



Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Operation Market Garden **The Battle for Arnhem, 17 - 25 September 1944**

By September 1944 the Second World War in Europe looked all but over. Germany was at bay, her armies disorganised and demoralised, pressed hard by the relentless advance of the Soviets in the east. In France, Commonwealth, American and allied forces had overcome fierce resistance to break out of Normandy, capturing Paris and liberating most of Belgium. The biggest threat to a quick Allied victory appeared to come not from the Germans, but from dangerously overstretched supply lines that could not keep pace with the rapid advance of the two main Allied armies in the west.

Faced with such a dangerous situation, the Allies decided that resources should be concentrated and a "rapier-like" thrust made into the German lines that would win the war by Christmas. Operation Market Garden was the proposed solution.

The Plan

Market Garden, the brainchild of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, commander of the Commonwealth forces in Europe, was one of the most audacious plans of the Second World War.



Arnhem (Oosterbeek) War Cemetery

"Now the sky was chaos...puffs

*of exploding shells...bombers plunging towards the
casting off and banking steeply...and
in between all this...an irregular pattern of
parachutes, men and supplies float*

In the largest airborne operation in history, Montgomery proposed to fly some 35,000 men of the First Allied Airborne Army, comprising the British 1st Airborne Division (including an attachment of the First Polish Independent Parachute Brigade Group) and two American Divisions into German-occupied Holland. American paratroopers would seize bridges at Eindhoven and Nijmegen, while British and Polish forces would be dropped north of the Rhine to capture and hold the vital crossing at Arnhem. These troops would be relieved by 30 Corps, spearheading the British 2nd Army, which would advance from the south along the single road from Eindhoven to Arnhem, eventually crossing the Rhine and enabling the Allied armies to sweep south into the industrial heartland of Germany to end the war.

From the outset, bad luck, assumptions and planning errors would have fatal consequences for the operation's success. With some of the "drop zones" for the airborne forces at considerable distances from the vital bridges, the element of surprise was lost and large numbers of troops were unable to reach their objectives, while the German's gained valuable time to reinforce their defensive positions. Delays in capturing some of the key bridges along the relief route would also have serious consequences for the British and Polish paratroopers in Arnhem.

There were too few aircraft to carry the entire army. Bad weather and a decision to make only three daily 'lifts' further hindered the effective force that the Allies could bring to bear on the ground. To compound matters, the paratroopers at Arnhem found their radios would not work and with communication with the forces outside the town almost impossible, all effective control over the engagement was lost as it spiralled into a series of isolated and desperate actions.

But, perhaps most significantly, intelligence reports indicating the presence of two SS Panzer Divisions near Arnhem were largely ignored, the assumption being that the reports were inaccurate or that these units were no longer combat effective. Over the next few days, the relatively lightly armed paratroopers in and around the town would face these tanks with little or no effective means of stopping them.



e earth, gliders

ing down..."



IWM: BU 1162

A Bridge Too Far?

On Sunday 17 September the attack went ahead as planned. The 500 gliders and 1,500 transport aircraft landed the first wave of airborne troops with little opposition and they soon began moving towards their targets, although as the Americans reached some of their objectives they found the bridges had already been blown up. The relief force of 30 Corps were also encountering difficulties back at the operation's start-line.

"The Second Army was always at the back of our minds...the thought of it made us stand up to anything..."

With only three days to make sixty miles along a narrow, well defended road, the 30 Corps armoured column ran into trouble almost immediately when German artillery picked off the nine leading vehicles, effectively bringing it to a standstill for nearly an hour. By the end of the first day, the column had travelled a mere seven miles.



