the Div troops.

In particular the RAMC.⁽⁹⁻⁵⁴⁾ Very few of them came back. They remained with the wounded, in the Elizabeth Hospital in Arnhem itself, in the MDS at Oosterbeek, and in the RAPs.⁽⁹⁻⁵⁵⁾ Regardless of the shelling and mortaring, of the MG or SA⁽⁹⁻⁵⁶⁾ fire, regardless of capture by the Germans, they continued their work.

And the civilians. A J.L.O. says:

“We took some Dutch liaison soldiers with us and they were immensely useful in the early stages in contacting the civilians in the area, all of whom were anxious to be as helpful as possible.

“There was one Dutch civilian, too, whom I particularly remember. He was a big man, very noticeable because he wore throughout a gent’s natty summer suiting of impeccable cut. He looked like something out of a spy story, of the more sophisticated kind. He stayed with us while he could be useful, and then he just vanished. To tell all that he did might still be harmful, but he was a very good man to work with.”

Chapter 10

Towards the End

40 Polish Paratroops Were Ferried

Until the Sunday evening it was still hoped that 2 Army could reach Arnhem in time to relieve the Div. The DZ to be used by the Polish Para Bde was never cleared of the enemy, so the paratroops themselves were unable to drop at Arnhem. Their gliderborne element were mostly gunners and fought with our gunners to the end.

On the Saturday night about 40 Polish paratroops were ferried across from the south bank and another 140 came the following night.

An officer says:

“I had to meet them, organise them into squads and send them off with guides to the sections of the perimeter to which they were to go. It was very unpleasant for we were under fire all the time.

“They fought like demons. They didn’t have to be told to get snipers (and by then there were plenty of snipers who had infiltrated into our position). They just went after them and got them.”

Dorsets Fought Their Way to the Bank

Finally, on the Sunday night a Bn of Dorsets fought their way to the southern bank and elements crossed in assault boats under the same sort of fire. They went immediately into the line with the rest of the Division, but their numbers were not sufficient to turn the scale.

A withdrawal on the Monday night was ordered, the craft to be used being manned by Royal Canadian Engineers of 2 Army. The 1 Airborne Div came back, all who could move and be ferried over in that one night.

Chapter 11

The Withdrawal

We Were Told to Muffle Our Boots

Perhaps the withdrawal is best described in the words of the B.B.C. correspondent Stanley Maxted (who had landed with the Div nine days previously) in a broadcast:—

“Late on the afternoon we were told that the remnants of the Division were going to pull out that night. The enemy was making it impossible for the elements of the 2nd Army to relieve us. B.B.C.’s Guy Byam, Alan Woods, of the *Daily Express*, and I were told to destroy all our equipment with the exception of what would go into one haversack. We were told to muffle our boots with bits of blanket and be ready to move off at a certain time.

“When the various officers were told to transmit this news to that thin straggle of hard-pressed men around the pitifully small perimeter, a great silence seemed to come upon them even in the middle of the shelling—you see, day or night the shelling and mortaring never stopped. The ones I saw just drew a deep breath and said: ‘Very good, sir.’ Then those staring eyes in the middle of black, muddy masks saluted, as they always would, and faded away to crawl out on their stomachs and tell their men.

They Caught the Water in Their Caps

“Perhaps I should remind you here that these were men of no ordinary calibre. They had been nine days in that little space, being mortared and shelled, machine-gunned and sniped from all round. When a tank or a self-propelled 88 gun broke through, two or three of them detached themselves and somehow or another had put it out of business.

“For the last three days they had had no water, but very little small arms ammunition, and rations cut to one-sixth. Luckily, or unluckily, it rained, and they caught the water in their caps and drank that. These last items were never mentioned—they were airborne, weren’t they? They were tough and knew it.

“Well, at two minutes past ten we clambered out of our slit trenches in an absolute din of bombardment—a great deal of it our own—and formed up in a single line. Our boots were wrapped in blanket so that no noise would be made. We held the tail of the coat of the man in front. We set off like a file of nebulous ghosts from our pock-marked and tree-strewn piece of ground. Obviously, since the enemy was all round us, we had to go through him to get to the River Rhine.

