



When Intelligence Made a Difference

— WWII ERA —

Operation Market Garden

by Wim Klinkert

Operation Market Garden was a bold, spectacular Allied airborne and ground operation, in September 1944, penetrating over 50 miles into Nazi-occupied Netherlands. This operation, which failed to hold the bridges over the Rhine River at Arnhem forms a dramatic episode in the Allied advance towards the Rhine and has encouraged new research about the use and misuse of intelligence by the opposing combatants.

The British author Anthony Beevor made the latest major contribution to this topic in his 2018 book, *Arnhem, the Battle of the Bridges*.¹ He discusses the two important questions that are attached to Market Garden from the perspective of intelligence: first, the supposed betrayal of the Allied plans to the Germans by the Dutch double agent Christiaan Lindemans, codenamed “King Kong;” and second, the low quality of Allied intelligence, leading to an underestimation of the German military strength and consequently to the failure to hold on to the Arnhem bridgehead. Both topics were, and still are, the subject of multiple publications of varied quality.

The Dutchman Christiaan Lindemans worked for the anti-German resistance in occupied Western Europe, mostly to help Allied airmen escape to safety. Slowly though, his fellow resistance fighters began to lose confidence in him due to his recklessness. In March 1944, when the resistance seemed unwilling to help free his brother, taken prisoner by the Germans, Lindemans decided to work for the Abwehr² as well. His main contact and protector was Hermann Giskes of section III F.³ From August, Lindemans began

to provide the Germans with valuable, and mostly accurate, military information on the Allied advance through Northern France and Belgium, thereby proving his worth as an agent. In early September, he was ordered to provide information on the plans of the Belgian resistance - as well as those of the Allies - for sending agents behind German lines. As a result, he infiltrated successfully Belgian and Dutch resistance groups. He even managed to penetrate the Allied headquarters in Brussels, befriending, among others, Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands – commander of the Dutch interior forces – and Philip Johns, head of the Low Countries Section of the Special Forces Headquarters.⁴ Johns knew about plans to advance to Arnhem and wanted Lindemans to play a role. Around 8 September Lindemans was thus assigned by the British to contact the Dutch resistance, in order to coordinate the military operations with resistance activities. The British had no idea about Lindemans’ double role, although a message by Giskes, indicating his double role, had been intercepted at the end of August. Moreover, some close associates of Prince Bernhard had expressed doubts about Lindemans’ reliability, but as they had no proof no action was taken. Lindemans travelled towards the frontline on 12 September, but only reached Holland on the 14th. In the meantime, on 10 September, the die was cast and the Allies’ decision taken to launch Market Garden on the 17th.

Just across the border in Holland, Lindemans gave himself up to a German patrol, saying he was an Abwehr agent. The Germans brought him to *Generaloberst*⁵ Kurt Student’s *Fallschirmjäger* (paratroop) Headquarters in Vught, southwest of Arnhem. Lindemans told the Germans that hundreds of British tanks were ready to advance northwards towards Eindhoven. Next, he was transported to Giskes’ former Headquarters near Utrecht in the centre of Holland. There, he betrayed a number of British agents and probably gave the Germans military information on the Allies, including Allied plans for a northward advance towards the Rhine, including airborne forces, to be executed within a few days. Subsequently the Germans let Lindemans go, to fulfil his mission for the British in Eindhoven. Soon after his arrival the Dutch resistance, considering him very untrustworthy and unwilling to take risks, incarcerated him. His definitive unmasking took place only at the end of October.

1. Anthony Beevor. *Arnhem, the Battle of the Bridges*. London: Penguin, 2018.

2. The German military intelligence service.

3. The Abwehr counter espionage agents bureau.

4. A section of the British Special Operations Executive (SOE).

5. Colonel-general.

In his detailed analysis, Dutch intelligence historian Bob de Graaff makes clear that Lindemans' information only affected German military operations to a limited extent.⁶ The Abwehr had already realized from other sources, as well as from their own military operational analysis, that the next Allied step would be an attempt to cross the Rhine, possibly via the Netherlands. Agents employed by Walter Schellenberg, head of foreign intelligence of the *Sicherheitsdienst*⁷, had also acquired information, via Swedish contacts, that the Allies were planning airborne attacks to cross the Rhine. Furthermore, a message had come in via the intelligence service of the German Army that intercepted Allied radio traffic that such landings were to be expected from 14 September onwards. The Allies in turn noticed, through decoded Enigma messages, that the Germans took such airborne operations, among others around Nijmegen and Arnhem, seriously into account. All this information was collected between 9 and 14 September. Allied reconnaissance flights and bombing attacks on the 16th were interpreted by the Abwehr as indicators of an imminent Rhine crossing. Lindemans' information, in fact, only reaffirmed a scenario the Germans were already preparing for, although they lacked reliable, detailed information on the exact time and place. Indeed, as early as 3-4 September, they had already put in place some precautionary measures: a SS-battalion under *Sturmbannführer*⁸ Sepp Krafft was sent to Arnhem, with the assignment to prepare for an airborne attack in that region. Similar preparations were made in other areas as well. Krafft's unit was very effective on 17 September, when the attack actually began.

