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1944

HISTORY OF THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION

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Camp Claiborne, Louisiana -- eighteen miles from the town of Alexandria, La., -- was the mother camp of the 101st Airborne Division which was activated at that post on August <sup>16</sup>15, 1942. Many of the division's present units (20 May, 1944) were transferred from the 82nd Infantry Division, stationed at Camp Claiborne, which was divided in half to form both the 101st Airborne and 82nd Airborne Divisions.

(One Hundred First Division originally approved 23 May, 1923. Wisconsin, territory of the division, has a Civil War tradition on which the design of the shoulder patch -- divisional insignia -- is based. The black shield recalls the "Iron Brigade," one regiment of which possessed the famous war eagle, "Old Abe."

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(The story is that a Chippewa Indian, Chief Sky, captured an eaglet on the Flambeau River, Wisconsin, in 1861 and sold him for a bushel of corn. A subsequent purchaser, having paid five dollars, gave him to the Eau Claire Eagles -- Company "C" of the Eighth Wisconsin Regiment. A sergeant carried him into battle, perched on a shield between the National Color and the Regimental Color. Old Abe flew to the end of his tether and screamed while the guns roared. The brigade shouted in response. Thus the eagle went through 36 battles. He was wounded in the assault on Vicksburg and again in the Battle of Corinth. During this latter engagement the Confederate General Sterling Price is said to have offered a reward for the bird's capture or death.)

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The name of the division was derived from the 8th Wisconsin Regiment of the Civil War. (The following information was furnished by John W. Wright, Colonel, USA, Retired, of the Historical Section, Washington, D. C. :

On 23 July, 1918, the War Department took initial steps to organize the division, the 201st Infantry Brigade to be organized in France from White Pioneer Infantry Regiments as soon as those regiments could be replaced with colored Pioneer Regiments. Between 16 September and 30 October, 1918, 110 officers and non-

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A Distinguished Service Medal was presented to Major General William Carey Lee, the Commanding General, on Saturday, February 26, 1944, in England for Lee's meritorious work in organizing and establishing the Airborne Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for the training of airborne units. The citation follows:

"Major General William C. Lee, United States Army. For exceptionally meritorious and distinguished service rendered in a duty of great responsibility while organizing and establishing the Airborne Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for the training of airborne units. Through his creative genius he inaugurated and supervised the training of the original parachute groups in the Army of the United States from which the airborne units were developed. As the result of his efforts the airborne program which exists at the present time was instituted. Major General Lee was instrumental in the establishment of the Parachute School, Fort Benning, Georgia, 15 May 1942. With meager facilities, a few partially trained instructors, and by exceptional ability, force of character and the will to get the job done he built the framework for a powerful striking force. The creation of the Airborne Command was the first effort of the United States to train airborne units on a major scale."

One battalion of the 401st Glider Infantry was lost to the division on March 3, 1944, when the First United States Army ordered the attachment of the 2nd Battalion to the 82nd Airborne Division at Scat Post camp. Movement orders affected also the 2nd Battalion's Medical Detachment, Anti-Tank Platoon, Communication Section of Headquarters Company and the Transportation Section of Service Company.

The division's basketball league championship was captured by the "Screaming Eagle" team of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment which defeated the "Towed Target" quintet of the 401st Glider Infantry Regiment, 48 to 29, in the Newbury Corn Exchange on the night of March 6, 1944. The winners were presented with a trophy cup by Brigadier General Don F. Pratt. The tournament was sponsored by the Special Service section of the division.

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Another distinguished guest visited the division on April 20, 1944, with a party of nine from the American Embassy, Grosvenor Square, in London. Mr. Edward R. Stettinius, American under-secretary of state, absented himself from secret chambers where he had been conducting a series of talks with British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, to visit the airborne troops of the 101st Airborne Division. Stettinius inspected the state of training of both glider and parachute troops and found it "highly commendable."

The 401st Glider Infantry Regiment and the division were saddened by the news of the death of First Lieutenant Samuel Lieberman who died in a glider crash-landing on April 20th. The lieutenant, who was making a training flight over English soil, was the executive officer of a company in the 2nd Battalion of the 401st which had been attached to the 82nd Airborne Division at Scat Post camp, March 3, 1944.

#### EXERCISE "TIGER"

During the week of April 23-30, 1944, the 101st Airborne Division participated in a field maneuver known as "Exercise Tiger" which was under the direction of the VII Corps Commander. General locale of the exercise was the Torquay area on the southwestern coast of England, just off the channel.

101st Airborne troops were sectioned in three echelons -- parachute, glider and seaborne. Composition of these elements were as follows:

1. Parachute echelon -- 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, Company "C" of the 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion and elements of Division Headquarters, Division Artillery Headquarters, 101st Airborne Signal Company and 326th Airborne Medical Company.