“After about two hundred yards of silent trekking, we knew we were among the enemy. It was difficult not to throw yourself flat when machine-gun tracers skinned your head or the scream of a shell or mortar-bomb sounded very close—

but the orders were to ‘keep going.’ Anybody hit was to be picked up by the man behind him.

I Couldn’t See the Man Ahead

“Major Oliver had reconnoitred the route earlier on with a Headquarters officer and had it memorised. The back of my neck was prickling for that whole interminable march. I couldn’t see the man ahead of me—all I knew was that I had hold of a coat-tail and for the first time in my life was grateful for the downpour of rain that made a patter on the leaves of the trees and covered up any little noises we were making.

“At every turn of the way there was posted a Sergeant Glider Pilot who stepped out like a shadow and then stepped back into a deeper shadow again. Several times we halted—which meant you bumped into the man ahead of you—then when the head of our party was satisfied the turning was clear, we went on again.

“Once we halted because of a boy sitting on the ground with a bullet through his leg. We wanted to pick him up but he whispered: ‘Nark it. Gimme another field dressing and I’ll be all right. I can walk.’

“As we came out of the trees—we had been following carefully-thought-out footpaths so far—I felt as naked as if I were in Piccadilly Circus in my pyjamas, because of the glow from fires across the river. The machine-gun and general bombardment had never let-up.

I Gussed it was Pretty Bad

“We lay down flat in the mud and rain and stayed that way for two hours till the sentry beyond the hedge on the bank of the river told us to move up the dyke and be taken across. Mortaring started now and I was fearful for those that were already over on the bank. I gussed it was pretty bad for them.

“After what seemed a nightmare of an age we got our turn and slithered up and over on to some mud flats. There was the shadow of a little assault craft with an outboard motor on it. Several of these had been rushed up by a field company of Engineers. One or two of them were out of action already.

“We waded out into the Rhine up to my hips—it didn’t matter, I was soaked through long ago—had been for days. And a voice that was sheer music spoke from the stern of the boat saying: ‘Ye’ll have to step lively, boys. T’aint healthy here.’

“It was a Canadian voice, and the Engineers were Canadian Engineers. We helped push the boat off into the swift Rhine current and with our heads down between our knees waited for the bump on the far side—or for what might come before.

A Blessed Hot Mug of Tea

“It didn’t come. We clambered out and followed what had been a white tape up over a dyke. We slid down the other side on our backsides, and we sloshed through mud for four miles and a half—me thinking, ‘*Gosh! I’m alive. How did it happen!*’ In a barn there was a blessed hot mug of tea with rum in it and a blanket over our shoulders. Then we walked again—all night.

“After daylight we got to a dressing station near Nijmegen and then we were put in trucks, and that’s how we reached Nijmegen. That’s how the last of the few got out to go and fight in some future battle.

“No matter what battle that is, I know they won’t let you down.”

Conclusion

The Road From the North was Blocked

Arnhem was part of a larger operation. Success was achieved at Eindhoven and Nijmegen, and could be exploited because the road down which the counter-attack from the north would have to come was blocked by 1 Airborne Div at Arnhem. The operation was a big factor in the clearance of Southern Holland.

The operation itself was not a complete success because only two of the three river barriers were carried. But Arnhem has left in history a record which those who come after must strain every ounce of courage and endurance they possess even to equal.

[The account by Stanley Maxted is printed by permission of the British Broadcasting Corporation.]

WAR

Arnhem Revisited

ABCA ‘War’ Pamphlet No. 97, June 23rd, 1945

Spring in Holland

By Major ERNEST WATKINS. R.A.
WAR Staff Writer

AFTER Emmerich the war became less obtrusive. The road westwards was the Canadian Army supply route “Victoria—Up” and we had to make a diversion, crossing and recrossing the Dutch frontier, to reach the main road into Arnhem.

When we reached it we drove fast down an empty road, empty save for the orange flags hanging from all the cottages and for a few men on cycles, with orange armbands. Finally we came to the embankment overlooking the flat lands that border the River Ijssel. Across the river, to the west, was Arnhem.

