



# 101st Airborne Division: 'Rendezvous with Destiny' Endures

By Martha C. Koester

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*To the German Commander,  
NUTS!  
The American Commander*

—Acting 101st Airborne Division commander Brig. Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe's reply to German forces on Dec. 22, 1944, the day Germans demanded an immediate surrender in Bastogne, Belgium.

**H**owever, among all the actions taken by one of the most highly decorated divisions in the U.S. Army, none means more to Soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division than the classic retort of acting division commander McAuliffe to German forces in 1944. To 1st Sgt. Omar Mascareñas, of Fort Campbell's Dental Activity and an officer of Fort Campbell's Sgt. Audie Murphy Club, "Nuts" best illustrates the tenacity and bold mentality of the 101st Airborne Division.

"It tells you what we are like. We don't believe that we could be defeated or that we have to surrender to anybody," he said. "We're going to make the mission happen, and that's a good example of how you should continue regardless. He was surrounded; there was really no way, and for him to say that. ..."

In December 1944, the 101st was tasked with protecting the critical transportation hub of Bastogne, Belgium, which was under siege. There, German forces issued an ultimatum: Surrender immediately or face annihilation from a blitz of German artillery. Yet, McAuliffe refused with his classic reply, boosting the sagging spirits of American Soldiers. The siege was broken by the division on Dec. 26, 1944.

"[The 101st Airborne Division] will find a way," said Sgt. 1st Class Erin L. Trudden, student detachment NCO-IC, Medical Company Blanchfield Army Community Hospital. "We will figure it out as we go."

"When I first got here, I was assigned to the 101st Sustainment Brigade, the youngest of the brigades here," said Master Sgt. Peter A. Mayes, a former member of the 101st Sustainment Brigade Lifeliners and public affairs NCO for the division. "As Col. Michael P. Peterman, the 101st Sustainment Brigade commander, said, 'It is our parachutes that basically got those Soldiers into Normandy.' That's part of my history."

"I just always go back to the verse in the division song, 'We have a rendezvous with destiny; our strength and courage strike the spark that will always make men free,'" said Sgt. 1st Class Brian Ramirez, NCOIC of perioperative services at Fort Campbell's Blanchfield



Army Community Hospital. “It’s that strength and courage of the 101st that just ‘strikes that spark’ to give hope to people who don’t have freedom. I think the 101st has displayed that many times in history and will continue to do that in the future. It’s one of the great privileges of serving here.”

### About the Screaming Eagles

Units such as 1st Brigade Combat Team, “Bastogne;” 2nd Brigade Combat Team, “Strike;” and 3rd Brigade Combat Team, “Rakkasans” have helped build the strong heritage for the NCOs of the 101st Airborne Division.

“You find that with a lot of the 101st Soldiers, this is not just *a* division, it’s *the* division,” Trudden said. “There are very few places [around Fort Campbell] where you don’t see the [101st] flag. Everything around here is ‘Eagle this,’ ‘Eagle that,’ ‘Screaming this,’ ‘Screaming that.’ It’s very much embedded, and when you say Fort Campbell, it’s an automatic association with the 101st.”

“This is ‘Screaming Eagle Country,” Mayes said. “No matter where you go in this town, you are going to see Abe [the Screaming Eagle on the insignia of the 101st Airborne Division] somewhere. That is what this place is all about. This is Abe’s home. This is Abe’s world, and we’re proud of it.”

The division was first activated Aug. 16, 1942, at Camp Claiborne, La. In his first address to Soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division, commander Maj. Gen. William C. Lee said that though the division had no

In his first address, the first commander of the 101st Airborne Division, Maj. Gen. William C. Lee, (left) said the division had a “rendezvous with destiny.” (Photo by Martha C. Koester)

history, it had “a rendezvous with destiny,” and the division was to be called on when the need was “immediate and extreme.”

Those words — “a rendezvous with destiny” — would prove so inspirational that the words would be incorporated into the division’s song, “Screaming Eagles.”

“Just think about what that says,” Mascareñas said. “Every time a commander gets ready to deploy, they always say they are getting ready for another ‘rendezvous with destiny.’ It’s just a perfect phrase for it.”

