

101

History of The Screaming Eagles

COLLECTED AT
CAMP EAGLE - OUTSIDE
HUÉ, VIETNAM -
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BY JAMES B. GREEN
1LT, INF

A Publication of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile)



"...And where is the prince who could so afford to cover his country with troops for its defense as that 10,000 men descending from the clouds might not in many places do an infinite deal of mischief before a force could be brought together to repel them?"
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



Prepared By
Information Office
101st Airborne Division (Airmobile)

Staff Photo



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101: A History of the Screaming Eagles is an authorized publication of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile). APO 96383. It is published for the benefit of new members of the division by the Information Office, Camp Eagle, RVN (Tel., 5413). Views and opinions are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army.

As you join the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), I extend to you a hearty airborne welcome.

You will soon learn that the 101st has a proud heritage of unequalled accomplishments. Because of their individual and collective acts of heroism, the "Screaming Eagles" are widely acclaimed as the world's best fighting men. You are the heirs of a rich and distinguished tradition, a tradition born on the battlefields of Europe in 1944 and nurtured by ten campaigns in the Republic of Vietnam.

Although the parachute has been replaced by the helicopter, the unique spirit of the paratrooper has remained unchanged. The mystique of the airborne soldier who descends from the sky to bring destruction to the enemy is as strong today as it was twenty-eight years ago.

When the first elements of the "Screaming Eagles" arrived in Vietnam in 1965, the division faced a tremendous task. It has risen to the challenge and in innumerable encounters it has acquitted itself with honor, imagination, and indomitable will to succeed. In pursuit of its "rendezvous with destiny," the 101st has made great strides toward security for the people of Thua Thien Province and the safety and tranquility which are so essential to continued progress.

The importance of the division's mission in Vietnam has not diminished over the years. Our goal is to help the Vietnamese government and people to help themselves. Toward this end, we have embarked on intensive pacification, development, and training programs in northern I Corps. The fruit of our efforts will be a Vietnamese people free from intimidation and terror, able to lead normal and productive lives in a country of potential abundance and great beauty.

I urge all of you to accept the task at hand as a personal challenge and always to strive for the pinnacle of success in your every endeavor. By so doing, your tour in Vietnam will become a deeply rewarding personal experience and you will share the satisfaction of having made your contribution toward the realization of a free and peaceful Vietnam.

AIRBORNE ALL THE WAY!