It was 11 o'clock in the morning of a fine day in April. The sky was clear and the sun was brilliant. The assault on Arnhem had started five days before, and now the German line was 10 miles farther west beyond it.

The Town remained Empty

The parallel road and rail bridge over the Ijssel had been blown and we crossed on a Bailey bridge. In front was an extensive factory—it had made artificial silk—and we turned right to regain the main road. It ran straight into Arnhem, down a broad boulevard lined by blocks of excellent flats. Structurally most of them were intact, but they had been shelled, machine-gunned and fought through, and the debris still lay in the street.

After the withdrawal of the men of 1 Airborne Div from Arnhem last September, the Germans, resentful of the welcome the inhabitants had given them, cleared the whole town of every person living in it. Then they divided it into four zones and proceeded systematically to loot each zone in turn. The loot they sent to four bomb-damaged towns in Germany, with a message that it was a free-will offering from the Dutch to their less fortunate neighbours. After that the town remained empty. I do not like the German sense of humour.

I drove out to Wolfhezen and then back again into Oosterbeek in a jeep. The country was like the higher lands in Surrey, the same woods of fir and patches of open sandy ground, the same country cottages, some thatched, that look so attractive on a day full of sunlight. Not all of them were attractive. Some had been burnt out. A great many had been shattered by shellfire. Occasionally alongside the road there was an empty container or a wrecked jeep with the airborne flash still on its wing. They said the woods were still full of other souvenirs.

Oosterbeek was much worse. The Germans had built fire positions along the whole length of the lower road, just above the flat fields alongside the river, and had thrown together road blocks of furniture and felled trees across the roads leading away from the river. They had buried the dead. Otherwise they had left the place untouched.

The Gun in the Churchyard

Hartestem, the big hotel that had been Airborne Div HQ, was still there, wrecked, but the grass had grown over the shell and mortar holes in the gardens and on the tennis court. Oosterbeek Church still stood, roofless and scarred, and in the churchyard, just outside the porch, was a 17-pdr ATk gun, still pointing east. Alongside it a wrecked artillery tractor lay half on its side.

A few hundred yards to the east a burnt-out Mark IV tank blocked most of the road. Beside it a parachute still was draped around the wrecked gable end of a

small cottage, its red silk now very faded. The whole suburb had remained as it was left. Except, of course, for the graves. There was one on the corner just opposite the church. An airborne helmet hung from the wooden cross, with a big rent in the steel above the left eye.

Now They are Overgrown

The place is not quite as it was left. Then the leaves were turning brown and the gardens of the houses looked very neat and Dutch. Now they are overgrown and new leaves are on the trees and another year's growth is hiding the traces left last autumn. The place had a defiant, bedraggled air. Nature had got out of hand and knew it. Somehow, the uncut lawns, so very small and suburban, looked worse than the wrecked houses. The ground is so cut up by gardens that it is very difficult to believe that the perimeter in Oosterbeek could have been held for eight days.

When we reached the centre of the town again I left the car. This was where, seven months before, the 350 or so men of the Airborne Division who did get into Arnhem had held the northern approaches to the road bridge over the Rijn for four days.

The Germans Had Built Two Pallisades

It was very quiet. The main supply route did not pass near it, and there was no other traffic. The bridge itself was wrecked, the span over the river neatly cut out by the charges and dropped into the stream. There was the embankment that carried the road south to Nijmegen up to the level of the bridge. There were the ornamental gardens, with a lake in the centre, at the foot of the embankment. There were the carriageways, on either side of the gardens, and the two met at the foot of the embankment. After the fighting in September the Germans had built two pallisades of wood and sand across the roads and blown a crater in between them. The stretch of roadway up to the bridge had been left as it was, unused and unusable. On it still stood the remains of more than 20 trucks that the airborne men had shot up that first morning.

They lay at all angles across the road and the verges, a light rusty brown, their wheels gone, the chassis members resting on the tarmac, and edged with little ridges of sand and dust blown against them by the wind over the winter months. With all woodwork burnt away, the wrecks looked small and unimpressive.

