



University of Chester

Deteriorative Influences Upon the Morale of the British 21st
Army Group in the Shadow of Operation 'Market Garden'.



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Introduction and Context

Operation 'Market Garden' was initiated by Allied forces on the 17th September 1944, ending on the 25th of the same month. Up until that point of the Second World War, it was the largest airborne landing to have ever been undertaken.¹ The main aim of Operation 'Market Garden' was to open up an invasion route for the Allied forces into the north of Germany from the Netherlands. In order to do this, the operation sought to capture and cross a number of bridges over a series of rivers and canals, including the Rhine and the Maas.² The first part of this operation - 'Market' - involved the landing of paratroopers in proximity to these bridges in order to capture and secure, awaiting part two of the operation. 'Garden' involved the movement of heavier units from Belgium, up through the Netherlands, relieving the units holding these bridges (See Source 0.01, 0.02, 0.03).³

The operation ended in disaster following a number of hindrances and tactical error. This included an array of faults related to strategy, intelligence, planning, weather and fortune. It was General Bernard Montgomery, who devised the plan, and remained "Market Garden's unrepentant advocate", although the operation was deemed a failure.⁴

Following the unsuccessful operation, the Allied forces were unable to cross the Rhine until 1945 and aside from the delay, the failure led to a severe fall in British military morale.⁵ This drop was then exacerbated by the period of hard fighting encountered by units of the British 21st Army Group, the force under Montgomery's command. One of which was British VIII Corps, who were set the task to clear the region from enemy forces up to the River Maas, in preparation for the invasion and ultimate demise of Nazi Germany.⁶ This thesis will

¹ Charles B. Macdonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, (Centre of Military History, US Army; Washington, D.C., 1993) p.132

² Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Montgomery*, (Collins; London, 1958) p. 272

³ L. F. Ellis, & A. E. Warhurst, *Victory in the West. Vol. II: The Defeat of Germany*, (Her Majesty's Stationary Office; London, 1969) (History of the Second World War. United Kingdom Military Series. Ed: Sir James Butler) p.29

⁴ Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Montgomery*, p. 298

⁵ Jonathan Fennell, 'Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War' P.25 in King, Anthony (ed.), *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

⁶ Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine: Combined Arms Doctrine in British 21st Army Group in North West Europe, 1944-45*, (Helion & Company Ltd; UK, 2015) p.112

explore the deteriorative influences upon the morale of the British 21st Army Group in the shadow of Operation 'Market Garden'.

This work is heavily grounded in the events of late September 1944, this is predominantly because the failure of operation 'Market Garden', led to change in strategy and a new set of requirements for the Allies.⁷ Thus, the failure to secure the final bridge at Arnhem was pivotal to the substantial drop in morale amongst the British troops. This drop has been identified by Jonathan Fennell's in his study into the states of morale within the British 21st Army Group.⁸ Fennell's work will be act as foundation for this thesis, upon which this work shall endeavour to illuminate the core factors that deteriorated morale for many British troops in the latter stages of 1944.

In terms of historiography, the heroic last stand at Arnhem has inspired much interest and debate into the topic. The operation gained a solid association with the phrase '*A Bridge Too Far*' after the publishing of Cornelius Ryan's book in 1974.⁹ Since Ryan's book was adapted to film in 1977,¹⁰ the operation has been in the domain of popular history of the Second World War, with a great deal of literature and films produced to give a version of history to a wider audience.¹¹ This has had the effect of catalysing debate surrounding the causative factors leading to the failure of the attack. One key view of academic historiography, argued by John Buckley, suggests that the failure was a conceptual one.¹² In other words, we can infer from this that the failure was due to poor; planning, organisation, leadership and strategy.

⁷ Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine: Combined Arms Doctrine in British 21st Army Group in North West Europe, 1944-45*, (Helion & Company Ltd; UK, 2015) pp.111-116

⁸ Jonathan Fennell, 'Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War' P.25

⁹ Cornelius Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, (Popular Library; 1974)

¹⁰ *A Bridge Too Far* (United Artists; UK, 1977)

¹¹ For examples of books –

Major General J. Frost, *A Drop Too Many* (Pen & Sword Ltd.; UK, 2008)

Major General R. E. Urquhart, *Arnhem* (Pen & Sword Ltd.; UK, 2011)

Sebastian Ritchie, *Arnhem Myth and Reality: Airborne Warfare, Air Power and the Failure of Operation Market Garden*, (Robert Hale Ltd; London, 2011)

Christopher Hibbert, *Arnhem*, (The Windrush Press; UK, 1998)

Bob Carruthers (Ed.) '*Arnhem 1944: A Bridge Too Far?*', (Pen & Sword Military; UK, 2013)

¹² John Buckley, *Monty's Men: The British Army and the Liberation of Europe*, pp.208-231

After the United States joined the war effort in a more meaningful role in late 1941, strategy in the Second World War “was fashioned by powers with diverse national interests”.¹³ This becomes perceptibly clear in the strategic debate surrounding the means in which the Allied powers would advance into Germany.¹⁴ After the invasion of Normandy in June 1944, and the consequent break out of the region, strategy was debated between rival Generals within the Allied forces including US Generals George Patton, Omar Bradley and the now Supreme Commander of Allied Forces Dwight Eisenhower. In the view of British General Bernard Montgomery, a powerful thrust towards Berlin was the best means of ending the war as soon as possible.¹⁵ However, Eisenhower opted for a ‘Broad Front’ as a means of balancing rival demands from US and British Commanders.¹⁶ This is noted in Montgomery’s memoirs as he reflected upon the requirements of the British. Montgomery claimed;

The British economy and man-power situation demanded victory in 1944: no later. Also, the war was bearing hardly on the mass of the people in Britain; it must be brought to a close quickly. Our “must” was different from the American must: a difference in urgency, as well as a difference in doctrine. This the American generals did not understand; the war had never been brought to their home country. Why should we throw everything away for reasons of American public opinion and American electioneering (1944 was the Presidential election year)? The strategy we were now to adopt would mean more casualties in killed and wounded. The armies were not being deployed on a broad front for any reasons of safety... Indeed, my plan offered the only possibility of bringing the war to a quick end.¹⁷

Instead of going for this audacious though risk burdened plan, Eisenhower, as Ernest J. King Chair writes, went for a “dull, unimaginative, but thoroughly safe campaign”.¹⁸ The ‘Broad Front’, whilst self-explanatory, involved engaging the Germans across a wide front and

¹³ Maurice Matloff, ‘Allied Strategy in Europe, 1939- 1945’, in Peter Paret (ed.) *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, (Oxford; New York, 1998) p.678

¹⁴ Maurice Matloff, ‘Allied Strategy in Europe, 1939- 1945’, in Peter Paret (ed.) *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, (Oxford; New York, 1998) p.678

¹⁵ Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Montgomery*, pp.270 -272

¹⁶ Anthony Beevor, *Arnhem: The Battle of the Bridges, 1944* (Penguin, UK, 2019) p.4

¹⁷ Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Montgomery*, pp.270 -272

¹⁸ Ernest J. King Chair, ‘Applied Strategy of World War II’ *Naval War College Review* Vol. 22, No. 9 (May 1970), pp. 62-70 p.64

wearing them down.¹⁹ Anthony Beevor notes that even the Germans were relieved with the 'Broad Front' strategy, as troops were distributed along a long line making both offensive and defensive operations more difficult.²⁰

The 'Single Thrust' thus, entailed a "really powerful and full-blooded thrust towards Berlin", with all possible resources given to that effort.²¹ This case for urgency, as Montgomery made clear, was not unfounded, as King Chair argues, aside from the Russians and Japanese, the United Kingdom was "the most thoroughly mobilised nation in world war II. She was using up irreplaceable natural and human resources at an alarming rate. If she were to recover from victory she had to have something to recover with".²²

Hence, we see a clear divide in necessity of the two nations which is reflected in the demands required by the corresponding Generals. Montgomery and Britain required a quick and clean victory, to end the economic and human drain which warfare brings so close to home. The US on the other hand, had no real restraints economically to necessitate riskier strategy to end the war quicker.²³ Along with this Anthony Beevor points out that, this plan satisfied neither US nor British Generals, with US Generals Omar N. Bradley and George C. Patton desiring "to go through the Siegfried Line like shit through a goose", and Montgomery's plan to bypass German defences, both receiving insufficient backing to be successful.²⁴ Eventually, an adapted version of Montgomery's plan was adopted in the form of Operation 'Market Garden', though the operation was not given maximum priority by Eisenhower, and was to be adopted within his 'Broad Front' strategy.²⁵

One reason to launch the operation was due to information about the strength of the *Wehrmacht*. This will be discussed at length in chapter two of this thesis, however, a founding element to the view of German weakness was because thousands of German prisoners were being taken daily. Fennell points out in Le Havre 11,000 prisoners were taken

¹⁹ Ernest J. King Chair, 'Applied Strategy of World War II' *Naval War College Review* Vol. 22, No. 9 (May 1970), pp. 62-70 p.62-66

²⁰ Anthony Beevor, *Arnhem: The Battle of the Bridges, 1944*, p.4

²¹ Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Montgomery*, p. 272

²² Ernest J. King Chair, 'Applied Strategy of World War II' p.64

²³ Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Montgomery*, pp.270 -272

Ernest J. King Chair, 'Applied Strategy of World War II' p.64

²⁴ Anthony Beevor, *Arnhem: The Battle of the Bridges, 1944* p.4

²⁵ Christopher Hibbert, *Arnhem*, (Phoenix; London, 2003) pp. 30-31.

at the cost of 388 casualties.²⁶ Thus, given the perceived state of the *Wehrmacht*, with a high proportion of divisions unfit for service, and a view amongst the Allies of imminent collapse.²⁷ “Monty’s insatiable appetite”,²⁸ finally swayed the opinion of Dwight Eisenhower, leading to acceptance of Montgomery’s plan for the decisive defeat of Germany.²⁹

The historiography around whether Montgomery’s suggestion of a full-blooded thrust would have been successful is split. Historians such as R W Thompson in his critical study of Bernard Montgomery and H. Essame, agree with the view that victory could have been achieved in 1944.³⁰ On the contrary, the official history of the Second World War by L. F. Ellis and A. E. Warhurst are generally more supportive of Dwight Eisenhower’s broader front.³¹ The discussion surrounding the adopted strategy, although hypothetical at times, is important to note as it is relevant later in the investigation of the impact the failure of Operation ‘Market Garden’ had upon morale. This is because the attempt to break through and cross the Rhine at Arnhem was fundamentally the work of Montgomery, although lacking the full requirements to make it ‘full-blooded’ enough, it determined the state of British morale in the later stages of 1944.

This shift in strategy from Eisenhower is an overarching issue when assessing morale, as to state hypothetically, had the Supreme Commander not allowed this move, or had he given Montgomery’s plan the sufficient supplies, the subsequent dip in morale may have been different. Failure in strategy however, cannot be placed solely upon Eisenhower, as it was Montgomery who led the planning for Operation Market Garden with Lieutenant General

²⁶ Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People’s War: The British and Commonwealth Armies in the Second World War*, p.555

²⁷ Stewart W. Bentley Jr., ‘Operation MARKET-GARDEN: Historical Perspective for Future Combined Arms Deep Battle’, *Army History*, No. 15 (Summer 1990), pp. 12-20 p.12

²⁸ B. H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (Book Club Associates: UK, 1979) p.565

²⁹ Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People’s War: The British and Commonwealth Armies in the Second World War*, pp.555-6

³⁰ R. W. Thompson, *Montgomery the Field Marshal: A Critical Study of the Generalship of Field- Marshal, The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, K. G., and of the campaign in North-West Europe, 1944-45*. (Allen & Unwin; London, 1969)

H. Essame, *The Battle for Germany*, (Batsford; London, 1969)

³¹ L. F. Ellis & A. E. Warhurst, *Victory in the West. Vol. II: The Defeat of Germany*, (History of the Second World War. United Kingdom Military Series. Ed: Sir James Butler) (Her Majesty’s Stationary Office; London, 1969)

Frederick Browning.³² Thus, the relevance of good strategy and leadership is prevalent in the maintenance of strong morale in future operations.

To explain the shortcomings of strategy and leadership, key factors to the failure of the operation are identified by secondary writings. A prominent factor is in regard to landing zones of airborne troops. This alone, William F. Buckingham argues, was “the single most important factor in the failure at Arnhem”.³³ The drop zones of the airborne troops was between six and eight miles to the west of the bridge at Arnhem.³⁴ Drops also took place over a period of three days to the same drop zone locations, which undermined the element of surprise and enabled German forces to focus counter attacks to a particular location.³⁵ Consequently, a trend within the historiography is becoming apparent, one which views the repulsion a failure of strategy and planning

A prevalent element within much of the historiography of Market Garden’s failure, comes in the from the supposed overlooking of ULTRA intelligence reports. These told of German II SS Panzer Corp Divisions and reinforcements in the Arnhem area.³⁶ However, as Sebastian Ritchie argues, much of this intelligence argument is based upon legend rather than evidence.³⁷ In fact for Ritchie “the key Allied failure did not relate to II SS Panzer Corps at all. Rather, it concerned the Germans’ ability to deploy as infantry at very short notice an extraordinary array of auxiliary personnel”.³⁸ That being said, Stewart Bentley asserts that Montgomery and Browning’s failure to take full advantage of intelligence reports was some of their “most important mistakes”.³⁹ Reportedly, issues such as bad weather also played a role in the operations failure, with reinforcing forces prevented because of this.⁴⁰

³² L. F. Ellis & A. E. Warhurst, *Victory in the West. Vol. II: The Defeat of Germany* p.29

³³ William F. Buckingham, *Arnhem 1944*, (Tempus; UK, 2004) p.231

³⁴ Stewart W. Bentley Jr., ‘Operation MARKET-GARDEN: Historical Perspective for Future Combined Arms Deep Battle’, *Army History*, No. 15 (Summer 1990), pp. 12-20 p.14

³⁵ Christopher Hibbert, *Arnhem*, p.184

³⁶ Stewart W. Bentley Jr., ‘Operation MARKET-GARDEN: Historical Perspective for Future Combined Arms Deep Battle’, *Army History*, No. 15 (Summer 1990), pp. 12-20 p.17

³⁷ Sebastian Ritchie, *Arnhem Myth and Reality: Airborne Warfare, Air Power and the Failure of Operation Market Garden*, (Robert Hale Ltd; London, 2011) p. 125

³⁸ Sebastian Ritchie, *Arnhem Myth and Reality: Airborne Warfare, Air Power and the Failure of Operation Market Garden*, pp.126-7

³⁹ Stewart W. Bentley Jr., ‘Operation MARKET-GARDEN: Historical Perspective for Future Combined Arms Deep Battle’ p.17

⁴⁰ Peter Calvocoressi, Guy Wint, John Pritchard, *Total War: The Causes and Course of the Second World War*, (2nd Ed) (Viking; UK, 1989) p.548

When addressing the subject of secondary literature, there is an abundance surrounding a variety of debates relevant to Operation 'Market Garden'. However, in regards to the period following the failure of the operation, there is surprisingly a great deal less. Charles Forrester gives a possible explanation to this relative lack of public interest, noting the contrast to 'Market Garden'. He states that British VIII Corps would "play an important but subsidiary role".⁴¹ Indeed, the role of VIII Corps during the later stages of 1944, would prove "useful though unspectacular".⁴²

Though, it is the work of Dutch historians A. Korthals Altes & N. K. C. A. In't Veld, in their aptly named book - *The Forgotten Battle: Overloon and the Maas Salient 1944-45* - who attempt to illustrate the events in the region. With this in mind the book, published in 1995, acknowledges the lack of secondary material on topic, stating in the introduction, that "no more detailed description... than given in this book has yet been published".⁴³ In the twenty-four years following the publishing of this book, there are no publications of any other additional research of the topic and in particular, the parameters set by this thesis.

Jonathan Fennell's work, whilst focusing heavily on the study of morale, also does not examine this particular period of fighting in any real depth.⁴⁴ Generally, information of these battles appears sporadically within the history of particular divisions, such as that of 6th Guards Tank Brigade.⁴⁵ However, works such as these often lack a solid academic grounding and present themselves in the form of a general narrative.⁴⁶

With reference to existing oral testimony, the importance and relevance of morale is clear through the study of combatants involved in this period of fighting. Morale whilst subjective, holds great significance when considering both victory and defeat. It is clear that

⁴¹ Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine*. p.112

⁴² Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine*. p.112

⁴³ A. Korthals Altes & N. K. C. A. In't Veld, *The Forgotten Battle: Overloon and the Maas Salient 1944-45*, (Spellmount Ltd. ; UK, 1995) p.ix

⁴⁴ Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies in the Second World War*, (Cambridge University Press; UK, 2019)

⁴⁵ Patrick Forbes, *6th Guards Tank Brigade the Story of Guardsmen in Churchill Tanks*, (Naval & Military Press; UK, 2015)

⁴⁶ Patrick Forbes, *6th Guards Tank Brigade the Story of Guardsmen in Churchill Tanks*, (Naval & Military Press; UK, 2015)

throughout the history of warfare, maintaining high levels of morale is a central pillar of cohesive and impassioned combat.⁴⁷

With consideration to the shadow of defeat following operation 'Market Garden' and the requirements of the 21st Army Group. It is evident from much of the available literature, that levels of morale during this period dropped notably.⁴⁸ Hence, there is a need within this thesis, to explore what factors detriment morale in a military environment.