John J. Hennessey

JOHN J. HENNESSEY
Major General, USA
Commanding

Division Commanders



MG William C. Lee
Aug 1942- Feb 1944



BG Don F. Pratt
Feb 1944-Mar 1944



MG Maxwell D. Taylor
Mar 1944-Aug 1945



BG Anthony G. McAuliffe
Dec 5-26, 1944



BG W. M. Gilmore
Aug 1945-Sept 1945



BG Gerald C. Mickle
Sept 1945-Oct 1945



BG Stuart Cutler
Oct 1945-Nov 1945



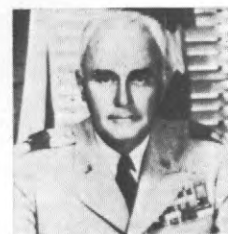
MG T. L. Sherbourne
May 1956-Mar 1958



MG William C. Westmoreland
April 1958-June 1960



MG Ben Harrell
June 1960-July 1961



MG C. W. Rich
July 1961-Feb 1963



MG Harry H. Critz
Feb 1963-Mar 1964



MG Beverly E. Powell
March 1964-March 1966



MG Ben Sternberg
April 1966-July 1967



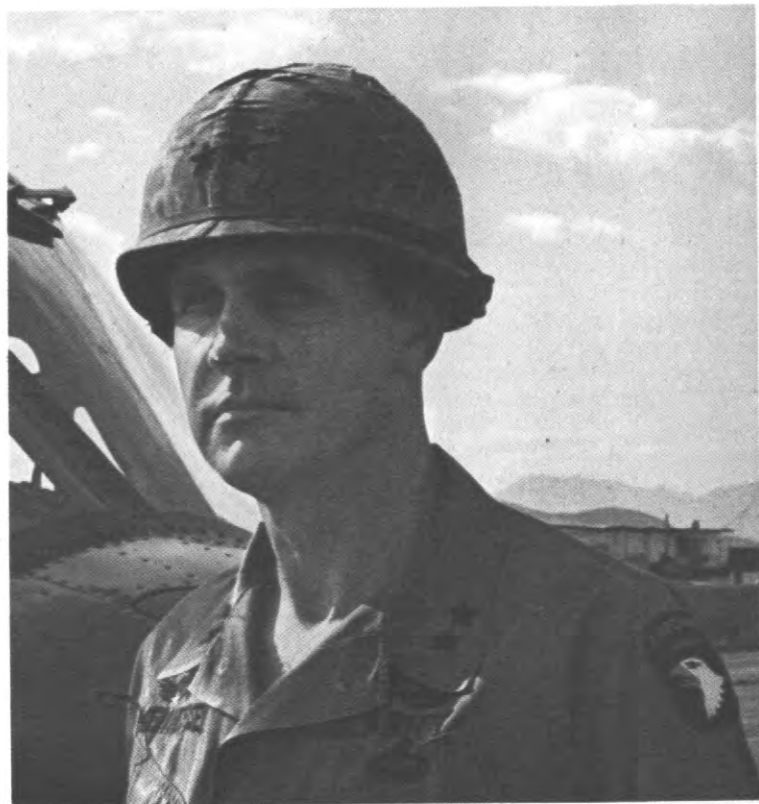
MG O. M. Barsanti
July 1967-July 1968



MG Melvin Zais
July 1968-May 1969



MG John M. Wright Jr.
May 1969-May 1970



MG John J. Hennessey
Commanding General



The Screaming Eagle

To those of us who have been fortunate enough to wear the Screaming Eagle patch, the name of Old Abe has a personal meaning. Old Abe has a history dating back to the Civil War. He was the mascot of the 8th Wisconsin Regiment and was engaged in over 20 battles. During firefights he would fly over the battlefield screeching and screaming as only an eagle can do. He became so famous that several Confederate commanders offered rewards for him dead or alive. Old Abe was wounded in action twice, but despite his wounds he lived to the the venerable old age of 21. He spent his declining years in the Wisconsin State Capitol. After his death he was mounted on a perch and placed in the memorial hall. In 1904, the hall was destroyed by fire and nothing remained of Old Abe.

