

US GLIDER INFANTRY IN WORLD WAR II

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The US Army began to form airborne units in 1940, with the first parachute infantry battalion activated in Sep 1940. The initial unit intended to operate via gliders was the 550th Airborne Infantry Battalion, activated 1 Jul 1941 at Howard Field, Panama Canal Zone. The next glider unit was the 88th Airborne Infantry Battalion, activated 10 Oct 1941 at Ft. Benning, GA, under control of the Chief of Infantry. By the end of 1941 the Army had four parachute and two glider infantry battalions. These were all placed under control of the new Airborne Command, activated 21 Mar 1942.¹ While parachute troops drew jump pay, glider infantry were considered “normal” troops and received no extra pay.

By the time Airborne Command was formed, the Army had decided that airborne units would be increased to regiment size. The 88th Airborne Infantry Battalion was reorganized and redesignated 15 Jun 1942 as the 88th Infantry (only the 1st Battalion was filled with personnel). The remainder of the regiment was gradually formed and it was finally redesignated 24 Sep 1942 as 88th Glider Infantry.

Forming Airborne Divisions

Before the 88th Infantry added “glider” to its designation, the Army had formed two airborne divisions from other resources. These were to be small formations (9,000 men or less; the infantry division at that time was about 15,500 men) with both parachute and glider elements. For a variety of reasons, the 82nd Division at Camp Claiborne, LA was selected to form the basis for the two new airborne divisions; it would become the 82nd Airborne Division and the other formation would be designated 101st Airborne Division.²

The 82nd Division was reorganized and redesignated 15 Aug 1942 as the 82nd Airborne Division. The division had three infantry regiments. The 325th and 326th Infantry were redesignated 15 Aug 1942 as the 325th and 326th Glider Infantry, assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division. The 327th Infantry was relieved from the 82nd Division, redesignated as 327th Glider Infantry, and assigned to the 101st Airborne Division on 15 Aug 1942. The 401st Infantry (an element of the 101st Division) was redesignated 15 Aug 1942 as 401st Glider Infantry, assigned to the 101st Airborne Division, and activated at Camp Claiborne.³ Each division also received a parachute regiment, and other reorganizations and activations took place to create the two airborne divisions.

Tables of organization and equipment (TOEs) for the airborne division were not finalized until 15 Oct 1942. These were small divisions, with only 8,505 men. Nominally triangular in structure, they had only seven instead of nine infantry battalions (three in the parachute regiment and two in each of the two glider regiments). Division artillery was likewise divided by type, with one parachute field artillery battalion and two glider field artillery battalions; the parachute battalion had three batteries and the glider battalions had two batteries each.

The 82nd Airborne Division moved from Ft Claiborne, LA to Ft Bragg, NC in Oct 1942, where it remained until it was ready to move overseas the next year. The 101st Airborne Division had moved from Claiborne to Bragg late the month before; it would participate in Second Army maneuvers in 1943 before preparing to move overseas as well.

¹ Headquarters, Provisional Parachute Group had been activated 10 Mar 1941 at Ft. Benning to control the organization of new units. This became Airborne Command 23 Mar 1942. The mission of Airborne Command was to “provide properly trained airborne units for offensive.” (This mission statement is shown as printed in *The Army Almanac*, but the word “operations” appears to be missing at the end of the sentence. On 1 Mar 1944 it was redesignated as the Airborne Center.

² As set out by Wilson, the selected division could not be from the Regular Army or National Guard and should be stationed where air facilities and flying conditions were favorable. The 82nd Division was part of the Organized Reserves. The 101st Division was also in the Organized Reserves, but not in active service. For whatever reason, it was disbanded 15 Aug 1942 in the Organized Reserves and then concurrently reconstituted in the Army of the United States as 101st Airborne Division and activated at Camp Claiborne. The “Army of the United States” was the designation for components of the Army not forming part of the Regular Army, National Guard, or Organized Reserves.

³ This meant that these regiments were designated as glider infantry a month before the original regiment (88th) was given that designation.

Leaving aside the TOE for the moment (and ignoring the fact that no airborne division actually went into combat with exactly this organization), the Army constituted four more airborne divisions.⁴ Rather than taking on existing division designation, these were given numbers in a gap in the intended designations of infantry divisions. All were constituted in the Army of the United States and each was to include two glider infantry regiments.