One identifiable erosive factor in this specific period, is the weather conditions and terrain of the region of combat. Poor weather conditions, in particular heavy rain, played an evidential role in not only reducing willingness to fight amongst the troops, but making the terrain more difficult to manoeuvre. This in turn, made fighting in the battle of Overloon and Venraij (Venray) much more treacherous and complex.

Another factor, contributory to the former, is the revival of German resistance following the failure of 'Market Garden'.⁴⁹ The unexpected resistance of the *Wehrmacht* made fighting much more difficult for the British 21st Army Group – thus, causing additional and detrimental effects upon morale.

This study will be a fundamental part in the understanding of the influencing and contributing factors upon British troop morale in the period between 'Market Garden' and the Ardennes Offensive and its impact upon the fighting ability of the 21st Army Group. It is a period which has somewhat been overlooked by many historians, and there has not been a study of the same parameters published before. With these factors considered, this dissertation will be undertaken to provide a qualitative examination of the topic, in order to compliment the quantitative studies of morale undertaken by Jonathan Fennell.⁵⁰

Therefore, the first chapter of this thesis will show how the weather conditions and the terrain of the environment around Overloon and Venraij, had a detrimental effect upon

⁴⁷ Godfrey Hutchinson, *Xenophon and the Art of Command*, (London; Greenhill Books, 2000) p.60

⁴⁸ Jonathan Fennell, 'Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War' p.25 in Anthony King (ed.), *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

⁴⁹ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, (Cambridge University Press; New York, 2005) pp.701-702

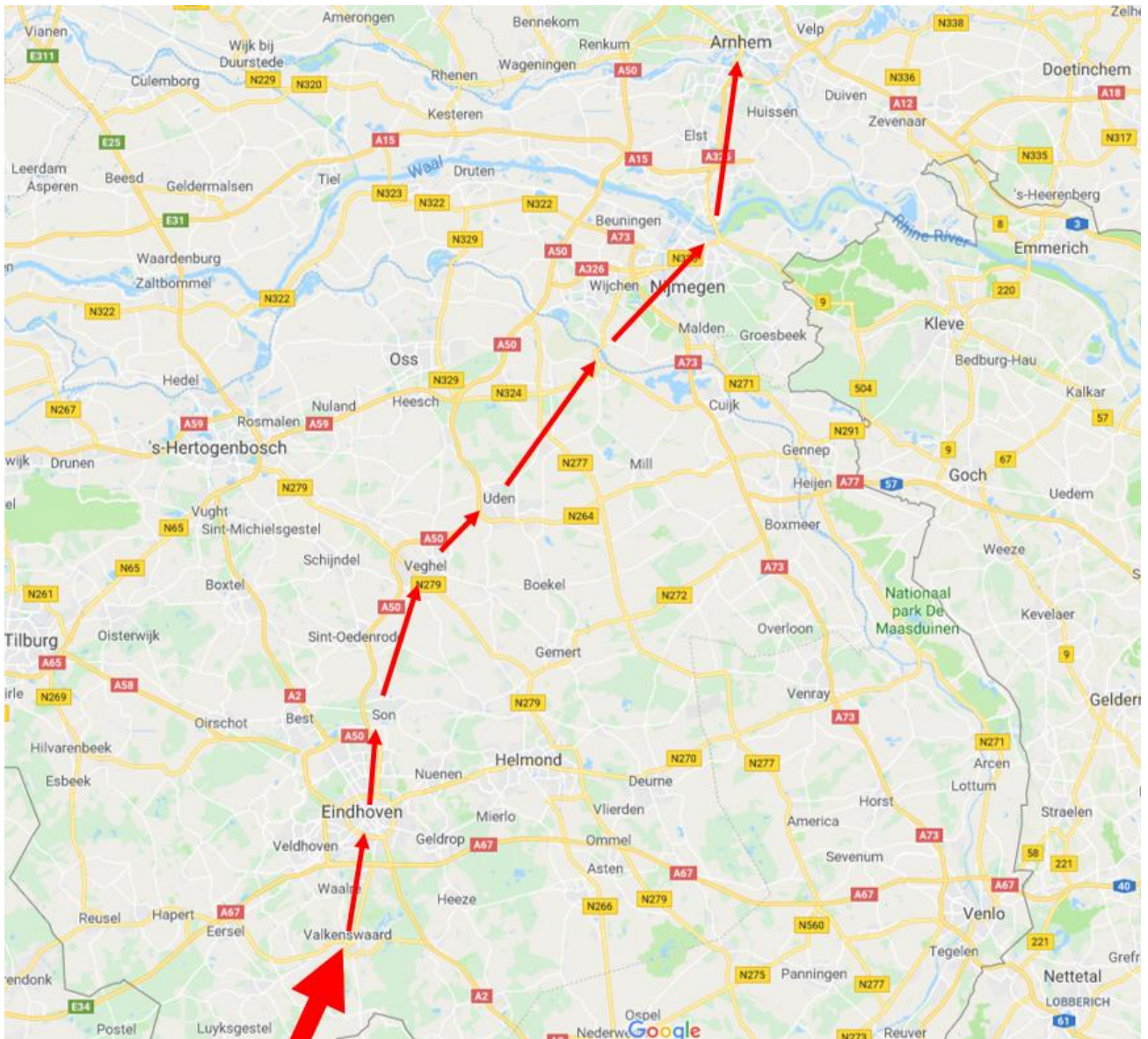
⁵⁰ Jonathan Fennell, 'In Search of the X Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 37: 6-7, pp. 799-828.

fighting capabilities of the British. Resulting in the deterioration of morale amongst the 21st Army Group. Chapter two, will examine the reasoning behind the decision to launch operation 'Market Garden' by gauging the presumption held by the Allies of the *Wehrmacht's* strength following retreat from France. This will be followed an examination into the effect of this resurrection of German fighting ability, upon the morale of the 21st Army Group.

Source 0.01⁵¹

Operation Market Garden Route Plan

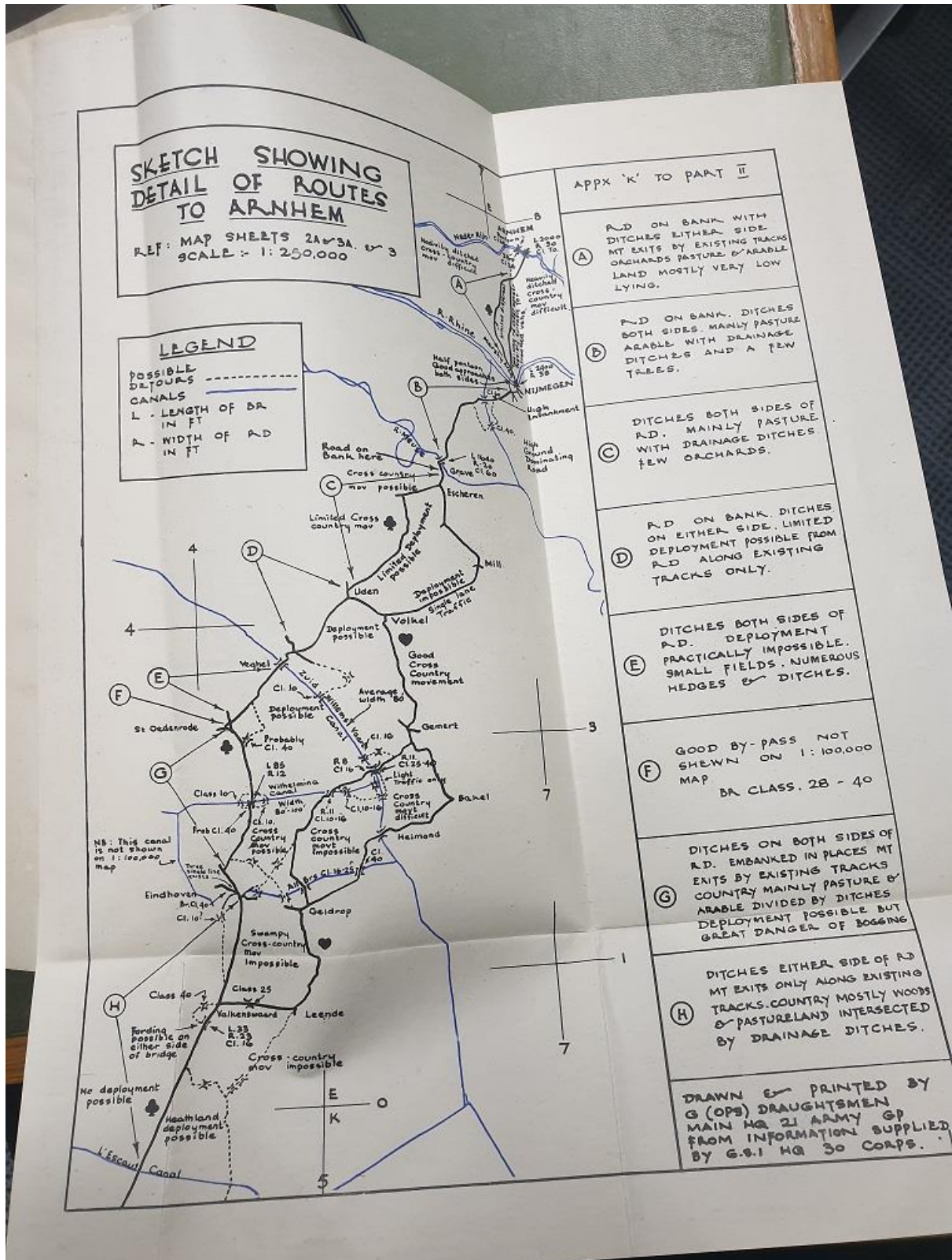
The image below shows a rough guide curated by the author of the route taken by the Allied ground forces in 'Garden' depicted as red arrows - arrow breaks indicate bridges to be crossed)



⁵¹ Map taken from *Google Maps*. Arrows added by Harry Kirby- Jones

Source 0.02⁵²

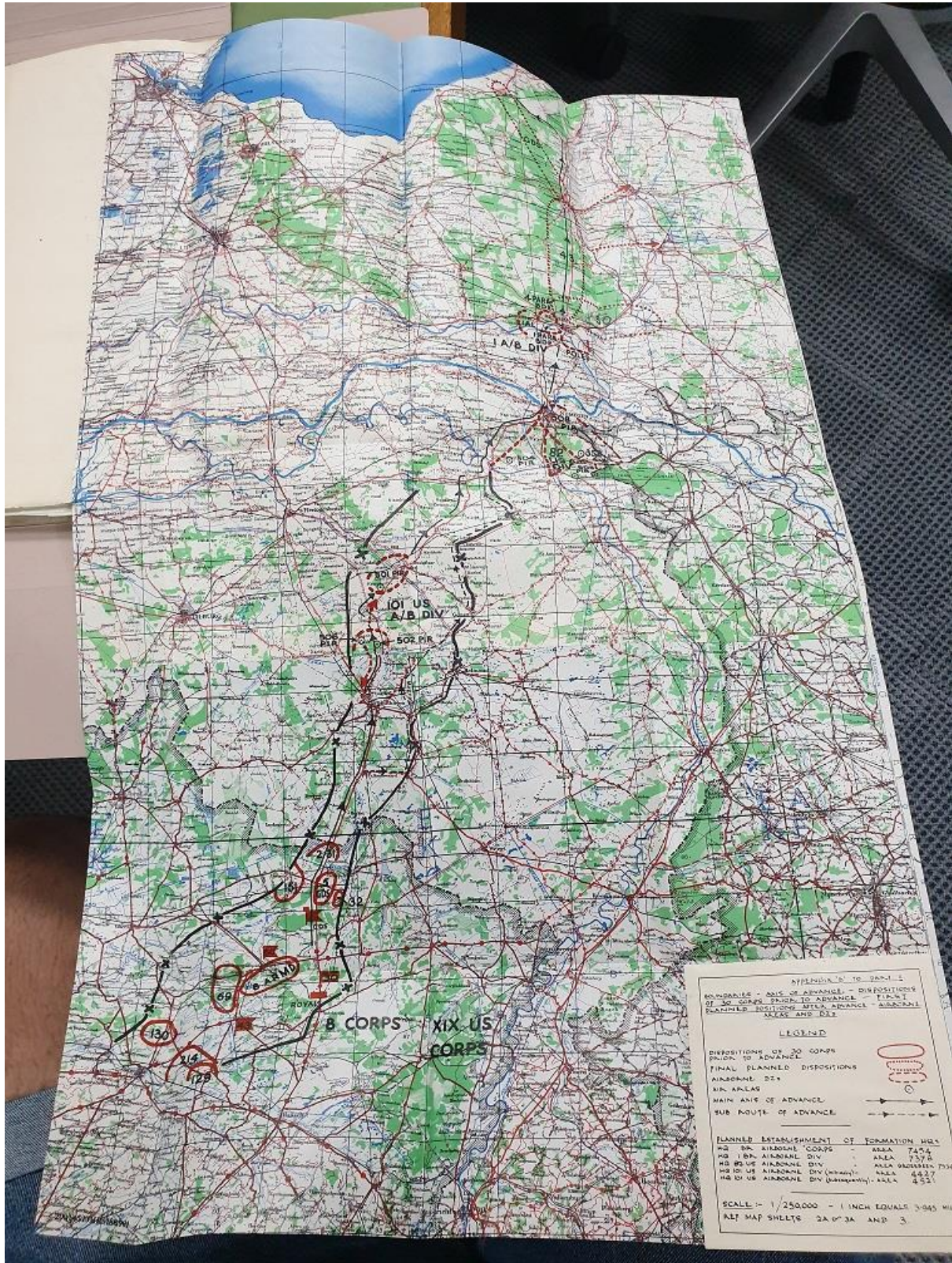
“Sketch Showing Detail of Routes to Arnhem” From Operation Market Garden Official



Report”

Source 0.03⁵³

“Plan of Route’ From Operation Market Garden Official Report



⁵² 'Sketch Showing Detail of Routes to Arnhem' From Operation Market Garden Official Report, *The National Archives* – WO 205/1126

⁵³ 'Plan of Route' From Operation Market Garden Official Report, *The National Archives* - AIR/1249

Defining Military Morale

The morale of troops is a phrase often defined as the mental, emotional state of individuals without much regard to the complexity of psychology.⁵⁴ To define this concept is not without great difficulty as James A. Ulio eloquently states, “it is like life itself, in that the moment you undertake to define it you begin to limit its meaning within the restrictive boundaries of mere language”.⁵⁵ For Ulio, the closest definition of the term is “that conditioned quality, in the individual soldier and in the unit of command, which holds the soldier, holds the unit, to the performance of duty despite every opposing force or influence”.⁵⁶

The subjectivity of the word is clear within Ulio’s definition, it can be anything that holds firm the fighting ability and endeavour of the individual, the group, or both. Thus, it is easy to understand why an array of academics from varying fields have attempted to address this definition in previous studies, with considerations to the importance of maintaining high states of morale in respect to fighting capabilities.

Jonathan Fennell, a dominant figure in assessment of military morale, asserts that whilst a great number of definitions of the term are focused around the concepts of “affective states, such as contentment and happiness, and group dynamics”, there are crucial flaws of an emphasis of these mental states.⁵⁷ Namely, Fennell uses the example of the Vietnam War in which, high morale within a small group of soldiers, may in turn lead to mutiny as a necessity for group survival, thus undermining the needs of the military under which they served.⁵⁸

Fennell concludes that it is “important to stress that motivation does not require the individual or group to be positive about assigned objectives. Combatants can be highly motivated to carry out tasks that they don’t necessarily want to engage with, that they are not hopeful, optimistic or confident will succeed”, though contentment is a contributory

⁵⁴ ‘Morale’ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/morale>)

⁵⁵ James A. Ulio, ‘Military Morale’ *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 47, No. 3 (Nov., 1941), pp. 321-330 p.321

⁵⁶ James A. Ulio, ‘Military Morale’ *American Journal of Sociology*. p.321

⁵⁷ Jonathan Fennell, ‘Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War’ Pp.7-8

⁵⁸ Jonathan Fennell, ‘Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War’ Pp.7-8

factor to the maintenance of morale.⁵⁹ Fennell looks to Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, a key character featured in this dissertation, who stated that morale was the “the quality which makes men go forward in an attack and hold their ground in defence”.⁶⁰

The importance of military morale is well noted throughout history. Sean Childs highlights the view of Xenophon - a soldier of the fourth century - who claims that “in action, the sustaining of morale was an imperative”.⁶¹ In his definition of the term morale, Childs takes an approach similar to that of Fennell, recognising the challenging relationship with affective states and favouring a style which sees military morale as being closely tied to troop motivation.⁶²

Having considered these definitions, it is difficult to disagree with Fennell’s explanation of morale in a military context. It is true that for an individual to go into an environment in which their life may be lost, if not seriously injured - be it psychologically or physically, they may not be too keen about such an endeavour. Consequently, the association of happiness to the desire to kill or be killed appears to be an almost inhumane trait, and thus is, as S. L. A. Marshall claimed, the “basic philosophy governing human relationships within an army”.⁶³ Therefore, the vertebrate of morale must originate from motivating influences upon the individual soldier and the group of soldiers.