As Though the Sunshine were an Antiseptic

I walked up the embankment towards the river. On the left, the east side, were the ruins of the school which some 50 Engineers had held during four days until the fires started in various corners of the building had spread to their store of explosives and the roof blew off. It was an empty shell, the outside curiously

unmarked. On the right, to the west, were the houses that had been Brigade HQ and the other strong points of the main body at the bridge. They, too, had burnt out. Some had completely collapsed.

It was very silent in the hot sunshine and the clear light seemed to take away all emotion, as though the sunshine were an antiseptic for that, too. But not quite all. There was the contrast between what had died and what was still growing.

Outside one shell of a building still hung a small glass sign, PENSION FRANCINE. Inside, the *pension* was a pile of bricks surmounted by a rusty hot-water radiator. Beside the doorway of the next house, a doorway that led into a void, was a white enamel plate, reading "J— H. van der Does. Chirug." A bullet had chipped away the surgeon's first name. St. Agnes School had been burnt. So had St. Michael's Church. All that man had made had been destroyed.

In the Centre was a Flower Bed

And Nature mocked him with an artifice of which the satire was too pointed, for the trees were undamaged and in full leaf and the grass along the embankment was thick and rank. The candles on the chestnut trees were in bloom and already their petals were falling like a fine, intermittent snow. And there were the flowers.

I climbed over a pile of rubble, formerly a house, to the gardens behind. One end of the garden, that nearest the house, was buried by fallen brickwork, the other erupted by a recent bomb crater, a smooth, perfect circle in the sandy soil. There were perhaps five yards of undisturbed ground in between. In the centre of this five yards was a flower bed, unaffected by seven months of neglect. It was a mass of yellow and red tulips in full bloom. They moved gently in the little wind, apart from and indifferent to the wreckage that lay around them.

I should not like to stay in Arnhem now. It is too empty of people and the ghosts have it all their own way.

WAR

Waiting to be Scrubbed

ABCA 'War' Pamphlet No. 79, October 14th, 1944

Airborne Worries

By Major ANTHONY COTTERELL
WAR Staff Writer

[This article was completed by Major Cotterell during his attachment to 1 Airborne Division and while waiting for the start of the operation. The operation turned out to

be the Battle of Arnhem. No news has been received of Major Cotterell since 17 Sept., 1944.]

THE use of Airborne troops to exploit opportunities as they occur is a fine idea, but a little wearing on the nerves.

I reached the Parachute Bde HQ on Friday evening, the jump being planned for Sunday morning. The Bde staff was in a state of considerable apprehension; not that the operation would take place, but that it wouldn't. This was the third time they had been alerted since D-day, and they found each stand-down more progressively discouraging. As the B.M., talking on the telephone to someone at Division said, "The only thing that gives us slight sickness is every time we turn on the wireless, hearing the news."

No doubt about it, the news was depressingly good, the B.B.C announcers tediously smug; the arrows on the newspaper map moved nearer to Germany almost as you looked at them.

About the operation itself there was not a great deal of evident excitement, no doubt because this was the oldest and most seasoned Parachute Bde. There was nothing experimental or uncertain in their approach, apart from the inevitable personal uncertainties of anyone approaching an operational jump.

Shot With Technicalities

"What are you going to do, hook up when you take off?"

"No, when I pass the coast."

"I'm going to hook up everyone on the ground."

"Oh, I don't know. People want to go and be sick or move around."

The conversation was shot with these technicalities.

I spent the evening reading the operation orders and in having the plan explained by the B.M. in the briefing hut. Next day I went 10 miles to hear the briefing of B Coy of one of the battalions, which I was to join after dropping.

The company had been brought in to the Intelligence Room at Battalion HQ, the oak-panelled drawing-room of a country house. They stood or sat round a large square model of the piece of country involved, and listened to their company commander, a major with the M.C.

The Fascination Had Flown

"The general form of the operation is to cut off the German retreat," he began. It would be idle to pretend that this stirring announcement caused any evident flutter. The riveting fascination of the pre-D-day briefings had flown.

The battle began to unfold itself in anticipation.