Airborne Division	Constituted	Glider Infantry Regiments	
11 th	12 Nov 1942	187 th	188 th
13 th	26 Dec 1942	189 th	190 th
15 th	18 Jan 1943	191 st	192 nd
17 th	16 Dec 1942	193 rd	194 th

As with the divisions, the glider infantry regiments were given numbers in their own series, rather than assuming any existing numbers. Only three of these divisions would actually be formed.

The first of the new airborne divisions to be activated was the 11th, on 25 Feb 1943 at Camp Mackall, NC. It participated in Dec 1943 maneuvers and then prepared for overseas service. Next to be formed was the 17th Airborne Division, activated 15 Apr 1943 at Camp Mackall. It was in maneuvers in Dec 1943-Jan 1944 and then in Feb 1944. The last division actually formed, 13th Airborne Division, was activated 13 Aug 1943 at Ft Bragg. It moved to Camp Mackall in Jan 1944. By the autumn of 1943, the Army abandoned earlier plans for large numbers of divisions and froze the number at the 90 already active. This meant that the 15th Airborne Division would not be formed.

The three new airborne divisions were activated with their assigned glider infantry regiments. However, by that point the Army had two left-over regiments. The 88th Glider Infantry—the original such regiment—moved from place to place while the airborne divisions were forming.⁵ On 3 Dec 1943 it was assigned to the 13th Airborne Division. The 326th Glider Infantry—officially assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division, had been left behind when the division moved overseas. On 8 Dec 1943 it was relieved from the 82nd and assigned to the 13th Airborne Division. With these new regiments assigned, the 189th and 190th Glider Infantry were disbanded 8 Dec and 4 Dec 1943, respectively.

The initial organization of the glider regiments was as follows:⁶

Regt Hq & Hq Co	145 personnel	
Chaplain	1 person	
Med Det	73 personnel	
Service Co	93 personnel	
Glider Inf Bn (x2)	658 personnel	
Hq & Serv Co		202 personnel
Glider Rifle Co (x3)		149 personnel
Aggregate personnel	1628	

Personnel in the regimental headquarters and headquarters company were primarily armed with carbines (5 officers had pistols and 21 privates had rifles). The only heavy weapons were the 8 37mm AT guns (4 each in two platoons). There were also a total of 15 bazookas. The company had no vehicles of any kind, only 12 hand carts (4 in the communications platoon and 4 in each AT platoon).

⁴ In the US Army, to constitute a unit is to place the designation on the official rolls of the Army. Constitution often (but not always) occurs in advance of actual activation or organization of the unit.

⁵ Sometime during 1943 it came under the control of 1st Airborne Infantry Brigade.

⁶ This is actually the Aug 1944 TOE. However, as noted in the source document, it differed little from the Oct 1942 TOE (23 more personnel: 17 officers, 4 warrant officers, and 2 enlisted men). The regiment had 81 bazookas, a weapon not available in 1942 but clearly issued well before summer 1944.

The service company were also mainly armed with carbines, along with three .50 caliber machine guns (mounted on trucks) and 10 bazookas. Virtually all of the regiment's motor vehicles were here: 21 jeeps, a single ¾-ton truck, and 10 2½-ton trucks. The original 29 bicycles were later replaced with motor scooters. The only other vehicles in the regiment were the two ¾-ton trucks and 3 jeeps in the medical detachment.

The glider infantry battalion's headquarters and service company also mostly had carbines as personal weapons. It included a machine gun platoon (4 .30-caliber machine guns and 4 hand carts) and a mortar platoon (6 81mm mortars and 6 hand carts). Other weapons included 10 bazookas. The battalion headquarters platoon also had 4 hand carts.

Just as the glider infantry regiment had two battalions instead of three, the glider rifle company had two rifle platoons instead of the three standard in rifle companies. Each platoon (three squads) had three BARs and rifles; the platoon commander carried a carbine. The weapons platoon had 2 .30-caliber machine guns and 4 60mm mortars; most of its personnel had carbines. The platoon also had 6 hand carts. Company headquarters had 6 bazookas and 6 submachine guns that could be distributed as needed, in addition to the rifles and carbines for its own personnel. Company headquarters also had two hand carts.

In summary, the glider infantry regiment was a small (two-battalion) unit with very little organic transport. Even its two rifle battalions were smaller than their non-airborne counterparts, with 6 instead of 9 platoons. That gave the regiment 36 rifle squads versus a conventional infantry regiment's 54 (for two battalions) or the actual 81 (for three battalions). Since the parachute infantry regiments were also small (albeit with three battalions), the US airborne divisions were fairly weak units.

