

The History of the 101st Airborne Division



by John C. Silva

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World War Two

"Rendezvous with Destiny"

The 101st Airborne Division was activated August 16, 1942 at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana and placed under the command of Major General William C. Lee. At the activation ceremony, MG Lee observed, "The 101st...has no history, but it has a rendezvous with destiny." While the first part of his statement was not quite true, the second part certainly was.

The 101st was originally activated on July 23, 1918 as part of the mobilization

for World War One. Because weapons, ammunition and other supplies were scarce for training, the 101st was never fully organized or manned. After the war was over, the 101st was demobilized. In 1921, as part of a build up of Reserves, the 101st was reconstituted as the 101st Infantry Division and made its headquarters in Milwaukee, WI. For the most part it was a paper division with little in the way of real units and it remained that way until the United States entered World War Two.

The Birth of Airborne

In 1940, the US Army began testing the viability of parachute infantry units.

After the first tests at Fort Benning, GA were so successful, the Army began forming Parachute Infantry battalions and regiments. After the British Army successfully used Parachute Infantry in combat, the US Army authorized the raising of 2 Airborne Infantry Divisions; the 82nd Airborne and the 101st.

When the 101st was formed, its core units were the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), 327th and 401st Glider Infantry Regiments (GIR), three artillery battalions (the 377th Parachute Field Artillery, the 321st Glider Field Artillery, and the 907th Glider Field Artillery). Additional support units were the 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion,

the 101st Signal Company, the 326th Airborne Medical Company, and the 426th Airborne Quartermaster Company. In October of 1942, the new Screaming Eagles reported to Fort Benning GA for rigorous training in how to jump out of airplanes and fight a war when you land.

The training was intense. Not only did the soldiers have to learn basic Infantry skills, they had to learn two entirely new ways of fighting a war. At first the parachute troops and the glider troops trained separate. Later, in early 1943 they began to train as a Division. In June of 1943, the 506th PIR was added to the ranks of the 101st just in time for the Second Army Maneuvers. That training

exercise was designed to test if the 101st was prepared for battle. Finally in July, 1943 the 101st was certified as ready and began to move to their embarkation points in New York. On September 5, 1943, the 101st set sail for England.

Preparing for War

After all of the personnel and equipment had arrived in England, the 101st began advanced training which included night fighting, urban warfare, German equipment familiarization, land navigation and many others subjects. In addition, the 101st established their own jump school to certify the new units being added to the Division. In January,

1944, the Division added the 501st PIR to its ranks bringing its fighting strength to 3 Parachute and 2 Glider Infantry Regiments. The Division suffered a major blow to morale when MG Lee suffered a heart attack and was forced to return to the United States. His replacement was Major General Maxwell Taylor.

In March of 1944, a demonstration of American military power was staged for English Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Supreme Allied Commander General Eisenhower, and dozens of high ranking civilian and military officials. The 101st was tasked with demonstrating the newest weapon in the

American Army, the Airborne Division. Because Taylor was new to the Division he ordered the Division Artillery Commander, Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe who would later command the 101st during the Siege of Bastogne, to brief the Prime Minister and Gen. Eisenhower on the capabilities of the 101st Airborne Division. As a result of this demonstration, the American Airborne troops earned the respect and admiration of their Allies and secured their place in the initial invasion forces.

Shortly after this demonstration, MG Taylor received his orders for entering the war. His Division would play a key role in the upcoming invasion of France,

Operation OVERLORD. Training intensified and culminated with three large scale operations designed to familiarize the soldiers with conditions they would encounter in France. Finally in May of 1944, the 101st left their training areas for their staging and jump-off points.

The Mission

The 101st was given the mission of landing behind enemy lines in the area designated at UTAH beach on the Cherbourg Peninsula. Once on the ground they were to clear the exit points from UTAH for the 4th Infantry Division's breakout. In addition they

were to block any reinforcements from reaching UTAH. On June 5, 1944, the day before the invasion was scheduled for, the 101st received a visit from General Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander. At that visit, he asked if there was anyone from Kansas. A young Private raised his hand and Eisenhower replied "Go get 'em Kansas!".

D-Day, June 6, 1944

At 10:15 pm, June 5, 1944, 6,600 soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division began taking off aboard 1,432 C-47 transport aircraft from England. Shortly after midnight, the C-47s were over

UTAH and the 101st Paratroops began hitting the silk. Problems began immediately. Because of heavy enemy fire, many of the transports had taken evasive action and could not find the proper drop zones. In addition, dense fog blanketed the area. The Pathfinder teams which had dropped an hour before had done their best but could not mark all of the drop zones in time.