"Phase 2 will be to move to the railway station and establish a firm base until we know if there is anyone in the town. If there is, we'll have to deal with them. Number 6 platoon" (who were leading the line of march) "will adopt battle

formation in taking the station, in case of accidents. Number 4 platoon will cover the east and south-east approaches to the station, Number 5 platoon the west and south-west approaches.”

“In Phase 3 the company less one platoon will move to this position here,” and he pointed on the map to a position near the rest of the battalion. “Number 5 platoon with two Piats and a mobile M.G. will block the eastern approaches to the town.”

“What’s the DZ like, Sir?”

“Any questions?”

“How long are we holding, sir?”

“Depends. If the enemy don’t attack us we’ll have to go and find them.”

“When does this drop come off, sir?”

“Sunday morning, about nine-thirty.”

“How far to march, sir?”

“From the RV to this position is about five miles. B Coy have, unfortunately, got further to go, around the eastern edge of the town.”

“What’s the DZ like, sir?”

“Rough.”

Platoon commanders then took over their platoons, some to study air photographs and maps, others to another model which showed the DZ. I followed Lt. Levene’s platoon.

The Only One With a Tower

“As you can see, the DZ is fairly flat, but there are a lot of houses and trees breaking it up ... RV at this place, and get the pronunciations right, in case you have to ask. But you shouldn’t need to ask. You can tell it by the church. There are three churches, but ours is the only one with a tower. The others have spires. Now you want to memorise this map. What is this place?” He pointed to one rather absent-looking member of the audience.

“I’ve forgotten, sir,” said the man, smartly and in a soldierly fashion.

The briefing continued.

Chutes were drawn and fitted after lunch, to the invariable accompaniment of depressing jokes. “You’ve got a blanket in there, not a chute,” or “Looks like it’s full of dirty washing.”

Meteorologically, the day had been disastrous. An almost continuous downpour, while, so we heard, there was a 50-mile-an-hour gale in the Channel. And, by way of lending an extra fillip, it was announced that, owing to reroute-ing, an earlier start must be made, and reveille would be at 0300 hours. It was therefore in no mood of facile optimism that we retired to bed, soon after the time laid down—2000 hours.

I Was Jumping Last

There is nothing like wet weather and the apparent likelihood of frustration to deflate nervous excitement and to induce that, in some ways, advantageous mood of not caring much what happens—not really expecting anything to happen, either.

None the less, I began to think of to-morrow's jump as an ordeal. Not that I really believed that the parachute wouldn't open or that I should be injured in landing. The apprehension was all connected with the test of will-power involved in jumping out of the aircraft. Also, I was jumping last, which increased the chances of having to watch some demoralising hesitation or technical hitch. Of course, there shouldn't be either, but there might be. And how doubly maddening to break your back or be sniped in the air at this stage of the war.

Such notions made recurrent darts across my mind. The prospect of doing something horribly unnatural in the morning produced a tendency to linger over the normal routine of going to bed, so that the intervening hours would last as long as possible, so that the inevitable despairs of the early morning could be postponed and camouflaged.

We Were Doing Far Too Well

All of which led up to a knock on the door shortly after 11 p.m. and the corporal storeman bending down by my sleeping bag to say that the operation had been postponed 36 hours. I was not really surprised. I was not really anything.

There was another plan the next day, another briefing, then a final scrubbing of that particular interlude. There was no doubt about it. We were doing far too well in France and Belgium.

Monday was declared a holiday, or shall we say a half-holiday, because no one was particularly festive. At about 11 a.m. the B.B.C. programme was interrupted with an announcement that Brussels had fallen. Brigade prayers for the temporary recovery of the German Army continued. After lunch we went to the movies, came back and listened to records of Frank Sinatra, who enjoyed a considerable following among the Bde staff. Some went off to town, others fell asleep, with the unhealthy fatigue of Boxing Day.

They Didn't Want to Read

Nothing happened on Tuesday. After lunch we went to the movies again, this constituting the first time the Brigadier had been to the pictures two days running. Conversation at teatime was depressed. To-morrow it would be three months since D-day. Self-pity reigned. Most people had seen all the movies. They didn't want to read, get drunk, write letters or play bridge. They had packed and unpacked their kit, cleaned their weapons, and even slept too often to want to do so any more.