“I have been a Soldier for a long time, but when I went downrange with [the 101st Sustainment Brigade], that’s where my mettle met the road,” Mayes said. “That’s my pride.”

As Screaming Eagles, “we understand where we came from; we understand how iconic our leaders are,” Mayes said. “Those are giants. We are standing on their shoulders, and we have to live up to their legacy. Anything less would be unacceptable.”

However, none of the groups of the 101st Airborne Division garners as much attention as the legendary 506th Infantry Regiment or “Band of Brothers,” which traces its roots back to World War II. The regiment made its mark multiple times in history, whether parachuting into Normandy or capturing Adolf Hitler’s outpost, his Eagle’s Nest at Berchtesgaden.



“I ask a lot of my new Soldiers if they have seen the ‘Band of Brothers’ miniseries,” Mascareñas said. “If they answer, ‘No,’ a sergeant has to take that Soldier to go watch it. When they come back, the Soldier says, ‘Wow!’”

Air-assault operations are a significant part of the 101st Airborne Division’s history, and training is critical for NCOs. Thousands of Soldiers and leaders assigned to the division train each year at the Sabalauski Air Assault School, widely known as the 10 toughest days in the Army.

“When my Soldiers graduate [from Air Assault School], you see a transformation,” Mascareñas said. “When you get [the wings on your uniform], you just moved a mountain. I have been to Airborne School, and I have been to Air Assault School. Air Assault School was probably the best training I received. Just the way it was run, it was so professional — ‘dress right dress.’ It’s all about standards and attention to detail, and that’s where you learn those things.

“All that tradition spills out to the tenant units, like my unit. A few months ago, my unit achieved a 52-percent Air Assault-qualified [rate], which is unheard of in a dental company. You won’t find that anywhere else. But why did we do that? Because we feel we are a part of the 101st, and we want to be a part of that tradition.”

## Role models

The 101st Airborne Division has turned out its fair share of high-profile leaders, both officer and enlisted.

“You’re looking at men who are considered legends at what they do,” Mayes said. “Everyone knows retired Maj.

Gens. Jeffrey J. Schloesser, John F. Campbell, David H. Petraeus, current Command Sgt. Maj. Alonzo J. Smith and retired Command Sgt. Maj. Marvin L. Hill. We all know those names. When you think of the Army of the past 10 to 12 years, that is this Army”

NCOs look to Smith, the current 101st Airborne Division command sergeant major, for inspiration, members of Fort Campbell’s Sgt. Audie Murphy Club said.

“A good example is Smith,” Mascareñas said. “He is my hero. That’s who I want to emulate because of what he went through. He was injured and was out of commission for a while. But to be able to come back, take the historic 101st downrange and come back with more history? Wow, he’s awesome.”

While on a combat operation in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in June 2010 with the 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, Smith’s vehicle was struck by rebels firing an 82 mm recoilless rifle, which severely injured his leg. Smith successfully underwent multiple surgeries and fought depression.

Another 101st Airborne Division role model who gained recent Armywide attention was Sgt. 1st Class Greg Robinson, the first Soldier with an amputated limb and prosthetic to graduate from the Air Assault School in April 2013.

Robinson, a combat engineer with A Company, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, lost a portion of his lower right leg during a mission in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in October 2006.

“I don’t know of any other Soldier who could have done what he has done,” Mayes said. “The 10 toughest days [in the Army], and this guy just showed everyone he is more than capable of handling it.

“[That shows] the true spirit of what the 101st Airborne Division is all about — when you have that kind of imagery, that kind of passion: ‘I’m not giving up. My leg injury did not stop me. I own it instead.’”

## A brotherhood

The 101st Airborne Division’s traditions honor the Soldiers who served before, with events such as the Week of the Eagles to present the best of the division and the Run for the Fallen, which is held on post to honor service members and is hosted by the division.

“One of the things I like when I go to the ceremonies on post is I see many of the veterans who were



The Screaming Eagles of the 101st Airborne Division boast an impressive combat record fought on the beaches of Normandy to the mountains of Afghanistan. A monument at the Don F. Pratt Museum at Fort Campbell, Ky., depicts Soldiers in the combat operations in which the 101st Airborne Division took part. (Photo by Martha C. Koester)

in the 101st,” Mascareñas said. “Just to talk to these old Soldiers brings a chill. It makes you want to be a better Soldier when you come to work because it’s not a regular unit. This is an historic unit, and when you come to work you just feel like you want to do better.”

