



USA, halt to drone battalion of 173rd Airborne: Congress seeks explanation from Army

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The US Army's decision to return the 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment to traditional airborne infantry functions is now under scrutiny by the American Congress. A bipartisan group of lawmakers has formally asked the Army to explain why it decided to discontinue, after less than a year, the unit's specialization in drone warfare and autonomous systems.

BrigataFolgore.net had already covered the change of direction on August 20th in the article **"USA: the 173rd Airborne's 'drone' battalion returns to airborne infantry"**, explaining how the 3-504th PIR, approximately 600 men from the 173rd Airborne Brigade, would return to focusing on the fundamental tasks of airborne infantry at the end of the experiment conducted in Europe.

However, that choice has now become a political issue.

A bipartisan letter to the US Army

According to reports from the Associated Press, Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Republican Thom Tillis, independent Angus King, and Republican Representative Mike Turner sent a letter to Army leadership requesting a detailed briefing on the decision.

The lawmakers want to know the data, analyses, and decision-making process that led to discontinuing the battalion's specialization after just a few months of activity. They also want to know whether the choice was made autonomously by the US Army or whether it derives from guidance from Pentagon leadership.

The main concern revolves around the risk of dispersing the acquired experience precisely as the war in Ukraine is showing how FPV drones, autonomous systems, artificial intelligence, and rapid on-field production capabilities are transforming ground combat.

According to the lawmakers, eliminating a specialized unit could slow the United States' ability to learn directly from Ukrainian experiences and adapt with sufficient speed to the transformations of the modern battlefield.

The 3-504th PIR and the 173rd Airborne experiment

The unit at the center of this matter is the **3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment**, reactivated within the 173rd Airborne Brigade at the beginning of 2026.

As previously explained by BrigataFolgore.net, the battalion had been used as a sort of real-scale operational laboratory to verify how to integrate drones, terrestrial robotic systems, and new technologies within a light airborne infantry formation.

The approximately 600 paratroopers had also worked on the production and internal modification of drones and on the application of tactics derived from experiences gained on the Ukrainian front. Part of the personnel had had direct contact with Ukrainian military personnel, and already in 2025 the 173rd Airborne had developed its own **FPV Drone Lab** at the Del Din Barracks in Vicenza.

The objective was not simply to equip infantry with some small UAVs, but to understand how the massive diffusion of unmanned systems could modify the organization of a battalion itself.

LaNeve's decision

The change in direction was ordered by General **Christopher LaNeve**, currently leading the US Army as acting chief of staff, who ordered the battalion to return to focusing on its fundamental airborne infantry tasks.

The decision also comes during a phase of significant change at the Army's leadership.

The previous Chief of Staff, General Randy George, had strongly supported the acceleration in the use of unmanned systems and, together with Army Secretary Dan Driscoll, had promoted the **Army Transformation Initiative**, which provided for faster integration of modern UAS into operational formations.

George was subsequently removed from his position and Driscoll submitted his resignation. The lawmakers signing the letter therefore fear that the change in leadership could also determine a slowdown in some of the transformation initiatives already underway.

Drones yes, but the question of how to integrate them remains open

The matter, however, does not appear to represent an abandonment of drones by the US Army.

The problem is rather to establish **how and at which organizational level to integrate them**.

The 3-504th PIR experiment raises a central question for all Western ground forces: is it more effective to create units highly specialized in warfare with autonomous systems or to distribute these capabilities directly within traditional companies and battalions?

General LaNeve himself has recently emphasized the need to return to the center of training the fundamental capabilities of the soldier and small units, while simultaneously maintaining the development of artificial intelligence, autonomy, and new technologies.

And it is precisely on this balance that the discussion is now concentrated.

On one hand, the Army seems to want to prevent an entire battalion of paratroopers from progressively losing its primary identity as an airborne infantry unit; on the other hand, some members of Congress fear that dissolving a dedicated structure could disperse expertise

developed in a sector that is evolving at an unprecedented pace.

The 3-504th PIR will therefore return to airborne infantry, but the open discussion in Washington shows that the 173rd Airborne experiment is far from concluded.

The lessons learned by its paratroopers could indeed contribute to establishing what will be the future relationship between **soldier, drone, and artificial intelligence** in the US Army.

Sources:

[Associated Press - Lawmakers ask Army to explain why it told a military unit to stop specializing in drone warfare](#)

[BrigataFolgore.net - USA: the 173rd Airborne's "drone" battalion returns to airborne infantry](#)