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Vanguard of the Crusade: The 101st Airborne Division in World War II

Mark Bando

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Contents. In an age of exaggeration and hype, when words like "great," "famous," and "legendary" are often used to describe the ordinary and slightly-above-average, it is difficult to describe the truly special. Further, when so much has been written about a subject, it is hard to find fresh perspectives and new ways to approach it.

With *Vanguard of the Crusade*, author Mark Bando has accomplished just these things. Through decades of painstakingly collecting and verifying first-hand accounts of some of the fiercest fighting in the European Theater, he has illuminated the personal experiences of the members of this truly and justly famous American airborne division. From their baptism of fire in the advance echelon of Operation Overlord, to capturing the first objectives of Operation Market-Garden, and defiantly holding the key crossroads at Bastogne during the German Ardennes Offensive, the exploits of the "Screaming Eagles" are expertly recounted in this heavily-illustrated single volume.

Expanding significantly on the author's previous work, *Vanguard of the Crusade* includes dozens of previously unpublished, rare photos as well as significantly enhanced versions of photos which have appeared in some of his works before. Historians, buffs, reenactors, and collectors alike will be fascinated by the extensive new sections about airborne equipment and parachutists' uniforms, as well as the all-new special feature segments about the major German formations defeated by the 101st in its campaigns in France, Holland, and Belgium. Ten brand new, highly-detailed maps based directly on primary source documents also support the text, which, like Bando's previous works, draws heavily on vividly-recounted, authentic anecdotes gleaned from the airborne veterans themselves.

Significance More than any of the other combatant forces in the Second World War, the US Army standardized its divisions' organization, training, and doctrine. This allowed unparalleled flexibility of employment and a consistency of battlefield performance rivaled by the tactical forces of no other army. Airborne divisions, on the other hand, were the closest thing the US Army had to specially trained and organized "assault" units, designed specifically for striking behind enemy lines and holding key terrain while isolated and cut off.

The 101st Airborne Division thus required and attracted a special kind of soldier, of whom unusual-and deadly-demands were made routinely, in training as well as combat. By chronicling the Division's combat experience through the eyes and in the words of its soldiers themselves, *Vanguard of the Crusade* provides priceless insights into what made this division so distinctive and the traditions it built so worthy. Perhaps one of their own, Private First Class Tex McMorries, put it best, "The best and toughest of the paratroopers were cold, fearless killers, who went to great extremes to kill the enemy." *Vanguard of the Crusade* is their story.

Told without a shred of sentimentality, but with an implicit and profound respect for the paratroopers and glidermen who wore the Screaming Eagle patch, the book captures the spirit and the deeds of the Division which, from Normandy to Holland to the Ardennes, was the vanguard-and a bulwark-of the Crusade in Europe.

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