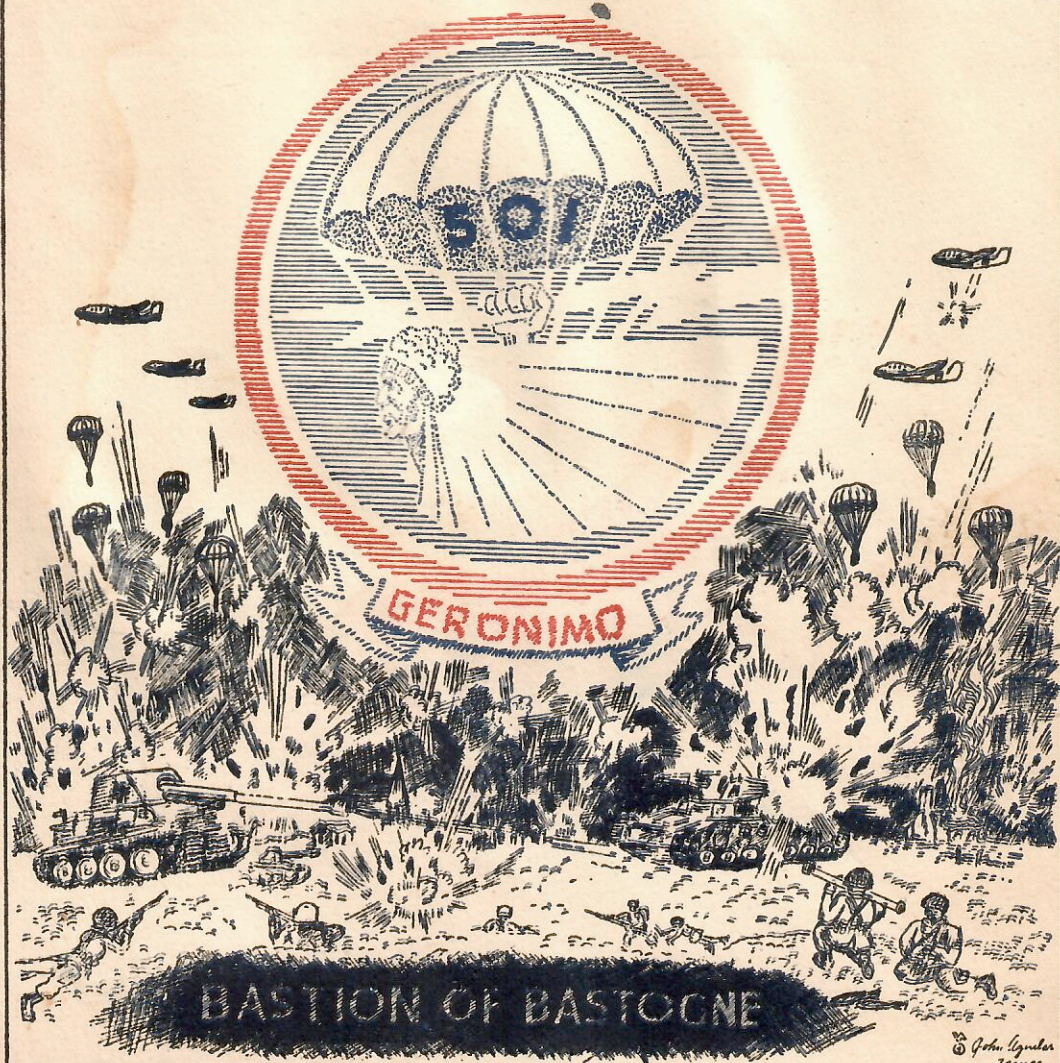


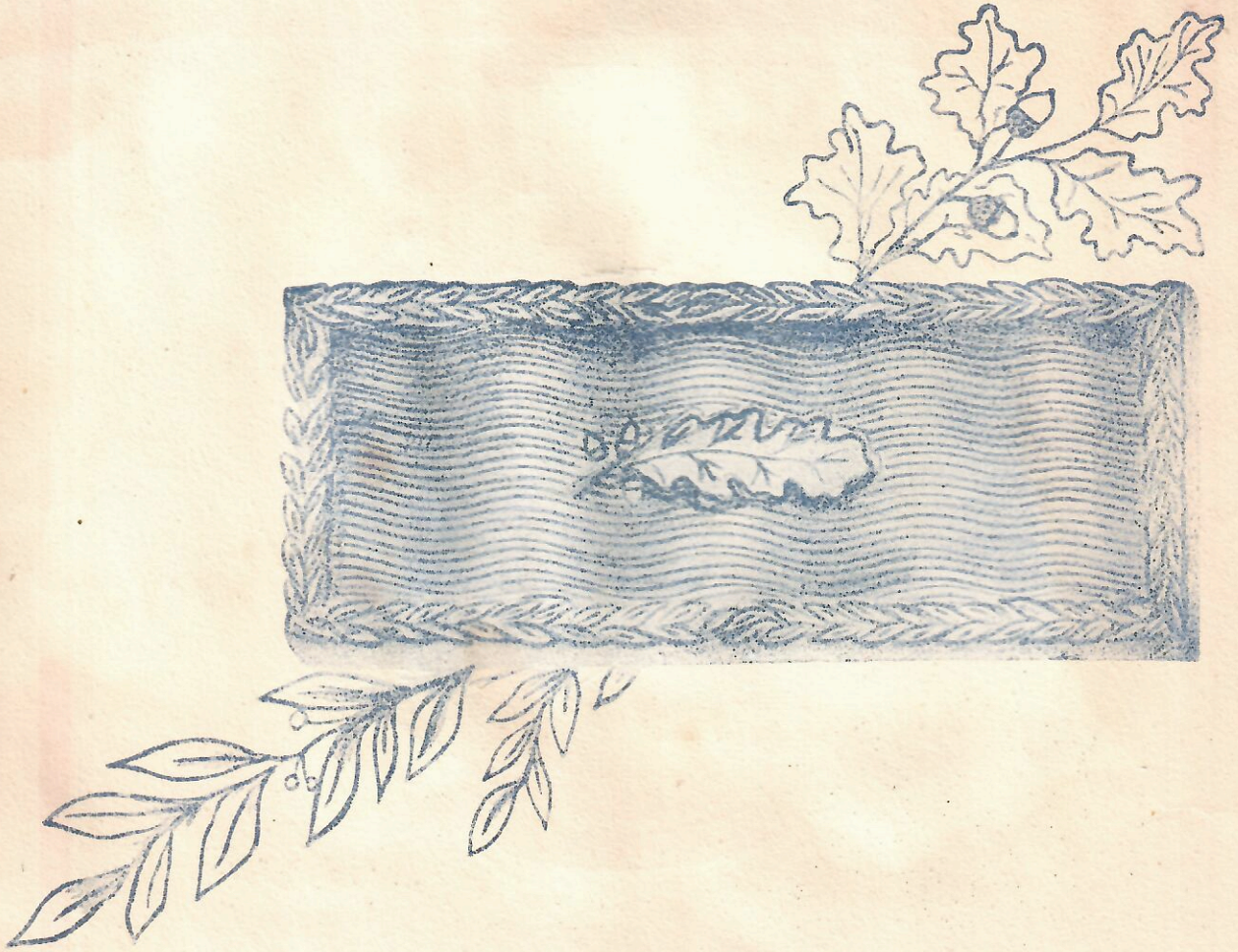


# THE PRESIDENTIAL CITATION





John Agnol  
France





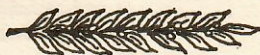
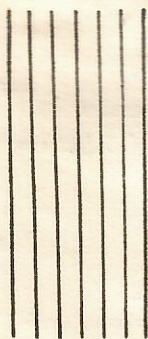
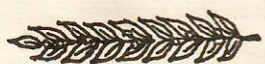




To the men  
who gave their  
lives in battle

501

PARACHUTE INFANTRY





HEADQUARTERS  
THIRD UNITED STATES ARMY  
APO 403

GENERAL ORDERS

NUMBER 31

7 February 1945

EXTRACT

UNIT CITATION

Under the provisions of Section IV, Circular 333, War Department, 22 December 1943, and in accordance with the authority contained in war Department cable W-24608, 21 January 1945, the following units are cited :

101st Airborne Division (less 2d Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry Regiment) with the following attached units :

501st Parachute Infantry Regiment.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

*These units distinguished themselves in combat against powerful and aggressive enemy forces composed of elements of 8 German divisions during the period from 18 December to 27 December 1944, by extraordinary heroism and gallantry in defense of the key communication center of Bastogne, Belgium. Essential to a large scale exploitation of his breakthrough into Belgium and northern Luxembourg, the enemy attempted to seize Bastogne by attacking constantly and savagely with the best of his armour and infantry. Without benefit of prepared defenses, facing almost overwhelming odds and with very limited and fast-dwindling supplies, these units maintained a high combat morale and an impenetrable defense, despite extremely heavy bombing, intense artillery fire, and constant attacks from infantry and armour on all sides of their completely cut off and encircled position. This masterful and grimly determined defense denied the enemy even momentary success in an operation for which he paid dearly in men, material, and eventually morale. The outstanding courage and resourcefulness and undaunted determination of this gallant force is in keeping with the highest traditions of the service.*

By command of Lieutenant General PATTON :

HOBART R. GAY  
Brigadier General, U.S. Army,  
Chief of Staff.