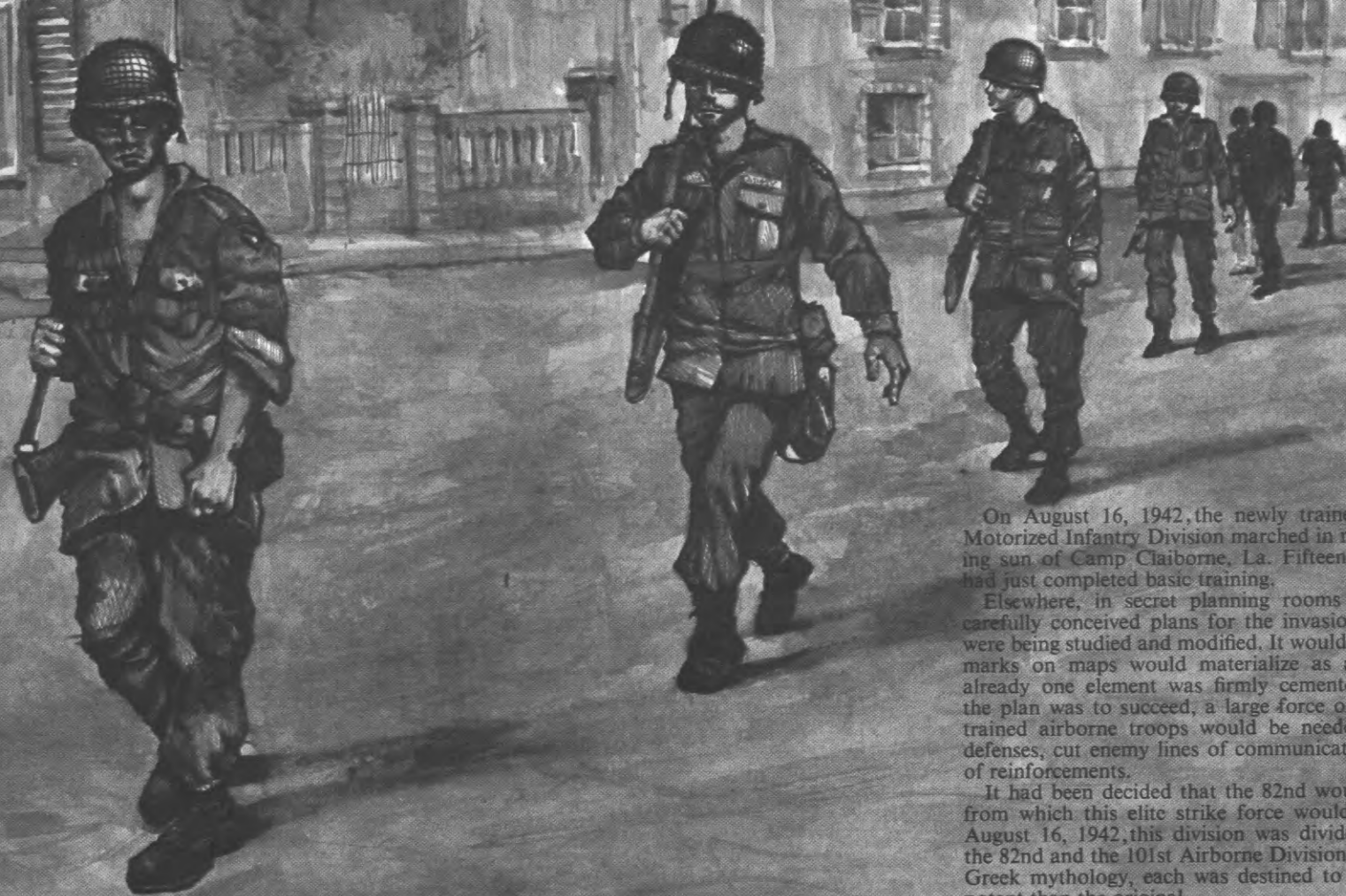
In July 1939 "Young Abe" was found in the same section of the Wisconsin wilds as his celebrated counterpart. There are those who

claim that because of almost identical markings, Young Abe is a direct descendant of his famous Civil War forebear. In November 1942 Young Abe became the mascot of the 101st Airborne Division.

The Screaming Eagle is ageless to the officers and men of the 101st today. He is worn with pride on the shoulder of every soldier of this division, symbolizing the prowess of that defender of freedom, and the might of the division which he represents. He is the guiding spirit of the determination which culminated in successful operations in Europe and here in the Republic of Vietnam.

The Screaming Eagle remains in our midst as a constant reminder to us of our proud heritage. With esprit de corps, he carries forward the illustrious record of the division, linking the reputation of the past with the successes of the future.

Beginnings...



On August 16, 1942, the newly trained troops of the 82nd Motorized Infantry Division marched in review under the blistering sun of Camp Claiborne, La. Fifteen thousand strong, they had just completed basic training.

Elsewhere, in secret planning rooms in allied capitals, the carefully conceived plans for the invasion of Nazi-held Europe were being studied and modified. It would be two years before the marks on maps would materialize as armies in conflict, but already one element was firmly cemented into the scheme: if the plan was to succeed, a large force of hard-hitting, superbly trained airborne troops would be needed to leap-frog coastal defenses, cut enemy lines of communication and block the flow of reinforcements.

It had been decided that the 82nd would be the raw material from which this elite strike force would be molded. Thus, on August 16, 1942, this division was divided into two new units, the 82nd and the 101st Airborne Divisions. And like figures from Greek mythology, each was destined to be more awesome and potent than the original.

Brig. Gen. William C. Lee, a long time advocate of the airborne concept and a pioneer in parachute warfare, was chosen to lead the 101st. Months of arduous training, drills, maneuvers and practice jumps lay ahead before the challenge of combat was met, but for the division's commanding general, the future was clear.



"...Such a force would require unusual training..."