Richard Christmann, an Abwehr agent who had interrogated Lindemans near Utrecht, later declared that the information given by Lindemans was sent on 16 September to a different German Headquarters, which did not seem impressed, even expressing doubt on Lindemans' reliability. Christmann also said that some small extra units were sent to Arnhem, and hospitalized soldiers were evacuated, an allegation which is hard to verify today. In fact, on 17 September all major German commanders proved to be surprised by the scale and timing of the attack: only Krafft had actually been prepared. Most famous, of course, is the story about *Generalfeldmarschall* Walter Model, having lunch near Arnhem when the parachutists and gliders

came down. He rushed to safety, thinking the Allied forces were there to take him prisoner.

Although the Germans had their eyes on Arnhem as a possible Allied objective, the city never enjoyed top priority among military commanders. A Rhine crossing more to the East, even on German territory, was thought to be more probable as well as imminent. Lindemans had brought Arnhem to the attention of the Germans, but that had not altered their planning seriously. While they had been surprised by the September 17 operations, they managed to quickly recover tactically. Lindemans' information might have had more effect on the German countermeasures against the ground attack, south of Eindhoven, a city on the Belgian-Dutch border. Based on Lindemans' information, Student had sent reinforcements to that area, effectively delaying the ground attack on the 17th.

Another controversy linked to the Market Garden is related to Allied intelligence. Did inadequate Allied intelligence result in a disastrous operational defeat? On what information did Montgomery base his decisions, and was that information correct? Additionally, how was relevant information distributed among the Allied commanders, during a period of rapid change in the military situation? Was Market Garden indeed the intelligence failure, as Lyman Kirkpatrick in his book *Captains Without Eyes* states?⁹ Did the relevant intelligence elements fail to inform the commanders of the different risks involved? Was the planning done too hastily? Or did Allied intelligence underestimate the German strength, as Michael Lee Lanning wrote in *Senseless Secrets*?¹⁰ To get a general idea of the workings of Allied intelligence, one has to look at different levels of information gathering and processing, from Ultra signals intelligence at Bletchley Park to actions by intelligence officers at divisional level.¹¹

What did Ultra in fact say in the months, and especially the weeks, leading up to the Market Garden operation? Based on Ultra, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) published weekly intelligence reports. The one dated 20 August 1944, when the Allied armies crossed the Seine and the Germans seemed totally beaten, has gained notoriety:

The August battles have done it: the German Army in the WEST has had it.

6. Bob de Graaff *Dood van een dubbelspion*. Den Haag: sdu, 1997.

7. German political information service. The subordinate SD was the intelligence and security service of the SS.

8. SS rank equivalent to major.

9. Lyman Kirkpatrick. *Captains Without Eyes*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

10. Michael Lee Lanning. *Senseless Secrets*. New York: Birch Lane, 1996.

11. Joel Jeffson. *Operation Market Garden: Ultra Intelligence Ignored*. Fort Leavenworth: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2002. Pp. 1-2.

Crippled, in the NW by appalling losses, in the SW by sheer futility, and in the SOUTH by totally inadequate reserves, the armies of RUNDSTEDT, of KLUGE, ...are committed willy-nilly to what must shortly be the total surrender of more than two-thirds of FRANCE. It is an achievement of which the Allied Armies may well feel enormously proud, and of which the enemy is frankly envious.¹²

But the 'Victory Disease' began to show cracks not long after that. In the first days of September, it started to become clear that the Germans had regained their strength in the Dutch-Belgian border region and that the entrance to the port of Antwerp, the Scheldt, would be heavily defended. A total German collapse did not seem imminent, something Ultra duly made the Allied commanders aware of. A German defence line from Antwerp to Maastricht became visible from 6 September onwards. The simultaneous crossing of the Scheldt by the German 15. *Armee*, with tens of thousands of men reinforcing the southern Netherlands, was also noticed by Ultra. It is remarkable that SHAEF's weekly intelligence summaries did not press these developments home more clearly even though they were mentioned in the daily intelligence report of 10 September.¹³ On 15 September, Ultra reported that the German Army Group B had established its headquarters at Oosterbeek, close to Arnhem. Ultra also revealed that the Germans were expecting Allied advances to either Aachen or Arnhem, including employing airborne troops. And while Bletchley Park's cryptanalysts, which had not been informed of Montgomery's plans in order to avoid a biased analysis of the incoming information, did report the growing strength of the German army in Holland, the problem was disseminating this information down the line. This occurred very slowly and did not reach the corps commanders in the field. Both SHAEF and Field Marshal Montgomery's 21 Army Group received this Ultra information. SHAEF released a new weekly report on 16 September, mentioning the arrival not only of the German 15. *Armee* in the Netherlands, but also of two SS armoured divisions (albeit greatly reduced in strength) near Arnhem.