In terms of impacting influences upon military morale, there exist two main categories that are used by sociologists, psychologists and historians alike, these are endogenous and exogenous factors. The former is used to describe elements inside the military force and the latter refers to external influences. Jonathan Fennell proposed the following framework to identify possible key external and internal stimuli for military morale.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Jonathan Fennell, ‘Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War’ p.8

⁶⁰ Imperial War Museum (IWM) 99/1/2 Major General Raymond Briggs Papers, Paper by Field-Marshal Montgomery, ‘Morale in Battle: Analysis’, 30 April 1946, p.43.

⁶¹ Godfrey Hutchinson, *Xenophon and the Art of Command*, (London; Greenhill Books, 2000) p.60 cited in Sean Childs, ‘Soldier Morale: Defending a Core Military Capability’ *Security Challenges* Vol. 12, No. 2 (2016), pp. 43-52 pp. 43-44

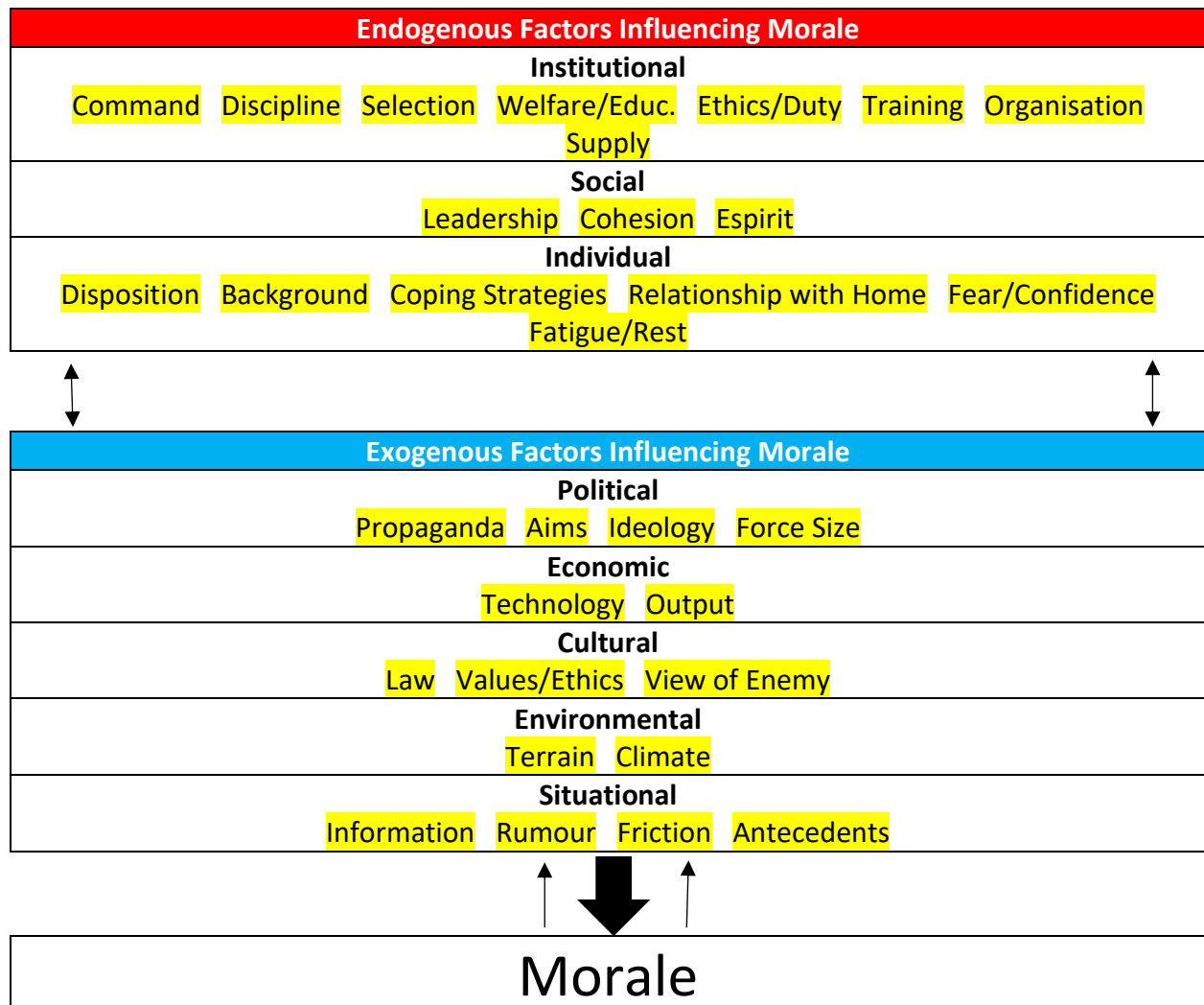
⁶² Sean Childs, ‘Soldier Morale: Defending a Core Military Capability’ *Security Challenges* Vol. 12, No. 2 (2016), pp. 43-52 pp. 45-46

⁶³ S.L.A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War*, (Alexandria: Byrdd Enterprises, Inc., 1947) p. 165

⁶⁴ Jonathan Fennell, ‘In Search of the X Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy’ pp.11-12

Source 0.04

"Factors affecting the morale of troops, commanders and the army."⁶⁵



Upon this recreated table, it is evident that identified variables affecting morale are numerous. They vary from structural factors such as political ideology to leadership, to more micro level factors such as past experiences and training of individual soldiers. This study will use this framework to inform the selection of relevant concepts that may illuminate the consequence of the failure of 'Market Garden'. In particular, this will address the experiences of the 21st Army Group after in subsequential months following the doomed operation. This in turn will provide an insight to the exogenous and endogenous factors influencing morale amongst the British forces active in this region.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Fennell, 'In Search of the X Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy' pp.11-12

To fully express the complexity of the study of military morale, another framework is identified by Tarak Barkawi, who suggests that factors influencing morale should be divided into the 'Societal', which "locates soldiers and armies within the culture and society from which they were recruited... ideologies derived from this context shape the way the soldiers behave and give them a 'cause' for which to fight".⁶⁶ The other method is 'Organizational', which is similar to 'Endogenous' factors, in the way that it focuses upon the the internal workings of the military force, such as "professionalism, regimental tradition... unit identity, quality of leadership... full stomachs, good weapons, training".⁶⁷ Barkawi's classification mirrors the work of Fennell, using only different terminology to equate the same meaning.

Morale, Leadership and Strategy in the Second World War

The importance of good leadership cannot be understated in the maintenance of positive morale within fighting forces. Leaders such as Julius Caesar, Hannibal and Oliver Cromwell, to name just a few have relied upon understanding morale of their armies in order to effectively use it to in many cases to overcome great odds in battle.⁶⁸ Leadership and strategy is relevant to this study, as it was indeed the strategy and leadership of individuals such as Montgomery who devised the plan for 'Market Garden' and inspired troops to fight. Thus, it is a main causative factor behind fluctuations in military morale.

Another example relevant to the Second World War was Adolf Hitler's construction of an infatuated populous and military machine. Arthur Upham Pope claims that the need to control morale was long known to Germany after the First World War. Pope suggests that it was the belief in the "early twenties... that morale and propaganda forces would decide the next war."⁶⁹

The Third Reich, thus produced a fanaticised armed force, evident not just within the SS. More recently, the complicity of the *Wehrmacht* in the National Socialist regime and its

⁶⁶ Tarak Barkawi, 'Culture and Combat in the Colonies: The Indian Army in the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Apr., 2006), pp. 325-355 p.325

⁶⁷ Tarak Barkawi, 'Culture and Combat in the Colonies: The Indian Army in the Second World War' p.326

⁶⁸ Arthur Upham Pope, 'The Importance of Morale' *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 15, No. 4, Civilian Morale (Dec., 1941), pp. 195-205 p.195

⁶⁹ Arthur Upham Pope, 'The Importance of Morale' p.197

ideology was made evident in 1995 by the exhibition, *War of Annihilation: Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941-1945*, which documented the 'average' German soldiers' active involvement in war crimes. In Thomas Kuhne's study of comradeship within the *Wehrmacht*, it becomes evident that the binding forces of morale within the German military were bound for a number of diverse factors, ranging from leadership, ideology to perceived brotherhood.⁷⁰

In regards to warfare strategy is as important, if not more, than leadership in terms of the maintenance of morale. Prussian military scholar Carl von Clausewitz defined strategy as "the use of engagements for the object of war".⁷¹ Strategy for Clausewitz was a means of obtaining policy goals through use of armed forces, which is different to tactics which can be defined as the use of arms during an engagement.⁷² Colin Gray describes strategy as "the use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy".⁷³ In other words, strategy is the means of achieving what is desired by the military force or nation, be it unconditional surrender or the capture of a city.

Peter Paret takes a similar stance, asserting that "strategy is the use of an armed force to achieve the military objectives and, by extension, the political purpose of the war".⁷⁴ Strategy therefore, underpins how an armed force will act and what they should do in order to reach the desired goals. As well as this, and pertinent to this thesis, strategy also determines success, failure and what will be encountered by soldiers.

In the context of the Second World War, a relevant example of the application of good leadership and strategy upon forces is at the Second Battle of El Alamein in October to November 1942. This battle demonstrates the importance of the stimuli influential upon morale. At Alamein the British Eighth Army - under the command of Montgomery - turned the tide against Field Marshal Erwin Rommel to begin to push the Axis forces out of North Africa. As Fennell notes, in North Africa prior to Montgomery's take over, "the defeats suffered by Eighth Army at Gazala and Tobruk, in May and June 1942, and the stalemate on

⁷⁰ Thomas Kuhne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship: Hitler's Soldiers, Male Bonding and Mass Violence in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge University Press; UK, 2017) pp.1-6

⁷¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard & Peter Paret, (Princeton; NJ, 1976) p.128

⁷² Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy*, (Oxford University Press; UK 2012) P.17

⁷³ Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy*, P.17

⁷⁴ Peter Paret 'Introduction' in Peter Paret (ed.) *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, (Oxford; New York, 1998) p.3

the El Alamein line, in July 1942, were, it can be argued, influenced significantly by a morale crisis that reached a peak in the first two weeks of August 1942".⁷⁵ Fennell continues, "deficiencies in for example leadership, training and equipment had an extremely negative impact on the material means available to Eighth Army, but they also impacted seriously on morale".⁷⁶ It can be inferred that failures in strategy and leadership can cause a spiral of declining morale, fuelled by further military disappointments.

Therefore, the consequence of diminishing morale within the Eighth Army had the effect of further inhibiting grand strategy of the conflict in North Africa.⁷⁷ This resulted in the replacement of Commander in Chief Middle East, Claude Auchinleck for Harold Alexander, and put in charge of the Eight Army was Montgomery, whom under the circumstances, presented determined efforts to, "improve the endogenous and exogenous factors influencing morale in the desert: Montgomery built his command style around the need to foster the will to fight in his men".⁷⁸

Along with this, Montgomery set targets that were realistic given the settings the Eighth Army were faced with.⁷⁹ The adoption of a more positive strategic manner also had effects on the morale of the enemy, as factors such as increasing equipment such as tanks, and the reevaluation of the use of artillery helped to weaken the German will to fight and influence their strategy in the theatre.⁸⁰

Evidence therefore suggests that adequate leadership and strategy is vital to the fostering of good morale within an armed force. The consequence of Montgomery's actions contributed to a resounding victory over the *Panzerarmee Afrika* after some considerable defeats in the theatre.⁸¹ Following this victory, Montgomery was appointed commander of Allied Ground forces during the invasion of Normandy and in charge of the British 21st Army Group in the period relevant to this dissertation.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Fennell, 'In Search of the X Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy' p.21

⁷⁶ Jonathan Fennell, 'In Search of the X Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy' pp.21-22

⁷⁷ Jonathan Fennell, 'In Search of the X Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy' p.22

⁷⁸ Jonathan Fennell, 'In Search of the X Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy' p.22

⁷⁹ Jonathan Fennell, 'In Search of the X Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy' p.22-23

⁸⁰ Jonathan Fennell, 'In Search of the X Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy' pp.25-28

⁸¹ Jonathan Fennell, 'In Search of the X Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy' p.22-23

However, Montgomery's strategy and leadership throughout the war is not without its critics, as he was often seen as a difficult man to deal with, as was the view of both Winston Churchill and US General Dwight Eisenhower.⁸² Cornelius Ryan noted the ferocity of Montgomery when in conversation with the US General which led to the response, "Steady, Monty! You can't talk to me like that. I'm your boss".⁸³ Monty's fierce determination nonetheless, would prove decisive in the adoption of the plan for 'Market Garden'.

Strategy and leadership, as Fennell has made clear, are tightly bound to the study of troop morale, for obvious reasons. That being if there is limited confidence in those leading that they will be successful, then confidence and the will to fight will diminish. In the strategic clash between Eisenhower and Montgomery in 1944, failure in strategy and leadership had a negative impact in troop morale, which was further catalysed by the battles and conditions faced as a result. The consequence for morale of the failure at Arnhem has been quantified in Jonathan Fennell's work, as documented in the graph below.⁸⁴

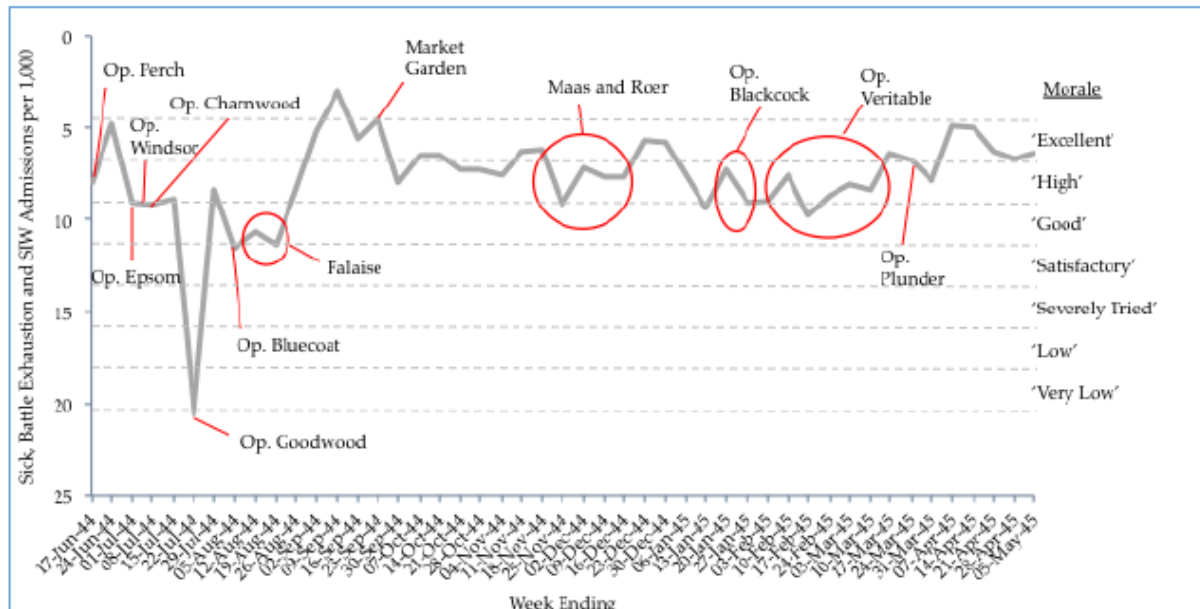
⁸² John Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy*, (Penguin, 1994) P.56

⁸³ Cornelius Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, (Popular Library; 1974) P. 85-88

⁸⁴ Jonathan Fennell, 'Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War' P.25

Source 0.05⁸⁵

“Second Army, Weekly Admissions per 1,000 to General Hospitals and Casualty Clearing Stations for Sickness, Battle Exhaustion and SIW, 11 June 1944 to 5 May 1945. Morale scale equivalents are presented on the right-hand Y-axis”



Fennell’s study, identified factors such as battle exhaustion, desertion and self-inflicted wounds, and placed them in conjunction with bi-weekly ‘Censorship Summaries’ compiled from examined letters made by members of the British Second Army, which includes the 21st Army Group.⁸⁶

The classifications of morale on the right-hand side of the Y-axis were determined by the studying of these ‘Censorship Summaries’, after which Fennell was able to categorise assumed states of morale ranging ‘Excellent’ to ‘Very Low’.⁸⁷ On the timeline he has used the combined scores from both studies, quantitative and qualitative, in order to document troughs and peaks of British troop morale in a more generalised and quantifiable manner.

