

In May 1945 it was the Russians who hoisted their flag over the ruins of the Reichstag building in Berlin. In this way World War Two, in Europe, was signalled as being effectively over. However, the troops who captured Berlin could easily have been British or American, if events around a small town in Holland had turned out differently.

If Operation Market Garden, planned to take place in the area near Arnhem, in Holland, had succeeded, the western Allies could have punched their way across one of the last great natural barriers between them and the German fatherland.

Their tanks and troops might have reached Berlin weeks before the Russians, ending the war by Christmas 1944. The fate of post-war Europe might have been very different.

Operation Market Garden was the idea of Bernard Montgomery, commander of the Commonwealth forces in Europe. It was intended to speed up the Allied advance to Germany by establishing a route across the River Rhine, bringing the war to an earlier end. Three Allied airborne divisions would seize bridges and canal crossings at the Dutch towns of Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Arnhem, while the Allied tanks and troops of XXX Corps would advance by road to secure them.

On Sunday 17 September 1944, British pathfinders touched down in fields west of Oosterbeek. They were followed by more paratroopers dropping from some 140 aircraft and 320 gliders. As the first wave of airborne forces attempted to advance, some met stiff resistance from German units.

By the evening, only a few hundred men of the Parachute Regiment had reached the Arnhem road bridge. They secured its northern end, but by the following morning the operation was already in jeopardy. German counter-attacks had cut them off from the landing zones, British forces were scattered and their radio communication disrupted, while bad weather delayed the arrival of vital airborne reinforcements.

Meanwhile, XXX Corps struggled slowly towards them along a narrow, well defended road. The forces around Oosterbeek fought to hold their ground and to reach their comrades in Arnhem, where a dwindling group of British paratroopers faced German reinforcements including Panzer tanks. The British had few antitank weapons, limited food and supplies and their ammunition was running low.

The first elements of XXX Corps finally arrived south of the river on the evening of 22 September, but by then the bridge had been lost and survivors had fought their way back towards encircled Allied troops at Oosterbeek. On the night of 25 September, in heavy rain and shielded by an intense artillery barrage from XXX Corps, the remaining airborne troops began to withdraw across the river. The Allies would not cross the Rhine again until the spring of 1945.

Arnhem became known as 'a bridge too far'. Approximately 10,600 Commonwealth servicemen took part, but only 2,400 returned. More than 1,500 were killed, while the remainder were captured or wounded and that is to say nothing of the losses experienced by the Americans.

The battle of Arnhem has become one of the "what ifs" of history.

The historian, Antony Beevor wrote;

Market Garden, the plan to end the war by capturing the bridges leading to the Lower Rhine and beyond, was a bold concept: the Americans thought it unusually bold for Field Marshal Montgomery. But the cost of failure was horrendous, above all for the Dutch who risked everything to help. German reprisals Operation were cruel and lasted until the end of the war.

The British fascination for heroic failure has clouded the story of Arnhem in myths, not least that victory was possible when in fact the plan imposed by Montgomery and General 'Boy' Browning was doomed from the start.

Life is full of "what ifs" and as we look back we can probably identify times in our lives that fit into this category.

"No Mistakes" is an original Christian poem about walking in faith by Lenora McWhorter. It urges believers to hang on to hope through every struggle and trial.

No Mistakes

When my hopes fade
And my dreams die.
And I find no answer
[By asking why.](#)
I just keep on trusting
And hang on to [my faith.](#)
Because God is just

He never makes mistakes.
Should the storms come
And trials I must face.
When I find no solution
I rest in [God's grace](#).
When life seems unfair
And more than I can take.
I look up to [the Father](#)
He never makes mistakes.
God sees our struggles
And every bend in the road.
But no mistake is ever made
Cause He weighs every load.
--Lenora McWhorter

I am sure those who served at Arnhem had lots of what if moments and I hope that they were sustained by their faith in God as we can be if we give him the chance.

Amen.