Glider Infantry in Combat

The 82nd Airborne Division moved to North Africa Apr-May 1943. Because of the shortage of gliders and resultant training problems, the 326th Glider Infantry was left behind and the division added a second parachute regiment. It was committed to combat during the invasion of Sicily, in Jul 1943. While parachute units were dropped the first and second days, the 325th Glider Infantry came in by sea. Following the end of operations there, the division returned to North Africa. For the invasion at Salerno in Sep 1943 the 82nd again landed some elements by parachute while the 325th Glider Infantry came in by sea. The division remained in combat until Nov 1943, when it was redeployed via North Africa to the United Kingdom.

The 101st Airborne Division left the US for the United Kingdom Sep 1943. Unlike the 82nd, it did take both of its glider regiments with it. However, once the two airborne divisions were together, the problems of a two-battalion glider regiment were solved by effectively breaking up the 401st Glider Infantry. Its 1st Battalion was attached to the 327th Glider Infantry, serving as the 3rd Battalion of that regiment, and its 2nd Battalion was attached to the 325th Glider Infantry, serving as that regiment's 3rd Battalion.⁷ With attached regiments, both divisions now had three parachute regiments and one glider regiment.

Both divisions air-landed at Normandy 6 Jun 1944; once again, the airborne assault was restricted to the parachute regiments. The 325th Glider Infantry (82nd Airborne Division) was flown in the night of 6 Jun and early morning of 7 Jun 1944. The 327th Glider Infantry (101st Airborne Division) was brought in by sea and landed 7 Jun 1944. The divisions continued in ground combat until they were withdrawn to England 13 Jul 1944.

The next airborne operation in Europe was Operation MARKET-GARDEN: the attempt to lay an "airborne carpet" behind the Germans opposite 21st Army Group and secure crossings over the lower Rhine. (MARKET was the airborne operation and GARDEN was the ground attack.) Closest to the front lines, the 101st Airborne Division was to secure crossings at Veghel and Zon, north of Eindhoven. The 82nd Airborne Division was next to the north, slated to land in the Nijmegen-Grave. (The British 1st Airborne Division

⁷ This did not sit well with the 101st, since the 401st Glider Infantry was one of "its" regiments while the 327th had come from the 82nd. However, the 82nd and its regiments all had campaign participation credit for World War I and thus were favored over newer units with no history.

was the farthest north, to drop at Arnhem, the well-known “bridge too far.”) The airborne assault began 17 Sep 1944. For both divisions, the assault wave was entirely composed of the parachute regiments. (By contrast, the glider-borne brigade of the British 1st Airborne Division was in the first wave.) The two glider infantry regiments and other troops were flown in on 18 Sep 1944; in the area of 82nd Airborne Division especially, some intended landing zones were still the scene of active fighting. The two divisions remained involved in ground fighting until 11 Nov 1944 (82nd) and 28 Nov 1944 (101st), when they were withdrawn to France for rehabilitation.

The Army’s very first glider unit, the 550th Airborne Infantry Battalion had moved from Panama to the US in 1943 and was sent to Italy in May 1944. In Jul 1944 it was joined with a variety of other airborne (mainly parachute) units as the Provisional Seventh Army Airborne Division, soon renamed as the 1st Airborne Task Force. This force (including the glider infantry) was dropped 15 Aug 1944 as part of the invasion of Southern France. Following the landings, 1st Airborne Task Force moved toward the Alps and assumed defensive positions on the Franco-Italian border. It was discontinued 23 Nov 1944.

The 17th Airborne Division moved from the US to England in Aug 1944.

In response to the German offensive in the Ardennes, beginning 16 Dec 1944, the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions were moved by truck from Reims to the front on 17 Dec 1944 (the 82nd to the Vielsam-St. Vith area and the 101st to Bastogne); the 17th Airborne Division was flown to Reims on 23-25 Dec 1944 and then moved via ground transport to the Ardennes area on the 25th; the division first took up positions along the Meuse River. All three divisions remained in the line until Feb 1945; the 82nd was relieved 4 Feb, the 17th on 10 Feb and the 101st not until 25 Feb. Upon relief, all returned to France, where the 13th Airborne Division had landed on 6 Feb 1945.

The original TOE for airborne divisions was clearly unsatisfactory, and the first three engaged in combat in Europe had attached parachute regiments for extra strength. As already noted, the 82nd and 101st had also turned their glider regiments into three-battalion units. A new TOE for the airborne division was published (an ironic date indeed) on 16 Dec 1944. These divisions went from about 8,500 men to 12,979. The division would have two parachute infantry regiments and a glider infantry regiment, all of three battalions. The supporting artillery was now two parachute and two glider field artillery battalions.

