

Assignment #1

The 101st Airborne Division (ABD) and the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment

First Read Study Instructions and Core Reading: Battle of Carentan, Normandy (7 to 13 June 1944) Virtual Staff Ride (Provided as a separate document)

During the field study, you are responsible for all the actions of the 101st Division Headquarters and the actions of the 501st PIR from D+2 (8 June 1944) to D+7 (13 June 1944). Discuss the actions and decisions from both your own and the unit's perspective. Remember that other staff ride participants are discussing the actions of the 502d PIR, 506 PIR, and the 327 GIR. You should discuss the actions of these other units from a division perspective and allow other participants to discuss the details of their unit actions. For the division and the 501st PIR you should be prepared to discuss:

- Unit organization and equipment, training, and morale.
- Key decisions, why those decision were made, and the consequence of the decision.
- Unit's actions and accomplishments.

This supplemental reading contains four parts:

- **Part 1: Overview of the 101st Airborne Division**
- **Part 2: A short biography of Major General Maxwell D Taylor – commander 101st**
- **Part 3: Airborne Infantry Regiment Organization and Equipment**
- **Part 4: A short biography of Colonel Howard Johnson – commander 501st PIR**

Part 1: Overview of the 101st Airborne Division "Screaming Eagles." Additional information can be found at https://www.ww2-airborne.us/18corps/101abn/101_overview.html

"The 101st Division has no history, but has a Rendezvous with Destiny."¹

Gen. W.C. Lee (the first commanding general of the division),
August 1942

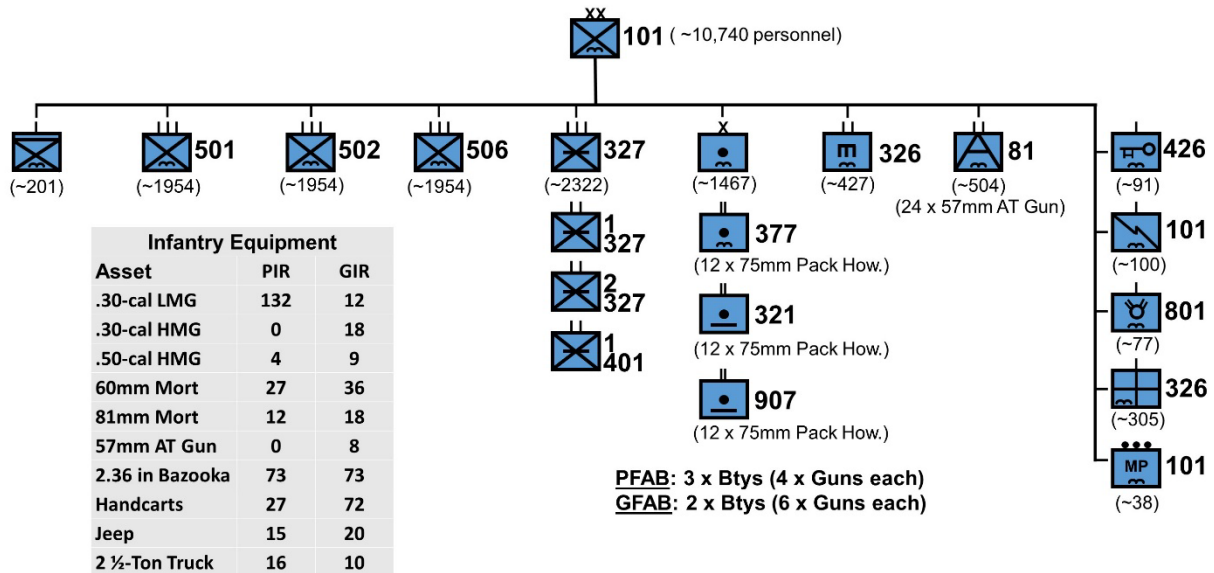
In August 1942 the U.S. Army activated the 101st Airborne Division at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. In October 1942 the division moved to Fort Bragg, North Carolina and started its training to qualify for its new airborne mission. In the spring of 1943 the division conducted its first division maneuvers and then that summer participated in the Army Tennessee maneuvers (primarily jumping from trucks).