The tenacity of the 101st Airborne Division on the battlefield is well documented and admired by many NCOs.

“I have a godson who is 12 and is a World War II fanatic,” Trudden said. “When I told him I was [making a permanent change of station] to Fort Campbell, he said, ‘You are going to the 101st?’ It was like I had been chosen for God status or something. ‘Do you know what they have done?’ he asked.”

Above all else, the resounding theme of the 101st Airborne Division is one of family unlike that at other installations, said Mascareñas, who was once told he could not shop at a shoppette at another installation because he had not earned his Airborne badge.

“Here [at Fort Campbell], it’s like, ‘Hey, why don’t you have your wings? Come on, let me show you how to get them,’” Mascareñas said. “I’m probably the 1 percent of this post [working in a dental clinic], but they treat me like I’m the 90 percent guy [in an Air Assault unit], as if I was a first sergeant in the 101st. That’s what I like about it — how they treat you like family and how they make you a part of the team.”

“I think if you come here and you drive around this post, and you’re not moved or if it doesn’t make you wear your uniform with more pride and more satisfaction and a desire to do better, then you are in the wrong business,” Trudden said. “If so, you need to go away; you need to go get an application from McDonald’s, because they probably need a fry guy, and it just might be better suited for you than this unit.”

## Timeline

- **Aug. 16, 1942:** The 101st division is activated at Camp Claiborne, La. In his first address to Soldiers, commander Maj. Gen. William C. Lee says that though the division had no history it had “a rendezvous with destiny.” The phrase becomes part of the division’s song and motto.
- **June 6, 1944:** Screaming Eagles become the first Allied Soldiers to set foot into occupied France in the Cotentin Peninsula. The division plays a major role during D-Day operations by clearing a path for the 4th Infantry Division to land on Utah Beach; the division eventually links the Utah and Omaha beachheads and liberates the city of Carentan.
- **Sept. 17, 1944:** The 101st jumps into Holland for Operation Market Garden. The division fights for the liberation of the Netherlands and spends 72 days in combat.
- **December 1944:** The 101st is called to action during the Battle of the Bulge. The critical transportation hub of Bastogne, Belgium, is under siege, surrounded by enemy forces who demand an immediate surrender. Acting division commander Brig. Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe refuses, with his classic reply of “Nuts!” The siege is broken Dec. 26, but fighting continues until January 1945 as Allied units reduce Nazi advances in the Ardennes Forest.
- **Spring 1945:** The 101st liberates the Landsberg concentration camp and captures Adolf Hitler’s mountain retreat in Berchtesgaden.
- **Nov. 30, 1945:** The 101st is inactivated eight months after the German surrender.
- **September 1956:** The 101st is reactivated at Fort Campbell. The activation of the 101st and the 82nd airborne divisions marks the culmination of the Army’s efforts to establish airborne operations.
- **September 1957:** President Dwight D. Eisenhower sends elements of the 101st Airborne Division to safeguard the Little Rock Nine, a group of African-American students trying to attend classes at Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Ark.
- **July 29, 1965:** The 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division arrives. The remainder of the 101st deploys in December 1967 and makes history as the largest and longest airlift operation directly into a combat zone. The division is involved in combat operations from Saigon to Quang Tri province. In August 1968, parachutes are shed in favor of helicopter-borne operations. While in Vietnam, the 101st Airborne Division fights 45 operations and 17 Screaming Eagles earn the Medal of Honor.
- **February 1974:** Commanding general Maj. Gen. Sidney B. Berry signs an order authorizing wear of the Airmobile qualification badge. On Oct. 4, 1974, the 101st is redesignated the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), which it maintains today.
- **March 1982:** Elements of the 101st are sent to the Sinai Peninsula for peacekeeping operations. On Dec. 12, 1985, 248 Screaming Eagles are killed in a plane crash in Newfoundland as they were returning home from a Middle East assignment.
- **August 1990:** The division is deployed to the Middle East in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. On Jan. 17, 1991, the division fires the first shots of Desert Storm and destroys Iraqi radar sites. A cease-fire comes Feb. 28, 1991, and the Screaming Eagles return by May 1.
- **1990s:** The division supports U.S. and United Nations peacekeeping missions in Somalia, Panama, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo.
- **November 2001:** In response to terrorist attacks on 9/11, the 3rd Brigade Combat Team (Rakkasans) deploy to Afghanistan. The Screaming Eagles participate in combat operations including Operation Anaconda in the Shoh-I-Khot Valley, which dealt a major

blow to the Taliban and al-Qaida.

