
The Round Tablette

Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)

Thursday, 13 September 2012

26:01 Volume 21 Number 1
Published by WW II History Round Table
Edited by Dr. Connie Harris
www.mn-ww2roundtable.org

Welcome to the September meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table, and to the beginning of the next quarter century of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. This evening's speaker is John McManus, the author of *September Hope*, along with Airborne and ground veterans of Operation MARKET GARDEN and the fighting in the Schledt Estuary.

Beginning on September 17, 1944, Operation MARKET GARDEN, the largest airborne battle in history, was also the only major Allied defeat of the Northwest European Campaign. It provides interesting case studies of the need for well-planned logistics, of the problems of inter-Allied rivalries, and of the impact of weather on battle plans.

Operation MARKET GARDEN's origins lay in the surprising success of the Allied invasion that had regained more territory than was even optimistically planned for. By August 25, Paris came under Allied control once again and the Seine River was not an obstacle to advance. While the German *Wehrmacht* was in a desperate state, Allied overconfidence would plant the seeds of defeat. At the rate the Allied armies were moving across France, many thought the war would be over by Christmas.

Overall, General Dwight D. Eisenhower's strategy was to advance on as broad a front as his logistics would allow. British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery proposed the strategy of a concentrated single thrust northward along the coastline to take the vitally important port of Antwerp. Lieutenant General Omar Bradley vehemently opposed this plan. He, like many American generals, doubted Montgomery's prowess as a leader, and believed that American forces should take the lead with the victory in sight.

Montgomery's single thrust plan would also mean halting Lieutenant General George S. Patton's Third Army, which had advanced the farthest east of the Allied armies. The debate between the "broad front" versus "single thrust" caused friction between the Americans and British leadership. Eventually, Eisenhower decided to maintain a broad front but add more troops to Montgomery's northern thrust.

As Montgomery drove into Belgium, he complained about shortages of fuel and supplies, even though he was receiving 80 percent of the support he requested. He proposed that all of Bradley's forces should halt so all logistical support could go to British 21st Army Group. Though he did not get all the gas and POL, he got most of it. In quick succession, Allied forces captured Brussels on September 3rd and Antwerp on September 4th. Antwerp fell so quickly that the Germans could not destroy the port facilities, but Montgomery failed to close the deal by not moving his armies ten more miles to capture Walcheren Island and the South Beveland peninsula. The Wehrmacht's Fifteenth Army Group had been fleeing up the coastline from the Pas de Calais, and because of Montgomery's halt, were able to ferry across the Schledt Estuary at night to Walcheren Island and then back into Holland where they controlled passage through the Estuary, and thus made Antwerp's pristine port facilities useless for upcoming operations.

Eisenhower came under increasing pressure from Washington from the Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, and from the Army Air Forces commander, General Henry "Hap" Arnold, to have a major airborne operation before the end of the war in Europe. In addition, Montgomery, having halted at Antwerp, proposed an armored thrust supported by British and American airborne forces across Holland and the Rhine. This would become Operation MARKET GARDEN.

This badly thought out plan was also plagued by bad luck. Allied airborne forces would be dropped behind enemy lines over three days, and capture bridges at three major place. The inexperienced British 1st Airborne Division was to capture the most difficult bridge at Arnhem, while the more experienced American 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions would capture the bridges at Nijmegen and Eindhoven respectively. MARKET GARDEN began on September 17th after extensive air attacks. Despite strict orders against it an American officer carried a complete set of battle plans on board an attacking glider, it crashed killing all on board. Within hours the plans, were in the hands of Kurt Student, of the *Wehrmacht's* First Parachute Army.

The 17th of September was a bright and sunny day, and the first day drops went off without a hitch. Over the next four days inclement weather disrupted most of the air operations, delaying re-enforcements and supplies to the

WWII History Round Table on DVD!!! Programs \$10 + tax & shipping

Order online at: www.barros.us/online-store.cfm or contact Rob at (763) 639-3399

struggling airborne units. In addition, movement of armored units was impeded as roads turned into muddy quagmires, and swollen rivers and streams that made movement difficult. The flooding strengthened the German defensive operations.

Logistics finally caught up with the Allies. The forward mechanized and motorized units could not be supplied with gasoline. The French railroad and road networks, wrecked by Allied air power to prevent German movements against the Normandy beachhead, could not be repaired quickly enough to support the fast moving armies. Montgomery's failure to take the Scheldt Estuary, making Antwerp unavailable for logistical support came back to haunt the Allies and resulted in costly fighting. In contrast, the Germans benefited from their shortening supply lines and were able to put up a vigorous defense. By the end of November the rapid Allied advance stalled out in the Dutch countryside.

Further Reading:

John McManus, *September Hope: The American Side of a Bridge too Far* (New York: Penguin Group, Inc. 2012).

David Bennett, *Magnificent Disaster: The Failure of Market Garden, the Arnhem Operation, September 1944* (Drexel Hill, PA: Casemate, 2008).

James Gavin, *On to Berlin* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992).

George Koskamaki, *Hell's Highway: A Chronicle of the 101st Airborne in the Holland Campaign, September – November 1944* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2007).

Guy LoFaro, *Sword of St. Michael: The 82nd Airborne Division in World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2011).

Robert Kershaw, *It never snows in September: The German View*, (Surrey, Ian Allan Publishing, 1990)

Denis Whitaker & Shelagh Whitaker, *Tug of War: The Allied Victory that opened Antwerp* (Toronto, Canada: Stoddart Publishing, 2000)

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - Sept. 18, 2012 J.E.B. Stuart, American Knight www.tccwrt.com - info @ tccwrt.com

St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - - Steve Anderson - 715-386-1268

Rochester WWII History Round Table -507-280-9970; www.w2roundtable-rochester.org

Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium April 2013, <http://www.tccwrt.com/symposium.html> or tccwrt@yahoo.com

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
Air Show - Eden Prairie - July, 14-15, 2012; <http://www.airexpo-mn.org/> - 952-746-6100

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717
CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafmn.org or Bill at 952-201-8400
Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523
Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.com

Round Table Schedule 2012-2013

13 Sept.	Market Garden
11 Oct.	Holocaust
25 Oct.	Vietnam Emerges from WW2
8 Nov.	Interviews of Nazi Leaders
13 Dec.	Relief of Bastogne
2013	
10 Jan.	Eastern Front
14 Feb.	Military Intelligence Language Sch.
14 Mar.	Mistakes in the German Retreat
28 Mar.	WW2 in the Middle East
11 Apr.	The Ruhr Pocket
9 May	Malmedy

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton
coldpatton@yahoo.com

At the 11 October Round Table, the Gerber family will be selling some of Dr. Jim's books – first editions and signed copies. Bring your checkbook!



Map from USMA History Dept. website <http://www.westpoint.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/World%20War%20II%20Europe/WWIIEurope68.gif>