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**Report date:** 15 July 1944

**Title:** Operations of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division in the Invasion of France

**Author:** Headquarters European Theater of Operations, United States Army War Department Observers Board

**Abstract:** Army Ground Forces Report No. 116 – Exhibit A is a detailed summary of operations of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. This report also notes the division's fighting in the line as an Infantry division for approximately 20 days. Summary information submitted by COL Charles H. Coates, Infantry, was received from COL G.J. Higgins of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.

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Number G-116 Inclosure

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HEADQUARTERS  
EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS  
UNITED STATES ARMY

WD OBSERVERS BOARD

15 July 1944.

SUBJECT: Operations of the 101st Airborne Division in the Invasion of France.  
Army Ground Forces Report No. 116.

Submitted by: Colonel CHARLES H. COATES, Infantry.

1. Forwarded herewith as Exhibit A is detailed summary of operations of the 101st Airborne Division in the Normandy peninsula from D-1 to D+24 inclusive. Annexes showing actual drop points are not available but it is interesting to note the wide dispersion that can normally be expected even in an airborne operation as well executed as this one was. It is also interesting to note that this division fought in the line as an infantry division for approximately 20 days.

2. The source of the above summary is Colonel G. J. Higgins, C/S, 101st Airborne Division.

/s/ Charles H. Coates,  
CHARLES H. COATES,  
Colonel, Infantry,  
WD Observers Board.

1 Incl:  
Exhibit "A".

HEADQUARTERS 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION  
Office of the Division Commander  
A. P. O. 472, U.S. Army

OPERATIONS OF THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION IN  
THE INVASION OF FRANCE

June 5, 1944. (D - 1)

At 0600 orders were received from 21 Army Group, and later confirmed by First U. S. Army, that "D" - day would be June 6, 1944. All units were notified, and the day was spent in last minute checks of personnel and equipment.

By 2130, all parachutists were assembled at their respective parked planes. Final instructions were issued, and the first serials began loading at 2230. General Eisenhower and party visited the various departure airdromes beginning at 1930 and continuing until the last plane departed.

All serials were airborne by 2330, and marshalling of the air fleet began.

June 6, 1944. (D - Day)

In the division headquarters serial number (13) check points were easily identified and the timing remarkably accurate initially. The coast of France was passed over at 0109, and the formation immediately ran into fairly thick fog. Up until this time the air was entirely clear, with a full moon that, while low on the horizon, provided good visibility. Upon entering the fog, the planes took additional interval. For the next few minutes the fog was spotty and some flak was encountered. At about five minutes from the coast, the fog cleared somewhat and some flak was encountered while over Etienneville - Pont L' Abbe'. Almost immediately thereafter another bank of fog or clouds was encountered and caused further dispersion of the planes. It is believed that this combination of flak and fog caused the wide dispersion of planes.

Opposition upon hitting the ground varied with the locality but in general was not strong. The enemy made little or no effort to dispatch strong patrols to destroy the parachutists but stayed in positions and fired indiscriminately. Both small arms and artillery fire was encountered but due to the general confusion had little effect. Machine guns at important road intersections caused some casualties but their local protection was poor and most were eliminated in short order.

Due to the extremely wide dispersion, methodical assembly by units was almost out of the question. Commanders gathered up all personnel in the vicinity, regardless of unit, and proceeded toward objectives. At "H" hour the strength of units on the various objectives was as follows:

Elements of division headquarters, headquarters company, military police platoon, division artillery headquarters and headquarters battery, division

signal company, and about forty officers and men from the 3rd battalion, 501 (a total of about eight-five) proceeded to Pouppeville at daylight and after a sharp skirmish secured the town and Causeway number 1 leading from the beach. Contact was made with elements of the 4th Division (Company G, 8th Infantry) at 1215. The 4th Division passed through and began the attack on St. Marie de Monte, which still contained German troops. The division headquarters echelon then proceeded to Hiesville where the division C.P. had been established by other personnel of the headquarters echelon.