In Arnhem, the operation was not going to plan. Some 2,000 men of the 1st Airborne's 1st Parachute Brigade began to encounter heavy opposition as they closed in on the vital bridge. It was impossible to co-ordinate any attack on the German defenders because of continuing problems with the radios but, even so, one battalion (some 700 men) reached and captured the northern end of the bridge. Digging into the surrounding buildings they waited for the inevitable

IWM: HU 2127



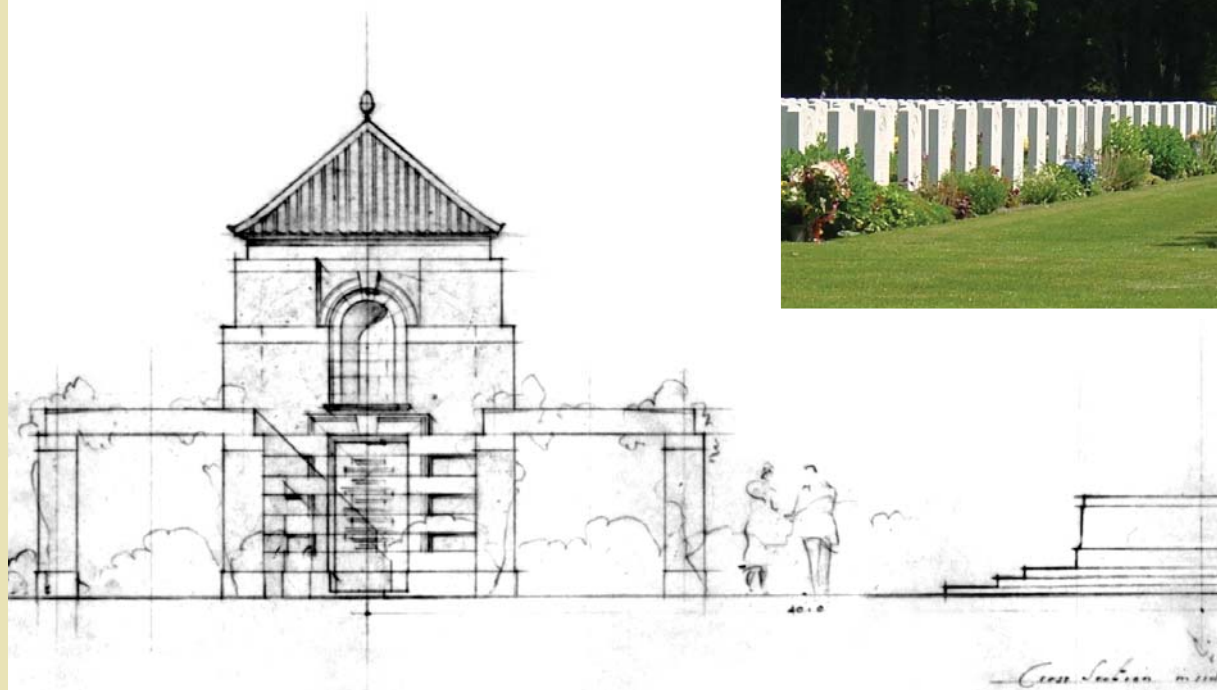
*Valkenswaard
War Cemetery*

German counter-attacks. Sure enough, the tanks which had been discounted in the earlier intelligence reports began moving into Arnhem to take on the paratroopers.

Throughout the next day, the remainder of the 1st Parachute Brigade fought desperately to reach the men at the bridge who were putting up a heroic defence in the face of overwhelming odds. By nightfall it was apparent that any further attempts to reach the bridge would be futile but it was not until Thursday 21st that surrounded, with no ammunition, no hope of relief, and with German tanks systematically destroying house after house, the much reduced force at the bridge was forced to surrender.

But all was not yet lost. The remainder of the Airborne Division had formed a perimeter on the outskirts of the town at Oosterbeek. This became known as The Cauldron and for as long as they held it, Market Garden stood a chance of success. Everything now depended upon how soon 30 Corps could reach them.

On the second day of the operation, 30 Corps had covered 20 miles in just a few hours. On the third day, they reached Nijmegen, where the Americans were still engaged in bitter street fighting. The bridge here, over the River Waal, was the last obstacle to Arnhem and it had to be captured. On Wednesday 20th, day four of the operation, the Americans were ordered to cross the river so that the bridge could be attacked from both ends simultaneously. The attack was successful but at a terrible cost. More than half of the force was killed or wounded but with the Nijmegen bridge now in Allied hands the route to Arnhem was open. It appeared as if Operation Market Garden would at last succeed.