The revised glider infantry regiment was a much larger and stronger force, with a TOE strength of 3,114. (The prior glider regiment had been just over 1,600 men; the regiment in a normal infantry division had a strength of 3,258 men.) The major difference between normal and glider infantry regiments was the lack of a cannon company in the latter. The new regiment had the following strength:

Regt HQ & HQ Co	104 personnel
Chaplain	3 personnel
Medical Det	133 personnel
Service Co	115 personnel
AT Co	170 personnel
Glider Inf Bn (x3)	863 personnel
Hq Co	124 personnel
Rifle Co (x3)	199 personnel
Weapons Co	160 personnel

The increase in vehicles and weapons was as significant as the personnel increases. The regiment’s headquarters and headquarters company (which had no vehicles of any kind in 1942) was now given 19 jeeps, a ¾-ton truck and a 2½-ton truck. Personal weapons now included more rifles than carbines, and there was a .50-caliber machine gun and 4 bazookas as well. Each of the three chaplains had his own jeep, and the medical detachment had 7 jeeps along with a 2½-ton truck. The service company was now flush

with vehicles: 8 jeeps, 2 ¾-ton trucks, and 28 2½-ton trucks. Here, too, rifles now outnumbered carbines, and the company also had 8 .50-caliber machine guns (all truck mounted) and 8 bazookas.⁸

The antitank company was a new addition to the regiment. (Two antitank platoons had been part of the regiment's headquarters and headquarters company in the old organization.) The company had 9 57mm antitank guns and 9 bazookas, along with a truck-mounted .50-caliber machine gun. Vehicles included 32 jeeps (9 used to tow antitank guns) and a single 1½-ton truck. The company was divided into three antitank platoons and a mine platoon.

The new glider infantry battalion was now organized much like its normal counterpart. Headquarters and headquarters company (124 personnel) had 3 57mm antitank guns (in an antitank platoon), along with 6 .30-caliber machineguns and 5 bazookas (3 of which were in the antitank platoon). Personal weapons were about equally divided between carbines and rifles. The company had a single ¾-ton truck and 17 jeeps (3 for towing the antitank guns). The weapons company (160 personnel), a new unit, had a mortar platoon (6 81mm mortars) and two machine gun platoons (4 .30-caliber machine guns each). Other heavy weapons included a .50-caliber machine gun and 6 bazookas. The company had 19 jeeps. Carbines were much more plentiful than rifles in this company. The rifle company (199 men) now had the standard three rifle platoons along with a weapons platoon. The latter had 3 60mm mortars, 1 .50-caliber and 2 .30-caliber machineguns. Each platoon had 3 BARs (one per squad) and company headquarters had 6 additional BARs as extra weapons, along with the spare 6 submachine guns. There were 2 jeeps in the company, both in the weapons platoon.

The new airborne division, and especially the new glider infantry regiment, was a much stronger and improved organization. The four divisions in Europe reorganized in Mar 1945. The reduction to a single regiment in each division led to the elimination of some existing glider infantry units. The 401st Glider Infantry was disbanded 1 Mar 1945 in France, with its two battalions used to form official 3rd Battalions in the 325th and 327th Glider Infantry.⁹ The 88th Glider Infantry was disbanded 1 Mar 1945 in France as well, losing out to the 326th Glider Infantry as the survivor in 13th Airborne Division. In 17th Airborne Division, the 193rd Glider Infantry was disbanded 1 Mar 1945 in Belgium with the 194th as the survivor. Finally, the 550th Airborne Infantry Battalion was disbanded 1 Mar 1945 in France as well. This meant that both of the original glider infantry units disappeared.

The last airborne operation in Europe was Operation VARSITY on 24 Mar 1945, with the 17th Airborne Division and the British 6th Airborne Division dropping across the Rhine River near Wesel. For a change, the parachute and glider regiments were in the same lift. The division remained in combat until 12 Apr 1945. The 101st Airborne Division moved to the Ruhr area 31 Mar 1945 and took over a sector of the front on 4 Apr 1945, advancing later into south Germany. The 82nd Airborne Division returned to the front 4 Apr 1945 and was engaged until hostilities ceased on 7 May 1945. 13th Airborne Division never served in combat, although it did serve as a source of parachute-trained replacements for the other three divisions.