By the time the paratroops were on the ground, 1,500 had been killed or captured. About 60% of their equipment had been either dropped into swamps or dropped into enemy hands. Despite these problems, the remaining soldiers began to rally around their leaders. MG Taylor

managed to scratch together a force mainly comprised of officers and set about capturing one of the causeways leading to UTAH. Just before they attacked, Taylor was heard to comment "Never were so few lead by so many." Despite being heavy on brass, the small force managed to capture the causeway after a brief skirmish.

Throughout the area, small groups of soldiers began forming ad-hoc units to carry out their objectives. Ltc. Robert Cole, commander of the 3rd Battalion 502nd PIR managed to scrape together a force of roughly 75 men. Most were from his unit but several were from the 506th PIR and even the 82nd Airborne.

Once assembled, the force marched for the northern exits from UTAH. Along the way, they encountered a German convoy and attacked it. 10 Germans were captured and many more killed. Upon reaching St. Martin de Varreville, Cole sent a reconnaissance party forward to check the coastal battery. Discovering that the position had been destroyed and deserted, Cole split his force to seize the 2 exits from UTAH. Once his troops were in place, they dug in to wait for the 4th Infantry Division.

South of 3rd Battalion, LTC Patrick Cassidy was rallying his men from 1st Battalion, 502nd PIR. Like, Cole, Cassidy put together a combined force of

some of his men and others separated from their units. A patrol was sent forward to check the other northern exits from UTAH. These had also been heavily damaged and deserted and Cassidy reinforced it. Still further south, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 506th PIR were fighting to secure the southern exits from UTAH. Despite missing their drop zones, these units had not been as widely dispersed as the 502nd. The men of the 506th had to fight through several small villages on their way to the exits. As they approached their objectives, the exits were under attack already from the 8th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division. The paratroops joined the fight and the exits were secured. Germans began

surrendering en-masse at the southern end of UTAH.

Carentan

By late afternoon on D-Day, the 4th Division had broken free from UTAH and linked up with the 101st. That night, with the beachhead secured, the Americans dug in for the night and attempted to rally the rest of their troops. The next day, the 101st received new orders. V Corps, which had landed at OMAHA to the south has holding on to a very small beachhead and could not exit from the beach. Between UTAH and OMAHA was the town of Carentan. The 101st was ordered to break through their

southern flank, seize Carentan and link up with the forces at OMAHA.

Their first objective was the town of St. Come du Mont and would use 4 battalions; the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 506th PIR, the 3rd Battalion 502st PIR and the 1st Battalion 401st GIR. The attack stepped off early in the morning of June 8. By mid-morning, the approaches to St. Come du Mont had been cleared and defensive positions established east of the town. 3/501 had reached the Carentan highway and the enemy began withdrawing from the area. Later that evening, the force was reinforced by the fresh 327th GIR. The next objective was to establish bridgeheads across the

Douve river. At 1:00 am, June 10, the 101st attacked and by dawn, St. Come du Mont had been encircled and cleared of enemy forces. The drive now focused on Carentan. Here the drive was slowed considerably. Most of the bridges and causeways leading to Carentan had been destroyed. Only one causeway was completely intact. The engineers began working under heavy enemy fire to repair the others.

Several patrols were sent forward to scout the approaches to Carentan and came under heavy fire. Finally, 3/502 began to cross the causeways in force in the face of intense enemy fire. The paratroops managed to cross to the the

edges of Carentan but could not enter the town. For two days, the 3/502 fought against massed machine gun and artillery fire to establish a foothold on Carentan.

While the battle for the causeways raged, the 327th GIR, reinforced by 1/401 had crossed south of Carentan and secured the eastern exits from the town. That accomplished, the 327th began their assault on Carentan from the east. Carentan was surrounded and being attacked from two sides but the Germans held. The attacking forces were ordered to pull back to allow a massive artillery and naval gunfire bombardment of Carentan to begin. At dawn of June 12, the barrage lifted and the assault began

anew. 1/506 and 2/506 attacked from the west and the 501st and 327th attacked from the east and north. Quick advances were made and Carentan was seized.

1/401 was ordered to remain in Carentan while 1/327 and 2/327 were ordered east to secure the high ground near Montmartin en Graignes. That evening, the 327th ran into stiff resistance at Rouxeville. After a fierce battle, 2/327 broke through the German positions and linked up with a pocket of soldiers from the 29th Infantry Division who had been surrounded. 2/327 then linked up with 1/327 and captured the heights.