" A tank *advancing* and firing shells

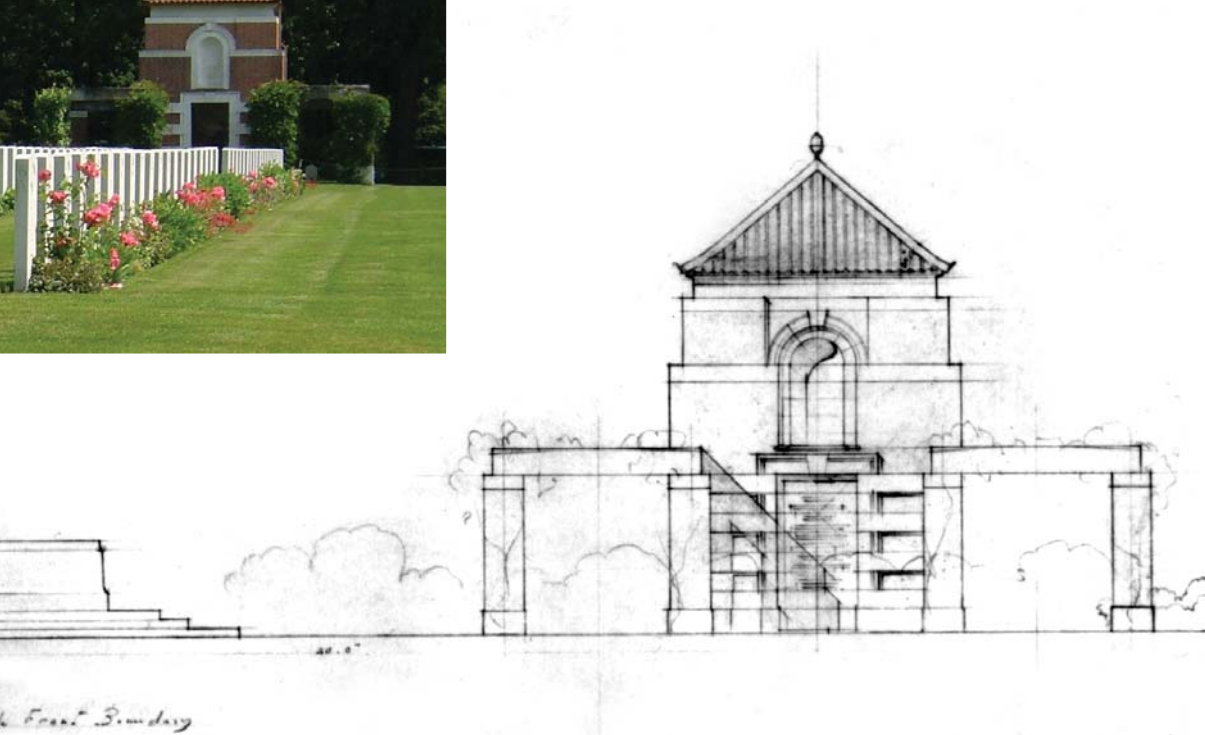
is the most *frightening* thing imaginable...and of *all* the experiences

I had later on I was *NEVER* more frightened than now..."

On the evening of Friday 22nd, 30 Corps's tanks began to arrive on the south bank of the Rhine opposite the bridgehead still held by the 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem but, despite repeated attempts over the next three days, it proved impossible to reinforce their positions. By the 25th it had become clear that what remained of the 1st Airborne Division would have to be withdrawn and that night, under cover of darkness, two thousand were ferried across the river to safety. Although they had originally been asked to hold the area for three days, they had held it for nine.



