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History Rocks

Posted by [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-17 11:31:00

Tags: wwii, market garden, history today

Two Intelligence Problems for Today

(U) As noted in today's "History Today," this is the anniversary of WWII's Operation MARKET GARDEN. It's also the anniversary of America's most sanguinary day, the battle of Antietam, Maryland, during our civil war. Both are excellent examples of intelligence problems (or failures!). In both examples, senior military leaders chose to interpret the intelligence presented in their own erroneous fashion (McClellan believing his own over-inflated Confederate order of battle information, Montgomery ignoring the presence of an SS Panzer Corps in his troops' dropzones). Lots of food for thought for intelligence professionals.

304 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-17 14:22:56

Market-Garden

According to "A Bridge Too Far" Montgomery tended to ignore ULTRA for his own Intelligence staff. Seeing how well ULTRA was exploited, not very intelligent on Monty's part.

What turned Antietam into a Union Victory was poor OPSEC by the Confederates allowed a copy of the confederate marching orders to fall into Union hands.

3047 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-17 17:29:28

Intell failures?

I think instead of either of these battles being examples of intelligence failures, they were more examples of a mind set.

Monty was sure the Germans were defeated, and his quick, single thrust was over confidence more than anything else. His military plan, while perhaps brilliant, was overly optimistic in its time table. As it turns out, the Germans were far from defeated. The time table was shown to be ridiculous in a re-enactment celebrating the battle back in 1984. Using refurbished tanks and equipment, it took the "column," which was not under attack, nearly as long to reach Arnheim as it did back in 1944.

McCellan always had a case of the "slows," and was always sure he was outnumbered. His march into the middle of Lee's dispersed army took too long (as also did Monty's plan and execution), his attacks on the battlefield were disjointed, allowing Lee to move reserves. His refusal of committing an entire Corps at the end (Fitz John Porter's IIRC) to decide the battle doomed any chance he had. He was overly cautious due to an old over-estimation of CSA troops in Richmond (thank Pinkerton), the

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previous spring, when for once in their existence, the Army of Northern Virginia received something like triple rations. That was the intel failure, and of course, his own paranoid personality was only too happy to supported the faulty intell, as he was always sure he was outnumbered.

3048 re 304 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-17 17:57:37

Re: Intell failures?

As I have said many times battles, especially pivotal battles, are lost more than they are won.

Not to get off topic, but in mentioning all of the Allied paratroopers involded in Market-Garden don't forget the Polish airborne brigade. In another of the battle's disasters they were dropped on the German side of the Rhine and suffered horrendously in getting back to Arnhem

304 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-17 18:03:17

305 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-17 22:07:19

Market Garden

The Poles. Everyone forgets the Poles, who were unfairly blamed for the failure by the British and shamefully treated and sacrificed for the sake of the careers of British officers. Their story, to include their commander who died a penniless dishwasher after the war, is tragic.

3054 re 305 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-18 11:22:32

Re: Market Garden

Maybe the Poles were so horribly treated because the Bletchley Park mob could not swallow their pride in having to work with the Polish Cyrtanalysts who had the first successes in attacking the Enigma code.

And isn't that an enigma!

305 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-18 12:18:36

1st British Paras

IIRC, the commander of the British 1st Para division had no previous experience with commanding airborne troops, and that was his first jump.

There were so many things that made this overly complicated plan fail that it is hard to just pinpoint one, but surely one of the biggest was the failure of the the 1st Para's entire communications system. The crime of it was that they knew their radios had problems prior to the jump.

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Aside from "A Bridge Too Far" by Ryan, the book, "It Never Snows in September" is an excellent read on the battle.

3056 re 3055 [redacted] @ 2009-09-18 13:07:41

Re: 1st British Paras

And to think the Allies were looking for an operation for the "First Allied Airborne Army." You're absolutely correct about all of the failures of various parts of the operation which contributed to its failure. Kurt Student the German Airborne commander said he wished could command such a large airborne force.

Or as they say: "Be Careful what you wish for!"

3057 re 304 [redacted] @ 2009-09-18 17:45:26

Re: Intell failures?

When I was an OB analyst in the Army Reserve, our Captain told us our biggest challenge would be to get Patton-wannabe commanders to pay attention to us at all.

Both Antietam/Sharpsburg and Market Garden bear this out. Both are shocking examples of commanders critical misjudgments in their use of intel, one through lack of confidence, and one through over-confidence.