By June 14, UTAH and OMAHA had

been completely linked. The Germans had launched several counter-attacks at Carentan but were brutally repulsed. The 101st had linked the forces landing at OMAHA and UTAH. The 502nd PIR had linked up with the 82nd Airborne and the 4th Infantry Divisions while the 327th had linked up with the 29th and 1st Infantry Divisions at OMAHA. On June 15, the 101st was transferred to VIII Corps and given the responsibility for the southwest flank. The 101st continued to fight in northern France for the next 3 weeks. In July, they were ordered back to England to prepare for a new mission; Holland.

Operation MARKET-

GARDEN

In the summer of 1944, the Allied Armies began to encounter supply problems. There were plenty of supplies in England, but not enough port facilities to unload them in France. The allied command decided to focus their attention on the port city of Antwerp and devised a bold plan. The British Second Army would launch a ground attack on Antwerp while the newly formed 1st Allied Airborne Army would conduct an Airborne assault on the Mass, Wahl and lower Rhine rivers. On September 17, the 101st Airborne, along with the 82nd and British 1st Airborne Divisions landed in the largest Airborne assault of

the war, 20,000 soldiers in all.

The initial drops were an overwhelming success, the Pathfinders had laid out the drop zones almost perfectly and the Germans were taken completely by surprise. The assault ran into trouble when 2 German Panzer Divisions launched a counter-attack at Best. Fortunately, the glider troops of the 327th and 401st GIRs had landed with over 80% of their equipment and heavy weapons. The German tanks were quickly destroyed once reinforcements could be brought forward and Best was seized. Meanwhile, the Paratroops converged on the Maas and Wahl rivers and established bridgeheads across both.

Within two days, Operation MARKET-GARDEN had driven 50 miles into German territory. The 101st was relieved by a British Armored Division and was ordered south to protect the southern flank from being cut off.

THE 101st managed to liberate several Dutch towns from German control while they repulsed several German counter-attacks. On several occasions the fighting was hand-to-hand in brutal street fighting. The 101st bought valuable time for the 82nd Airborne and British forces in the assault on Antwerp. By the end of November, Antwerp was in Allied hands and the first supply ship dropped anchor on November 28, 1944. The

101st was ordered into a base camp for a much-needed rest. That rest would be cut short by the German Ardennes Offensive.

The Battle of the Bulge

On December 16, 1944 the German Army launched their Ardennes Offensive with 13 Divisions. Their objective was to capture the Ardennes forest region in Belgium and France and paralyze the Allied armies in the west so they would concentrate on defeating the Russians in the east. The initial attacks by the Germans were very successful and the Allied front began to collapse. Units were being overrun all along the lines

and the Germans penetrated deep into Allied territory. On December 17, the 101st Airborne received orders to move north to reinforce the key town of Bastogne.

When the 101st received its orders, their commander, MG Taylor was in Washington at the War Department and the Division Artillery Commander, Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe was named acting commander. It was up to McAuliffe to lead the division in trucks and trailers 107 miles to Bastogne. When the division arrived, the Germans were already on the outskirts of the city and McAuliffe ordered the 501st PIR to launch a diversionary

attack east of Bastogne to distract the Germans. It worked perfectly and in the confusion, the 101st Drove the Germans from Bastogne and established firm defensive positions.

The Siege of Bastogne

The fighting around Bastogne was intense. The Germans wanted it as badly as the Allies wanted to keep it. By December 20, Bastogne was completely surrounded and the 101st, along with elements of the 10th Armored Division were cut off from the rest of the Allied Armies. The Germans launched several brutal attacks on Bastogne and managed to enter the city on several occasions.

Each attack was driven back however, some after hard hand-to-hand fighting. The defenders of Bastogne held out with everything they had. On December 22, the Germans offered to allow the 101st to surrender. BG McAuliffe issued a short, and now famous, reply. **"NUTS!"**

By this time, 5 German Divisions were engaged in the effort to capture Bastogne, but still the 101st held. They received vital air and artillery support including several air-dropped resupply. Finally, on December 26, the US 4th Armored Division broke through and reinforced Bastogne. The 4th Armored, along with the 3rd Army, had driven over 100 miles to reach Bastogne and

attacked with little rest. Also on the 26th, several dozen cargo gliders managed to land and deliver vital supplies including medical personnel and equipment for their wounded.

