

# *The Black Devils*

*by Ray Routhier*

A PICTORIAL HISTORY  
OF THE  
FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE

## First Special Service Force Commanders

Maj. Gen. Robert T. Frederick 20 July 42-23 Jan 44  
Col. Edwin S. Walker 24 Jan 44-5 Dec 44

## Executive Officers

Lt. Col. John S. McQueen 20 July 42-31 Aug 42\*  
Lt. Col. Paul D. Adams 1 Sept 42-27 Jan 44  
Lt. Col. Kenneth S. Wickham 28 Jan 44-23 Jan 44  
Lt. Col. Robert D. Burkans 24 Jan 44-5 Dec 44

### S-1 Adjutants

Lt. Col. Kenneth S. Wickham 20 Jul 42-28 Jan 44  
Lt. Col. Richard W. Whitney 29 Jan 44-5 Dec 44

### S-2 Intelligence Officer

Lt. Col. Robert D. Burkans 20 Jul 42-5 Dec 44

### S-3 Operations Officers

Lt. Col. John B. Schenberger 20 Jul 42-15 Sep 42  
Lt. Col. Emil Eschenberg 16 Sept 42-27 Jan 44  
Lt. Col. Conrad Tate 28 Jan 44-5 Dec 44\*

### S-4 Supply & Services Officer

Lt. Col. O. J. Baldwin 20 Jul 42-5 Dec 44

## Regimental Commanders

### 1st Regiment

Lt. Col. Alfred C. Marshall 20 Jul 42-4 Jan 44  
Lt. Col. J.P.R. Sheburn 5 Jul 44-15 Oct 44\*  
Lt. Col. Richard W. Whitney 16 Oct 44-5 Dec 44

### 2nd Regiment

Lt. Col. D. D. Williamson 20 Jul 42-28 Dec 43\*  
Lt. Col. Robert S. Moore 29 Dec 43-30 Apr 44  
Lt. Col. J.P.R. Sheburn 1 May 44-4 July 44  
Lt. Col. Robert S. Moore 5 Jul 44-5 Dec 44

### 3rd Regiment

Lt. Col. Wm. "Leggs" Mahoney 20 Jul 42-3 Apr 43  
Lt. Col. Edwin S. Walker 27 May 43-23 Jan 44  
Lt. Col. R.W. Bichel 24 Jan 44-5 Dec 44\*

## Battalion Commanders

### 1st Regiment

1st BN Lt. Col. R.W. Bichel 20 Jul 42-23 Jan 44\*  
2nd BN Lt. Col. J.P.R. Sheburn 20 Jul 42-29 Apr 44  
1st BN Lt. Col. W. S. Gray 2 May 44-5 Dec 44  
2nd BN Maj. John Shaw 20 May 44-5 Dec 44\*

### 2nd Regiment

1st BN Lt. Col. Tom MacWilliams 20 Jul 42-2 Dec 43\*  
2nd BN Lt. Col. Robert S. Moore 20 Jul 42-29 Dec 43  
1st BN Maj. Jim Gray 2 Dec 43-20 May 44  
1st BN Maj. Ed Thomas 20 May 44-5 Dec 44  
2nd BN Maj. J.L.C. Waters 2 Jan 44-5 Dec 44\*

### 3rd Regiment

1st BN Lt. Col. T.P. Sillay 20 July 42-5 Dec 44\*  
2nd BN Lt. Col. J.S. Downes 20 Jul 42-Oct 44\*  
2nd BN Lt. Col. R.T. Hafft Oct 44-5 Dec 44

## Medical Detachment (Force Surgeon)

Maj. L.D. Buscher 20 Jul 42-5 Dec 44

## Service Battalion

Lt. Col. Gerald Rodchauer 20 Jul 42-5 Dec 44

This roster identifies only the Commanders of the specific units within the FSSF chain of command.

\*Denotes Casualty Officers.

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## *The Black Devils*

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A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF  
THE FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE

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by Ray Routhier

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ray Routhier". The signature is written in a cursive style with large, sweeping loops.