MacClellan did not trust his own Army's military intelligence reports about Lee's army, and he was somewhat justified in this because early in the war, his cavalry could not penetrate the screen put up by Lee's (J.E.B. Stuart's) cavalry to get good info. So MacClellan hired Pinkerton detectives to do it, who, not being trained for such work, tended to over-estimate the size of the enemy's forces. They soon learned Little Mac loved reports that indicated Lee's army was huge (which justified MacClellan's caution), and they proceeded to give the boss more of what he wanted. Thus at Antietam/Sharpsburg, when Lee's army was on the ropes, MacClellan was sure that Lee was hiding more troops somewhere, and never delivered the knock-out blow. Gen. Longstreet and a few staff officers manned a couple of cannon in the devastated center of their line, and convinced MacClellan of what MacClellan wanted to believe.

While Monty was somewhat justified in dismissing the evidence of two depleted SS divisions, which were indeed sent to the area to refit precisely because they really were beat up (reduced to cadre Kampfgruppen), he also was totally blind to the German army retreating out of Antwerp across the line of advance of 30 Corps (!), which at first was not in his peripheral vision, as it were. If any one of the several misjudgments and mishaps (they are not intelligence failures, they are failures on the part of the commander to use intelligence intelligently) were the only thing to go wrong, Market Garden

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might have worked well enough to at least keep British Airborne Division from near-annihilation (it is still a very far stretch to assume Germany would have been defeated as Monty imagined), but of course it is never the case that only one thing goes wrong in a complicated operation.

3059 re 305 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-18 17:54:40

Re: Intell failures?

In Monty's defense, there was a gap of critical time from when he first proposed Market Garden, to the time it was executed. As in many campaigns, the window of opportunity closes quickly, and perhaps the time lag between idea and execution was one of the biggest killers of the plan.

The same would apply in Little Mac's case, from the time he found the CSA orders to the time he brought Lee to battle.

3060 re 305 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-18 18:05:33

Re: Intell failures?

True, Market Garden was very rushed. One of the misjudgments involved was whether such a huge, complicated operation could be put together so quickly. They found out that dropping three airborne divisions on that kind of terrain on the fly was asking (and assuming) too much. Market Garden became the new example of a large scale airborne operation planned on short notice and resulting in unexpectedly high casualties instead of Crete.

(I'm just glad my Dad wasn't in that mess -- he was in the 507th Parachute Inf Regt, which was in the 82nd at Normandy, but was still recuperating from wounds during Market Garden; he and his outfit were thrown back into the fight in The Bulge as part of the new 17th Abn Div.)

It seems to me that in Little Mac's case, even if he had had another week to play with, it not would have changed his mindset, nor the forces he brought to bear, nor how he used them. The one who had to come up with a new and very different plan on very short notice was Lee.

3061 re 306 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-18 18:38:32

Re: Intell failures?

I don't recall the 82nd or 101 having exceptionally high casualties during their drops, and there was a lot better concentration of the drops than there was on D-Day.

The 1st Paras, in part, landed on the edge of the SS Training Battalion Kraft, as I recall, and did take some serious casualties just trying to land and get organized. I wonder who missed that unit being there?

I also seem to recall that there was not a lot of trust in the Dutch Underground, as the Germans had

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done a pretty thorough job penetrating them, though they still could have been used more than they were.

Mac's lost chances were fought in the gaps of the Maryland mountains. Still, he had overwhelming numbers once on the field of battle, though give the ANV credit; Grant did little better in '64 and '65. It takes a lot to actually destroy an army, and in this case, it took about three more years of attrition.

In that same line of thought, the Allies inflicted something like a quarter of a million casualties on the Germans in Normandy (killed, wounded, captured), and largely destroyed all their vehicles, yet they managed to limp to the German frontier and get themselves reorganized.

3062 re 3061 [redacted] @ 2009-09-18 18:50:13

Re: Intell failures?

M-hm. Not dropping at night on top of Rommel's defenses made a big difference in the casualty rates for U.S. 82nd and 101st. The pilots were certainly more experienced, too.

Maybe they didn't "miss" (overlook) Kraft's Tng unit; maybe they "dismissed" it because it was a training unit, given the optimistic mindset of the time, I dunno.

Yep, sometimes the enemy proves unexpectedly resilient.

I'd hesitate to say when MacClellan made the most critical bad decision in that campaign. I see it more like a series/actions of decisions that were not good enough, with the odds of winning big narrowing with each one till there are no more -- like Napoleon at Waterloo. Or Lee at Gettysburg. A long list of such.

3063 re 3062 [redacted] @ 2009-09-18 19:47:51

Re: Intell failures?