⁸⁵ Jonathan Fennell, ‘Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War’ P.25

⁸⁶ Jonathan Fennell, ‘Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War’ Pp.16-27

⁸⁷ Jonathan Fennell, ‘Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War’ Pp.16-27

As is evident from this graph, although it is not the largest fall, the following months after Operation 'Market Garden' sees a noticeable decline in morale, from a peak following the devastating German defeat in the battle of the Falaise Pocket a few months prior.⁸⁸ Fennell explains this decline, "for example, morale would appear to have been at its highest before and during Operation Market Garden. But Market Garden was failure. It is likely, as John Buckley has argued, that Market Garden was a conceptual failure rather than a morale one".⁸⁹ This provides a good explanation for the importance of competent leadership and strategy, as although morale was bolstered to a point deemed 'Excellent' in Fennell's study, failure still prevailed. Hence, strategy is a crucial element to the maintenance and creation of positive morale.

The bulk of this dissertation will be focused on the dip following 'Market Garden', in late September 1944 proceeding into the battles for Overloon and Venraij. As noticeable on Fennell's timeline (Source 0.05), there is a gradual decline in morale, with slight increases throughout this period. This time involved a period of hard fighting to clear the salient west of the Maas, made worse by bad weather, conditions and resistance from the enemy. Therefore, it is important to explore the context of the battles ensuing in the shadow cast by Operation 'Market Garden'.

The Shadow of Operation Market Garden

Operation 'Market Garden', in summary was a failure for multiple reasons, underestimation of the enemy lead to an adoption of an over confident strategy, aimed at destroying the German Reich in one thrust. In the wake of the failure, Charles Forrester professes that "Montgomery realised that to make the final assault on Germany – that is, for the crossing of the Rhine to be successful – it would first be necessary to destroy the German forces between the Maas and the Rhine".⁹⁰

⁸⁸ A Williams, *D-Day to Berlin*, (Hodder & Stoughton; London, 2004) Pp.204-206

⁸⁹ John Buckley, *Monty's Men: The British Army and the Liberation of Europe*, (London: Yale University Press, 2013) pp.208-31

⁹⁰ Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine: Combined Arms Doctrine in British 21st Army Group in North West Europe, 1944-45*, p.111

Montgomery proposed that the Ruhr region of must be the “strategic objective” and that future operations required to “force mobile war on the Germans”.⁹¹ This task was given to British VIII Corps of the 21st Army Group under Lieutenant- General Sir R. N. O'Connor in Operation 'Constellation'.⁹² The operation was made up of the 3rd British Infantry Division with supporting division of armoured units, such as the 6th Guard Tanks Brigade and the 11th Armoured Division.⁹³ The intent of the operation was to take control of the towns of Overloon in Venraij (Venray) in an attempt to clear German forces from the west of the river Maas, subsequently blocking a German bridgehead at Venlo.⁹⁴ (See source 0.06)

⁹¹ Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Montgomery*, p.302

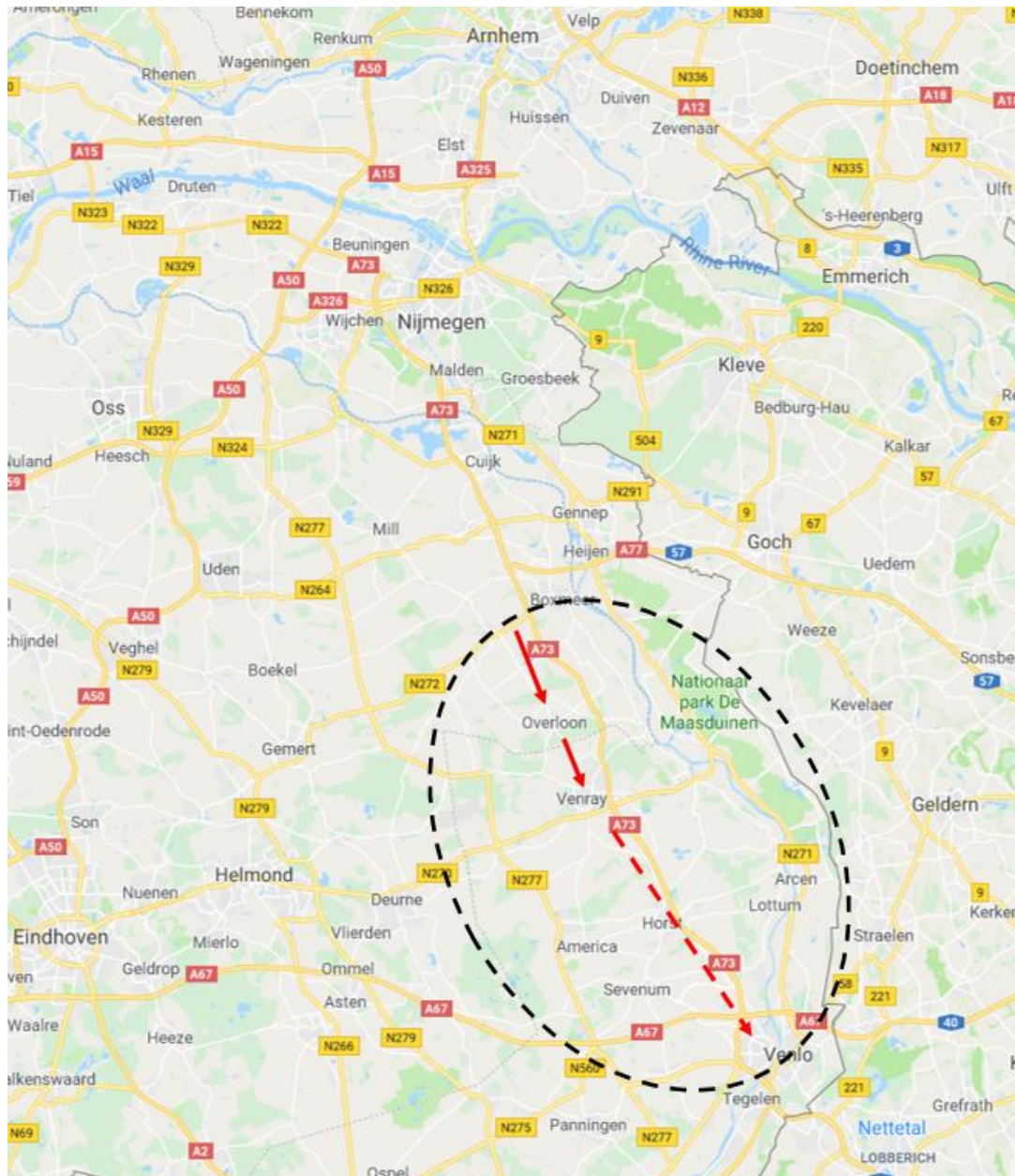
⁹² Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine: Combined Arms Doctrine in British 21st Army Group in North West Europe, 1944-45*, pp.111-5

⁹³ Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine: Combined Arms Doctrine in British 21st Army Group in North West Europe, 1944-45*, pp.114-5

⁹⁴ Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine: Combined Arms Doctrine in British 21st Army Group in North West Europe, 1944-45*, pp.114-5

Source 0.06⁹⁵

Map of region west of Maas with proposed route of Operation Constellation



This work intends to illuminate this gap in the literature by investigating testimony from individuals who fought in the area, to better understand the endogenous and exogenous factors that were encountered and consequently affected morale. Examination will also look

⁹⁵ 'Map of region west of Maas with proposed route of Operation Constellation' Map from Google Maps. Added to by Harry Kirby - Jones

to the resurgence of German fighting potential which had been overlooked by planning and strategy.

Fennell's work whilst extensive in the discovery of a quantifiable form of morale, fails to attach a qualitative study of the period discussed into his thesis. Through studying oral testimony given by combatants there are main themes that present themselves, these could be potential reasons for increased rates of sickness, battle exhaustion, desertion and self-inflicted wounds.

Along with this, coverage of the impact of weather conditions and terrain - and the connection between the two exogenous factors - is not given sufficient attention when discussing the 21st Army Group's campaign after 'Market Garden'. A study of personal experiences of the battle, given through interviews, are of great use in identifying emotional response when discussing feature of the battle. The intent of this thesis is to use Jonathan Fennell's framework in attempting to quantify states of military morale through 1944 and 1945 (Source 0.05), as a basis for further study in the other qualitative aspect of the topic.

In chapter one, the impact of conditions and terrain will be explored and considered alongside established knowledge on this period of fighting. The key themes identified in the following chapters will suggest worthy concepts in the future understanding of morale during the Second World War. As discussed in this chapter, this area of the Second World War has been overlooked by many historians, however, this thesis aims to fill the gaps in understanding of this period of fighting, and to illuminate the erosive impact upon morale.

Methodology

To complete this research, testimonial evidence of fifteen combatants was studied from the online source of the Imperial War Museum (IWM). This evidence however, does encounter issues when regarding reliability. This is primarily due to the period of time in which the events happened and when the interviews were recorded. In this instance, the majority of interviews were held between the late 1980s and 2000s. In which case, many interviewees are regarding events from over fifty years ago, which may result in discrepancies with reality. In terms of the study of morale, this does not present itself as too

great an issue, as one key element that will be explored will regard the emotional responses to this period. In other terms, how the interviewee felt about the situation and the manner in which they speak about the events. This will be a guiding tool towards discovering the period of fighting's impact upon morale.

In addition to this, the sample size available at the Imperial War Museum does also present difficulty in provided a generalised view of the deteriorative factors upon morale of an entire army. Whilst a number of differing regiments are examined, not every unit had the same experience and thus, a fully generalised thesis will be impossible. However, this work does aim to illuminate some common themes within the sources available.

The National Archives also provided a bulk of this research, in particular documents and reports from institutions such as the War Office (WO). Documentation used in this thesis, provides a broad understanding of many elements of morale from a structural perspective. Given this, these sources can also prove reliable in the discovery of the interpretation of the military forces on a macro scale, and thus can guide the historian in the assumption made by institutions such as the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEP).

Chapter 1 – Conditions, Terrain and Morale

Weather conditions are a well know halter of armies, as Napoleon Bonaparte experienced in his invasion of Russia in 1812, poor conditions and terrain can devastate a military force.⁹⁶ This chapter will examine the impact conditions, in terms of both weather and terrain, had upon the morale of the British 21st Army Group during the period following 'Market Garden' - culminating in the battle of Overloon and the subsequent battles around Venraij. It will argue that weather conditions, when combined with the terrain of Maas salient made the conflict harder for the British both physically and psychologically, each of which were erosive to their morale. An explanation will also be given to how Fennell's framework has grounded this chapter in terms of assessing levels of morale.

To serve as evidence of this morale crisis, a qualitative study will be made of personal testimony to gauge states of morale amongst combatants, in order to further the quantitative study of morale referred to in source 0.05. As is clear in source 0.04 - climate, weather and terrain are exogenous factors, in other words, they are impacting factors outside of the military organisation.⁹⁷ During the autumn and winter of 1944, the Netherlands experienced prolonged periods of rain and colder weather, as is customary to the time of year. In addition to this, the topography of this particular region of Europe would prove to be of no aid to the British during this period.

Poor weather and terrain is evident from reports in *The Times* newspaper, which documented on 6th October 1944 that Allied forces in the area surrounding Overloon were, "moving ahead slowly, hindered by marshy terrain and enemy lines".⁹⁸ For armoured formations, *The Times* notes that it was much of the same, stating that the formation "fighting its south-eastward beyond Overloon is still more or less bogged down by the hopeless tank country".⁹⁹

On the 16th October a similar situation was portrayed, asserting that the British advance had moved "1,000 yards to-day in the face of stern opposition and extremely troublesome

⁹⁶ David C. Gompert, Hans Binnendijk, Bonny Lin 'Napoleon's Invasion of Russia, 1812', Chapter in *Blunders, Blunders, and Wars: What America and China Can Learn* (Rand Corp.; 2014) pp.46-48

⁹⁷ Jonathan Fennell, 'In Search of the "X" Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy', pp.9-12

⁹⁸ 'Progress Beyond Antwerp' *The Times* (London, England), Friday, October 6, 1944, Issue 49970, p.3.

⁹⁹ 'Good Advance Beyond Turnhout' *The Times* (London, England) Friday, October 6, 1944, Issue 49970, p.4.

conditions".¹⁰⁰ Consequently, it is clear that the terrain of the region wreaked havoc upon the manoeuvrability of the British attacking columns. Therefore, it is easy to see how this exogenous factor was influential upon the success of the foreseeable operations.

Kaushik Roy makes the importance of these conditions clearer in terms of their effect upon the individual soldier. He argues that service conditions have a greater role in shaping morale than grand ideologies such as Fascism.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, what becomes apparent is that deteriorative influences upon morale can originate from a variety of arguably mundane sources, however, they can be highly destructive towards the maintenance of positive morale.

In the case of terrain, every military force and the campaigns that are undertaken are constricted by the surface area of the country in which they are fighting.¹⁰² Under these circumstances, it can be confidently assumed that terrain can have detrimental impacts upon fighting ability, and the will of troops to continue fighting with the highest vigour. In regards to the marshland and forests of the eastern Netherlands, modern warfare techniques incorporating heavy vehicles, such as tanks and troop carriers, became identifiably more difficult. This is key within the evidence explored throughout this chapter.

However, for a greater visual understanding, video footage provides a good insight to the trouble conditions and terrain could have upon military logistics, such as supply and transport. Footage (See below) produced by Army Film and Photographic Unit, shows both heavy and light vehicles from the 11th Armoured Division, getting stuck in mud and hindered by macerated roads following the British advance into Overloon.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ 'Great Air Assault On Rhine Bases' *The Times* (London, England) Monday, October 16, 1944, Issue 49975/2, p.4.

¹⁰¹ Kaushik Roy, 'Discipline and Morale of the African, British and Indian Army units in Burma and India during World War II: July 1943 to August 1945' *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (NOVEMBER 2010), pp. 1255-1282 p.1255

¹⁰² Douglas Wilson Johnson, 'Geographic Aspects of the War. Part I. The Western Theater of War', *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* Vol. 47, No. 3 (1915), pp. 175-183 p.175

¹⁰³ Army Film and Photographic Unit, *Poor Quality Roads Affect Vehicle Movement In The Overloon-Venraij Sector Of 8th Corps Front (Part 1)*, (October 1944) Cat No. A70 182-1 - Imperial War Museum
Army Film and Photographic Unit, *Poor Quality Roads Affect Vehicle Movement In The Overloon-Venraij Sector Of 8th Corps Front (Part 2)*, (October 1944) Cat No. A70 182-2 - Imperial War Museum

Source 1.01¹⁰⁴

“Footage of Poor-Quality Roads Affect Vehicle Movement In The Overloon-Venraij Sector Of 8th Corps Front”



¹⁰⁴ Army Film and Photographic Unit, *Poor Quality Roads Affect Vehicle Movement In The Overloon-Venraij Sector Of 8th Corps Front (Part 2)*, (October 1944) Cat No. A70 182-2



The condition of the roads - made clear by the footage - shows the exertion necessary for manoeuvring vehicles. This is made clear by the numerous instances of trucks, jeeps and other heavy vehicles requiring assistance.

From this, it can be surely inferred that the effectiveness of the 11th Armoured Division was hindered, as extra time would be required to assure vehicles did not get stuck. Along with this, issues would arise surrounding counter attacks by enemy artillery. However, aside from this footage, which while useful in illustrating some roads, does not provide the same insights as those present at the battles. Subsequently, there is a lot to be gained from examination of oral testimony of combatants, to both verify and allow for an emotional response to the difficulties faced.