As more units of the 3rd Army began to arrive, the Allies began to attack out from Bastogne. Slowly the German salient around Bastogne was reduced and the Germans driven back. Over the next three weeks, the Germans fought for every inch of ground. By January 18, 1945 the Germans had been driven from Belgium and the 101st was relieved by VIII Corps at Bastogne. The Commander of VIII Corps issued a receipt to MG Taylor upon his return to command of

the Division. It read:

*Received from the 101st Airborne
Division:
the town of Bastogne, Luxembourg
Province, Belgium.
Condition: Used but serviceable*

For the heroic defense of Bastogne, the 101st Airborne Division was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation, the first ever to be awarded to an entire Division.

Following the siege of Bastogne, the 101st Was ordered into the Ruhr area of Germany, but without the 501st PIR. The 501st was ordered into Reserve for a

special mission. They began training for a possible rescue attempt of Allied prisoners of war. Due to a shortage of transport aircraft and the relatively low priority of the mission, it was never mounted.

The 101st became part of a blocking force that later became known as the "reduction of the Ruhr Pocket." An entire German Army Group was set up in the Ruhr River region of Germany and was one of only a very few cohesive German units remaining. In the beginning of April, 1945, the US First and Ninth Armies attacked the Ruhr Pocket. Knowing that retreat meant more German soil lost to the Allies, the

Germans fought with everything they had, but they could not hold. They were desperately short of supplies with virtually no hope of receiving more. They could not withstand the onslaught of the American Armies.

By the end of April, the entire German force had been eliminated and the Allied forces had captured 325,000 prisoners. The final mission for the 101st came at the end of April. Teaming up with the 3rd Infantry Division they assaulted Hitler's vacation retreat at Berchtesgaden. Here the Division accepted the surrender of the German XIII SS and LXXXII Corps. The 101st also captured several key member of the

Nazi Regime who were later brought before the War Crimes Tribunal at the Hague. The 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment captured Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, commander-in-chief of the Nazi party. The 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment captured Julius Streicher, the anti-Semitic editor of Der Sturmer, and Obergruppenfuhrer Karl Oberg, the chief of German SS in occupied France. Colonel General Heinz Guderian, a leading armor expert, was also captured.

Aftermath

During World War Two, the 101st Airborne Division spent 214 days in combat. In addition to 2 Medals of

Honor awarded to Soldiers of the 101st, the Division awarded 47 Distinguished Service Crosses, 516 Silver Stars and 6,977 Bronze Stars. The Division was responsible for capturing 29, 527 Enemy soldiers. The price of victory was high. 2,043 Screaming Eagles were killed in action and 7,976 were wounded. 1,193 became MIA and 336 were taken prisoner. During the war, the following units were part of the Division's "Rendezvous with Destiny."

501st, 502nd and 506th Parachute Infantry Regiments, 327th and 401st Glider Infantry Regiments, 101st Parachute Maintenance Battalion, 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion,

326th Airborne Medical Company, 81st Airborne Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, 101st Airborne Division Artillery, 321st Glider Field Artillery Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, 463d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, 907th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, 101st Ordnance Company, 426th Quartermaster Company, 101st Signal Company, Military Police Platoon, Headquarters Company, and a Reconnaissance Platoon

Post World War Two and Korea

The 101st remained in Germany serving occupation duty until November, 1945 when they were deactivated in France and shipped home. Between 1945 and 1956, the 101st was activated and deactivated three times as a training unit at Camp Breckinridge, KY and Fort Jackson, SC. They were responsible for training the 11th Airborne Division which served with honor in Korea. In March, 1956, the 101st transferred to Fort Campbell, KY where they remained in active service but at reduced manpower levels. In the early '60s, the Army predicted a larger involvement in Southeast Asia and began building up the 101st in addition to several other units. In July of 1965, the 101st was ordered

into combat.

A New War

The 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne landed at Cam Ranh Bay, South Vietnam on July 29, 1965. The 1st Brigade was the third unit to be shipped to the new war zone and was comprised of the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 327th Infantry and the 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry. After a brief period where the Soldiers acclimated themselves and received all their equipment, the 1st Brigade wentwane into action. The Brigade was ordered into the Song Con Valley, about 20 miles northeast of the town of An Khe. During one mission, the 1st BN,

327th Inf. encountered heavy enemy fire at their landing zone. Three company commanders were killed and the contact was so close, air support and artillery could not be called in. As the 1st BN pulled back, they were finally able to call in strikes on the enemy force. That night, 100 sorties and 11,000 rounds of artillery hit the enemy. The next morning, the 1st BN was pulled out. They later discovered that they had landed in the middle of a heavily entrenched enemy base.