At 1800 no word had been received from the 501st Parachute Infantry, nor the 3rd battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry. The 502 reported scattered elements in the Varreville area with an overall strength of about 500 men. The 506th had gathered some 350 in the vicinity of Culoville. The 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion had assembled less than a hundred, with one howitzer, in the vicinity of Foucarville.

The initial glider landing took place at 0500 with the following results:

The division CP began to function as such at 1800 D-day with initial communication limited to messenger and SCR 300 radio. One wire line had earlier been laid to the 506 Parachute Infantry but due to enemy infiltration could not be maintained.

The second glider echelon arrived at 2100 with the following results:

As of 2400, D-day, the division CP was located at Hiesville with approximately 50% of the division headquarters airborne combat echelon accounted for; the 501, with the exception of about one hundred and twenty officers and men from the 3rd battalion at the division CP unaccounted for and, insofar as could be determined with missions incomplete; the 502 still widely scattered but holding strong points generally north of St. Germain de Varreville with approximately 500 men; the 506 at Culoville with some 350 men, with no word of the 3d battalion; the 377th Field Artillery Battalion with some eighty-five men with the 502; Battery A 81st AT, with five 57mm guns at the division CP and Battery B with six guns at Culoville; remaining glider elements scattered in and around Hiesville, in many cases unable to move because of scattered enemy resistance and no waterborne elements of the division present in or enroute to the assembly areas. The following command and staff personnel of the division were present at the division CP: General Taylor, CG; General McAuliffe, Asst CG; Colonel Higgins, C/S; Colonel Sherburne, Div Arty Comdr; Lt. Col., Pappas, Div Engr; and Major Griswold (injured) Asst G-4. General Pratt had been killed in the first glider landing; Lt. Col., Millener (G-3) Capt. Schweiter (G-2), Major Danahy (G-3) were missing; Major Legere (G-3) had been wounded and evacuated and waterborne personnel, due to arrive about 1400, were unreported. A skeleton staff was formed and plans made to enable the units of the division to assemble and carry out the missions assigned. At 2000 the CO 506 was issued orders to gather all available forces and proceed to the south at dawn in order to protect the south of the corps from enemy forces advancing from Carentan.

June 7, 1944. (D / 1)

At dawn the 506 with an estimated strength of 500 men (groups continued to arrive at the regimental CP throughout the night) advanced to the south. At

Vierville determined enemy resistance was encountered but after sharp fighting the town was won and the enemy retreated on S. Come de Mont. Angoville au Plain was captured about noon but the further advance was held up about a thousand yards to the southwest.

During the early morning hours word was received that the 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, had reached its assembly area just southeast of St. Marie du Mont. Orders were issued to wipe out enemy resistance of unknown strength in the vicinity of Le Groseillier. The battalion was engaged on this mission when the 506th was held up at St. Come de Mont. About 1400 orders were issued to disengage from the enemy at Le Groseillier and proceed on Vierville to re-inforce the effort of the 506. The battalion could not be withdrawn immediately and did not arrive in the battle area until about 1900. At that time it was decided to hold the attack on St. Come du Mont until dawn the next day.

In the meantime, the C.G. 4th Division was contacted and arrangements made for the release of all elements of the 502nd Parachute Infantry and of the 377th Parachute Field Artillery. Orders were issued to the 502 to proceed on and bivouac in the vicinity of Haute Folie. The regiment (estimated strength about 700) arrived about 1500; at 1800 orders were issued to establish a road block in the vicinity of La Croix Pan to prevent any enemy movement from the south and attack at dawn the following morning with the mission of initially preventing any movement of enemy in Houesville from re-inforcing the St. Come de Mont garrison, then destroying the enemy remaining in the Houesville - Les Queenils - Liesville area. On moving out to establish the road block at 2200, the enemy was found to be in some strength at the designated point. The road block was then established about one thousand yards north of La Croix Pan.

During the day the 3rd battalion, of the 501 continued to gain strength as dispersed units reported in. At 1900 this battalion was ordered to proceed to the vicinity of Vierville and attached to the 506 for the assault on St. Come du Mont in the morning. The strength of the battalion was about 280 men at this time.

The 1st Battalion of the 401 and the eight available tanks of company D, 70th Light Tank Battalion, plus Battery A, 81st AT Battalion, were also attached to the 506 for the assault.

