

The Big Picture – Fire Brigade

Narrator: In September of the same year, 1944, came Operation Market Garden, the largest airdrop ever attempted. An entire airborne army, British and American, was dropped into Holland just ahead of General Montgomery's steadily advancing British army. Its mission was to capture certain strategic bridges over the great rivers of the area before those bridges could be destroyed by the retreating Germans. After some of the bitterest fighting of the entire war, the mission was only partly successful.

However, the airborne divisions of World War II were not limited to an airborne role. They were also employed as regular infantry divisions. The 101st in fact achieved its greatest fame fighting as an infantry division at Bastogne. But fighting as an infantry division required somewhat different weapons and equipment than fighting as a strictly airborne unit. And this equipment had to be left behind whenever the division took to the air.

Still, this concept of the airborne, with one foot in the air and the other on the ground, persisted until a very few years ago, until the advent of tactical atomic weapons. These weapons, of course, changed a good many concepts of warfare. Because of their...