For the rest of 1965, the 1st Brigade continued to mount patrols and interdicted the enemy supplies lines. At the beginning of 1966, the enemy greatly

reduced his operations. In May, the enemy began massing in the Pleiku and Kontum provinces. The 1st Brigade was moved from An Khe to Dak To, a Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) base camp in the northern area of S. Vietnam. Here as S. Vietnamese force was surrounded by the 24th North Vietnamese Regiment. The 1st Brigade was ordered in to reinforce the S. Vietnamese position.

After evacuating the S. Vietnamese forces, the 2nd BN, 502nd Inf. established their lines inside the abandoned camp and sent C Company forward in an exposed defensive position. On the night of June 6, the 24th

NVA Regiment attacked C Company in a brutal assault. In a desperate attempt to stop the enemy advance, the commander of C Company called in air strikes on top of his own position, killing NVA and Americans alike. It was a hard decision to make, but it worked. The 24th NVA pulled back long enough for A Company 1/327 to be brought in by helicopter to reinforce the C Company positions.

With the arrival of A 1/327, the 24th NVA began to retreat. The soldiers of 1st Brigade pursued the enemy and several large scale air attacks were called in. Hundreds of enemy soldiers were killed but the 24th NVA managed to escape into Laos.

In October and November, 1966, the 4th Infantry and 1st Cavalry Divisions were heavily engaged with enemy forces in the Kontum province. When it became clear that the enemy was attempting to withdraw into Laos like the 24th NVA, the 1st Brigade was airlifted to try and block them. After a massive helicopter airlift, the 101st landed just as the enemy was crossing into Laos and safety. The 1st Brigade was ordered into reserve at Phu Yen.

In early 1967, the 1st Brigade acted as a rapid reaction force, reinforcing American and South Vietnamese forces when necessary and responding to enemy attacks. The 1st Brigade was

become experts in rapid helicopter assaults. In April of 1967, the 1st Brigade was attached to Task Force OREGON and placed under operational control of the III Marine Amphibious Force and moved to Chu Lai.

At Chu Lai, the 1st Brigade assisted in a large-scale pacification effort in the Quang Tri province. Later, the 1st Brigade was called in to assist a Marine battalion finish off an enemy attack around Khe Sahn, which would be the scene of a long, bloody siege in 1968. The 1st Brigade conducted long patrols designed to push the enemy from the villages in Quang Tri.

In the fall of 1967, Task Force Oregon

was reorganized into the 23rd Infantry Division. Better known as the Americal Division. The 1st Brigade was detached to await the arrival of the 2nd and 3rd Brigades of the 101st Airborne Division, which arrived in December 1967.

The Tet Offensive

On January 31, 1968, the North Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive. Tet, the traditional Vietnamese New Year Celebration, was supposed to be a peaceful time. The enemy attacks caught the Americans by surprise. The 101st Airborne, along with the 1st Cavalry Division and the 5th Marine Regiment,

began to fight for control of the Hue City. Hue was considered vital to the Communist effort because of its history of Buddhist activism and Communist sympathy. The North Vietnamese felt that Hue would be their first political foothold into South Vietnam and committed Regular forces to its capture.

When Tet began, Hue was defended by South Vietnamese Army units who were quickly driven from the city. The 101st and the 1st Cavalry were sent in to recapture the city. The battle for Hue raged for three weeks and was the only extended urban combat of the war. Later, the 5th Marine Regiment would be called in to reinforce the 101st and 1st

Cavalry.

Fighting in Hue was intense and advances were measured by houses. Each building seemed to hold enemy soldiers. In some cases, the soldiers of the 101st fought hand to hand. Finally, after much destruction to the city, Hue was liberated from the North Vietnamese. During the Tet Offensive, over 33,000 enemy soldiers were killed and many thousands more captured. Tet was a major American victory despite the appearance of defeat back home in the political arena.

It is interesting to note, that one platoon from 2nd Brigade was airlifted into Saigon and fought a pitched battle on the

roof of the American Embassy after it had been infiltrated by enemy forces.

