

**The PATHFINDER's distinctive winged torch symbol comes from ancient Greece where runners opened up the Olympic Games and means to "Light the Way". The original red backing worn on PATHFINDERS from 1943 onwards was changed to black in 1964 to signify night operations. PATHFINDERS wear the full-color winged torch on their Class "A" uniforms and a subdued version on their [Army Combat Uniforms \(ACUs\)](#).**

What is a Pathfinder?

U.S. Army Pathfinders are an elite force making up less than 1% of the total Army. Their primary mission is to infiltrate areas and set up parachute drop zones and helicopter landing zones for Airborne and Air Assault missions.

#### HISTORY OF US ARMY PATHFINDERS

The Pathfinders began in World War II when American paratrooper units needed a way to mark areas and guide aircraft to a specific spot. Early airborne operations resulted in scattered drops up to 7 miles from the target; in the night weather and other factors aircraft had trouble finding the drop zones. The 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion and 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division were working on an idea they had learned from the British. This elite force would go in prior to the main assault with visual and electronic signaling devices to guide aircraft to the drop zone and gliders to their landing zones. Their first use in combat was 13 September 1943 during the combat jumps into Italy.

They are most remembered for their heroic jump into Normandy during the invasion of 1944 on June 6th, when they led the way for Allied forces into Europe. They were used in Southern France, Holland, Belgium, Germany for the Airborne forces. They were also used in the Pacific theater with the 11th Airborne Division during the liberation of the Philippines.

The Korean War saw limited use of the Pathfinders with the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team during two combat jumps and operations. Vietnam saw the largest use of Pathfinders due to the developments of helicopter insertion and resupply which were pioneered by the 11th Air Assault Division. Nearly every Army Aviation Battalion had a Pathfinder detachment and deployed them on nearly every mission. Setting up helicopter landing zones, medivacs, resupply points, slingloads in full view of the enemy displayed great bravery and coolness under fire. The most successful missions were those when Pathfinders were in control. However due to their small size very little recognition was given to the Pathfinders.

After the Vietnam War Pathfinders were with the major Airborne units and various Combat Aviation Battalions/Groups. They also saw a growth in Army National Guard and Army Reserve Pathfinder Platoons during the 1970s and 1980s. Pathfinders were used in many ways and not always correctly; but many conducted Joint Task Force missions in Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East.

In the early 1990s the Army started disbanding their Pathfinder units in the belief those skills could be learned by regular troops attending Air Assault School and by individuals within the unit who were Pathfinder qualified. During the Panama invasion and the 1st Gulf War showed that Pathfinders were an important factor needed and 2 companies were raised in the 101st Airborne Division. The 10th Mountain and 82nd Airborne Divisions now have Pathfinder companies and conduct combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Pathfinder units today still live by the motto of "First In-Last Out" and proudly wear the Pathfinder Torch.

To more visit the following link:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pathfinder\\_%28military%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pathfinder_%28military%29)