In early 1944, transferred to England and continued its training. On 5 February General Lee suffered a heart attack and returned to the United States. In March, BG Maxwell D. Taylor, former commander of the 82d Airborne Division Artillery, assumed command of the division.

¹ Bando, Mark. The 101st Airborne at Normandy (1994), 9.

Soon after that the division underwent another organizational change when the 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, was attached to the 327th Glider Infantry to operate as the regiment's third battalion. The division was now training with the task organization with which it would fight in Normandy.²

101st Airborne Division Organization



PIR: 3 x Bns with 3 x Rifle Cos

- Companies: 3 x Rifle Plts
- Rifle Plts: 2 x Sqds (12 pax; w/ 1 x M1919 LMG each); 1 x Mortar Sqd

GIR: 2 x Bns with 3 x Rifle Cos

- Companies: 2 x Rifle Plts; 1x Wpns Plt (2 x M1917 HMGs, 2x 60mm Mortars)
- Rifle Plts: 3 x Sqds (12 pax)

In England, the 101st participated in three major exercises. On the last exercise, the division's mission was to capture the causeways leading away from a simulated beach. Ironically, the regiments were scattered at the wrong drop sites. Nevertheless, the units regrouped and accomplished their assigned tasks successfully.

The "Screaming Eagles" lacked combat experience, but had been extensively trained and contained many combat veterans. Although lightly equipped, it was a strong formation with four infantry regiments (standard infantry division had 3 regiments). The men of the division were determined and highly motivated to accomplish the mission. Cornelious Ryan in his classic work "*The Longest Day*" stated "**The 101st on its first combat jump was fiercely determined not to be outdone by its more illustrious partner [the 82d ABD]**".³

Part 2: A short biography of Major General Maxwell D Taylor – commander 101st.

Major General Maxwell D. Taylor (1901 – 1987)

² CMH web site. <https://history.army.mil/documents/ETO-OB/101ABN-ETO.htm>

³ Bando, Mark. *101st Airborne, The Screaming Eagles at Normandy* (2001), 8.

- **Early Life:**
 - 1901: Born and raised in Missouri.
 - 1918-1922: West Point. 4th in class and commissioned in the Corps of Engineers.
 - 1927-1927: Transferred to the Field Artillery and promoted to First Lieutenant.
 - 1927-1933: French and Spanish instructor at West Point.
 - 1933: Field Artillery School.
 - 1935: Command and General Staff College – promoted to Captain.
 - 1935 -1939: Attaché duty American embassy in Tokyo and in China.
 - 1940: United State Army War College and promoted to Major.
 - 1940 – 1942: Various assignments: Commander 12th FA Battalion, Office of the Secretary of General Staff.
 - 1941 (December): Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel.
 - 1942 (February): Promoted to Colonel.
 - 1942 (December): Promoted to Brigadier General.

- **Italian Campaign:**
 - 1942: Chief of Staff 82d Airborne Division and then commander of the 82d Airborne Division Artillery. Combat experience in Sicily and Italy.
 - 1943: Secret Mission to Rome to coordinate 82^d air drop with Italian Force. Reporting directly to Eisenhower's staff (friends in high places).

- **101st Airborne Division:**
 - 1944: Assigned to command the 101st Airborne Division.
 - 1944 (May): Temporary promotion to Major General

Part 3: Airborne Infantry Regiment Organization and Equipment. Additional information can be found at ["1st Battalion \(Airborne\), 501st Infantry Unit History"](#). U.S. Army Alaska Public Affairs Office. Other sources noted in the foot notes.

