

Trenches to Foxholes



(Clockwise from left) American paratroopers with the 173rd Airborne Brigade, based in Vicenza, Italy, jump from a C-130 Hercules aircraft into the Dutch army's Ginkelse Heide training area in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, May 20, 2014. □ American paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade, based in Vicenza, Italy, land in the Dutch army's Ginkelse Heide training area in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, after jumping from an U.S. Air Force C-130 Hercules aircraft May 20, 2014. □ Chief Warrant Officer 3 Bobby Sattazahn, drop-zone safety officer with the 173rd Airborne Brigade, counts the paratroopers who jumped from a U.S. Air Force C-130 May 20, 2014, to commemorate Operation Market Garden and the Battle of Arnhem. (U.S. Army photos by Pascal Demeuldre)



Soldiers still learning from Montgomery's bold gamble

The 173rd Airborne Brigade traveled from Vicenza, Italy, to Nijmegen in the Netherlands with one goal -- discover lessons learned from what could arguably be termed the worst disappointment of World War II.

During a commemorative parachute drop May 20, more than 40 of the 173rd's leaders performed an in-flight rig, donning their parachutes and equipment inside the plane and then departing for a battle staff ride to learn from Operation Market Garden in September 1944.

Market was the airborne part of the operation; Garden was the ground portion.

The brain child of British Field Marshal Bernard Law "Monty" Montgomery, Operation Market Garden's objective was to capture eight bridges and end the war by Christmas.

Despite the success of the initial parachute and glider landings, Operation Market Garden went awry almost from the very beginning.

For example, after the Allied victories at Normandy and the Falaise Pocket, British intelligence was confident that the Germans had no front-line quality troops in the vicinity.

However, near Arnhem was the headquarters of Field Marshal Walther Model,

commander of Army Group B; other German units in the area were Luftwaffe Gen. Kurt Student's First Parachute Army and SS Gen. Wilhelm Bittrich's 2nd SS Panzer Corps (consisting of two tank divisions). All these troops were of the first caliber.

About 18,000 British, American and Polish troops were killed in Operation Market Garden and the Battle of Arnhem.

The 1977 film "A Bridge Too Far" told the story of Market Garden and Arnhem, and they were also covered in the television series "Band of Brothers."

Robert Slosson and Pascal Demeuldre contributed to this report.