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2. Glider echelon -- 321st Glider Field Artillery Battalion, 907th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, 326th Airborne Medical Company, 101st Airborne Signal Company, 426th Airborne Quartermaster Company and elements of Division Headquarters and Division Artillery Headquarters.

3. Seaborne echelon -- 327th Glider Infantry Regiment and the first battalion of the 401st Glider Infantry Regiment which was attached to the 327th Infantry.

#### Movement to exercise area

Advance details of airborne elements left home station Sunday, April 23 and arrived at Torquay on Sunday evening. Movement of the main body by motor began at midnight Sunday with the train movement commencing the following morning at 0945. The last unit closed in Torquay at 1800 Tuesday, April 25th.

The seaborne elements left Reading by motor and train on Sunday, April 23rd with the exception of the 327th Infantry's "B" Company and attachments which left at 2130 Thursday, April 20th. "B" Company arrived at Ivybridge and marched to their marshalling area at Cornwood "A". Their arrival was not anticipated and much confusion resulted.

Remainder of seaborne elements moved according to schedule and were dispersed over five marshalling areas which were 40 miles apart. Units were so dispersed within these areas that contact was impossible and regimental commander could not maintain control.

Airborne elements moved from Torquay by truck on Wednesday, April 26th to their dispersal area in the vicinity of Kingsbridge, Moddiswell and Churchstow. Movement was without incident.

Seaborne elements commenced loading at two ports of embarkation -- Dartmouth and Plympton. These elements were loaded on 16 different vessels (LST's and LSI's) with no regard for tactical unity. For example:

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Rendezvous With Destiny  
*A History of  
The 101st Airborne Division*

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By

LEONARD RAPPORT

AND

ARTHUR NORTHWOOD, JR.

Br 14272

WASHINGTON  
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ENGLAND

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same emotion which prompted me to call my chute an illegitimate child). Floating downward, I could see none of the fellows who had jumped with me. But, I couldn't squander time in the air looking for my pals—I'd do that on the ground. I'll eat my tin hat if I was in the air more than twenty-five seconds. The passage of time, it seems to me, is controlled in large measure by the events and surroundings during the period involved. Of course, a minute has only sixty seconds in it, but some seconds pass more slowly than others. At no time in my life have seconds passed, lagged, more excruciatingly slow, I felt like climbing right up inside my canopy and hiding there.

At one and the same time, I was preparing to land; looking to see if I was being fired upon; waiting to be fired upon; hoping I'd drift away from the small-arms and machine-gun fire on the ground; trying to judge where I would land. In the distance other troop-carrier planes roared over, unquestionably having already discharged their cargoes of paratroopers. They were skimming the treetops and each was drawing machine-gun fire from the ground. I saw no enemy fighter planes, but tracers from the ground streaked across the sky in all directions. There was a hell of a bombardment, aerial and naval (all ours) on the coast, and high in the sky to the south flak bursts (enemy) were plainly visible.

It was as bright as day during my descent, and I wondered why I was not being fired at. One redeeming feature of landing via parachute is that in the process no noise is made. Of this I was glad as I had drifted directly across enemy ground fire. Seeing that I would clear by a goodly margin the activity below me, I slipped to hasten my descent. I quick-slipped when it appeared I'd land in some tall trees. I wanted to avoid those babies. I have never made a tree-landing, but I understand they aren't so bad—on maneuvers. But this was no maneuver and to end up suspended in a tree, until I got myself down, or waited for someone else to assist me wasn't just then an attractive prospect. I felt that while in the plane I'd already been a defenseless target quite long enough—I never got around to cultivating much of a taste for being a target—so I was more than casually interested in staying out of those trees. Well, I missed them, but barely so. I overlooked mentioning that during my descent I saw cows placidly standing around in the fields below me. This was a welcome sight as presence of those "milk dispensaries" meant but one thing to me—at least my landing would not be made in a mined area. Nor did I see evidences of other obstacles in the fields. It wasn't a bad landing at all, save for coming in backward and coming down right smack in the latrine for every cow in France. I must have been an awesome apparition when I finally reached cover, and how I *smelled!* What a stench. I had cow dung all over me. But, at any rate, I had landed, and I was still very much alive.

NOTE

<sup>1</sup> The 401st Glider Regiment, like the 327th, was a two-battalion regiment. In March 1944 the 2d Battalion of the 401st had been sent to the 82d Airborne Division and never rejoined the 101st. The 1st Battalion, though it officially remained the 1st Battalion of the 401st Regiment during the first months of combat actually functioned as the 3d Battalion of the 327th and is hereafter referred to by that designation. This was made official in the reorganization of the 327th in the spring of 1945, just before the end of the war in Europe. Until the reorganization the Battalion's companies retained their A, B, C, D designations, giving the 327th two sets of companies with these letters.