

## An Epic of the War

Glowing pride will be mingled with sorrow over the outcome of the heroic fight of the 1st British Airborne Division at Arnhem in Holland. It was landed there 10 days ago to secure and hold a bridgehead on the northern bank of the sector of the great River Rhine known as the Lek. It was a skilfully conceived tactical stroke, but also a very bold and hazardous adventure. Its execution was entrusted to the flower of the British Army, who had been trained as paratroopers for just such an enterprise. Its success was intended to facilitate the crossing of the river by Gen. Dempsey's 2nd British Army, advancing from the south. Then there would have been an excellent chance of turning the northern flank of the Siegfried Line, forcing thereby the withdrawal beyond the Rhine of all the German armies holding their front of resistance as far south as Belfort, and crippling fatally the waning power of the Reichswehr by the seizure of the armament centres of the Ruhr Valley. It is not too much to assert that, if this bold stroke succeeded, the Germans could not prolong their resistance until winter.

But it has failed, at least to the extent that the bridgehead has been abandoned, and only some 2,000 of the brave paratroopers of a division which was probably about 9,000 strong have been extricated to safety. The rest are dead or

prisoners in German hands, at least 1,200 of them wounded. After the initial landing was successfully accomplished fortune began to play scurvy tricks. The weather turned so bad that planes assigned to bring reinforcements and supplies were hopelessly handicapped in their missions. The corridor through which help was to come from Dempsey's army proved too narrow for effective use.

So this gallant band of paratroopers were left mainly to their own resources. They battled with unflinching valor for nine weary days, and lost their fight, but they have written an imperishable page in the military annals of the British race. The survivors bring back stories of a grim struggle, indomitably maintained against terrific odds. The Germans, realizing the gravity of the disaster which threatened them if the adventure succeeded, concentrated all their available resources to wipe out the daring paratroopers and seal the bridgehead. By day and night they maintained unceasing attacks with tanks, flamethrowers, self-propelled artillery, machine guns and other weapons, and deployed powerful forces of infantry to assaults. The ring of the defenses which the paratroopers had built was steadily narrowed, and as their ammunition and supplies melted away, the rain of hostile shells, bullets and flame became more concentrated and heavier. But still those young British heroes fought on, hoping that effective succor would come, until they could resist no longer.

Despite its tragic ending, their brave adventure was not wholly fruitless. Their seizure of the bridgehead at Arnhem enabled other British forces to capture another vital bridge at Nijmegen, because it prevented German reinforcements from arriving there in time. So the gallant men who fought and died at Arnhem had much to show for their fortitude. They had to face a much grimmer ordeal than the defenders of Malta and Tobruk, whose exploits won world-wide praise. British soldiers have often been at their best when their backs were to the wall. The siege of Lucknow in the Indian Mutiny and the defense of Rorke's Drift in the Zulu War are counted glorious episodes in British military history. So will the Battle of Arnhem be counted. The Scots people still take a mournful pride in the Battle of Flodden, the greatest defeat in their history, because their army died almost to a man around their king rather than yield. So the British race for ever will take a sorrowful pride in the dauntless fight of their brave paratroopers on the banks of the Lek.

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