At about 2100 the waterborne elements for the division staff arrived at the division CP.

No word of the 501st Parachute Infantry (less the 3d battalion) or the 3d battalion 506th Parachute Infantry.

Additional elements of the division signal company arrived, and communications were fairly well established by 2200.

Several companies of the 327th Glider Infantry arrived in the assembly area southeast of St. Marie de Mont and it was estimated that the regiment would be completely ashore by 0600 the following morning.

The 65th Field Artillery was attached to the division early this morning, and rendered excellent support throughout the day.



One platoon of five tanks was dispatched to the 506 from the 4th Division, and participated in the attack on Vierville.

June 8, 1944. (D / 2)

The attack on St. Come du Mont was launched at dawn and very severe hedge and street fighting took place throughout the day. The town was finally taken and all resistance eliminated by 2000. The 506 was ordered to bivouac in the vicinity of St. Come du Mont with strong protecting forces as far south as the main bridge over the Douve River. This bridge had been blown by a detachment of retreating Germans during the course of the day.

The 502 likewise ran into stiff resistance at Houesville and it was not until late in the afternoon that the enemy was eliminated in this sector. This regiment was ordered to bivouac in the vicinity of Houesville with strong forces to protect the west and north flank of the division sector.

At about 1000 the first contact was established with the 501st Parachute Infantry and elements of the 3d battalion, 506. These units had been holding out in the flooded areas just north of the Douve River, east of Carentan. Colonel Johnson and some 125 men were relieved by elements of the 506 near La Bourquette; other elements were relieved by the 327th late the same afternoon.

By 2200 the division had accomplished all assigned initial missions and was disposed occupying defensive sectors as follows: The 502 from Chef du Pont on the north to just south of Les Quesnils; the 506 from Les Quesnils along the Douve River to La Bourquette, inclusive; the 327th from La Bourquette to the mouth of the Douve. The 501 was assigned in division reserve in the vicinity of Vierville.

June 9, 1944. (D / 3)

Defensive positions were consolidated and orders were issued for the 327th to effect a river crossing at 0100 the following morning to reach the high ground around Brevands. Corps engineers brought up assault boats by concealed routes during the day and all plans were completed by 1800.

In the meantime, engineer reconnaissance indicated that an advance on Carentan from the north along the main highway might be possible. A temporary footbridge was constructed during the day and the 3d battalion, 502 was ordered to move down and attempt a crossing by infiltration. The 3d battalion moved out under cover of darkness and was prepared to effect a crossing at 0300 the next morning. The approach was discovered by the enemy prior to midnight and considerable artillery, mortar and machine gun fire was encountered in moving into position. Due to the heavy fire the crossing was cancelled at 0200.

June 10, 1944. (D / 4)

The 327th began the river crossing as of 0145, the actual crossing being preceded by a heavy artillery and mortar barrage, including nine 4.2 chemical mortars. This barrage proved extremely effective and permitted all three battalions to complete the crossing by 0600. At about 0300 the division commander asked the corps engineer to begin the construction of a floating bridge.

Casualties were very light. Units of the first battalion proceeded east through Brevands and at 1345 made contact with the reconnaissance troop of the 2nd Armored Division and Company "K", 175th Infantry (29 Division) just west of the Vire River. With this meeting contact was established between the V Corps and the VII Corps and the allied beachhead now extended along the coastline from Rivabella on the east to Ozeville on the west.

The 327th less the first battalion proceeded south and west on Carentan and after brushing aside slight enemy resistance was held up, at 1800, by strong enemy resistance 500 yards east of the bridge crossing the canal on the eastern edge of Carentan. The two bridges at this point had been destroyed by the Germans. Colonel Harper assumed command vice Colonel Wear relieved.

At 1400 the 3d battalion of the 502 resumed the attack on Carentan from the north by infiltrating across the four bridges just north of the town. Although under heavy rifle, machine gun, mortar and artillery fire the battalion crossed one entire company by darkness. The remainder of the 502 was ordered to assembly positions just south of St. Come du Mont, prepared to renew the crossing at daylight.