Indicators of Morale

To provide a means of recognising and quantifying periods of high and low morale, Jonathan Fennell identifies symptoms of periods of low morale. Whilst indirectly related to weather conditions and terrain, factors such as sickness, battle fatigue and self-inflicted wounds can be viewed as signs of low morale. In the case of the period following September 1944 for example, figures for those taken 'sick' after the failure of Market Garden, rose from '933' on 23rd September 1944 to '1760' - just one week later. On the 14th October, during the battle of Overloon, the figure was at '1540', and spiked to '2018' by the 28th October.¹⁰⁵ These figures can be due to a number of factors; however, it would seem likely that during periods of high exertion, conflict and stress both physical and mental, rates for sickness would increase. A correlation of reported sickness and low morale following defeat and the hard fighting becomes apparent.

The difficulty with Fennell's work however, is the failure to define the notion of those 'taken sick' and what categorises or delineates military sicknesses. The assumption alludes to the fact that there is a strong correlation between the numbers of reported sickness and the measurement of low morale. Whilst it is understandable that individual cases of sickness

¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Fennell, 'Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War' Pp.18-19

may, in many circumstances, be out of reach of a historian armed only with archives and repositories, clarification on what classified as 'sick' may be useful in determining its relationship to morale. In addition, there may be instances, for example an individual may fake an illness to avoid a battle.

It is not unusual for historians to use sickness as a gauging factor of morale within armies, Vanda Wilcox in her study of the morale of the Italian army in the First World War uses sickness and ill-discipline to suggest that Italian morale was eroding on the Isonzo front in the winter of 1915.¹⁰⁶ Though similarly to Fennell, Wilcox does not explain what the causes of sickness are, and in what way that relates to morale. Fennell's use of ailments such as battle fatigue, which are deemed the result of conflict, are more reliable means of gaining a quantifiable interpretation of military morale, as sickness could vary from influenza and venereal diseases to typhoid or cholera.

Whilst this may be true, as identified by Fennell – sickness and more importantly the cause of sickness is a complex subject. As Fennell argues, morale factors such as boredom, may influence the health of an army. Sickness because of venereal disease (VD) was prevalent in October 1944 within the 21st Army Group.¹⁰⁷ Fennell uses this as a key identifier of boredom and low morale within the British and Commonwealth forces, leading to promiscuity, resulting - on the week ending 7th October – the “equivalent in a year to the total strength of a division” reporting incidences of VD.¹⁰⁸ This issue was of such concern to “manpower difficulties”, that Montgomery issued a message to commanding officers stating that “we cannot afford to lose a single man unnecessarily”.¹⁰⁹ Thus, we can see that endogenous factors such as boredom and sickness (when properly classified) can be useful identifiers of troop morale.

This chapter therefore, aims to juxtapose Fennell's quantifiable work on morale of the 21st Army Group in this, with personal testimony from combatants present at the Battle of

¹⁰⁶ Vanda Wilcox, *Morale and the Italian Army during the First World War* (Cambridge University Press; 2016) p.2

¹⁰⁷ Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies in the Second World War*, p.571

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies in the Second World War*, p.571

¹⁰⁹ Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies in the Second World War*, p.571

Overloon in October 1944. It will argue that the stagnation in morale after the failure of Operation Market Garden was heavily influenced by weather conditions paired with the terrain of the region around Overloon and Venraij. These factors hindered the capability of British forces whilst aiding the German defence.

Battle Fatigue

Cases of battle fatigue and psychological signs of low morale, are useful in quantifying the fluctuation of British morale throughout the Second World War. This is fundamentally due to the fact that it can provide information for new areas of study, in terms of endogenous and exogenous stimuli. However, it must be noted that whilst the new Directorate of Army Psychiatry – set up to ensure greater numbers of troops returning to the front lines – was established during the Second World War in prelude to D- Day on 6th June 1944, many commanders viewed this as a means of easy escape from battle for servicemen, without the requirements of being physically wounded.¹¹⁰ Therefore, the suggestion was made that this was due cowardice and unwillingness to fight, being the cause rather than real psychological health problems.¹¹¹ Though in this study, this assumption, if true, could aid our understanding of morale as it may be a causative factor to ‘fake’ an illness, or avoid through cowardice. Though it would be extremely difficult to verify cases of feigned psychological illness.

Focus on the psychological state of troops was intensified after World War I.¹¹² In 1922 it was the view of Field Marshal Lord Gort that “in face of strong morale and esprit de corps “shell shock” would be practically non-existent”.¹¹³ The new policy adopted by psychiatrists in the prelude to the invasion of Normandy, was one that aimed to see those soldiers at risk

¹¹⁰ Edgar Jones & Stephen Ironside, ‘Battle exhaustion: the dilemma of psychiatric casualties in Normandy, June to August 1944’ *The Historical Journal*, 53, 1 (2010), pp. 109–128 p.109

¹¹¹ Edgar Jones & Stephen Ironside, ‘Battle exhaustion: the dilemma of psychiatric casualties in Normandy, June to August 1944’ p.109

¹¹² Edgar Jones & Stephen Ironside, ‘Battle exhaustion: the dilemma of psychiatric casualties in Normandy, June to August 1944’ p.109

¹¹³ Edgar Jones & Stephen Ironside, ‘Battle exhaustion: the dilemma of psychiatric casualties in Normandy, June to August 1944’ p.109-110

of a 'break down', discharge them or move to non – combat roles, leaving the most resilient fighting.¹¹⁴

Keeping this in mind, and using research from Fennell (see below) we can see an increase, after Operation 'Market Garden', in reported psychological and physiological cases for British troops. Fennell uses a table (1.02) to indicate Monthly Sick, Battle Exhaustion (BE), Desertion/AWOL (Absent without Leave) and Self-Inflicted Wounds (SIW) per rate of 1000 soldiers in the British Second Army.

Source 1.02

"Monthly Sick, Battle Exhaustion (BE), Desertion/AWOL and SIW Rates per 1,000 in Second Army, June 1944 to April 1945"

Month	Sick/1,000	BE/1,000	Desertion*/1,000	SIW/1,000	Total/1000
Jun 1944	14.42	5.96	0.82	0.18	21.39
Jul 1944	36.99	14.22	1.20	0.30	52.72
Aug 1944	35.72	6.49	1.87	0.19	44.26
Sep 1944	19.64	2.81	1.96	0.06	24.46
Oct 1944	26.93	3.70	2.32	0.06	33.01
Nov 1944	28.79	2.09	2.39	0.09	33.36
Dec 1944	29.31	0.65	2.42	0.07	32.45
Jan 1945	36.12	1.09	2.29	0.11	39.62
Feb 1945	33.70	0.77	2.82	0.04	37.32
Mar 1945	30.75	2.00	2.61	0.06	35.41
Apr 1945	22.80	1.70	Not available	0.11	24.61**

* Includes AWOL. As Courts Martial usually tried cases in arrears, the figures for each month are based on the Courts Martial from the following month, i.e. the figure for July 1944 is derived from the number of Courts Martial carried out in August 1944.

** Does not include desertion/AWOL

¹¹⁴ Edgar Jones & Stephen Ironside, 'Battle exhaustion: the dilemma of psychiatric casualties in Normandy, June to August 1944' p.109-110

From Fennell's table (1.02), it is evident that after September and the failure at Arnhem, there is an increase in all but one of his chosen categories. Self-inflicted wounds however remained stagnant during the two months – September and October. Aside from the no evident increase in SIWs, a possible reason for the increase in all other categories - if we are to assume these factors correlate with periods of low morale - is that this was in part due to the previous defeat.

Another explanation, made when observing the months October to December - which see increases in every category - may be the result of other endogenous and exogenous stimuli impacting the morale of British troops. For example, fighting conditions are a plausible exogenous factor for an increase in exertion and difficulty and subsequent morale deterioration.¹¹⁵ To confirm the relationship between elements such as battle exhaustion and morale, Fennell uses 'Censorship Summaries' of the same period to gauge troop willingness amongst the Second Army (Source 1.03).

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Fennell, 'Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War' Pp. 21

Source 1.03¹¹⁶

“Morale Description and scores based on the Censorship Summaries, Second Army, June

Month	Morale Description	Morale Score
June 1944	‘Excellent’	3
July 1944	‘Good’	1
August 1944	‘Good’	1
September 1944	‘Excellent’	3
October 1944	‘High’	2
November 1944	‘High’	2
December 1944	‘High’	2
January 1945	‘High’	2
February 1945	‘High’	2
March 1945	‘High’	2
April 1945	‘Excellent’	3

1944 to April 1945”

This table (1.03), which gauges morale based on qualitative studies of documents such as letter, shows a strong correlation between the combined figures on table (1.02) and the deemed level of morale. In other words, the higher total on the former correlates to a lower score, and a less positive state on the latter.¹¹⁷

Battle fatigue is a recurring theme within the oral testimony at the *Imperial War Museum*. Private Joseph Fuller of the Suffolk Regiment, is an example of this. After his experience fighting at Overloon, Fuller was taken to a battle school to recover from battle fatigue in nearby Helmond.¹¹⁸ Fuller described himself as “not frighten, just shaken” from what he had

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Fennell, ‘Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War’ Pp. 21-22

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Fennell, ‘Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War’) Pp. 21

¹¹⁸ Interview with Joseph Fuller, Imperial War Museum, 18005 – Reel 1 (1998-05-05)

experienced during the battle. From this, it can be assumed that Fuller is playing down the difficulty he faced with his mental health. Indeed, to make this point clearer, Fuller acknowledges that although he was taken to the school to learn 'camouflage' and 'how to be a sniper', the school was "only a reason of taking me out of battle".¹¹⁹

Fatigue is also present in the testimony of tank driver Robert Dare of the 4th Coldstream Guards, 6th Guards Tank Brigade.¹²⁰ He tells of his experience of being blown up in a minefield during the attack on Overloon, whilst driving a Churchill tank. He recalls how he attempted to save members of his crew whilst being dazed and injured from the explosion.¹²¹ He was taken to hospital and out of battle for some months to recover.

To fully grasp the severity of battle fatigue, Dare illustrates one condition he suffered, which was the loss of his ability to speak.¹²² This was until he spent some time undergoing hypnotism in order to regain his speech.¹²³ Dare claims that he was told his symptoms effects were the result of Battle Fatigue.¹²⁴

Hightower asserts that morale is defined in physiological terms as the ability to "maintain tension over a period of time".¹²⁵ Taking Hightower's definition into account, it cannot be argued convincingly that episodes of battle fatigue, as such experienced by Dare and Fuller, can be correlated with satisfactory levels of morale.

Aside from actual cases of battle fatigue, the psychological impact of the conflict, particularly in the period after the break out of Normandy is well noted by Edward Lloyd of the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment. Lloyd recalls the experience of witnessing the death of an officer suffering with shock.¹²⁶

A psychological and emotional perspective is present through much of the interviews also. Albert Holdsworth of the same battalion as Lloyd, makes this evident in the manner in which he recalls the battle of Overloon, describing it simply and subtly as "rough". Though it is

¹¹⁹ Interview with Joseph Fuller

¹²⁰ Interview with Robert Dare, Imperial War Museum, 18268 – Reel 2 (1999-02-23)

¹²¹ Interview with Robert Dare

¹²² Interview with Robert Dare

¹²³ Interview with Robert Dare

¹²⁴ Interview with Robert Dare

¹²⁵ Raymond L. Hightower, 'A Sociological Conception of Morale' *Social Forces* Vol. 22, No. 4 (May, 1944), pp. 410-415 p.413

¹²⁶ Interview with Edward Lloyd, Imperial War Museum, 13283 – Reel 3 (1993-07-26)

clear that Holdsworth is understating the battle as is evident through his depressed manner of speech. Holdsworth pauses frequently throughout his description of the battle, which could be inferred as emotionally straining, punctuated by a number of sighs and exhalations. The vocal aspect of testimony by Holdsworth does give the impression of reflective anguish. Therefore, it is evident that there exists some form of negative emotional attachment to the battle for Holdsworth, proving the psychologically straining nature of the battle.

It would be improper to assert that these episodes of battle fatigue and psychological drain, were due solely to conditions and terrain of the proximity of Overloon and Venraij, as it is evidently not true. These men in their testimony, acknowledge they had been fighting since the invasion of Normandy in June 1944.¹²⁷

Indeed, the value of the testimony of both Dare and Fuller is that they prove, during the Battle of Overloon that there was a proportion of troops that had been fighting for four months. Thus, the impact of smaller, 'mundane' factors, as Roy calls it, such as rain and cold can be viewed as being additional issues placed upon months of vigorous fighting, which the troops had to deal with. To prove this, there are a number of instances throughout the testimony studied in which conditions are referred. Thus, showing that it was a notable factor for those who had fought at Overloon.

The Impact of Bad Weather at the Battle of Overloon

From the testimony studied at the Imperial War Museum, the impact of the poor weather clearer had an erosive effect upon the morale of the men. This is without the inclusion of other factors such as terrain. It is identifiable due to the generally negative connotations held to the experience of being in rain and cold weather.

The attack on the village of Overloon, was originally planned for the 11th October 1944, but due to rain the operation was held off until the following day.¹²⁸ Herbert William Brown, a

¹²⁷ Interview with Robert Dare
Interview with Joseph Fuller

¹²⁸ Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine: Combined Arms Doctrine in British 21st Army Group in North West Europe, 1944-45*, p.115

tank driver and British NCO serving with 4th Battalion Coldstream Guards, described this delayed start to the Battle of Overloon;

We started a lot of action in Holland, all around Venraij, Venlo, Overloon. The Battle of Overloon... they had to put it off for twenty-four hours, it **poured** [emphasis] with rain. We had the 3rd British Division with us then, infantry division, everybody was soaked.¹²⁹

The manner in which Brown speaks is notable, as he emphasises words such as 'poured', which is dragged out for a greater effect. From the emphasis on this word and in the context that this interview was held in 2000, fifty-six years after the event. A logical assumption can be made that the impact of the rain was sufficient enough to remain a present memory for Brown. In addition, proof of the suggestion that the rain inhibited the movement of British forces is already made distinct, as the operation was postponed for twenty-four hours.

Brown continues describing that under the circumstances, he and his crew would often play the card game 'cribs' in the tank waiting to dry off.¹³⁰ It would get to such a point within the tank, that "you'd have a job to see one another" because of the vapour of drying clothes.¹³¹ When the rain stopped, Brown would start the tank and use the "terrific heat" of the exhaust to dry the crew's clothes "in a few minutes".¹³²

Brown's testimony tells us a lot about the effect of the rain, it can be inferred that the soaking was substantial enough to inhibit any action. Given his manner of speech, and the contents of his narrative, it is clear that at the time this may not have been a completely pleasant experience. Harking back to the fact that it has remained present in his mind for such a long period, also show the significance of the downpour.

Though as tank driver, we get an image of how situations such as these may have been positive for crew relationships, as in the case of Brown, he would play cards with his co-driver as a means of passing the time, whether this was substantial enough to make the experience pleasant, Brown does not specify.¹³³ Thus, there is room here to argue that the

¹²⁹ Interview with Herbert William Brown, Imperial War Museum, 20311 – Reel 3 (2000-05-13)

¹³⁰ Interview with Herbert William Brown

¹³¹ Interview with Herbert William Brown

¹³² Interview with Herbert William Brown

¹³³ Interview with Herbert William Brown

rain had a beneficial role in bolstering the morale of units such as tank crews, who used the time to enjoy each other's company. Although, this does not prove substantial for those troops not in the shelter of a tank.

The impact of poor weather upon the 21st Army Group at Overloon is apparent nonetheless, as the fact that the attack was postponed proves that the rain prevented effective battle and created a necessity for shelter. Ernest Goozee of the 2nd Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment, tells of a similar experience upon arrival at Overloon;

But the weather had turned so bad, that it was all mud, so the vehicles and tanks couldn't get through at all, so we had to lay low during the rain. Twenty-four hours I think it was, before we could do battle to capture Overloon.¹³⁴

Goozee's testimony validates the suggestion that weather inhibited both tank and troop movement at the battle. Poor weather is also referenced in the testimony of Alec Pugh of 2nd Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment, who struggles to fully recall the battle though acknowledges that "it was wet and miserable, I know that much".¹³⁵ As well as this, Thomas Jones of the 4th Battalion King's Shropshire Light Infantry, has a similarly negative stance in regard to the weather conditions of the period. When he was asked by the interviewer what the weather was like, he responds, "terrible, wet, cold, I can't remember any fine days in that part".¹³⁶

Testimony such as this is mirrored by Reginald Rutherford, an officer in the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment. During his time in the region of the Netherlands, Rutherford recalled the experience as "dreadful weather and dreadful places to be".¹³⁷ He then re-emphasises the conditions encountered precluding the battle of Overloon during his description, stating "it was raining, terribly bad weather".¹³⁸ This adds to the assumption that these weather conditions, impacted the individual morale of Rutherford and of the troops of 21st Army Group more widely.