On activation day he said, "The 101st . . . has no history, but it has a Rendezvous with Destiny. Like the early American pioneers whose invincible courage was the foundation stone of the nation, we have broken with the past and its traditions to establish our claim to the future."

Indeed, the new airborne units had broken with tradition in a very real sense. Following World War I, the traditional division structure was changed to allow more flexibility and maneuverability. The old structure of 28,000 enlisted men and officers was trimmed to 15,000 men organized along more manageable lines. And the new 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions were trimmed even more, down to approximately 8,000 men. As elements of a hard-hitting shock force, these men would operate on the run, carrying their logistical support or receiving it by glider or parachute. Such a force would require unusual training. Such training would require unusual men—a cut above the rest.

By the fall of 1942 the division had moved to its new home at Fort Bragg, N.C., and training was underway. And it was rough. Records speak of units marching 25 miles in 6 hours, 35 minutes—speed marches being highly rated at the time as endurance builders.

New training devices had to be developed,

tested and incorporated into the training. Often there were night maneuvers and little sleep.

Pounding through the soft sand, the men sprinted up the slope and threw themselves onto the log wall. The obstacle shook from the impact of well-muscled bodies as jump boots scrambled for foot-holds. Straining, the young paratroopers pulled themselves up and over, only to tumble into the sand on the other side.

Standing nearby, a drill instructor bellows, "GO! GO! GO! GO!" This is the "torture course" and it's every inch uphill.

One trooper observes bitterly, "We cheered when they told us we were going Airborne, because we didn't know any better. We thought that the hikes were over, but they gave us runs instead."

In the summer of 1943 the 101st was ordered to England. The 82nd Airborne Division had already gone overseas to participate in the invasion of Sicily where the legend of the American Airborne was already beginning to grow. But for the Screaming Eagles of the 101st, a long sea voyage in crowded troopships came before the first days of combat.



"...Such training would require unusual men..."

D-DAY: Normandy!

On October 18, the 101st landed in Liverpool and the paratroopers discovered the cockney accent, "mild and bitters," pretty English girls and more marches, more jumps, more maneuvers. But in England the maneuvers began to mean something, the jumps took on a familiar pattern. The paratroopers realized they were preparing for the real thing.

Ironically, General Lee was not to take part in the actual baptism by fire of the 101st. In the spring of 1944 he was stricken with a heart attack, forcing his removal from active duty. Brig. Gen. Maxwell B. Taylor was brought from the 82nd Airborne Division to replace him. But the division Lee had molded would now continue with the vitality and direction he had carefully instilled. On the night of June 5, 1944, the Screaming Eagles were ready. The next day would be D-Day and the invasion of Normandy.

Pfc. David K. Webster of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment stood in line with his comrades and watched the cooks pile steak, green peas, mashed potatoes, white bread, ice cream and a cup of coffee onto the trays of the paratroopers. Later he would write, "Small quiet groups sit under the plane wings and watch the sun go down. Eight o'clock: 'It won't be long now,' says Porter the medic. Porter the medic who was machine-gunned the next day and will never leave the cemetery in Ste.



Mere Eglise. Nine o'clock: A few planes start to roar. Checking their motors. Ten Thirty: We clamber aboard the plane and sit down, each in his own silence. This is the end of our training, this is the one-way road. I try to sleep, but I can't. Now the whole field is shaking with the roar of motors. Ten Forty-five: 'There they go!' the crew chief shouts. 'They're off!'

"Eleven o'clock: Our tail swings around. We wheel about and head up the runway. Dead silence. I swallow my seasick pills and try to act nonchalant, but it's no go. My legs are weak and my throat is dry and I can only talk in a stuttering whisper. Some of the boys are chain-smoking. A few are asleep. With a soft rush, we leave the ground; we are airborne. There is no going back."

The plan had been a daring one. Four hours before H-Hour, the time of the invasion by sea, paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions were to drop into areas well inland of Utah Beach. Troops would land both by parachute and glider.

While other troops attacked by sea, the paratroopers were to block approaches to the beach, capture and hold two causeways leading inland and knock out gun emplacements on the Cherbourg Peninsula. The fate of the seaborne invasion hinged on the paratroopers' ability to keep German reinforcements from reaching the beach. Some strategically placed bridges were to be held, others destroyed. And the La Barquette Locks were of vital importance. Should they be destroyed, the route of advance for the invading Allied troops would be blocked by inundated lowlands.