IWM: BU 1143



The Dead

Approximately 10,600 men fought at Arnhem, but only some 2,400 returned. Over 1,500 were killed, the remainder were captured or wounded. Had the operation succeeded it is possible that the war would have ended in 1944 and that the map of post-war Europe would have been very different.

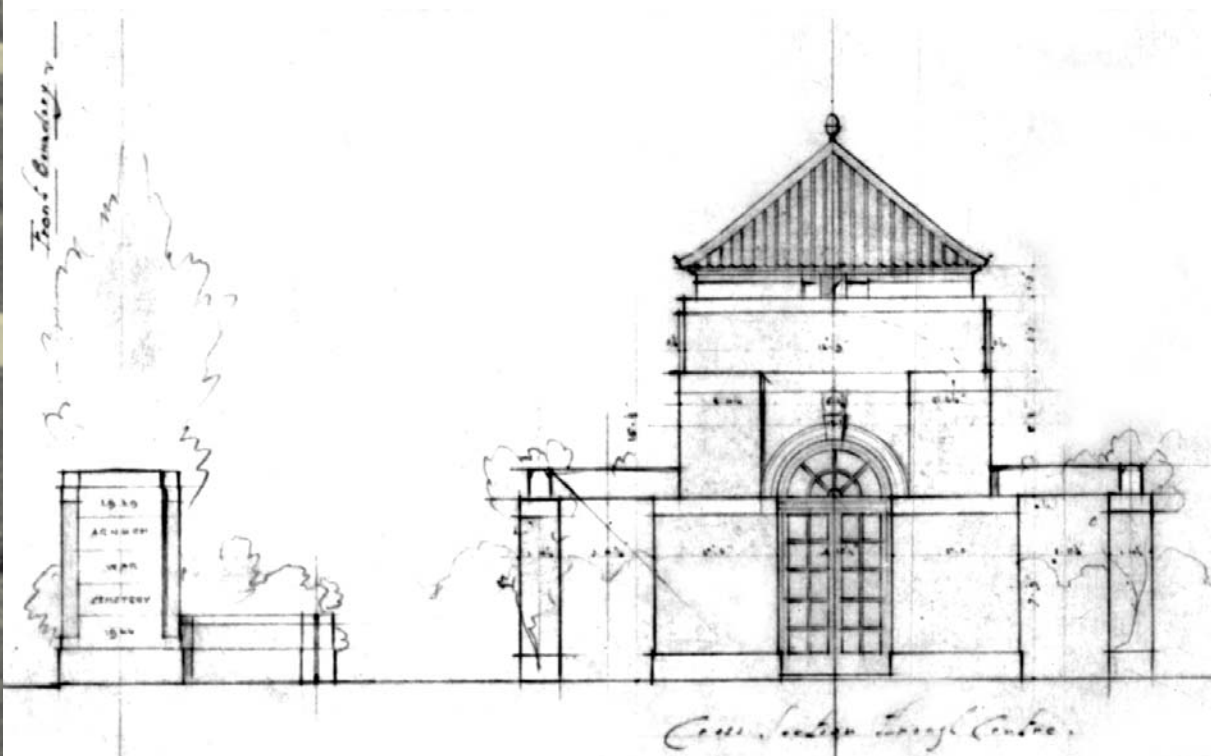
Historians continue to debate the reasons for Market Garden's failure but the bravery of those involved is not in question. Their sacrifice, marked in the main by the Commonwealth war cemetery at Arnhem Oosterbeek and the Groesbeek Memorial, will not be forgotten.

Cemeteries and Memorials

Although the majority of those who fought and died in Operation Market Garden are buried in **Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery** or commemorated on the **Groesbeek Memorial**, others are to be found in cemeteries along the Eindhoven to Nijmegen route traversed by 30 Corps, alongside their comrades who died during later operations in the area.

These include: **Valkenswaard War Cemetery**, which was the first village to be liberated on the main line of the advance into Holland in September 1944; **Eindhoven (Woensel) General Cemetery**; **Uden War Cemetery**; **Jonkerbos War Cemetery**; and **Mook War Cemetery**, where the village was entered by parachutists of the 82nd U.S. Airborne Division on 17 September 1944.