However, the six o'clock news did say that the German resistance was stiffening. The firmer resistance of the Germans was repeated at nine o'clock and a wave of enthusiasm swept over the mess. As an expression of rising morale, most of them joined in a thunderflash battle in the garden.

The days passed. The operation was postponed, modified, amended and postponed again. The field cashier brought us French francs, Belgian francs, Dutch guilders and finally German marks. Friday came and we drew our chutes again in the afternoon. It had been an unpromising morning, raining hard, and with a culminating signal from Command that all previous correspondence from Command in connection with the Command Athletic Championships was now cancelled.

Astonished at the Gaiety of it All

At tea the weather cleared a bit. The gentleman on the wireless said that if we were to visit a Northumbrian barn dance we should be astonished at the gaiety of it all. The operation was still uncertain, but the Brigadier said that he felt we were going and others expressed a hunch to the same effect. Practical details came in.

"Twenty minutes warning, four minutes red and then off," was agreed.

"When are you jumping, Bernard?"

"Number One."

"Difficulty with number one is to know whether to jump or not when you're on the wrong DZ."

"You jump on the green light," said the Brigadier firmly.

It began to look as if we were indeed going to jump on the green light. The discontents and frustrations were subtly replaced by the apprehensions of anticipation. Dinner was at 7 p.m. and most people went to bed immediately afterwards. We were told that in the event of a cancellation we should know by midnight. The authorities were better than their word. It was 11.30 p.m. when I was woken to be told that bad weather had caused a 24-hour postponement.

I had now been exactly a week with the Bde. The seventh day we rested, but feeling progressively more nervy. Towards evening on the eighth day, by one of those odd twists of the human nerve barometer, everyone was unusually gay and almost foolishly confident.

Nothing Can Save Us Now

The weather was good and the news gave no signs that advances on the ground would make our landing superfluous. The job itself was attractively spectacular. "Nothing can save us now," said the Brigadier, and everyone laughed excitedly.

All the same it wasn't long after dinner when the telephone rang to announce a 24 hour, or perhaps a 48 hour, postponement. For a novel reason, however: not because the ground forces were advancing too fast. This time they were not advancing fast enough.

“Another day or two, and we’ll all be bats,” said the Brigadier, on edge with frustration.

“There’s a hoodoo on this Brigade, you know,” said the Signals Officer.

“You’re absolutely right,” said the D.A.A.Q.M.G.(C-57) furiously.

The Mess Staff Had Been Playing Cards

They settled down to play bridge and their irritability was further fed by discovering that the mess staff had been playing with the cards and had made them filthy in the process.

“I wish to God we could ring up home,” said the Staff Captain.

“What is it to-day?”

“Frankly, I’ve lost count.”

“I’d have bet anything this was the day,” said the D.A.A.Q.M.G.

“Good thing we didn’t go last night. With this counter-attack we’d have had it properly,” said the Brigadier.

“We’ll have to unload the gliders,” said the I.O. “They’ve been loaded a week. They’ll fall apart.”

“Thank God I haven’t shaved.”

“My laundry won’t stand it,” said the D.A.A.Q.M.G. (nearly all their kit had been sent overseas in advance). “You know what we’ll have next. People coming up from 6th Div. giving us lectures on how to do it.” He picked up a chair, which promptly fell apart. “Even the bottom falls out of the bloody chair. Next thing’ll be route marches again.”

“Send them on a route march to-morrow,” said the Brigadier, coming back into the room. “Oh no, I suppose we can’t.”

“Trouble is these 24 hour postponements. Never time to do anything,” said the B.M.

Told to Plan an Operation

On Saturday morning the Brigadier took me for a long walk in the grounds of the local big house. I asked him whether he didn’t find the prospect of responsibility for the lives of his Brigade in battle a horrifying one.

He said he was still appalled at the thought of having to make quick decisions in battle, but he wasn’t worried when it came to the actual making of them. He also suffered from a sense of oppression and Oh-my-God when summoned to Div. HQ and told to plan an operation in a few hours. I asked just how much of the plan he had to make himself. He said that in this case the General had given him the Bde role and left the rest to him. Then the General had flown up the next day to ask him what he meant to do. He, in his turn, had given the three battalion commanders their general roles and not bothered them with guidance which they were all too experienced to need.