R. E. CUMMINGS,  
Colonel, Adjutant General's Department,  
Adjutant General.



## The Presentation by General Eisenhower

"It is a great personal honor for me to be here today to take part in a ceremony 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, therefore, will always be associated the name of the 101st Airborne Division and of Bastogne.

Yet, you men, because you are soldiers of proved valor and of experience, would be the last to claim that you are the bravest and the best. All the way from where the Marines are fighting on Iwo Jima through the Philippines and southeast Asia, on through the Mediterranean, and along this great front and on the Russian frontiers, are going forward-day by day-those battles, sustained by the valor of you and other Allied units, that are beating this enemy to his knees. They are proving once and for all that dictatorship cannot produce better soldiers than can aroused democracy. In many of these actions are units that have performed with unexcelled brilliance. So far as I know, there may be many among you that would not rate Bastogne as your bitterest battle. Yet, it is entirely fitting and appropriate that you should be cited for that particular battle.

It happened to be one of those occasions when the position itself was of the utmost importance to the Allied forces. You in reserve were hurried forward and told to hold that position. All the elements of drama—battle drama—were there. You were cut off, surrounded. Only valor, complete self-confidence in yourselves and in your leaders, a knowledge that you were well trained, and only the determination to win could sustain soldiers under those conditions. You were given a marvelous opportunity and you met every test. You have become a fitting symbol on which the United Nations, all the citizens of the United Nations, can say to their soldiers today, « We are proud of you ». As it is my great privilege to say to you here today, to the 101st Division, and all its attached units, « I am awfully proud of you ».

With this great honor goes also a certain responsibility. Just as you are the beginning of a new tradition, you must realize, each of you, that from now on the spotlight will beat on you with particular brilliance. Whenever you say you are a soldier of the 101st Division, everybody, whether it is on the street in the city, or in the front lines, will expect unusual conduct of you. I know that you will meet every test of the future like you met it at Bastogne.

Good luck and God be with you. "



## CITADEL OF BASTOGNE

At 2130 hours on Sunday night, 17 December 1944, just twenty days after its return from the front lines on the northern Rhine, the 501st Parachute Infantry was alerted for its third combat mission. With the majority of the men completely ignorant of the battle situation, a great number lacking critical items of equipment and with no one suitably dressed for winter warfare, the troops entered the town of Bastogne on the morning of 19 December 1944 and went out immediately towards the enemy.

That morning the fog was thick. The terrain was unfamiliar. No one knew the exact location of the enemy; the roads leading into Bastogne were choked with the heavy armor and artillery of retreating fragments of regiments. But by tactical good judgement and the extraordinary aggressiveness of the men, the regiment was able to seize key roads on high ground throughout its sector of defense. And where the enemy had expected, by the overwhelming strength of its attack, to continue to sweep all opposition before it and reach the English Channel before meeting effective resistance, it was unexpectedly stopped dead.

To reduce Bastogne it withdrew seven divisions from the attack and set them up around the whole town. In the sector to the northeast, the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment faced two of these divisions — sometimes more. Within two days all roads out of the town were cut. Shortly afterwards Bastogne was deep in enemy territory. German planes bombed the town each night. Artillery systematically smashed the buildings and the positions of the lines. It was impossible to



evacuate the wounded. The troops suffered from cold, from inadequate clothing, and from lack of sleep.

Snow capes were made out of sheets. Blankets were commandeered from the abandoned houses. Live stock was butchered to serve one meal a day. Uniform regulations were scrapped and the men were allowed to wear anything that kept them warm — civilian sweaters, even Army blankets. Ammunition and K rations were dropped by aerial resupply. Snow covered the fortifications; the men fought German heavy armor with infantry weapons — and *spirit*. An order to surrender brought the now famous answer, "Nuts!" Prisoners who were taken confessed disbelief that any group of human beings could hold out. Christmas was celebrated in foxholes that the world was watching.

#### AND THE LINES HELD

And the seven German divisions that had attacked Bastogne with confidence and high morale on the morning of the 19th of December — believing that in a day they would go to the English channel — were still there, still vainly attacking, still being thrown back with heavy losses, when, on the day after Christmas, the Fourth Armored Division of the Seventh Army followed by the Eighty-Third Infantry Division of the Third Army broke through to the town.

It was not only the siege of Bastogne that ended that day. The last military offensive of the Third Reich had ended too.