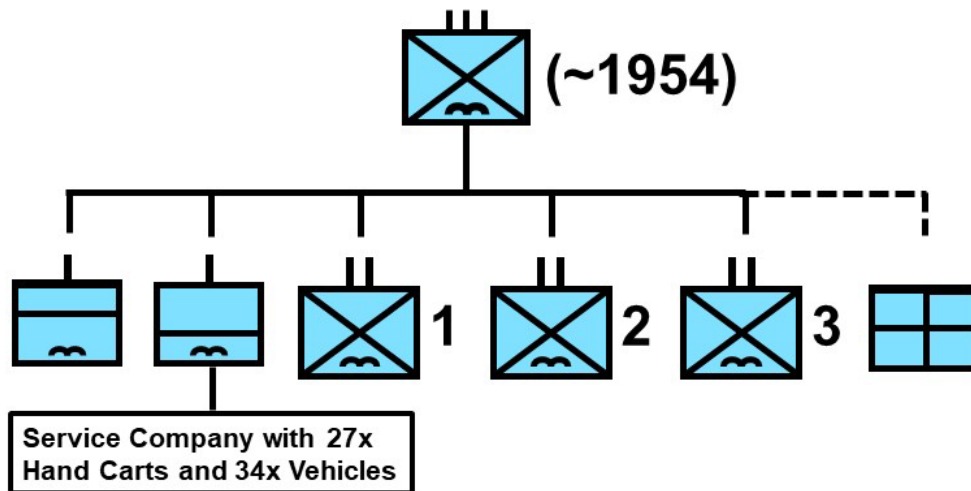
The 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment was activated at Camp Toccoa, Georgia on 15 November 1942. The famous airborne test platoon, the prime ancestor of all American parachute units, provided the nucleus of the 1st Parachute Battalion, which in turn provided part of the cadre, the unit number, the genealogical lineage and the heraldic background of the 501st Parachute Regiment. Its initial group of officers were hand-picked by its first commander, Colonel Howard R. Johnson.

All members of the regiment were parachute volunteers, but only a minor fraction were actually qualified jumpers during training at Camp Toccoa, GA. So, when that very arduous training was over in March 1943, the unit marched to Atlanta, GA, a distance of 105 miles (169 km). They then moved to Fort Benning, GA, to jump train all members not previously qualified.

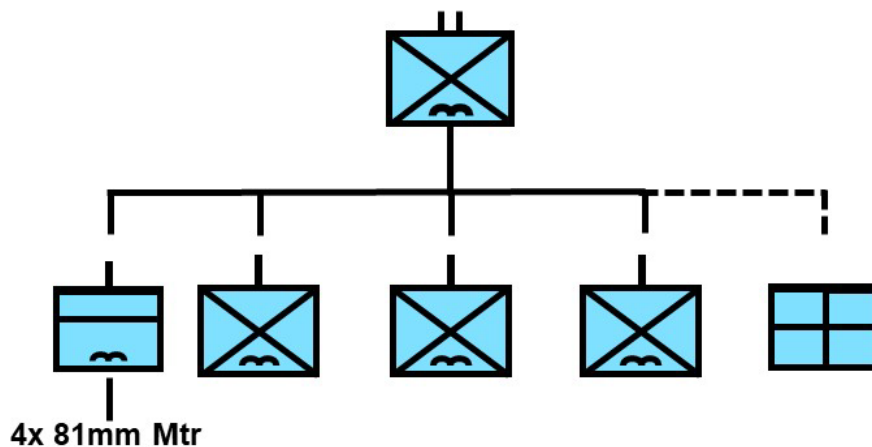
With jump training over, the regiment was assigned to the Airborne Command at Camp MacKall, NC. This was its home base during prolonged maneuvers in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Louisiana, and until January 1944, when the regiment deployed to England. Once in England the 501st became a permanent attachment of the 101st Airborne Division and was a vital part of that famous unit for the duration of World War II. In England, training was hard, realistic and became increasingly oriented toward an airborne assault into German-held Europe.

Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) Organization: A PIR consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Service Company, three Parachute Infantry Battalions, and the attachment from division of a small medical and chaplain detachment. The PIR, with only 1954

men, was about two-thirds the size of standard infantry regiment. The PIR had no regimental cannon or anti-tank company. Additionally it had only 34 vehicles whereas a standard regiment had 187 trucks and jeeps.⁴



Parachute Infantry Battalion Organization: The PIR's basic tactical unit was the parachute Infantry Battalion. The battalion consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Service Company, three Parachute Infantry Rifle Companies, and an attached medical detachment. The Parachute Infantry Battalion with only 37 officers and 512 enlisted, was about two-thirds the size of standard infantry company. The battalion had no heavy weapons company or vehicles. The HQ company did have four 81mm Mortars.⁵

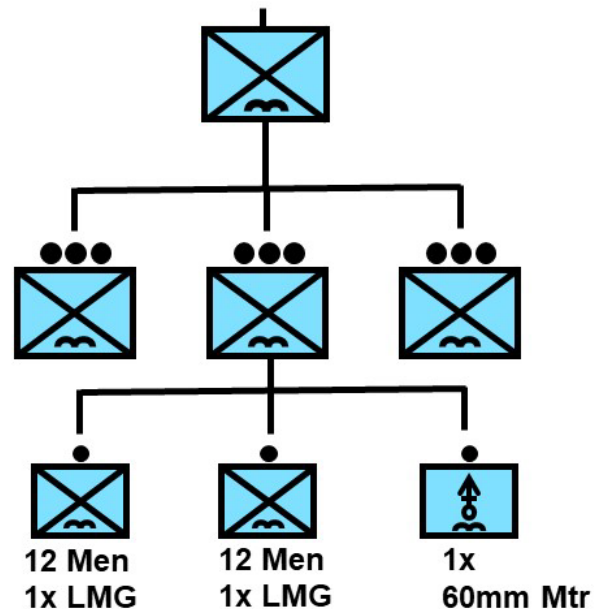


Parachute Infantry Company Organization: The Parachute Infantry Rifle Company consisted of company headquarters and three rifle platoons. As with the regiment and battalion, the company was about two-thirds the size of the standard infantry company (8 officers and 119 enlisted) [Note: standard infantry company has only 5 officers]. The company had no heavy

⁴ Zagola, Steven. US Airborne Divisions in the ETO 1944-45, 26-27.

⁵ Ibid, 26-28.

weapons platoon or vehicles. **The parachute rifle platoons** had two rifle squads and a mortar squad with one 60mm mortar [a standard infantry platoon had three rifle squads]. **The parachute infantry rifle squad** was the same size (12 men) as the standard rifle squad. Each squad had one .30-cal LMG verses one Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) in the standard squad.⁶



Part 4: A short biography of Colonel Howard Johnson – commander 501st PIR

Colonel Howard R. Johnson (1903 – 1944)

- **Early Life:**
 - 1903: Born and raised in Maryland.
 - 1923- 1924: Attended the U.S. Naval Academy (on the boxing team).
 - 1924: Resigned from the Naval Academy and joined the Army to become a pilot (2d Lieutenant).
 - 1920's and 30's serving in the Panama Canal Zone, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and in Tientsing, China.
 - Known to his peers as “Skeets.”
 - Said to have swashbuckling personality.
- **Preparation for World War II**
 - 1940s: Promotion dates not known, but most likely advanced from Major to LTC during the rapid buildup of U.S. Forces.
 - 1941: Turned down a battalion command in the 1st Special Service Force (Devil’s Brigade/The Black Devils)
- **101st Airborne**
 - 1941: Volunteered for parachute duty.

⁶ Zagola, Steven. US Airborne Divisions in the ETO 1944-45, 28-30.

- Zealot for physical training and set the individual record for running up Currahee Mountain.
- Known to his men as “Jumping Johnson.”
- It is believed that the popular airborne phrase "To command a parachute unit, you don't have to be nuts, but it helps!" is based upon Johnson.
- 1942: Selected to command the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment and promoted to Colonel.