Oh, I agree about para casualties in Normandy, I though you meant Market Garden, though it is hard to say what casualties they took when, given the scattered drops. My bad. :-)

3064 re 3063 [redacted] @ 2009-09-18 19:54:24

Re: Intell failures?

The casualties for British Airborne were so high in Market Garden, that one can say the corps as a whole took very high casualties. When one out of three divisions is wrecked, and the others had a hard time of it (Nijmegen, etc.), that's pretty bad.

3065 [redacted] @ 2009-09-21 03:16:51

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It's the same sort of problem that led to the Balckhawk Down event - complacency replaced caution, optimism replaced preparation. There's a book written by the paras themselves (British Press - I'll get the name) that admitted that nobody, and I mean nobody, bothered to check anything prior to the initial drops on the British side because it was going to be a cakewalk. Only the Americans and the Poles thought otherwise and they check everything they could, and fared much better than the Brits. The British planners at Brigade and below-levels just figured they'd follow the road along the river and reach the bridge with no problems because the Germans would just run away.

By the way, every Monty biography I've ever read mentions that he was never at fault. It was always somebody else who messed things up.

3069 [redacted] @ 2009-09-21 03:18:06

Antietam

PS: Little Mac didn't want to win the war. He wanted to be President.

3069 re 3069 [redacted] @ 2009-09-21 10:51:34

Re: market garden

This happens everytime commanders throw caution to the wind. I also believe Monty thought so highly of himself he could not conceive of a numerically inferior German force standing up to three Airborne divisions and 30th Corps.

Regardless of how well an operation is planned as soon as the battle begins the planning means nothing if the enemy does not act as "planned."

When Stalin told Ike his desire to have Soviet troops take Berlin Omar Bradley told Ike taking Berlin would cost approximately 100,000 casualties. Well, Bradley was right. Why? When forces are fighting on their own soil they have more to fight for and defend and fight harder.

Somehow commanders down through the ages have forgot this concept except for one - Sun Tzu.

3070 [redacted] @ 2009-09-21 13:15:10

San Diego Union-Tribune

September 20, 2009

Parachutists Commemorate Failed Allied WWII Operation

By Associated Press

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THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Hundreds of British, American and Dutch parachutists drifted out of blue skies over the central Netherlands yesterday to mark the 65th anniversary of an ill-fated operation aimed at bringing a swift end to World War II.

The mass jumps over the Ginkelse Heath, near the town of Ede, honored the thousands of Allied troops who took part in airdrops as part of Operation Market Garden in September 1944.

The operation was British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's plan to drop paratroopers deep behind enemy lines in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands to capture and secure key roads and bridges so that Allied forces massed in Belgium could pour into Germany's industrial heartland and bring World War II to an early end.

But once on the ground, the Allied troops met with stubborn German resistance in and around the city of Arnhem, and their advance stalled on a bridge there spanning the Rhine River in a battle immortalized in the star-studded 1977 Hollywood film "A Bridge Too Far."

Thousands of Allied troops were killed, captured or wounded in the battles.

Veterans of the mission watched the parachute jumps, and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk joined his Dutch counterpart Jan Peter Balkenende for a commemoration service in the town of Driel.

3078 re 305 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-21 17:27:09

Poles (was Re: Market Garden)

(U) A captain in my Army Reserve unit, wanting to take a dig at Poland (once he learned that my father's parents were Polish-American) asked me, "Why was it that the Germans took *longer* to overrun Poland in 1939 than it took them to defeat France in 1940, when the conventional wisdom was that France should have performed *better* than Poland?"

(U) The answer he was thinking of was, "The roads were better in France, so the Germans could move more quickly," --but the answer that immediately popped into my head was, "The Poles didn't have any British officers helping them!"

(U) Apologies and a ;-) to any currently-serving British military officers who may read this.

307 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-22 07:01:26

Nijmegen March

Not to mention the annual Nijmegen March held over three days and replicating the to-and-fro marches of the American paratroopers who fought their way through almost to Arnhem.

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The movie 'Bridge Too Far' depicts General "Boy" Browning, British commander of the airborne, having his batman pack his smoking jacket and golf clubs for the jump. It's true. 43 gliders which were to carry vital communications equipment to Holland were taken over by him and his staff to carry items to be used at his headquarters. Like the toilet paper, Browning came in by glider.

Roy Urquart dropped in on his first ever jump, having never commanded paras in peace or war.

3080 re 306 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-22 09:47:48

Re: market garden

Stephen Ambrose said that after the war, Ike tried to keep up a dialogue with Monty but stopped because of Monty's bloated ego. Monty tried to claim he won the Battle of the Bulge by preventing German reinforcements from reaching the battle.