But while the plan had been well-conceived and carefully prepared, the unexpected was to turn the night of the drop into a nightmare of confusion. As the formations of C-47 jump planes and trailing gliders approached the Normandy shore, anti-aircraft batteries opened up with fierce barrages. In spite of their orders to hold tight formations, the pilots began evasive maneuvers to avoid the withering fire. As a result, the paratroopers were dropped into a rectangle 25 miles long and 15 miles wide.

General Maxwell Taylor, commander of the 101st, found himself alone on the Normandy field with only a circle of curious cows for company. His 14,000 man command was nowhere to be seen. He didn't know it, but 70 per cent of his force was spread over an eight-square-mile area. Reaching into the pocket of his jump suit he produced the small toy "cricket" which was to identify him to other paratroopers in the darkness. His clicking soon produced answering clicks from a nearby hedge-row. Soon he and a rifleman from the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment were hugging each other in the darkness. Soon they met a group of artillerymen led by Brig. Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe. Eventually, most of the key staff officers of the division found their way to the general's group. At dawn the group moved out: 60 infantrymen and an assortment of clerks, MPs, artillerymen, staff officers and two generals. One squad was led by a major and two lieutenants served as scouts.

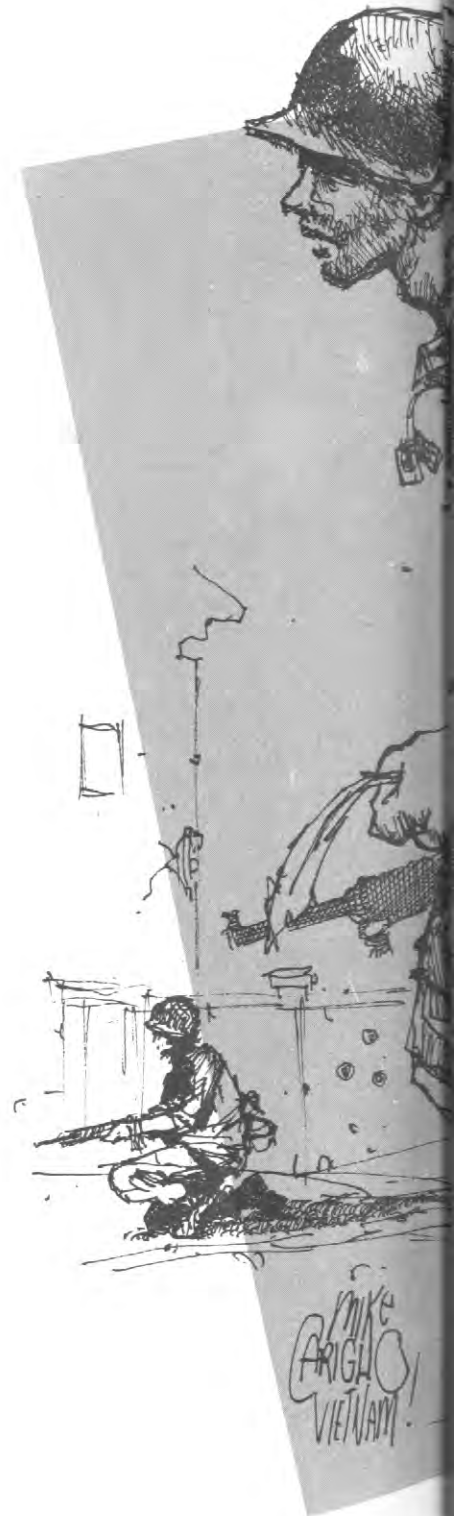
General Taylor remarked, "Never were so few led by so many."

Out of the chaos of the night, against seemingly insurmountable problems, the troops collected in small groups, oriented themselves, and set out on their own to the division objectives. For the moment, unit designations and previously assigned missions were forgotten. It was just such a disorganization that led critics of the invasion plan to suggest that the airborne troops would fail in their assault and be completely destroyed by the Germans. Instead, the paratroopers shrugged off the confusion and fought on as individuals, reflecting an esprit de corps that was to become legend.