Counter Attack and Vietnamization

Following Tet, the American forces began launching hundreds of small unit counter attacks designed to locate and destroy any remaining infiltrated enemy units operating in South Vietnam. In March and April, the 101st attacked enemy supply bases in the A Shau valley during Operation SOMERSET PLAIN. During this operation, several hundred tons of enemy supplies were captured. The 101st was next ordered into the

coastal lowlands in the Thua Thien province in Operation NEVADA EAGLE which began May 1968. For 288 days, the 101st conducted sweeping patrols of the area and engaged the enemy almost daily. After it was over, the province was cleared of enemy forces and the 101st had captured enough rice, weapons and equipment for 10 enemy battalions.

Following NEVADA EAGLE, the 101st returned to the A Shau valley and began a series of operations to clear the valley of enemy forces. During one operation, the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry assaulted Dong Ap Bia Mountain, aka Hill 937 where the enemy had

established a well fortified base camp. For 10 days, 3/187 launched attack after attack on the enemy position but could only advance yards at a time. The enemy had established several lines of defense. Fighting on Hill 937 was some of the most brutal of the war and was often hand-to-hand. 2 more Battalions of the 101st were called in to take Hill 937. In the end, Hill 937, now called "Hamburger Hill", was captured. The battle was very controversial because it had no tactical or strategic importance and the Army later abandoned it. Defending the operation, the commander of the 101st acknowledged that the hill's only significance was that the enemy occupied it. "My mission, was to destroy

enemy forces and installations. We found the enemy on Hill 937, and that is where we fought them," he later said.

The A Shau valley was finally cleared and armored forces were brought in to reopen abandoned air strips. After these operations, the 101st went through a series of reorganizations. Their name was changed to the 101st Air Cavalry Division and later the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile). With the change in names came a change in mission. The 101st was ordered back into Thua Thien to participate in Civil operation designed to bolster the South Vietnamese government forces.

The 101st established a series of fire

and patrol bases and conducted several operations that prevented the enemy from re-entering Thua Thien. In addition, the 101st provided valuable technical training to the South Vietnamese forces and supported several S. Vietnamese operations into Laos to cut off enemy supply and infiltration lines. All of these operations were designed to allow the S. Vietnamese Army to operate on their own and turn over the fight to them. This was called "Vietnamization."

Homecoming

In late 1971, and early 1972 the 101st Airborne Division began returning home to Fort Campbell. It was the last Army

Division to leave South Vietnam. The 101st Airborne spent almost 7 years in combat in South Vietnam. During that time, the Division became one of the most feared units of the American Army. During Vietnam, Army forces were ordered to create black and green subdued shoulder insignia that were designed to blend in with the green uniform. The 101st is the only unit to retain their colored emblem. The North Vietnamese called the 101st the "Chicken Men" because of their insignia. (The Vietnamese had never seen an eagle before) Many enemy commanders warned their men to avoid the Chicken Men at all costs because any engagement with them, they were sure to lose.

During Vietnam, 17 Soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor. They are:

Webster Anderson

Paul William Bucha

Michael John Fitzmaurice

Frank R. Fratellenico

James A. Gardner

John G. Gertsch

Peter M. Guenette

Frank A. Herda

Joe R. Hooper

Kenneth Michael Kays

Joseph G. LaPointe, Jr.

Milton A. Lee

Andre C. Lucas

Robert Morris Patterson

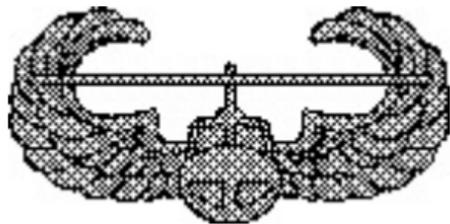
Gordon R. Roberts

Clifford Chester Sims
Dale Eugene Wayrynen

The 101st Today

A New Designation and Mission

In October of 1974, the 101st was redesignated as the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). The 3rd brigade was changed from Parachute to Air Assault capabilities. The 101st created an Air Assault school designed to teach new soldiers the art of fighting a war from helicopter assaults. These new Air Assault Soldiers were authorized to wear a new badge, The Air Assault Badge.



In 1975 and 1976, the 101st conducted numerous training and readiness exercises. They also opened their Air Assault School to other unit's soldiers to ensure that more of the Army's forces could engage the enemy after being inserted into the combat zone via helicopter. In 1975, 2nd Brigade, comprised of the 502nd Infantry and support units, participated in Exercise GALLANT SHIELD in Fort Bliss, TX. Here, the Air Assault forces defeated large Armored and Mechanized forces in a desert environment.