All he had done in the way of criticism had been to point out a minor road from an airfield which one of the C.O.s had ignored and suggest that they put an

outpost on it. He threw a passing bouquet to his Bde staff who reduced his work a tremendous amount, he said, by not being afraid to take decisions, and also by being experienced enough to make the right ones.

You Get No Marks for Mental Strain

The cancellation for that day was unique in that it came in the early evening.

“It really is purgatory, this hanging about,” said the D.A.A.Q.M.G.

“You realise that we’ve been on 36 hours’ notice for getting on for a month?” asked the B.M.

“Signal exercise, that’ll be the next thing,” said the D.A.A.Q.M.G.

“That’s the 19th time we’ve been within hours of getting into the ‘planes,” the B.M. went on bitterly. “You realise that no one’s the slightest sympathy with us. You get no marks for mental strain.”

“You got any aspirins, David?” the B.M. asked the Doctor.

“Hundreds of them, in serried rows.”

“Bloody awful, trying to kill time,” said the B.M.

That was Saturday, the 9th September. Actually, we took off on the 17th September, the DZ being in Southern Holland.

(1-1) Anthony Cotterell subsequently died of his injuries. His place of internment is unknown. See *Major Cotterell at Arnhem: A War Crime and a Mystery* by Jennie Gray, The History Press, 2012.

(1-2) pdr—pounder.

(1-3) Atk—Anti-tank.

(1-4) Bde—Brigade.

(1-5) HQ—Headquarters.

(1-6) Bn—Battalion.

(1-7) RE—Royal Engineers.

(1-8) Fd—Field.

(1-9) Amb—Ambulance.

(1-10) KOSB—King’s Own Scottish Borderers.

(1-11) Coy—Company.

(1-12) Bty—Battery.

(1-13) RA—Royal Artillery.

(1-14) Lt—Light.

(1-15) Pro—Provost.

(1-16) RASC—Royal Army Service Corps.

(1-17) REME—Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

(1-18) RAOC—Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

(1-19) Gp—Group.

(1-20) DZ—Drop Zone.

(2-21) Ind.—Independent.

(2-22) B.M.—Brigade Major.

(2-23) R.V.—Rendezvous.

(2-24) W/T—Wireless Telegraphy.

(2-25) L.O.—Liaison Officer.

(2-26) offr—officer.

(2-27) tpt—transport.

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- (2-28) fwd—forward.
 - (2-29) MDS—Main Dressing Station.
 - (3-30) G.O.C.—General Officer Commanding.
 - (3-31) C.R.A.—Commander Royal Artillery.
 - (3-32) tps—troops.
 - (3-33) MG—Machine Gun.
 - (3-34) arty—artillery.
 - (4-35) AP—Armour-Piercing.
 - (4-36) HE—High Explosive.
 - (4-37) Inf—Infantry.
 - (4-38) SP—Self Propelled.
 - (6-39) PIAT—Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank.
 - (6-40) pl—platoon.
 - (6-41) A.C.C.—Army Catering Corps.
 - (6-42) amn—ammunition.
 - (7-43) I.O.—Intelligence Officer.
 - (7-44) i/c—in charge (of).
 - (7-45) JLO—Junior Line Officer.
 - (7-46) NCO—Non-commissioned officer.
 - (8-47) RSM—Regimental Sergeant Major.
 - (8-48) cpl—corporal.
 - (9-49) rds—rounds.
 - (9-50) QM—Quarter Master.
 - (9-51) S/Sgt—Staff Sergeant.
 - (9-52) Armt Artfr Tels—Armament Artificer Telecommunications.
 - (9-53) QMS—Quarter Master Sergeant.
 - (9-54) RAMC—Royal Army Medical Corps.
 - (9-55) RAP—Rocket-Assisted Projectile [unclear].
 - (9-56) SA—Small Arms.
 - (C-57) D.A.A.Q.M.G.—Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General.