Dwight D. Eisenhower was later to say that the high point of his military career was the moment he "... got the word that the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions had landed and gone into action on the Cherbourg Peninsula."

By the end of June, troopers of the 101st and other Allied units had severed the Cherbourg Peninsula and captured the towns of Cherbourg and Carentan. On July 7, General Taylor stood on a German pillbox overlooking his now veteran troops.

He told them, "You hit the ground running toward the enemy. You have beaten him on his own ground and you can beat him on any ground." The following months were destined to add additional weight to General Taylor's statement.



Holland...

Over the flat, nearly treeless Dutch countryside the flights of C-47 jump planes roar in symmetrical patterns, the sound of their engines shattering the stillness. Paratroopers of the 101st, fresh from leave and resupply in England during the summer of 1944, now fell from the sky in a daring daylight jump.

On September 17, the division made the most successful jump in its history. This time the jump planes maintained tight formations and the broad, open fields of the Dutch countryside provided ideal drop zones for the paratroopers. Many made "parade ground" landings. There were, however, a few remarkable exceptions.

The glider banks and circles through the dark fog searching for a landmark. After an hour of aimless flying, the pilot decides to cut loose, hoping the craft isn't over Germany or the English Channel. Slipping down through the fog, the pilot catches a glimpse of the tow-plane as it disappears above. At 150 feet the glider breaks through the fog and heads straight for a hay stack. It hits and flips on its back.

The troopers crawl from the wreckage and find they are 200 miles from their target, behind enemy lines in Belgium. Almost incredibly, the Screaming Eagles haul their 37mm anti-tank gun from the wreckage and—with the help of the Belgians—take it to the highway. From here they hitch-hike to the battle in Holland.

The battle in Holland centered around 20 miles of road for the 101st. The job of the division was to punch a broad corridor through enemy territory from Eindhoven through Zon, St. Oedenrode, Veghel, and to Uden. Up this artery was to flow the British XXX Corps, with tanks thrusting northward and eventually into the heart of Germany's industrial core.

The nearly perfect jump and the element of surprise contributed to startling victories for the 101st on the invasion's first day. All major objectives planned for D-Day were successfully attained. But the Germans were determined to retain the corridor so impudently wrenched in their lines and soon bloody fighting was going on over the length of the road. The section of road held by the 101st was greater than any division could hold

through a conventional defense of fronts and lines. Screaming Eagles had to move rapidly over the length of the corridor, aggressively attacking the German forces, keeping them off balance.

But while the Airborne troops were successful in cutting the corridor for the British armor, the operation was going badly north of the division's sector. The Germans stopped the British advance. Of 10,000 British paratroopers dropped north of the Rhine, only 2,500 came back. While the vital port of Antwerp was seized and would be of strategic significance later, the drive into Germany was a failure.

As the fall turned into winter and the cold deepened, the units of the 101st were pulled out one by one and sent to Mourmelon, France, to regroup and resupply. But in 73 days of the Holland campaign, 3,300 Screaming Eagles had paid in blood for 20 miles of the Dutch road.





Bastogne...

In December of 1944 the war was going well for the Allies. The Third Reich was shrinking each day as the Allied armies pushed into German-held territory. But on December 16, along a thinly defended sector of the American front, 25 German divisions suddenly pierced the lines amid a thunderous artillery barrage and began a push that was to penetrate 65 miles into Allied territory. The "Battle of the Bulge" began.

The 101st, in reserve at Mourmelon, was called to help stem the tide of German advance. Many of the troops were on pass in Paris and even General Taylor was away in the United States. General Anthony C. McAuliffe was in command.

Two days after the initial German attack, troopers of the 101st were on their way.

Many of the troopers were still in their dress uniforms, shirts and ties. Some had no weapons and all were short on ammunition and other supplies. As the troops huddled together for warmth, the open-topped cattle trucks roared through the night, lights glaring in defiance of German aircraft. One 16-year-old paratrooper said, "... we drove until four the next morning and detrucked at a barn. It was here we learned that there had been a German breakthrough and that we were going to Bastogne."