- **February and March 2003:** The division deploys to Kuwait for Operation Iraqi Freedom and fights its way to South Baghdad. In April 2003, the 101st Airborne Division is ordered to northern Iraq and conducts the longest air assault in history. Screaming Eagles also conduct the first province election in Iraq and kill Saddam Hussein's sons Uday and Qusay.
- **Late 2005:** The division deploys to Iraq again and assumes responsibility for northern Iraq. The Screaming Eagles help train Iraqi soldiers and transition major parts of the country to Iraqi units.
- **Fall 2007:** The division again deploys to Iraq. In February 2008, it deploys to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. In June 2010, the entire division returns to Afghanistan to help restore Afghan people's confidence in government and train Afghan National Security Forces.

### "Screaming Eagles"

The song for the 101st Airborne Division is titled "Screaming Eagles" and was written by Col. Samuel R. Loboda.

We have a rendezvous with destiny.  
Our strength and courage strike the spark  
That will always make men free.  
Assault right down through the skies of blue;  
Keep your eyes on the job to be done.  
We're the Soldiers of the hundred-first;  
We'll fight till the battle's won!

### "Old Abe"

One of the most recognized insignia in the Army, the Screaming Eagle patch made its official debut in 1942. The patch featured a white eagle's head with a gold beak on a black shield topped with a crescent shaped Airborne tab. Its origins have roots in Wisconsin history.



Old Abe, the original eagle featured in the Screaming Eagle patch of the 101st Airborne Division, was wounded twice during the Civil War, though not seriously. A replica of the bird hangs in the division's museum at Fort Campbell, Ky. (Photo by Martha C. Koester)

In 1861, Chief Sky of the Chippewa tribe captured a bald eagle near the Flambeau River in northern Wisconsin. Chief Sky traded the eaglet for a bushel of corn to Daniel McCann of Eagle Point, Wis. McCann then sold the bird for \$2.50 to Capt. John E. Perkins, commanding officer of a militia company called the Eau Claire Badgers. The unit renamed themselves the Eau Claire Eagles.

When the unit entered federal service, it was redesignated as C Company, 8th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The mascot was adopted by the new 8th Wisconsin, which was nicknamed the Eagle Regiment.

Soldiers named the eagle "Old Abe" after President Abraham Lincoln and assigned the bird as a member of the regimental color guard. During the Civil War, the Eagle Regiment carried Old Abe into battle, screaming at the enemy while tethered to a wooden shield. Old Abe was wounded twice during battle, though not seriously.

After the inactivation of the Eagle Regiment in 1864, veterans donated Old Abe to the people of Wisconsin. The eagle frequently traveled around the nation as part of veteran reunions and special exhibitions. In 1881, Old Abe died from the fumes of a fire near his aviary in the Wisconsin State Capitol in Madison.



Upon his death, Old Abe was preserved and exhibited in the Capitol building's Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Hall until a fire ruined the display in 1904. A few of Old Abe's feathers survived and were preserved by the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison.

It was in 1921 that the legend of "Old Abe" and the 101st unit designation merged. The 101st Division of the Organized Reserves was born, with headquarters in Milwaukee, Wis. In 1923, a new black version of a 101st Division

insignia was approved for the unit. The former version featured a white eagle over flames on a royal blue shield.

The 101st Division of the Organized Reserves disbanded in Aug. 15, 1942; the next day the 101st Airborne Division was born. Old Abe was still on the insignia, but it was now topped with the Airborne tab.

Two other eagle mascots, "Young Abe" and "Bill Lee I," were soon acquired by the division, but Young Abe died in 1943, while Bill Lee I died in 1956. ■



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