¹³⁴ Interview with Ernest Goozee, Imperial War Museum, 20293 – Reel 1 (2000-04-20)

¹³⁵ Interview with Alec Pugh, Imperial War Museum, 10880 – Reel 4 (1989-09-13)

¹³⁶ Interview with Thomas Jones, Imperial War Museum, 20894 – Reel 3 (2000-11-23)

¹³⁷ Interview with Reginald Rutherford, Imperial War Museum, 13153 – Reel 3 (1993-05-04)

¹³⁸ Interview with Reginald Rutherford

With reference to the variety of testimony studied, which details an individual's entire military experience of the Second World War, there are limited occurrences when weather conditions are referred to whilst giving descriptions of their experiences. These descriptions tend to come when the weather is particularly remarkable, as in the circumstances at Overloon and Venraij, thus proving the severity of the conditions.

As well as this, terminology is important when determining emotional connections to memories. For example, Goozee's use of the word "bad". Rutherford's persistent reference to the rain as "dreadful" or describing the weather as "terribly bad". Pugh's use of the term "miserable". All of these terms are related to negative connotations.

In the opinion of psychologist Joel R. Davitz and of this thesis, "the words a subject uses in describing an emotional experience do indeed reflect or refer to some aspect of that experience".¹³⁹ Consequently, when the interviewee uses such negative terminology, they are doing so because their experience reflects the negativity of the chosen term. However, from this psychological perspective, the argument could be posed that the description and labelling of an event can differ depending on each individual's definition of the terminology they are using.¹⁴⁰ Although, to indulge this work into a phenomenological debate detracts from the intent of this thesis. In which case, the negative connotations associated with these words shall be upheld.

Davitz's view is useful in the study of morale, as assumptions such as these allow us to understand the emotional attachment of terminology in regards to the morale of the individual during the period. Simply put, negative terms equate to negative experience, thus, we can assume lower morale, particularly when combined with Fennell's quantitative research of the period (Source 0.05).

Moving away from the psychoanalysis of terminology, the poor conditions also provided some physical effects to the landscape and the ability to wage war. In the battle for Overloon and Venraij, this become evident in the excess of water in this marshy and wooded region of the Netherlands.

¹³⁹ Joel R. Davitz, *The Language of Emotion*, (Academic Press; London, 1969) pp.4-5

¹⁴⁰ Joel R. Davitz, *The Language of Emotion*. pp.4-5

Rain and Terrain at Overloon

Rain made the terrain unsuitable for the movement of tanks and heavy vehicles, it also gave the defensive advantage to the *Wehrmacht* and inhibited successful logistical warfare for the 21st Army Group. Arthur Rouse, an officer in 1st Battalion South Lancashire Regiment makes this clear as he describes that there was no shelter from the deteriorating weather, the ground was not suitable for tanks and vehicles and also there was great difficulty feeding his men.¹⁴¹

At Overloon, Rouse talks of a Company who did not receive a hot meal until two o' clock in the morning, which was the first time that had happened in the whole war, due to the shelling of roads.¹⁴² Given the condition of roads and passages to the village it can be assumed that these too would have hindered the successful movement of food trucks. Consequently, the complexity of the impact of the rain at Overloon is more apparent. As it is not just the unpleasant nature of being exposed to rain and cold, but logistics and the inability to move supplies such as food to the troops becomes another deteriorative factor for morale.

The diary of General Lashmer G. Whistler provides us with a personal insight to the effects of rain and the terrain. He states that the area in which Operation Constellation was fought, was full of "bags of mines and desperate mud. Churchills (Tank) bogging down everywhere. Bridges collapsing – in fact every blood thing quite bloody".¹⁴³

Reginal Rutherford supports Whistler's statement, claiming that the area around Overloon and Venraij was "all flooded".¹⁴⁴ This led to tanks being "bogged down completely", fitting with Whistler's account of the battle.¹⁴⁵ This was fundamentally due to the geographic location of Overloon and Venraij which were in a wooded and marshy region of the Netherlands, making the movement of tanks difficult.¹⁴⁶ Arthur Blizzard of Pioneer Platoon, 1st Battalion Suffolk Regiment highlights the challenges set by the marshy terrain, stating

¹⁴¹ Interview with Arthur Rouse, Imperial War Museum, 14255 – Reel 3 (1994-07-30)

¹⁴² Interview with Arthur Rouse

¹⁴³ WSRO, Whistler Papers, 9/48, personal diary, 18 October 1944

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Reginald Rutherford

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Reginald Rutherford

¹⁴⁶ Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine: Combined Arms Doctrine in British 21st Army Group in North West Europe, 1944-45*, p.114

that if you were to “dig six inches, you got six inches of water in, you couldn’t get down you see”.¹⁴⁷ Blizzard is referring here to the inability to build slit trenches for defensive cover due to the waterlogged ground. This further adds to the fact that terrain played a fundamental role in the way in which the battle could be fought, as well as the ways in which British troops could find defensive positions.

Rutherford also refers to the problems caused by a deep canal known as the Lobeek, which needed to be crossed by the British in order to continue pushing forward. At this canal, the terrain was used with explosive mines to detriment the British advance. Rutherford notes that for the first time, he encountered a water crossing at which the enemy had placed explosive mines on both sides of the water.¹⁴⁸ In attempting to cross this water obstacle and minefield, his Company lost “many men”, forcing two crossings with “tremendous difficulty”.¹⁴⁹ This illuminates the defensive advantage that can be gained from the use of terrain, which proves the hardship endured by the units of the 21st Army Group in their push to the Maas river.

Arthur Blizzard gives another good example of the defensive advantage the Germans held. He dictates that enemy troops were able to use a steeple in the nearby town of Venraij to gain a good view over the surrounding marshland, pinning the British down.¹⁵⁰ This is verified by an article from *The Times* published on the 16th October, it records that this steeple which was used as an artillery observation post had been burned down.¹⁵¹ This adds weight to the point that the *Wehrmacht* had a defensive advantage over the British given the landscape of the region.

Douglas Waller makes the difficult encountered by the topography, particularly for vehicles, clearer in oral testimony held in 2002;

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Arthur Blizzard, Imperial War Museum, 17979 – Reel 3 (1998-04-08)

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Reginald Rutherford

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Reginald Rutherford

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Arthur Blizzard

¹⁵¹ ‘Great Air Assault On Rhine Bases’ *The Times* (London, England) Monday, October 16, 1944, Issue 49975/2, p.4.

We got involved in quite a battle there (Overloon)... well it was a ghastly sort of place, you didn't really see anything... you were almost firing at shadows, ideal infantry country.¹⁵²

Waller also gives us an insight to the potential for enemy defence given the terrain they were faced with. When asked about the opposition faced;

Oh, it was very fierce, all the way, they were set up points within the forest on the thing, there was only one main road going through.¹⁵³

This ferocity addressed by the testimony of Waller is echoed in that of Brown. As upon being asked what happened to him during the battle, he responded;

"What happened to me? Well, I managed to survive it."¹⁵⁴

The close examination of terminology here is imperative in the understanding of Brown's experience of the battle. Claiming that he "managed to survive" the battle at Overloon, gives clear implications that the battle was an experience in which Brown deems his survival an achievement. Consequently, from this testimony, the nature of the battle become more evident as it must have been substantially difficult and hard-fought to have only "managed to survive".¹⁵⁵

The combination of terrain and conditions gave a defensive advantage to the Germans. As is clear from footage of churned up roads, the marshy and forested landscape inhibited effective deployment of heavy vehicles and led to a battle which was led by infantry units.¹⁵⁶ Charles Forrester also notes that the area "was flat and suited the defence... It was to be yet another close-quarter infantry slogging match".¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Interview with Douglas Waller, Imperial War Museum, 23447 - Reel 13 (2002-07)

¹⁵³ Interview with Douglas Waller

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Herbert William Brown

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Herbert William Brown

¹⁵⁶ Imperial War Museum, 'Poor Quality Roads Affect Vehicle Movement In The Overloon-Venraij Sector Of 8th Corps Front (Part 1)' [Allocated Title], (October 1944) Cat. No. A70 182-1

Imperial War Museum, 'Poor Quality Roads Affect Vehicle Movement In The Overloon-Venraij Sector Of 8th Corps Front (Part 2)', (October 1944) Cat No. A70 182-2

¹⁵⁷ Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine: Combined Arms Doctrine in British 21st Army Group in North West Europe, 1944-45* p.115

Ernest Goozee verifies this in his testimony, by claiming that the fighting was dominated by the sounds of Sten and Bren guns.¹⁵⁸ This is again backed up by Waller, who also emphasises the high employment of infantry units at Overloon, and the fact that the terrain type inhibited the effective deployment of tanks.¹⁵⁹ As we will explore later in this thesis, “the ferocity of German resistance” was intensified, as it was “now driven by the fact that the *Wehrmacht* was now fighting on the border of the Reich”.¹⁶⁰

The rain and poor weather were not constant features of the battles however, as the attack did commence on the 12th October 1944. The next issue detrimental to morale was the impact of barrages and artillery on terrain. A depiction of the battleground is made by John Ward, which shows a landscape filled with craters and burned trees. It gives a clear impression of the destruction metered out upon the landscape.¹⁶¹

Devastation as depicted by Ward’s sketch adds to the view that manoeuvrability would have been greatly restricted by the terrain. As well as this, from this picture an it can be better understood how there was a lack in defensive positions for the British. This added to the defensive advantage held by the German forces in the villages of Overloon and Venraij.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Ernest Goozee

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Douglas Waller

¹⁶⁰ Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People’s War: The British and Commonwealth Armies in the Second World War*, p.559

¹⁶¹ John Ward, *A Back Garden at Overloon, Holland, Wash*, (1944-10-01) - Art.IWM ART LD 4898 - Imperial War Museum

Source 1.04

"A Back Garden at Overloon, Holland by John Ward"



Ernest Goozee's account of the impact of artillery barrages from both British and German guns upon the village adds to the totality of Overloon's destruction. He explains that Overloon "was well bombed".¹⁶² To the extent that "there was no buildings left. Complete what's name".¹⁶³ Goozee's account whilst colloquialised, makes apparent the absolute destruction of the village.

Indeed, on the opening day of the attack, "four artillery regiments with medium guns and a battery with heavy guns, altogether 68 pieces" fired upon the village.¹⁶⁴ Air support was also made available from Hawker Typhoons of 83 Group RAF and USAAF (United States Army Air Force) Martin Marauders.¹⁶⁵ Ernest Goozee continues;

¹⁶² Interview with Ernest Goozee

¹⁶³ Interview with Ernest Goozee

¹⁶⁴ A. Korthals Altes & N. K. C. A. In't Veld, *The Forgotten Battle: Overloon and the Maas Salient 1944-45*, p.83

¹⁶⁵ Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine: Combined Arms Doctrine in British 21st Army Group in North West Europe, 1944-45*, p.115

Where the buildings had been severed by bomb damage and that, we dug holes, slit trenches. We barricaded the top with doors off buildings, for our own protection as much as we could... Jerry had bombed that so much that there was hardly a building standing.¹⁶⁶

This further proves that the Germans had the defensive advantage during the battle of Overloon as British soldiers had to suffice with unsuitable terrain, which was hard to constructed slit trenches for cover. As well as this, there were limited buildings left standing for protection from bullets or the weather. Thus, making the battle much more difficult and costlier for the British, which would further wear down the British will to fight on.

The testimony of Robert Dare makes the nature of the struggle for this region ever more apparent. When discussing the brigade's movement toward Venraij and Overloon, a stark description of battle is given;

It was absolute hell, we were shelled, there were 'moaning minnies', there were some infantry about but not a lot, but It was a real tank scrap battle. And we lost many, many tanks, through 'Tiger' tanks, because they couldn't cross the river you see they were trapped.¹⁶⁷

Dare gives us an insight into the other difficulties faced by the advancing 21st Army group in the region because of the restrictive nature of the terrain and conditions. This testimony also makes clear the amount of challenges faced by the 21st Army Group, not only in conflict but bound by poor terrain made worse by rain. However, with Dare's testimony, we discover an issue with reliability, because of his reference to 'Tiger' tanks. The 'Tiger' Tank or Panzerkampfwagen VI, is iconic in the debate surrounding tank design during the Second World War, namely due to the fact it was viewed as a superior design to that of Allied tanks at the time.¹⁶⁸

What is interesting is that "the Allies reported more encounters with Tigers than any other German type".¹⁶⁹ This is evident in the testimony of Robert Dare, although it does place

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Ernest Goozee

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Robert Dare

¹⁶⁸ Anthony Tucker-Jones, "Introduction". *Tiger I and Tiger II*. (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2012)

¹⁶⁹ Bruce Oliver Newsome, 'SD KFZ 181 PANZERKAMPFWAGEN VI AUSF E (E1951.23)', *The Tank Museum Online* (2019)

questions of reliability onto his description and those of other reportings, as only 1354 Tiger I's were ever created.¹⁷⁰ This is opposed to 8,540 German Panzer IV's and approximately 53,500 US Sherman tanks produced.¹⁷¹ Therefore, it is unlikely that there would have been a lot of these machines in the proximity. Also, when considering the military fronts that Nazi Germany were fighting, and the fact that these tanks entered service in 1943, the likelihood decreases further.¹⁷² Even when the successor to the Tiger name - the Tiger II - entered production, only 489 were produced.¹⁷³

Thus, it is evident that when dealing with oral testimony, there is the possibility that, in this instance, tanks are misidentified or pieces of evidence are missed or manipulated in order to form a solid narrative. Nevertheless, for this thesis, this provides a good insight to the fear that Dare had about his opponent's tank, and shows a lot about how British troops felt about going into combat during the period. Therefore, this allows us to gauge that this was likely to have been a contributing factor to the deterioration of morale.

This chapter has made clear that after the failure of Operation 'Market Garden', operations such as 'Constellation' were erosive to the troop morale. In this instance the poor autumnal weather of the Eastern Netherlands, combined with marshy waterlogged terrain, proved to be not only an unpleasant experience but gave the potential for greater casualties. Jonathan Fennell's quantitative research of morale proved that there was a dip in morale of the 21st Army Group following their defeat at Arnhem (See table 0.05).¹⁷⁴

The two exogenous elements of rain and terrain, worked in unison to make the attack more difficult for the British. This in turn gave a greater defensive advantage to the *Wehrmacht*, leading to much more hard fought battles faced. This was evidently a contributing factor to an increase in numbers of troops suffering conditions such as battle fatigue and sickness. Though it must be remembered that these are merely contributory factors. Issues such as

¹⁷⁰ Bruce Oliver Newsome, 'SD KFZ 181 PANZERKAMPFWAGEN VI AUSF E (E1951.23)

¹⁷¹ Mike Garth 'SD KFZ 161 PANZERKAMPFWAGEN IV AUSF D (E1951.29)' *The Tank Museum Online* (2019) & Steven Zaloga, *Armored Thunderbolt* (Stackpole Books; Mechanicsburg, 2008)

¹⁷² Bruce Oliver Newsome, 'SD KFZ 181 PANZERKAMPFWAGEN VI AUSF E (E1951.23)'

¹⁷³ Thomas Jentz, *Panzertruppen 2: The Complete Guide to the Creation & Combat Employment of Germany's Tank Force 1943–1945*. (Schiffer, 1996) p.288

¹⁷⁴ Jonathan Fennell, 'Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War' P.25

continued conflict since the Invasion of Normandy in June 1944, may also be fundamental to the detriment of British morale.

The study of oral testimony in this instance, has been useful in evaluating, to some extent, the emotional memory held by the interviewee. Whilst a lot of research of testimony of this kind is bound by assumption, particularly through that of emotional memory – it is clear when presented with transcriptions that this period of fighting was, in the most part, a horrendous experience in the individual lives of the sample group. What adds to this study is the interviewees ability, through what was predominantly open questioning, to identify endogenous and exogenous factors impacting morale. Those, of course were fundamental to this thesis.

Another important factor which comes as a given especially when discussing military history, is the effectiveness of the enemy. Relevant in this study in particular, as will be discussed in the next chapter – but the terrain and conditions faced at Overloon and Venraij would have, without doubt been only minor inconveniences had it not been for a determined, fanaticised military force opposing virtually every inch of ground taken.

Chapter 2 – Resurgence of the *Wehrmacht*

The decision to launch the airborne assault in the Netherlands in September 1944 was founded upon the belief that the German war machine had been broken. This was because of the massive retreat to more defensible land by remaining *Wehrmacht* forces.¹⁷⁵ This erroneous strategic move made by Allied command proved to be a morale disaster for the 21st Army Group, as is evident by the quantitative research by Jonathan Fennell.¹⁷⁶

Whilst the failure of Operation 'Market Garden' had a detrimental impact to the 21st Army Group both physically and mentally. The unpredicted resurgence in the *Wehrmacht's* fighting ability proved to be a contributing factor to the future difficulties faced by Montgomery's army. The clearing of the region of the Netherlands to secure the salient to the west of the River Maas, exemplified this resurgence in the "Iron discipline" and fighting ability of the German forces.¹⁷⁷

It was by this stage becoming apparent that capitulation was not on the agenda for the German high command. This was made clear by the persistence of German leaders to display assurance and hopefulness that victory was still a possibility.¹⁷⁸ Then upon the penetration of Germany by the allied forces, the mantra being espoused from the Reich chancellery was one of "win or die!".¹⁷⁹ Thus, poking the hot coals of fanaticism within the ranks of the German military.