With Allied units falling back to regroup before the advancing Germans, the 101st presented a paradoxical sight as the troopers moved into the path of opposing German armor and infantry. A military policeman

directing traffic at an intersection reflected the confusion. When asked what the situation was, he replied, "I don't know. Everybody else is leaving and the 101st is coming in."

It was later discovered that the Germans had expected to take Bastogne without a struggle. While they considered the town strategically vital, the high command had placed faith in the speed of the German offensive to give them the town uncontested. Instead, they ran into the bayonet of American resistance—the 101st Airborne Division.

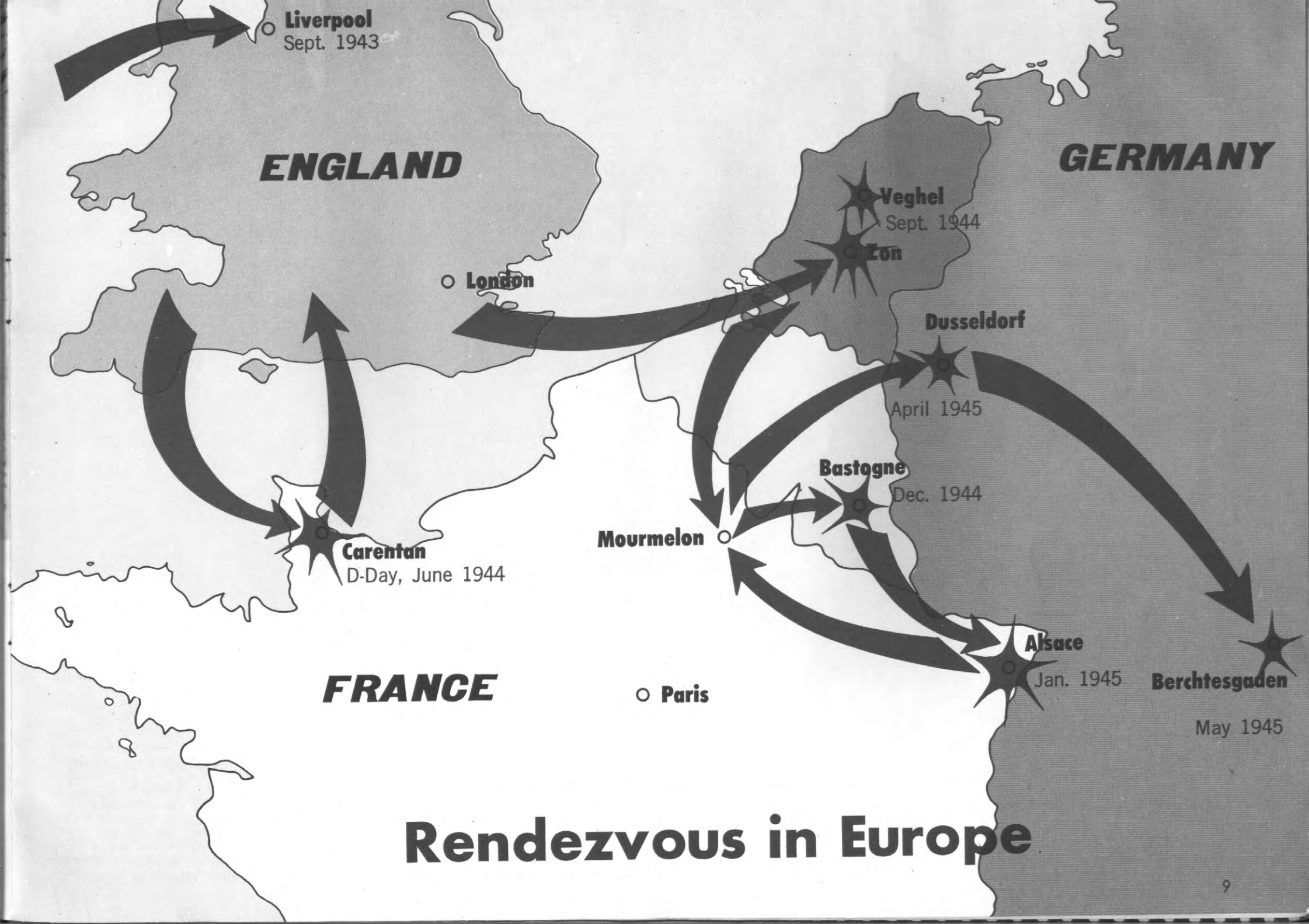
The advance of German armor rushed around Bastogne and swept past, leaving what they thought was a "pocket of resistance" for the infantry to clean up. Instead, they found a determined division. The advance could not continue further with Bastogne in

American hands and the offensive became anchored by this battle.