This much less optimistic assessment came too late for the Market Garden planners, who had begun collecting detailed information from 10 September onwards. Their main source was 21 Army Group headquarters, which was also informed by Ultra, but

seemed less convinced of the growth of German military strength in the southern Netherlands. The idea that German resistance would not be too impressive still lingered on in the Army Group headquarters. At the corps and divisional levels on the other hand, there was real concern about the strength of possible German resistance, concerns mentioned in their intelligence estimates in the days following 10 September. These levels were not privy directly to Ultra. What is especially noteworthy is that the intelligence reports of the American airborne divisions, still in the UK at the time, did mention German armoured divisions in the area of operations. This was probably partly based on information coming from the Dutch resistance. Additionally, individual staff officers tried to warn Montgomery not to take German fighting power too lightly. Most notable among them were Major Brian Urquart, intelligence officer of the British Airborne Corps; intelligence officer Brigadier Edgar Williams (21 Army Group) and, calling by telephone from England, his personal adjutant, Major-General Freddie de Guingand.¹⁴ Both Urquart and Williams were close to Montgomery personally.¹⁵ Even Major General Kenneth Strong, the chief intelligence officer for General Eisenhower at SHAEF, personally expressed concern, probably also based on Dutch sources. Montgomery, however, remained adamant. He had no intention of changing his operational plans at the last minute, nor of risking what he presumably saw as his last opportunity to attempt a British led Rhine crossing – an attempt to which Eisenhower had given the green light. He did not want to admit that the window of opportunity for such a daring operation had passed, that it was too late. Similarly, airborne commander Lieutenant-General Frederick Browning was not very willing, to say the least, to pass information down the line that could further pessimism on the feasibility of the operation.

Apart from Montgomery's personal ambition, the fact remains that the British distrusted any information based on HUMINT sources from the Dutch resistance. This was probably the result of the previous experiences with the so-called England Spiel, in which many SOE-agents dropped in the Netherlands had fallen into German hands. The British fear of German infiltration of the Dutch resistance had long been manifest, so when, on 6 September, Prince Bernhard

12. SHAEF Weekly Intelligence Summary 23, week ending 26 August 1944.

13. SHAEF, "G2 Report No. 98w (1200hrs, 10 September to 1200hrs, 11 September 1944), pp. 1-2.

14. Steven Rosson, *An Examination of the Intelligence Preparation for Operation Market Garden*. Charleston: Eastern Illinois University, 1997. P. 51.

15. Joel Jeffson. *Operation Market Garden: Ultra Intelligence Ignored*. Fort Leavenworth: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2002. P. 76.

presented Montgomery with relevant information on the German troops in Holland, he failed to get the Field Marshall's attention. The Prince later wrote: "The British considered us a bunch of idiots for daring to question their military tactics. The average Englishman doesn't like being told by a bloody foreigner that he's wrong."¹⁶ Equally remarkable is that aerial photography was sparsely used for the operational preparations, despite Urquart's famous attempt to convince Browning to undertake aerial reconnaissance near Arnhem.¹⁷ He succeeded but rather late, and in any case not much was done with the intelligence. The same lack of interest was shown for a more detailed terrain analysis, although Dutch sources had pointed out that the wet, low-lying polder¹⁸ area and the dykes were unusual terrain features that could slow down an armoured advance.¹⁹ Thus, although information was available, it was not considered in the planning process.

When considering those aspects surrounding the Market Garden operation, it is clear that it was not an

16. Cornelius Ryan. *A Bridge Too Far*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974. pp. 508-509.

17. Philip Bradley. *Market Garden: was Intelligence Responsible for the Failure?* Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University, 2001, P. 6

18. Flood plains surrounded by dykes.

19. Arnold Piper. *Intelligence Planning for Airborne Operations: A Perspective from Operation Market-Garden*. Fort Leavenworth: School of Advanced Military Studies, 1997. Pp. 15-19.

Allied intelligence failure. After all, the correct and relevant information was available and should have warranted at least further investigations, and certainly greater caution. Rather, the failure was in higher British command levels, hell-bent to make sure that Britain got credit for delivering the knockout punch to the Germans but also to test airborne operations before the war came to an abrupt end. The Germans were more successful in their use of human and signals intelligence and successfully deployed their forces to hand the Allies an ignominious defeat.

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