In 1976, the 101st returned to Europe for the first time to participate in REFORGER 76, an exercise designed to test units tasked with reinforcing West Germany in the face of a Soviet attack. In July, equipment, vehicles, and 318 of the Division's aircraft were ready to leave from Norfolk, Virginia. On 7 August, the advance party left for the Federal Republic of Germany, and by 29 August, the deployment was complete. The first tactical exercise began the following week. Using the air assault tactics tested at Fort Campbell and with a German mechanized brigade and an American armored cavalry regiment for ground support, the Screaming Eagles pushed the aggressors back. Within forty

eight hours, the Division dis engaged from the first exercise and moved to their major unit assembly areas to refit and deploy to a new area of operation. The scenario for a second exercise paralleled that of the first. Both times the 101st fought in a mid-intensity warfare environment, and each time air assault tactics proved effective.

After the second exercise ended, the Screaming Eagles participated in partnership training with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) units from Belgium, Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands. In addition, the 101st hosted an "Air Assault in Action" demonstration for NATO personnel and

made commemorative visits to the Division's World War 11 battle sites at Bastogne and in the Netherlands. After redeployment to the United States, a full Division review at Fort Campbell on 22 October celebrated the end of REFORGER 75 and the safe return of the soldiers who had participated in the exercise.

In June 1979, the Division received the first of their new UH-60A Blackhawk helicopters and integrated them into the air assault concept. The Division Commander, Major General Jack V. Mack, accepted the 101st production helicopter in January 1981. Fulfilling its readiness role under the "one Army"

concept, the division played a vital part in helping the United States meet its commitment in the Middle East.

Between November 7, and November 25, 1980, elements of the Division participated in the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Exercise BRIGHT STAR near Cairo, Egypt. The contingent was a battalion combat team of nine hundred men from the 1st Battalion of the 501st Infantry along with support units. The exercise gave the Screaming Eagles experience in overseas movement, desert warfare, and coordination with other branches of the United States Armed Forces and with foreign allies. Since then, several other exercises involving the Rapid Deployment Force

have been carried out.

In late March 1982, the XVIII Airborne Corps designated the 1st Battalion of the 502nd Infantry as the replacement unit to be sent to the Sinai peninsula in Egypt for a six-month tour of duty with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO). Supporting the American commitment to the peacekeeping force established under the terms of the 1979 Egypt-Israeli peace treaty, the Screaming Eagles and the 82nd Airborne Division from Fort Bragg alternated six month tours of duty.

Also during 1982, the Division received two Cohesion Operational Readiness and Training System (COHORT)

companies. Under this system, soldiers could be associated with a specific unit throughout their Army careers. After recruitment, the company received initial entry training and advanced individual training at one post. Upon arrival at their first duty station, they remained with their initial battalions for at least one year and then rotated as a unit to their first overseas assignment, concluding their enlistment abroad. The first Division COHORT company was Bravo Company of the 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry, which arrived at Fort Campbell in June 1982. Alpha Company of the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry, arrived as the second COHORT company at the beginning of August 1982. Reorganizing

once more in 1983, units from the 327th, 502nd, and 187th Regiments became the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Brigades of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). The 327th and the 502nd were two of the original units assigned to the 101st at their activation in 1942. The 187th's distinction stems from being the only airborne unit to serve in three wars: World War Two, Korea, and Vietnam.

Throughout 1984, the division participated in fifteen major exercises in the United States, Germany, Honduras, and Egypt, helping to maintain the readiness needed to fulfill its assigned mission to deploy rapidly worldwide using the unique capabilities of an air

assault division. In 1985, tragedy struck the 101st after a seemingly routine MFO tour of duty for the 3rd Battalion of the 502nd Infantry. Returning to Fort Campbell from the Sinai on 12 December, 248 Screaming Eagles perished in an aircraft crash near Gander, Newfoundland.

The 100 Hour War: Operation Desert Storm

After the Army of Iraq invaded and captured Kuwait, the first Army command to send troops to Saudi Arabia was the XVIII Airborne Corps. The Corps was made up of the 82nd

Airborne Division, the 24th Infantry Division (MECHANIZED) and the 101st Airborne Division. When the stand-by orders came in, the 101st was spread around the country. One Battalion was in Panama undergoing jungle warfare training, another Battalion was preparing for a peacekeeping mission in the Sinai, and 1,000 soldiers were at West Point training cadets. Several other units were working with Reserve and National Guard units. Within days, the mobilization machine was running at full speed.