The 501st Parachute Infantry was ordered to take over the defensive sector previously assigned the 502.

No changes were made in the dispositions of the 506 and this regiment remained in place after being passed through by the 502.

June 11, 1944. (D + 5)

At daylight the 502 resumed the attack and continued to infiltrate personnel across the bridges. By 0730 all the 3d battalion was over and elements of the 1st battalion began to cross. By 1030 this battalion was completely across and the 2d battalion began their forward movement. Many casualties were suffered at this time due to well-placed enemy fire from hidden pill-boxes, cellars, bunkers and other defensive works that were so placed as to bring effective fire on the one route of approach and yet so well concealed that it was almost impossible to locate them.

At 0600 the 1st battalion, 401, crossed the canal east of the city in the vicinity of the lock north of St. Hilaire and was advancing slowly on the city along the Bassin a Flot.

At 1115 it was decided to send two German prisoners into the city, under a flag of truce, to demand the surrender of the city by the commanding officer. All firing was suspended from 1115 to 1215. At that time the two prisoners returned with the information that the commanding officer would not surrender. Firing was resumed immediately but progress by the 502 was very slow due to the heavy fire it was receiving from the south and west.

The 1st battalion of the 401 was held up by strong enemy resistance at a point about 100 yards from the southern edge of the Bassin a Flot. The 2d battalion of the 327th was still in position some 500 yards east of the canal along the main road leading into the city and the 1st battalion was protecting to the south.

At about 1500 it was decided to move the 501 across the engineer bridge now completed near Brevands to a position on the left flank of the 327, cross the canal under cover of darkness, attack due west and isolate the town on the south. Arrangements were made to secure rubber boats and other necessary equipment and the 501 was moved to assembly positions just south of the 327th. General McAuliffe was placed in command of the task force attacking Carentan from the east. At about 2000 a message was received from the 502 that the enemy appeared to be withdrawing. The 506 was immediately ordered to pass through the 502 and advance to the south in order to sieze Hill 30 west of the city. The movement was successfully carried out and by 2300 the 506 was in control of Hill 30. Orders were issued to remain in place until dawn, then advance on the city from the west. The 502 was then withdrawn to division reserve in the vicinity of St. Come du Mont.

June 12, 1944. (D / 6)

At 0030 the 501 began the crossing of the canal east of the city. The crossing was completely successful and at 0740 contact was made with the 506 south and west of the city. This completed the encirclement.

At dawn the 401 resumed the attack from the Bassin a Flot and by 0730 was well within the city. Mopping up continued until 1000 at which time the city was under control and with the exception of a few snipers all enemy had been eliminated.

Immediately following contact at 0740 the 501 and 506 were ordered to proceed to the west and southwest in order to establish defensive positions to hold the town. The 327th was ordered to proceed to the south and take up a defensive position protecting the left of the division sector, east of Carentan.

The 501 and 506 reorganized and proceeded to the southwest and west along the main roads in their respective assigned sectors. Very stiff resistance was encountered and severe fighting ensued throughout the day. Losses in the 2d battalion 506 on the extreme right or north flank were high. A counter-attack by the Germans about 1800 forced them to withdraw some distance. The attack was stopped only when the final reserve element of the regiment was placed in the line.

The 501 also met stiff resistance and was held up after advancing some 1,000 yards from Hill 30. Company "D", 70th Light Tank Battalion was attached to the 501 and some further progress was made.

By dark both regiments were heavily engaged with the enemy and dug in for the night.

The forward echelon of the division CP was established in the vicinity of the Bassin a Flot as of 2100.

The 3d Battalion of the 506, which had been held north of the Douve in division reserve was released to the 506 as of 2200 and joined its parent unit immediately.

Preparations were made to motorize the second battalion of the 502 in the vicinity of St. Come du Mont and the battalion was alerted to move out on an hour's notice.

The situation at 2200 was critical with enemy pressure on the south, southwest and west continuing until well after dark.