With the end of war in Europe, 13th Airborne Division returned to the US Aug 1945 and began planning for movement to the Pacific theater. This proved unnecessary with the end of the war the next month. It was inactivated 25 Feb 1946 at Ft Bragg, NC. 17th Airborne Division returned to the US Sep 1945 and was inactivated 16 Sep 1945 at Camp Myles Standish, MA. The 101st Airborne Division was inactivated in France 30 Nov 1945. The 82nd Airborne Division, after occupation duties in Germany, returned to the US Jan 1946, moving to Ft Bragg.

It remains now to turn to the 11th Airborne Division. It moved from the US to New Guinea in May 1944, serving in ground operations there. In Jan 1945 it was withdrawn to prepare for operations in the Philippines. It ceased active operations late Jun 1945. At that point it began reorganization under the Dec 1944 TOE. 188th Glider Infantry was redesignated 4 Jul 1945 as 188th Parachute Infantry. Obviously,

⁸ It seems unlikely that all of these 2 ½-ton trucks were ever intended to be brought in by glider; more likely they would arrive when ground contact was made with the division.

⁹ On 6 Apr 1945 the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 401st Glider Infantry, were reconstituted and consolidated with the 3rd Battalion, 327th Glider Infantry and 3rd Battalion, 325th Glider Infantry, respectively. This allowed those units to assume the campaign participation credits of the battalions from the 401st.

some of its assets were used to form the 3rd Battalion of 187th Glider Infantry, and it drew trained parachutists from the separate 541st Parachute Infantry (which would be disbanded Aug 1945 in Luzon).

11th Airborne Division moved to Okinawa Aug 1945 and then moved to Japan for occupation duties.

With the end of World War II, the Army had two surviving glider infantry regiments: the 325th in the 82nd Airborne Division and the 187th in 11th Airborne Division. Post-war studies of the airborne division suggested a unit with three identical regiments and, overall, about the same size as the normal infantry division. A new organization was tested by the 82nd Airborne Division beginning in Jan 1948, although a final decision was not made until May 1949 and an official new TOE only appeared 1 Apr 1950. However, most training with gliders ended by 1948, and the new (parachute-qualified) regiments would all be designated as airborne. The 325th was reorganized and redesignated 15 Dec 1947 as the 325th Infantry. (On 15 Dec 1948 it would be reorganized and redesignated as the 325th Airborne Infantry.) The 187th retained the glider designation until 30 Jun 1949, when it was redesignated as the 187th Airborne Infantry.

The inactive 194th Glider Infantry of 17th Airborne Division was redesignated 18 Jun 1948 as 514th Airborne Infantry and would have a brief existence under that designation as a training unit. The inactive 327th Glider Infantry was also redesignated 18 Jun 1948, as the 516th Airborne Infantry. It also served in a training role (under 101st Airborne Division) until 1954. On 1 Jul 1956 it returned to its former number, redesignated as 327th Airborne Infantry. The 326th Glider Infantry simply remained inactive on the rolls of the Army.¹⁰

Campaign Participation Credit

88 th Glider Infantry	Central Europe
187 th Glider Infantry	New Guinea, Leyte, Luzon (with arrowhead)
188 th Glider Infantry	New Guinea, Leyte, Luzon (with arrowhead)
189 th Glider Infantry	None
190 th Glider Infantry	None
193 rd Glider Infantry	Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, Central Europe
194 th Glider Infantry	Rhineland (with arrowhead), Ardennes-Alsace, Central Europe
325 th Glider Infantry	Sicily, Naples-Foggia, Normandy (with arrowhead), Rhineland (with arrowhead), Ardennes-Alsace, Central Europe
326 th Glider Infantry	Central Europe
327 th Glider Infantry	Normandy (with arrowhead), Rhineland (with arrowhead), Ardennes-Alsace, Central Europe
401 st Glider Infantry	Normandy (with arrowhead), Rhineland (with arrowhead), Ardennes-Alsace, Central Europe
550 th Airborne Infantry Battalion	Rome-Arno, Southern France, Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace

¹⁰ At least as late as Sawicki's volume in 1981, it had not been disbanded.

SOURCES

The TOE details came from

“The U.S. Army Glider Infantry Regiment Part I,” The Tactical Notebook (Institute for Tactical Education, Quantico, VA, September 1992)

“The U.S. Army Glider Infantry Regiment Part II,” The Tactical Notebook (Institute for Tactical Education, Quantico, VA, October 1992)

Most of the remaining information was drawn from the following works, although I did scan some other material for information on combat operations.

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