On August 17, 1990 the first units of the 101st arrived in Saudi Arabia. 2,700 troops, 117 helicopters, 487 vehicles,

and 125 pallets of supplies was transported on board 110 US Air Force C-5 and C-141 transport aircraft. Meanwhile, the remainder of the division was loaded onto transport ships in Jacksonville, FL and 46 days later arrived in the Saudi port of Ad Daman. The 101st was the first US Army Division to have all of its assets in theater.

Shortly after arrival, the 101st moved to King Faud airport and established their base camp the dubbed "Camp Eagle II." Miles of concertina wire were stretched and millions of sandbags were filled to secure the base. Every member of the 101st took part, even the Division Band

who doubled as security for the Division Tactical Operations Center. When the plans for the liberation of Kuwait were finalized, the 101st was informed of its mission. When the assault started, the 101st, along with the 82nd Airborne and the French 6th Light Armored Division, would advance on the left flank of the advance and move north towards Baghdad and the Euphrates River Valley. The 101st then moved to their Forward Operating Base which was named "Bastogne."

3/502 was the first unit of the 101st to arrive at Bastogne and they quickly began establishing their presence. Over the next few weeks, the remainder of the

Division moved forward. Here at Bastogne, the Division began conducting training operations almost around the clock. Now that the Screaming Eagles were acclimated to the desert heat, the soldiers were prepared. Abandoned villages were used to practice street fighting and several courses were laid out to practice the difficult task of desert land navigation.

Opening Salvo

On January 17, 1991, Desert Storm, the mission to liberate Kuwait began. At 2:38 am, 8 AH-64 Apache helicopters of the 1st Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment destroyed two Iraqi early

warning radar sites, clearing the way for US Air Force strike aircraft on their way to Baghdad. The 101st Airborne Division drew first blood in Desert Storm. Blackhawk helicopters of 1st Battalion were on scene in case any Allied planes were shot down and the pilots needed to be rescued. The Apache gunships continued to attack Iraqi air defense positions. The first mission was a complete success and no losses were recorded for the 101st.

During the air campaign, the 101st Aviation Regiment flew hundred of sorties attacking various Iraqi positions. In mid-February, the Aviation units stood down in preparation for the ground

war.

On February 24, 1991, the 101st and the French 6th Light Armored stepped off on their envelopment of Iraqi forces on the left flank of the Coalition line. A total of 300 helicopters lifted the 101st Airborne to their first objective, FOB COBRA, 110 miles inside Iraq. The 101st achieved complete surprise and the Iraqi forces at COBRA were routed; most were taken prisoner. After a rapid refueling, the 101st lifted off and moved another 60 miles. By the evening of the 24th, Highway 8 was cut and the Iraqi's had lost a key supply line. The 101st consolidated their positions and settled in for the night. That day's operation had

been the largest helicopter assault in the history of modern warfare.

The next morning, 3rd Brigade (the 187th Infantry Regiment) moved north to occupy positions on the southern bank of the Euphrates River. They met little resistance and quickly captured their objective. The remainder of the 101st, maintained their positions at COBRA and Highway 8 as a blocking force for the main Coalition assault.

On February 26 and 27, the 101st began accepting the surrender of thousands of Iraqi soldiers who had been retreating from the massive ground assault. It soon became clear that the war was almost over and there would be little fighting.

The 101st began collecting the Iraqi soldiers and sending them to rear areas. In just 100 hours of combat, the 101st had completed the largest, most effective combat helicopter assault ever attempted. Not a single Screaming Eagle lost his life during the battle but victory was complete.

Standing Ready

After the Gulf War, the 101st Airborne Division returned home to Fort Campbell, KY. Since 1991, Screaming Eagle soldiers have been sent on numerous humanitarian and peacekeeping missions in places such as Rwanda, Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia. The

Division continues to maintain a high state of readiness. Time and again, the 101st has been called upon for difficult and dangerous missions. Each time, they accomplished them with professionalism, honor and courage.

Today, the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) is made up of the following units:

1st Brigade

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions 327th
Infantry

2nd Brigade

1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions 502nd
Infantry

3rd Brigade

1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions 187th
Infantry

101st Aviation Brigade

2nd Battalion, 17th Cavalry Squadron,
1st, 2nd, 3rd and 6th Battalions 101st
Aviation Regiment

159th Aviation Brigade

4th, 5th, 7th and 9th Battalions 101st

Aviation Regiment

Supporting Units

1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery, 106th Transportation Battalion, 129th and 561st Combat Support Battalions, C Company, 1st Battalion 377th Field Artillery, 63rd Chemical Company, the 101st Division Band and several other support companies.

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