The resulting issues that were faced by Montgomery's 21st Army Group – as made evident by the previous chapter – including a difficult fighting environment and prolonged battles against well defended positions. As a result of this, battles such as that at Overloon and Venraij proved to be fought with much more ferocity and bloodshed.

¹⁷⁵ John Keegan, *The Second World War*, (Hutchinson; UK, 1989) p.436

Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies in the Second World War*. p.555

¹⁷⁶ Jonathan Fennell, 'Reevaluating Combat Cohesion: The British Second Army in The Northwest Europe Campaign of the Second World War' p.25 in Anthony King (ed.), *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

¹⁷⁷ 'G-2 Special Summary Number 8 dated 22 November' *National Archives* – WO 219/790

¹⁷⁸ Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, (Harvard University Press; London, 2006) P.184

¹⁷⁹ Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht*. P.185

Operations following 'Market Garden', as stated by Major General G. P. B. Roberts, were "quite different to anything we had met before... now we came up against natural obstacles, sometimes fortified and sometimes not, but when held by the Germans they needed a lot of effort".¹⁸⁰ The maintenance of high morale and the limitation of casualties were, as Charles Forrester puts it, "were further issues to address".¹⁸¹

A good means of identifying Allied perception toward the fighting capabilities of the *Wehrmacht* is present at the *National Archives*. Reports to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) on 'Enemy Morale' throughout 1944 provide an insight to Allied presumptions.¹⁸² 'SHAEF Special G-2 Summary No. 6' produced on the 21st August 1944, documents the perception of German capability present in Allied high command after the successful invasion of Normandy.¹⁸³ It states;

Latest morale picture shows no significant change. Morale in SS and Parachute formations still very high though there have been recent examples of desertion by personnel of former. General signs of dissatisfaction due to lack of air and tank support among infantry units. Proportion of troops who still think Germans will win war about one fifth, but no solid ideas as to how this is to be achieved.¹⁸⁴

It is worth bearing in mind that this particular report does not document the proximity in which these Schutzstaffel (SS) and parachute formations were fighting. That being said, this report shows that the organisation more closely related to the National Socialist regime - the SS - was viewed by the Allies as being more confident in battle. The fact that the SS was intrinsically related to the Nazi regime, could be argued to be a predictable state for the fanatics.¹⁸⁵

Although, it was not merely the SS and the *Fallschirmjäger* (German parachutists) who were incited by the will of the Nazi machine. This was proven to Winston Churchill from an 'ULTRA' intelligence 'Special Message'. This message documented on the 22nd July 1944, a

¹⁸⁰ Major General G. P. B Roberts, *From the Desert to the Baltic* (London: William Kimber, 1987)

¹⁸¹ Charles Forrester, *Monty's Functional Doctrine: Combined Arms Doctrine in British 21st Army Group in North West Europe, 1944-45*. p.114

¹⁸² 'Enemy Morale' *National Archives* – WO 219/790

¹⁸³ 'SHAEF Special G-2 Summary No. 6 dated 21st August 1944' *National Archives* – WO 219/790

¹⁸⁴ 'SHAEF Special G-2 Summary No. 6 dated 21st August 1944' *National Archives* – WO 219/790

¹⁸⁵ Robert Koehl, 'The Character of the Nazi SS', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Sep., 1962), pp. 275-283 pp.282-283

telegram from Hitler for General Karl-Wilhelm von Schlieben of the *Wehrmacht* to “defend to the last pillbox” and that “every enemy attack must be shattered”.¹⁸⁶ Thomas Kuhne, in his book *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship* argues that the *Wehrmacht* were not innocent from the fanaticism of the Third Reich. Indeed, Kuhne points out that the “draconian military justice” of the *Wehrmacht* was indeed a contributing factor to the brutalisation and barbarisation of German soldiers.¹⁸⁷ From which, it can be argued that commands of these types could be a fundamental factor behind the resilience of the German defence.

However, at this point in 1944 the fact that from this report only one – fifth of German troops believed in victory, shows a devastating blow to morale. M. I. Gurfein and Morris Janowitz validate this in their study of the morale of the *Wehrmacht* who note that in June and July less than fifty per-cent of the captured German prisoners of war (POW) believed they could remove the Allied force from France.¹⁸⁸ This acknowledgement of the frail nature of the German POWs, helped to structure the belief that the *Wehrmacht* was under severe strain on a psychological level.

Although the adoption of the view of POWs does not provide an accurate interpretation of the whole German force. This is quite obviously due to the fact that these men had been taken captive at the hands of enemy soldiers, so it is not unreasonable to assume that their answers to the questions given to them, may be biased to put them in good stead with their captors. Nonetheless, it is clear how information such as this prior to the decision to launch ‘Market Garden’ may have founded Allied strategy for the defeat of Germany.

Though, this telegram shows the German response relatively soon after the Allied invasion of western Europe. Dated September 1944, another SHAEF report documents the view held about the morale of the German military. SHAEF Report G-2 Special Summary No. 7 proves this absolute underestimation of the *Wehrmacht*. Through the use colloquialisms the perception of the Allies becomes apparent, “Considerable evidence that enemy has had

¹⁸⁶ ‘ULTRA Intelligence Report dated 22 June 1944’ *National Archives* – HW 1/2992

¹⁸⁷ Thomas Kuhne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, pp.4-5

¹⁸⁸ M. I. Gurfein and Morris Janowitz, ‘Trends in Wehrmacht Morale’ *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring, 1946), pp. 78-84 pp.78-79

stuffing knocked out of him and present outlook of soldier is near one of bewilderment and helplessness brought on by our ability to move rapidly and bypass him".¹⁸⁹

Addressing the Germans as bewildered and helpless and as having the "stuffing knocked out of them" proves that there was a solid belief of the imminent capitulation of the enemy. As well as this reference is made to the motorisation of the British forces in the break out from Normandy and the subsequent pursuit of the retreating German forces, as they are now able to "bypass" the Germans. Interestingly, the report also refers to German divisions having "lost so much equipment that they have not adequate arms with which to fight". This can be understood as being further evidence, in the view of SHAEF of the impending collapse of the *Wehrmacht*, as they no longer have the military 'materiel' to continue the fight.

Already, a clear picture is being unveiled of the assumptions held by SHAEF. It was believed at this point that German "determination to fight is very lacking, particularly among infantry formations". This was made evident through the desertion of troops, who "fled under great stress" during the decimation of the *Wehrmacht* at the battle of the Falaise Pocket.¹⁹⁰ Though, the report clarified that, "it cannot be said yet there has been complete collapse in morale".¹⁹¹

A potential explanation is given in the statement's study of the opinions of captured young officers as according to the report they, "generally still believe in possibility of German victory. Most senior Officers now realise inevitability of defeat."¹⁹² Dividing the demographics of officers between young and old, we can see that the indoctrinated youth still uphold the belief in the domination of the Third Reich, as opposed to the elder officers who acknowledge the nation's demise. The fanatical youth being the target goal of Hitler who famously stated "whoever has the youth has the future".¹⁹³ Thus, it should come as no

¹⁸⁹ 'SHAEF Report G-2 Special Summary No. 7 dated September 1944' *National Archives* - WO 219/790

¹⁹⁰ 'SHAEF Report G-2 Special Summary No. 7 dated September 1944'

¹⁹¹ 'SHAEF Report G-2 Special Summary No. 7 dated September 1944'

¹⁹² 'SHAEF Report G-2 Special Summary No. 7 dated September 1944'

¹⁹³ Edward J. Kunzer, 'The Youth of Nazi Germany' *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 11, No. 6, The Challenge of Youth (Feb., 1938), pp. 342-350 p.342

surprise that a regime that intended to indoctrinate the youth with National Socialist ideology, resulted in a highly zealous young command with the *Wehrmacht*.¹⁹⁴

Whilst this report does not state specifically the date in September, it can be confidently assumed that this was prior to the assault at Arnhem, this is also made evident given the reference to the battle of the Falaise Pocket (8-17 August 1944). The image portrayed by this report shows the crucial influencing factors upon the strategy of the following campaign. It can be seen that the view of German weakness was instrumental in deciding Montgomery's plan of a singular thrust to Berlin. This is apparent in his letter to Eisenhower, in which Montgomery argued that "we have now reached a stage where one really powerful and full-blooded thrust towards Berlin is likely to get there and thus end the German war".¹⁹⁵ This strategy however, would result in the end of what had been – according to Source 0.05 - a sharp drop in morale for 21st Army Group.

The historiographical issue of the cause of the failure at Arnhem – whether it was the limitations placed on Monty's plan by Eisenhower or whether the plan was just fundamentally flawed - is irrelevant to this study. What is relevant however, is the fact that the decision to launch this failed attack - although it may have been a risk worth taking from the perspective of the British-¹⁹⁶ led to the erosion of morale amongst troops of the 21st Army Group. The failure also led to the discovery of the fact that the *Wehrmacht* had stopped their retreat and were able to mobilise into a fighting force.¹⁹⁷

The subsequent report in the series proves SHAEF's underestimation in the fighting capability of the German forces. It acknowledges that after 'Market Garden', the "enemy has recovered his stability after period of collapse and, although still confused, is showing more spirit in his fighting".¹⁹⁸ Following this "period of collapse" it is noted that the "enemy has now more cohesion on his front than he had at any time since Allied break out in NORMANDY".¹⁹⁹ There is a staunch contrast between this report and its predecessor. It

¹⁹⁴ Stephen Pagaard 'Teaching the Nazi Dictatorship: Focus on Youth' *The History Teacher* Vol. 38, No. 2 (Feb., 2005), pp. 189-207 p.191

¹⁹⁵ Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Montgomery*. pp.270 -272

¹⁹⁶ Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies in the Second World War*. p.561

¹⁹⁷ Sebastian Ritchie, *Arnhem Myth and Reality: Airborne Warfare, Air Power and the Failure of Operation Market Garden*. pp.126-7

¹⁹⁸ 'Special G-2 Summary No. 8' *National Archives* - WO 219/790

¹⁹⁹ 'Special G-2 Summary No. 8'

appears that there has been a complete reversal in the Allied assumption of German capability.

The report refers also to possible factors the maintenance of morale amongst the enemy troops, explaining that “he (troops of the *Wehrmacht*) is defending the Fatherland, in many cases in good defensive positions or in the prepared West Wall positions”.²⁰⁰ This gives an insight to the following difficulties that would be faced by the 21st Army Group in battles such as that at Overloon. The defensive positions, namely the Siegfried line, on the western border of Germany are highlighted as a source of these issues of German morale. These pre-prepared positions, would also prove a difficult challenge for the subsequent campaign to break into Germany.

The difficulty to be encountered by the British is shown by the reports suggestion that the Germans had a “certain proportion men with spirit. These make up for their lack of skill by aggressiveness”.²⁰¹ From this, it is clear that SHAEF were wrong in thinking that German forces were on the brink of collapse, both in a strategic and morale sense – as clearly there was a renewed fighting ability prevalent following ‘Market Garden’. Not only was there resilience in terms of morale, but this report documents the creation of new German divisions, going as far to state that, “some new divisions have fought very well, notably 553, 559 and the battalion under 176 Division”.²⁰² This proves that the allied presumption was mistaken, leading to the view of the report being that “no evidence of any signs of collapse and in present circumstances of fighting consider this unlikely”.²⁰³

The reports reference to the ‘spirit’ of the German soldiers, which notes that their lack in skill was compensated by aggression, follows on from the assumption made earlier of the fanaticism of the troops of the *Wehrmacht*. The report goes as far as to state that amongst “junior officers” there is “an air of optimism based apparently on faith in HITLER”. Though the report continues to state that “their views are quite illogical”.²⁰⁴ Thus, this provides further evidence to support the claim that a driving factor behind the *Wehrmacht* was founded upon fanaticism with the Nazi state. Indeed, ideology is identified in source 0.04 as

²⁰⁰ ‘Special G-2 Summary No. 8’

²⁰¹ ‘Special G-2 Summary No. 8’

²⁰² ‘Special G-2 Summary No. 8’

²⁰³ ‘Special G-2 Summary No. 8’

²⁰⁴ ‘Special G-2 Summary No. 8’

a key exogenous factor in the contribution and maintenance of morale within an armed force.

Given what has been previously discussed, and assuming this framework of contributing factors to morale (source 0.04), it is apparent how fanaticism within the *Wehrmacht* would play an important role to maintain a fighting will. This resolve to continue is made clear within the report, proving to be contradictory to the Allied belief that the *Wehrmacht* were close to breaking point and that an end in the war was in sight.²⁰⁵ To further oppose this belief the report points out the creation of successful division with the German forces, further damning the mistake made by the Allies in underestimating their opponent.

Whilst a date is not present on this document it can be confidently asserted that this followed 'Market Garden'. Reasons for this include the period of time spaced between each report in the series often exceeding a month. With this in mind, report No. 7 was dated September, therefore, report No. 8 must have been produced in autumn or winter following the operation.

However, present at the *National Archives* was another report entitled, "G-2 Special Summary Number 8".²⁰⁶ This report however, whilst sharing the digit '8', is dated 22nd November 1944, thus unsure of the relation to the former entitled as No. 8, this thesis will treat both documents as individual sources. The report maintains a similar tone to its counterpart, stating that there are, "No signs of any collapse in will to resist at the front".²⁰⁷ It explains that the cause of this hard resistance is due to the "Iron discipline of WEHRMACHT and SS".²⁰⁸ which is pointed out by Kuhne as providing a basis for the continued struggle of the brutal German troops.²⁰⁹

Another factor that the report identifies is the notion of defending the German 'Fatherland', which acted as another morale strengthening element. Defending their homeland instilled "into troops a desperate resolve to retreat no further".²¹⁰ This was exacerbated by the

²⁰⁵ Sebastian Ritchie, *Arnhem Myth and Reality: Airborne Warfare, Air Power and the Failure of Operation Market Garden*, p.11

²⁰⁶ 'Special G-2 Summary No. 8 dated 22 November' *National Archives* - WO 219/790

²⁰⁷ 'Special G-2 Summary No. 8 dated 22 November'

²⁰⁸ 'Special G-2 Summary No. 8 dated 22 November'

²⁰⁹ Thomas Kuhne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship*, pp.4-5

²¹⁰ 'Special G-2 Summary No. 8 dated 22 November'

commanding officers within the *Wehrmacht*, leading troops to “stand fast and protect the sacred soil of the Fatherland”.²¹¹ To further this concept, the report explains that German propaganda played a role in the maintenance of morale, by binding their defeat to the complete “annihilation of German Nation in the event of defeat”.²¹² Hence, it is clear that the report identified that a key contributing factor to the resilience of the *Wehrmacht* in its defence of Germany, was the influence of ideology and propaganda.

The influence of these exogenous stimuli was also combined, as the reports states, to the fact that the Germans were fighting from “well prepared defensive positions” with the “protection of concrete”.²¹³ As well as this, the report found that it was the belief of captured soldiers that the defence conducted, had in the most part been successful.²¹⁴ This belief in a solid defence can be assumed as being a key factor in the resilience of the individual soldier, especially when considering the ideological stance taken by the German high command towards its troops. Thus, the report sees that “desertions of true Germans very few and when they occur are usually caused by such things as lack of food or inadequate clothing”.²¹⁵ When examining this report, there is a clear and staunch difference between the current and those preceding ‘Market Garden’. Indeed, it is clear that the SHAEF reports have misread the situation following the German retreat through France and Belgium. This is evident also in the work of Sebastian Ritchie, who argues that the Allies completely underestimated the German ability to re-group, re-organise and form a capable defence following this period of retreat.²¹⁶

The production of this report No. 8 was after the operations at Overloon and Venraij, and thus gives us a good insight to the difficulty faced by the 21st Army Group active in combat. Even at this stage the report found that according to evidence from those captured, the reasons for a resurgence in fight capability was due to, “improved German positions of having short supply lines, no partisans to deal with, (and) reserve Divisions”. Though the report also gives an insight in the Allied belief of German defeat, noting that these reasons

²¹¹ ‘Special G-2 Summary No. 8 dated 22 November’

²¹² ‘Special G-2 Summary No. 8 dated 22 November’

²¹³ ‘Special G-2 Summary No. 8 dated 22 November’

²¹⁴ ‘Special G-2 Summary No. 8 dated 22 November’

²¹⁵ ‘Special G-2 Summary No. 8 dated 22 November’

²¹⁶ Sebastian Ritchie, *Arnhem Myth and Reality: Airborne Warfare, Air Power and the Failure of Operation Market Garden*. pp.126-7

given by the POWs are being perpetuated, “for final victory by those stupid enough to believe in it”.²¹⁷ In particular, this line illuminates the sense of shock for the Allies, as there appeared to be no chance of German victory, though for many POWs their fanaticism allowed for this confidence in Hitler. Subsequently, this provides us with a greater context of the ferocity and determination in which many German soldiers would have fought with in the later stages of 1944.