In the following days, the German Army suffered tremendous losses at Bastogne. The troopers of the 101st commanded excellent fields of fire on the slopes around the town. More and more enemy troops were fruitlessly thrown into the battle.

On December 22, four German officers came through the lines under a flag of truce. The Americans, confident of their ability to hold Bastogne, were surprised when the Germans demanded that the division surrender or face "total annihilation." A terrible artillery barrage was promised if the terms were not met.

The Germans walked up the road from Remoifosse carrying a large white flag.



Liverpool
Sept. 1943

ENGLAND

○ London

Carentan
D-Day, June 1944

FRANCE

○ Paris

Mourmelon

Bastogne
Dec. 1944

Dusseldorf
April 1945

Veghel
Sept. 1944

Zon

Alsace
Jan. 1945

Berchtesgaden
May 1945

GERMANY

Rendezvous in Europe

They were met by men of the 327th Glider Infantry, blindfolded and brought to the Co. F command post. From here the terms of the "surrender" were relayed to division headquarters. The men were surprised; they thought the Germans had come to surrender.

When General McAuliffe was informed of the message he laughed, "Aw nuts!" Then he thought for a moment, considering an appropriate wording for the refusal.

"Well, I don't know what to tell them," he told his staff.

"That first remark of yours would be

hard to beat," his G-3 replied.

That was the official reply that was drafted and sent back with the Germans. On the way back to their lines the Germans were told, "If you don't understand what 'Nuts' means . . . it's the same as 'Go to hell.'" That the Germans understood.

The threatened artillery barrage never materialized and the next day a massive flight of C-47s airdropped in 144 tons of much-needed supplies to the besieged division. For the next two days the Germans made determined attacks against the division's defenses. At times the muzzles of the

division's big guns were depressed to fire point blank at approaching tanks. Often cooks and clerks were in the trenches firing anti-tank weapons. But still the 101st held Bastogne.

With only two rounds of ammunition per artillery piece remaining, General McAuliffe decided on a daring move: Attack! Screaming Eagles assaulted under a barrage of artillery into the Champs sector. When they left, 18 German tanks were left burning in the field.

Then, on December 26, at 1650 hours, the lead elements of the U.S. 4th Armored Division entered the lines of the 101st. The siege was broken.



In March 1945 the entire 101st Airborne Division stood in a broad open field in Mourmelon and was reviewed by General Eisenhower. The 101st was about to be the first full division to be awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation.

General Eisenhower said, "It is a great personal honor for me . . . to take part in a ceremony which is unique in American history. Never before has a full division been cited by the War Department in the name of the President for gallantry in action. This day marks the beginning of a new tradition in the American Army . . . with that tradition will always be associated the name of the 101st Airborne Division and of Bastogne."

Following the battle for Bastogne, the 101st was moved to Alsace. This was a relatively quiet sector and the Screaming Eagles conducted night patrols and drank German beer and French wine from the many cellars in the area.

The end of WWII was to bring the 101st Airborne Division into the Ruhr Valley and finally to Hitler's fortress, Berchtesgaden, and his villa in the Bavarian Alps, Eagle's Nest. The troopers of the 101st were to be responsible for the capture of numerous Nazi war criminals and for the recovery of quantities of art treasures stolen by Nazi leaders.

Following the war, the 101st was inactivated and reactivated several times. As a training unit, it prepared for but never fought in the Korean War. In 1956 the division moved to Ft. Campbell, Ky., and organized under the Pentomic or nuclear age concept. While staying ready to fight anywhere at any time, the years passed. In 1965, the Pentagon told the 101st—get ready for action.