June 13, 1944. (D-7)

Early in the morning the attack was resumed by both the 501st and the 506 committing their reserve battalions. The 501 was immediately pinned down by heavy small arms fire but managed to hold its position. The 506 was again struck by a heavy enemy counter-attack and forced back to within 500 yards of the west edge of the city.

The 2nd battalion 502 was ordered forward and went into position on the right flank of the 506. This halted the counter-attack and enabled the 506 to regain some of its lost ground.

The enemy counter-attack on the north flank was characterized by strong mortar and artillery support and tremendous automatic weapon fire. (It was afterwards learned that a high percentage of the attacking force carried light machine guns and machine pistols).

At 1030 elements of Combat Command A, 2nd Armored Division, under command of General Rose were reported to be in the 327th Infantry sector. An urgent request to corps, relayed to army, resulted in this combat command being attached to the division.

Reconnaissance was immediately begun and an attack in the 506 sector set for 1400. This attack jumped off on time and by 1715 the objective of the 506 was reached.

The 502, less the 3d battalion, left to guard the northern part of the division sector in the vicinity of St. Come du Mont but with the 1st battalion 401 attached passed through the 506, followed the tanks and after bitter fighting attained the objective initially assigned the 506. The regiment began defensive preparations immediately and by 2200 were well dug in.

The 501 with the assistance of the tanks launched an attack in its sector at 1815. Its initially assigned objective was taken at 2100 and this regiment likewise established a defensive position and dug in.

The 506 was withdrawn to division reserve in the vicinity of Bassin a Flot at 2300.

The 327th maintained its defensive position along the railroad east of Carentan.

June 14, 1944. (D-8)

Mopping up of scattered enemy resistance began at daylight and continued throughout the day. By darkness only a few snipers remained in the sector.

Defensive preparations went forward rapidly and strong points were wired in as quickly as materials could be provided. An anti-tank mine belt was established along all likely tank approaches and every effort made to provide a strong defense.

At 1600 contact was established with the 508th Parachute Infantry of the 82nd Airborne Division at Baupre. The 508 had crossed the Douve early in the morning and now held a defensive line through Beuzeville la Bastille - Cretteville - Coigny - Baupre. This relieved a possible threat to the western flank in the northern sector of the division and accordingly the 3rd battalion of the 502 was moved down to join its regiment.

The 327th maintained its defensive sector along the railway from Carentan on the right to the crossing of the Vire River on the left where it had established contact with elements of the 29th Division. The 1st battalion of the 401 was withdrawn from attachment to the 502 when its 3rd battalion joined and, with the exception of one company dispatched to the division service areas in the vicinity of Hiesville, went into division reserve northeast of Carentan.

The 506th Parachute Infantry was ordered to prepare a strong reserve defensive position just west and southwest of Carentan and spent the day organizing this position.

No enemy action other than patrolling took place during the day or early evening.

June 15, 1944. (D + 9)

At daylight the 120th Infantry Regiment of the 30th Division (XIX Corps) began to pass through the 327th Infantry. By 2200 relief of the regiment had been completed and the 327th was ordered to assemble in a bivouac area northeast of St. Hilaire. The XIX Corps assumed responsibility for protection of the beachhead to the corps boundary just east of Carentan.

As of 1200 this date the 101st Airborne Division was relieved from assignment to the VII Corps and assigned to the VIII Corps.

All units continued to improve defensive positions and plans were made to strengthen the defenses to the southwest by placing the 327th in the line as soon as it could be assembled and reorganized after relief by the 120th Infantry.

Combat Command "A" was assigned the mission of reconnoitering to the south and southwest. Reconnaissance elements pushed forward at 1100 and after proceeding some 1500 to 2000 yards were held up by artillery and AT guns. While maneuvering in the area strong enemy infantry units infiltrated to their rear and a company of medium tanks, supported by one company of infantry, was dispatched to permit their withdrawal. Relief was accomplished by 1600 with few losses of personnel or materiel.

At 1700 air reconnaissance reported a strong armored force approaching Carentan from Periers. Plans were made to meet this expected attack by pushing the armored elements well forward and by putting two battalions of the 506 in their prepared defensive positions just west and southwest of Carentan. The

expected attack did not materialize and other than patrolling no further enemy action took place.