"As we jumped on the jeep...we noticed ...a CROSS and grave of one of yesterday's glider pilots. We had been surprisingly lucky...most of the first and second lifts had taken a lot of punishment before they even reached the ground.."



Members of the Polish Airborne forces who died in the operation are buried alongside their allies, while those who have no known grave are commemorated on the Polish Monument at Driel. Many of the Commonwealth aircrew who died during the operation have no known grave and are commemorated by name at the Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial, Runnymede in the United Kingdom (the subject of a separate information sheet).



Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery (1,763 burials)

The cemetery was constructed on the site of the airborne landings and contains the graves of the majority of those killed during Operation Market Garden and many of those who died in later fighting in the area.

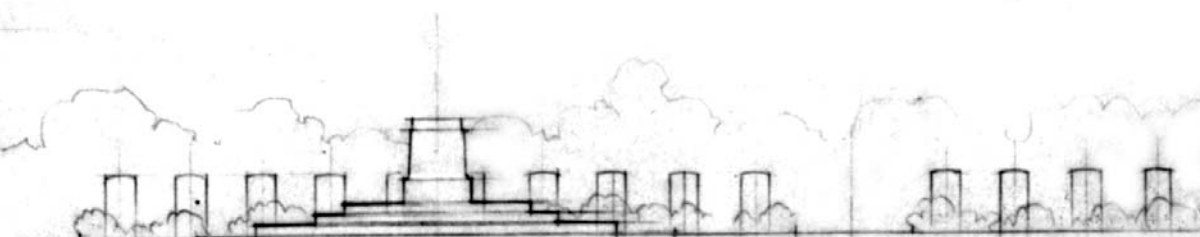
In 1945 some 1,200 children "adopted" the Commonwealth cemetery at Arnhem, placing flowers on the graves and developing close bonds with the relatives of those who had died - a tradition that continues among Arnhem school children to this day.

Arnhem is in the eastern Netherlands. Oosterbeek lies 7 km west of Arnhem on the road to Wageningen. From the Utrechtseweg, turn on to the Stationsweg heading for Oosterbeek Station. At the railway station, turn right on to Van Limburg Stirumweg. The entrance to the cemetery is a short distance along this road opposite the town cemetery.

Groesbeek Memorial (1,035 names)

The Groesbeek Memorial commemorates by name more than 1,000 members of the Commonwealth land forces who died during the campaign in north-west Europe between the time of crossing the Seine at the end of August 1944 and the end of the war in Europe, and whose graves are not known.

*Groesbeek is located 10 km south east of the town of Nijmegen close to the German frontier. The Groesbeek Memorial stands in **Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery** which is 3 km north of the village and 1.5 kilometres east of the main road to Nijmegen. On leaving the A73 motorway at the junction Overasselt-Mook-Groesbeek,*



follow directions to Mook, passing Mook War Cemetery and continuing to the roundabout outside the village of Groesbeek. Turn left at the roundabout onto Dorpstraat, passing through Groesbeek. The road name then changes to Molenweg. A Commission direction sign indicates the right hand turning from Molenweg onto the Zeven Heuvelenweg. The Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery lies 1 km down this road on the right.

Both the cemetery at Arnhem and The Groesbeek Memorial were designed by the architect Philip Hepworth.



Services Available to the Public

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is responsible for marking and maintaining the graves of those members of the Commonwealth forces who died during the two world wars, for building and maintaining memorials to the dead whose graves are unknown and for providing records and registers of these 1.7 million burials and commemorations found in most countries throughout the world.

Enquiries about the location of individual burials and commemorations may be directed to either of the offices below or to the Debt of Honour Register - a search by surname database at the Commission's web site at www.cwgc.org

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Quotations are from 'Arnhem Lift', published anonymously in January 1945, the author later identified as Sgt Louis Hagan, MM, a glider pilot.