Conclusive assumptions such as those indicated by the reports were also evident in terms of actual fighting. The retreat of German troops from Normandy and the potential total annihilation of the army in the battle of the Falaise Pocket, was evidence of the weakness of the enemy. The failure to completely destroy the German forces however, appeared to be due an Allied inability to capitalise on the entrapment of the enemy, as opposed to any other factor.²¹⁸ This, when twinned with reports on German morale and resilience, would prove enticing to get results quickly. As well as this, the view of Montgomery that “The British economy and man-power situation demanded victory in 1944: no later” shows clearly the arguable over-eagerness to end the war.²¹⁹

Whilst the misjudgement of SHAEF in the expectation of the *Wehrmacht* is clear through these variance of the reports on morale and their fighting ability on the battlefield. These reports also place into to question the accuracy of the information gathered by SHAEF inquiries. The reasons for this in this particular circumstance are the reliance on the words of POWs as a source of identifying the mood across a national army. Although, Gurfein and Janowitz point out that studies such as these amongst POWs were used to identify some trends, rather than act as representative of the enemy force. However, the study relevant to their work regarded only the statistical evidence received from one style of information extraction - questionnaires.²²⁰ Gurfein and Janowitz assert that these questionnaires were used only as a means of gauging mood for psychological warfare.²²¹ Considering the

²¹⁷ ‘Special G-2 Summary No. 8 dated 22 November’

²¹⁸ Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People’s War: The British and Commonwealth Armies in the Second World War*. pp.545-546

²¹⁹ Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Montgomery*, pp.270 -272

²²⁰ M. I. Gurfein and Morris Janowitz, ‘Trends in Wehrmacht Morale’ *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring, 1946), pp. 78-84 p.79

²²¹ M. I. Gurfein and Morris Janowitz, ‘Trends in Wehrmacht Morale’ p.84

publishing date of Gurfein and Janowitz's – 1946 – their study did not allow substantial time for the birth of revisionism surrounding this topic.

The reports by SHAEF, cover a broader spectrum of information than was studied by these two sociologists. By reference to information such as defensive positions and the formation of new fighting units, it is clear that there was a complexity, in these SHAEF reports, unlike those questionnaires studied by Gurfein and Janowitz. This in turn may have an influencing sway upon future strategy and at the very least provide a suitable source for reasoning behind strategic decision making.

Consequently, from such reports it is evident that there was an underestimation of the *Wehrmacht*, founded partially upon recent successes for the Allies, and in part due to the assumption of psychological weakness amongst the enemy force. The study which sought to identify such psychological frailness was, as discussed, deeply flawed given the situation of those sampled. The inaccuracy of the assumption led to a prolonged period of campaigning through difficult terrain, under difficult conditions, which simply eroded morale further after the already present dip following September 1944.

Impact on British troops

The resurgence of the *Wehrmacht* had a detrimental impact upon the morale of the 21st Army Group. This is primarily due to following a substantial defeat at Arnhem, the assumption of imminent collapse was gone and a new fight had to be fought with a reformed German military force, defending its border with every means necessary. Thus, the problems faced by the resurrection of the *Wehrmacht* is evident through the testimony of British troops that fought in the region. Lionel Roebuck of the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment makes this evident when describing the first instance of fear he experienced whilst fighting around Venraij;

Up to then I hadn't been really frightened, but really, I was a bit frightened in that corner because dare not go to sleep... there was a farm just up the road and Jerrys

were dug in on the other side in the field, about twenty to thirty yards away... we weren't far away from one another.²²²

Roebuck's acknowledgement that it was during this period that he had his first, memorable, encounter with fear, validates his difficulty he faced in this operation to secure the Maas salient. As well as this, Roebuck's testimony continues to shed light upon the view that the encounter with the German forces in this region, and the incorrect assumption of their strength, continued to catalyse the disintegration of the morale of the 21st Army Group.

To give a reason for the severity of fighting around Overloon and Venraij, Roebuck cites an account from a German soldier fighting in the area, whom he befriended in the 1980s. According to the German, *Wehrmacht* officers issued the order to "hold the position and then left them", showing that this would be a fight to the last man.²²³

An explanation of the treatment of German soldiers by the British is also made apparent through the second-hand account given by Roebuck. He states that his German friend, upon being captured by British troops, called to his comrade to surrender and to come out of his dug out.²²⁴ After doing so a British soldier shot his comrade through the head, killing him.²²⁵ Roebuck's response to this incident shows the mood amongst British troops during this fighting, as he explains that;

It's not difficult to understand really, because in that particular battle there were loads of instances where the Jerrys waited until the East Yorks' (regiment) got into a clearing in the woods, which they had covered in machine gun, and when they got half a platoon in a middle they just let fly, and that was it. It made them very angry, a lot of the lads were very angry 'cos it was a bloody battle there.²²⁶

From this testimony, a stronger image of emotion is revealed. Whilst the first part of this story is recited from a second hand account, initially arousing questions surrounding its reliability, Roebuck affirms the feeling of anger which was felt by the troops in the region. His narrative of the shooting of troops of the East Yorkshire Regiment further verifies the

²²² Interview with Lionel Roebuck, *Imperial War Museum*, 13584 – Reel 9 (1993-11-30)

²²³ Interview with Lionel Roebuck

²²⁴ Interview with Lionel Roebuck

²²⁵ Interview with Lionel Roebuck

²²⁶ Interview with Lionel Roebuck

ferocity and bloodiness of this period in 1944. Thus, we can see the contributory factors to the erosion of morale within the 21st Army Group.

Whilst this is the case, it must be noted that individual testimony, though useful on a personal level of study, does not present a universal image for the entirety of the British force. That being said the consistency of similar experiences shared amongst testimony available the refers to this period (within the Imperial War Museum), does show a stark correlation revealing the decline in morale.

A reason for the revival in ability of the German war machine becomes apparent in ULTRA intelligence transcripts of German telegrams in late September 1944. Signed by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of Staff of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) to General der Infanterie Von Scheele, to be circulated generally. The telegram regarded the lack of discipline in the *Wehrmacht*, with the issue being the concern of Hitler and the upper echelon of German high command. It states that the, "most serious complaints continue... about undisciplined groups wandering back to Holland or to Aachen and through the Burgundian gates. Their behaviour is so scandalous that it may be expected to infect the West Wall garrison".²²⁷ This telegram reflects the view of the SHAEF reports on German morale, that document some bands of desertion and ill-discipline amongst the German frontlines during the retreat from France. However, evident in this message, uncovered by British intelligence, is the intent by German command to deter capitulation in the western theatre.

By commission of Hitler, "signs of collapse" are to be prevented and given proper deterrence as is explained that, "looters and cowardly shirkers (including officers) are to be proceeded against on the spot with greatest severity... in the case of soldiers sentence is to be carried out immediately as a (deterrent measure). Only the utmost ruthlessness will stop this collapse of war morale which menaces our homeland".²²⁸ To maintain morale, Von Sheele is given "the right to decide on immediate execution even in the case of officers".²²⁹ The evidence presented by ULTRA, is useful in supporting the SHAEF report No. 8, which

²²⁷ 'CX/MSS/T321/115 (Germany/ West Europe) 28/09/44' *National Archives* - HW 1/3237

²²⁸ 'CX/MSS/T321/115 (Germany/ West Europe) 28/09/44'

²²⁹ 'CX/MSS/T321/115 (Germany/ West Europe) 28/09/44'

identifies the 'Iron discipline' of the *Wehrmacht* as a maintenance factor of morale.²³⁰ The threats of execution to be circulated across the force, proves that there were multiple endogenous and exogenous stimuli influencing the morale and fighting capability of the *Wehrmacht*.

What is also interesting is the date of this telegraph, coming three days after the end of Operation 'Market Garden' an image is portrayed of retreat and disintegration of the German military force. This relates to the view held by the Allies of the *Wehrmacht's* imminent collapse. However, given the fact that the right to execute officers and soldiers to deter the issue of undisciplined troops, allows the historian to assume that prior to this, the issue may not been as high of a concern amongst German command, otherwise the rights would have be devolved at an earlier date. This factor, whilst contradicting the belief of the Allies prior to 'Market Garden' of the weakness of the Germans, explains the renewed determination of the enemy in their defence of the Fatherland.

The information gathered from this telegraph also corresponds with the second-hand testimony of Lionel Roebuck and his suggestion of *Wehrmacht* officers demanding that their position was held, and then leaving the soldiers to fend off the British.²³¹ Thus, further revealing the fact that for the individual German soldier and officer, the struggle to defend the ground gained by the Nazis in 1940 was now one of utter desperation, leading to a will to fight for one's life and country.

Consequently, it must be acknowledged that the "ferocity" of battle was now also determined by the fact that it was being fought on the border of the Reich.²³² This in turn led to a harder battle for the liberating forces as proved by the oral testimony of British troops. Peter Brown of 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment, makes this evident when referring to the fighting at Overloon in a typically subtle manner as, "a bit rough".²³³ He also emphasises the fact that there was a lot of fierce street fighting in both Overloon and Venraij, which in turn further illuminates the ferocity of the fighting in the battles.²³⁴

²³⁰ 'Special G-2 Summary No. 8 dated 22 November' *National Archives* - WO 219/790

²³¹ Interview with Lionel Roebuck

²³² Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies in the Second World War*. p.559

²³³ Interview with Peter Brown, *Imperial War Museum*, 13854 – Reel 2 (1994-03-02)

²³⁴ Interview with Peter Brown, *Imperial War Museum*, 13854 – Reel 2 (1994-03-02)

The testimony of Officer Christopher Schofield of 4th Battalion Coldstream Guards, 6th Guards Tank Brigade, highlights the aforementioned fierceness encountered by the 21st Army Group at the battle of Overloon. When Schofield was asked by the interviewer of the opposition put up by the Germans, he responded, “they put up strong opposition there, and strong opposition just south at a place called Venraij... and that again was tough battle”.²³⁵ He describes it as a “fairly nasty battle”, in which he and his battalion encountered “Riegel” anti-tank mines for the first time. He states that they were so powerful they could easily blow off the under plate of a Churchill tank, leading to the fact that “quite a lot of people were either killed or wounded by these mines”.²³⁶

The use of mines is also referred to by Reginald Rutherford as causing many casualties when trying to cross the Lobeek.²³⁷ The use of mines is also claimed by Edward Jones to be because of the fact the Germans were on the defensive, and that in fact they were, “using mines much more extensively than they had before, particularly anti – personnel mines”.²³⁸ To make this point more salient, Jones recites a time in which he was moving through an area “when the second in command said, very quietly, ‘just a moment, just stand still everyone’, and we did and he said ‘look down’, we all looked down. All of us were standing astride of these little needles, wires that stick up from these anti – personnel mines, the whole area was covered, so we very cautiously crept back”.²³⁹ Jones then goes on to tell of how, in the same mine field, a British soldier lost a foot, and upon being rescued, the man rescuing him lost a foot, to which Jones continued “it was a particularly nasty experience”.²⁴⁰

From the testimony of these men, it is apparent that factors such as the greater intensity in the use of mines by the Germans - in order to support their defence of the region - was an eroding factor upon the morale of the British troops. Fundamentally, this is due to the casualties caused by these weapons. However, what must be seen as important is the design intention of a mine. Jones gives a description of the damage that could be inflicted by

²³⁵ Interview with Christopher Schofield, *Imperial War Museum*, 22121 – Reel 2 (2001-09-10)

²³⁶ Interview with Christopher Schofield

²³⁷ Interview with Reginald Rutherford

²³⁸ Interview with Edward Jones, *Imperial War Museum*, 13670 – Reel 4 (1994-01-18)

²³⁹ Interview with Edward Jones

²⁴⁰ Interview with Edward Jones

a mine, noting that it can blow “pebbles and dirt and bits of shrapnel into your lower body as well, it was a very nasty weapon”.²⁴¹

Weapons with the intent to mutilate soldiers in such a way, have a psychological effect amongst troops. For instance, the use of the Churchill ‘Crocodile’, an adaptation from the Churchill tank which placed a flamethrower as its main armament, had such a damning effect upon German morale that crew members of the ‘Crocodile’ would very often be executed upon capture by the enemy.²⁴² Therefore, when discussing morale, an important element of the effectiveness of these weapons is the fear that would be inflicted across the advancing British lines.

The strength of the German resistance is clarified in Rutherford’s account, in which he describes his company’s approach to Overloon, he claims, “we reached the outskirts of Overloon and we were met with tremendous resistance. However, we persevered, lost a lot of men, lost two or three Company Commanders”.²⁴³ Rutherford’s account proves the hard fighting that was endured by his company in the liberation of Overloon. He makes evident also, the fact that the battle took a lot of British casualties in order to achieve their objective.

Accounts such as these, makes clear the resurgence and strength of the *Wehrmacht*. Though, what is lacking from his account are reasons for why the Germans had been able to mount such a relatively solid defence. Consequently, evidence from SHAEF reports and decrypted messages from ULTRA, prove indispensable in discovering factors for the continued fight. They provide a structural perspective on to what instruments of ‘encouragement’ were used by German commanders, as seen by the ULTRA messages, whilst also allowing the historian to gauge the opinion of SHAEF on a macro level.

²⁴¹ Interview with Edward Jones

²⁴² Robert J. Kershaw, *D-day: Piercing the Atlantic Wall*. (Naval Institute Press, 1994) p. 234

²⁴³ Interview with Reginald Rutherford

Conclusion

This work has sought to illuminate and identify key contributing factors to the decrease in morale of the British 21st Army Group following the failure of operation Market Garden on the 25th September 1944. This work has made this clear by the adoption of framework and research produced by Jonathan Fennell as a basis to provide a qualitative element to the study of this topic. The study of personal testimony of combatants alongside official reports, has enabled this thesis to discover and examine exogenous and endogenous factors influencing morale during the period of fighting.

By using the framework set by Fennell (Sources 0.04 and 0.05), it is apparent that the factors most clearly impacting morale, can be identified as the weather conditions and terrain at the battle of Overloon and the subsequent battle for Venraij. The poor weather, not only produced a miserable, wet and cold environment for the men, but it also made the terrain much more problematic to manoeuvre. This of course, must be considered alongside the fact that the region was already low lying and prone to flooding – making it particularly hard for the movement of troops and heavy vehicles such as tanks. Thus, the result of this, was a battle fought heavily between infantry units leading to an increased number of casualties and consequently, a further decline in morale.

Related to this, the *Wehrmacht*, who were now mounting a desperate defence of the Fatherland from the encroachment of the Allied war machine, were given an advantage. The difficulty faced by the British due to terrain and weather, enabled greater defensive success for the already dug in German forces. Which at any standard, given the fact many officers were leaving their units to fight to the death, and instructions were being ordered for the execution of undisciplined troops, cannot be argued as being an organised defence. Consequently, the terrain provided an advantage to the doomed defence of the Reich, by prolonging the fighting and making every advance costlier for the Allied forces.

The resurgence of the *Wehrmacht* therefore, is an instrumental factor in the erosion of British morale, evident from the failure at 'Market Garden'. The assumption of SHAEF that following instances such as the battle of the Falaise Pocket, and the retreat of the German forces from Normandy, was a view that would prove costly in both morale and in terms of

casualties. Clear from the repelling of the Allies at Arnhem, the German forces were no longer in retreat and were not in a position to be easily overcome. This strategic mistake by the Allies, led to the battles for Overloon and Venraij in the subsequent months.

Now that the Germans had found their defensive positions and were putting a relatively solid, and ferocious defence, given the circumstance present to them, the difficulty endured by the British troops only escalated. This is because problems with terrain and weather were combined with techniques such as the greater use of explosive mines. Therefore, this resurgence is another factor which led to the further casualties and a greater destruction of morale amongst the troops of the 21st Army Group.

In terms of recommendations for further study of the topic, further research and recording of interviews of those present at the battles, would be imperative in gaining an even greater understanding of issues influencing the morale of these men. Given, the limitations placed upon this study in terms of time, it would be useful for future study to visit the location in order to get a better awareness of the difficulty presented by the troops in regards to terrain.

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