Never mind the stubborn (The Battered Bastards of Bastogne) resistance of the 101, one of the airborne divisions uses in Market-Garden and recovering from the battle when rushed to Bastogne; Patton wheeling Third Army to move on and relieve Bastogne and the decimation of 2nd SS Panzer by US 2nd Armored division just nine miles short of the Meuse River.

Also, as Patton watched Monty's forces slowly close the Falaise Gap enabling thousands of Model's 7th Army to escape, Bradley had to hold back Patton whose was screaming "Let me at 'em. I'll drive 'em into the sea for another Dunkirk!"

308 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-22 12:43:43

Some Historical corrections

Okay, being the history geek I am, a few thoughts regarding some of the previous posts here.

1. The Poles fought valiantly in both Market Garden and defense of their own country. Their Armored Division also fought quite well to close the gap at Falaise (The Mace). Great soldiers.

2. The French suffered a total military and political collapse, which had nothing to do with the British. The overall French Military HQ issued its orders from a castle by courier, no radios. Their defeat was a result of their own failed strategy, and poor operational doctrine.

2. It was the 2nd Panzer Div, not 2nd SS PzD that the US 2nd Armored Div (Hell on Wheels) took on at Celles, Belgium. The 2nd PZ was literally out of gas, as was the 116, and Panzer Lehr. 2nd SS was on the northern shoulder, as part of the II SS Pz Corps, fighting around Manhay. The 2nd SS actually overran large segments of US forces, when it had gas.

3. It is debatable how many Germans got out of Falaise, but there is no debate on the complete

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destruction of the tracked and wheeled resources of the Germans army in the West. Losses for the Germans range around the 250,000 number, or about the same as the Soviet victory at Stalingrad. The campaign equalled that in achievement.

4. The US Army estimated casualties for taking Berlin to be around 200,000+. According to C. Ryan's book on the subject, it was estimated that is what the Soviets suffered when taking Berlin and the surrounding area. The US Army judged it was not worth the casualties to take land we'd have to turn over to the Soviets.

5. While Monty had his faults, he was a successful military leader. His victories in Africa speak for themselves. His reshaping of the invasion of Europe does too. He had the thankless task of grinding down the German armored forces while waiting for the US Army to break out (no one accounted for the hedgerows). He achieved the needed attrition by late July, when many military writers count out the German forces fighting in Normandy as spent thanks largely to the British and Canadians fighting on the northern half of the front. Monty's gamble (Market Garden) seemed worth it at the time of restricted supplies, and what appeared to be a collapsing enemy. There are many things that killed this plan, but audacity was not one of them, at least in the concept.

3082 re 3048 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-22 16:07:01

Re: Intell failures?

Yes, good point about the Polish brigade. In the movie, A bridge too far, the part of the Polish Commander was played by Gene Hackman. The most telling thing that he did, was after being briefed he went over and looked at the briefing officer, and when asked what he was looking at, Hackman said, "Your uniform, just wanted to see that you were really on our side..."

308 [REDACTED] @ 2009-09-22 23:33:57

The Bulge

My dad was in 87th AFA at the time of the Buldge and was the Forward Observer in Ciney, the farthest point of penetration. He called in the fire missions on the German troops in the woods just east of there that stopped the advance as 2 US AD came rolling into town from the north the next morning. He had joined the battalion after D-Day and a foray into Paris a week before it was liberated.

3137 re 308 [REDACTED] @ 2009-10-05 21:16:04

Re: Some Historical corrections

- > The overall French Military HQ issued its orders from a castle
- > by courier, no radios.
- >

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Excellent COMSEC, then! :-)

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3159 re 308 [redacted] @ 2009-10-07 13:19:58

Re: The Bulge

I just finished reading, "Alamo in the Ardennes" which tells the story of the poor 28th ID, and the 10th Armored CCB and 9th Armored CCR, which were all the units that bore the brunt of the first five days or so in the center, and did more to blunt the German attack than any others in that area (opposite 5th Panzer Army). They took on overwhelming odds to buy time for the 101st ABD to get in place at Bastogne, and inflicted time loss and major damage to the 2nd PzD, Panzer Lehr, and 116th PzD. The Germans really never recovered, and by the time they reached the Meuse area, they were fought out and out of gas (litterally). That is not to detract from the 2nd AD who finished them off.

Good book, I highly recommend it. It notes in the end that the 101st got all the glory and the other units were hardly remembered for the sacrifices they made, at least officially. Without them, there would have been no stand at Bastogne

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