June 16, 1944. (D / 10)

The 327th was ordered to take over a defensive sector between the 502 and the 501 thus reducing the front to be held by each unit. The 1st battalion 401 was released to the 327th and by 2100 the 327th was established in the front line.

Defensive work continued and by 1500 a continuous anti-tank mine belt was in place along the entire division sector.

June 17, 1944. (D / 11)

At 0800 plans were made to push the outpost line some distance forward on the left in order to improve observation to the south and southwest. Limited objective attacks were planned by the 501 and 327. The attacks jumped off at 1825 and very little opposition was encountered. By 2200 the objectives had been attained and the new outpost line established.

At 0830 orders were received relieving all but one battalion of Combat Command "A" from attachment to the division.

Also on this date the following units were released from attachment: Company "D", 70th Light Tank Battalion; Troop "C", 4th Cavalry; 1st Platoon, Company "B", 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion; the 238th Engineer Battalion.

June 18, 1944. (D / 12)

No action other than patrolling took place on this date.

June 19, 1944. (D / 13)

No change. Intermittent mortar and artillery fire was received, several casualties resulted.

June 20, 1944. (D / 14)

No Change.

June 21, 1944. (D / 15)

The 506 relieved the 501 in the front lines and the 501 went into reserve in the vicinity of Bassin a Flot.

June 22, 1944. (D / 16)

No change.

June 23, 1944. (D / 17)

No change.

June 24, 1944. (D / 18)

No change.

June 25, 1944. (D / 19)

No change.

June 26, 1944. (D / 20)

Orders were received from the Commanding General, VIII Corps, at 1330 that one combat team of the division would move to vicinity of St. Sauveur Le Vicomte and take up a defensive position astride the main road leading south of St. Sauveur Le Vicomte through Prairie Marecageuses. The remainder of the division would follow the next day and the entire division would take up a tactical bivouac position generally west of St. Sauveur Le Vicomte.

Accordingly, the 501st Parachute Infantry with the 907th Glider Field Artillery and Battery C, 81st AA Battalion attached, moved out by truck at 1800 and by dark had taken up the assigned defensive position. Orders were issued to move the remainder of the division as soon as released by the 83rd Infantry Division. Command and staff personnel of the 83d reported in at the division CP at about 1900 and plans were made for the relief.

June 27, 1944. (D / 21)

During darkness and early morning, 4 infantry battalions and two field artillery battalions of the 83d Infantry Division moved in to the rear of the division defensive area. During the day relief was effected by exchange of both divisions. Movement was made by motor in the vicinity of Carentan to the vicinity of St. Sauveur Le Vicomte. The 2d Battalion of the 502d Parachute Infantry remained in position as a mobile reserve with the 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Infantry. All other units of the division cleared the Carentan area by 2330. Division CP closed at Carentan at 2100 and opened at St. Sauveur Le Vicomte at the same hour.

June 28, 1944. (D / 22)

The 2d Battalion, 502d Parachute Infantry joined the division as of 0930 and except for the rear echelon which remained at Heisville all elements of the division were closed in the St. Sauveur Le Vicomte area at that time.

At about 1200 orders were received from army that the 101st Airborne Division would move to bivouac area about 5 (five) miles south of Cherbourg and would be responsible for the defense of the Cherbourg Peninsula north of an east-west line through Montebourg. Reconnaissance elements were dispatched to the Cherbourg area and reconnaissance conducted during the day. Orders were issued at 2100 for the movement by motor of all elements of the division.

June 29, 1944. (D / 23)

Elements of the division began the movement to the Cherbourg bivouac area at 0815. Successive elements moved throughout the day and with the exception

of the rear echelon all elements of the division closed in the Cherbourg area by 2100.

Orders were issued assigning sectors of responsibility to the various units and some reconnaissance was carried out.

June 30, 1944. (D / 24)

Detailed reconnaissance by all units began at 0600 and continued throughout the day. Continuous patrolling was carried out in all areas. Beginning at 1000 the rear echelon elements moved to the division bivouac area. By 1800 on this date all elements of the division were assembled, for the first time since D-day, in the Cherbourg area.