No 1623

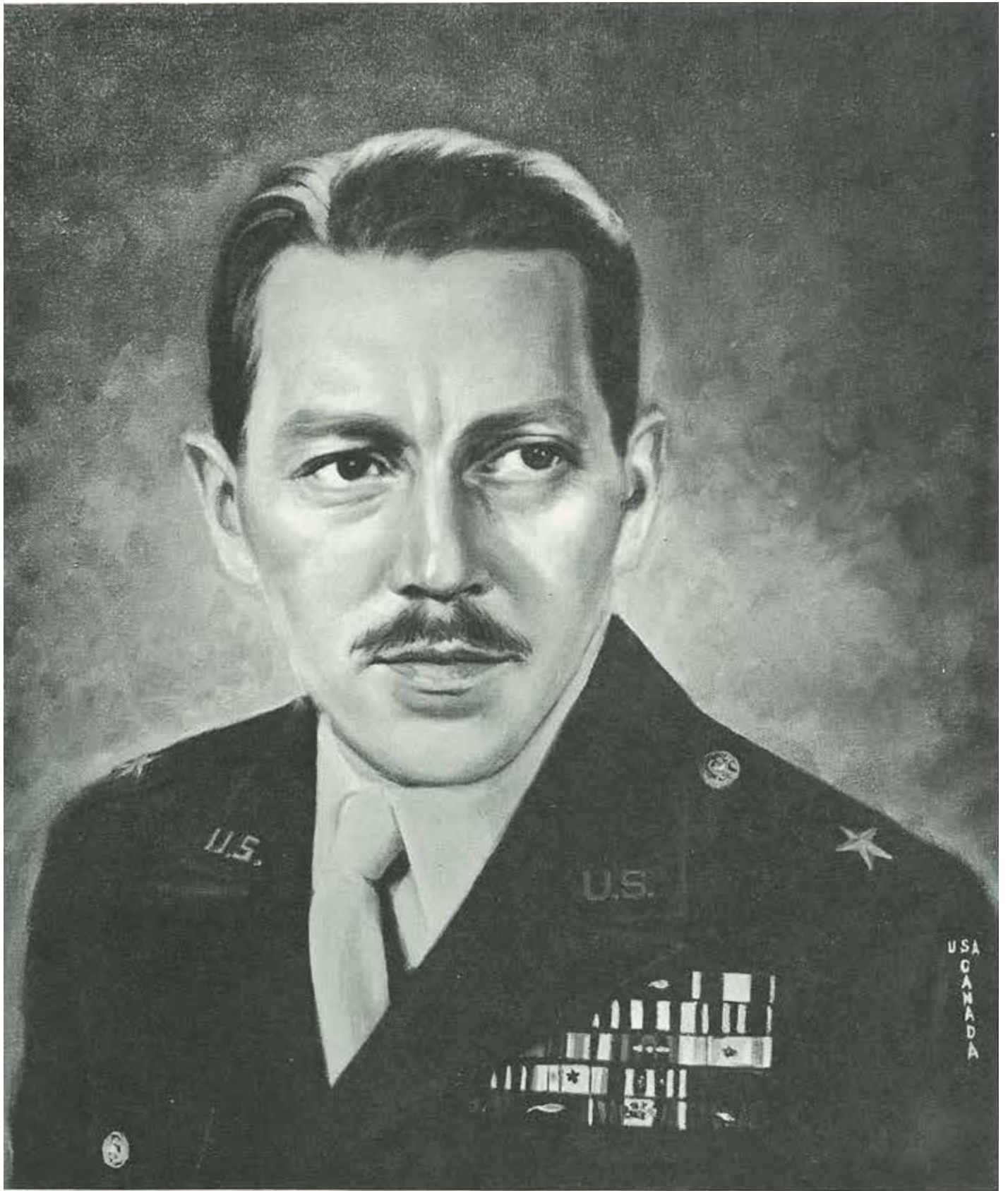
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PORTIONS OF THE PROCEEDS FROM THE SALE OF THIS BOOK  
WILL BE DONATED TO THE FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE WAR MEMORIAL FUND.





*First Special Service Force Regimental Colors, War Memorial, Helena, Montana.*



*Brig. Gen. Robert T. Frederick  
Commander, First Special Service Force  
20 July 1942 to 23 June 1944*





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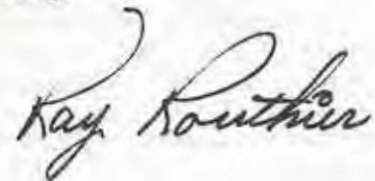
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# Introduction

Throughout history many stories have been written about military units. Some have been immortalized by famous writers while others, which had excelled just as much, if not more, have been left in the shadows of their military counterparts.

In World War II, due to restrictions and secrecy or lack of news coverage, many other military units had expressed gallantry above and beyond the call of duty, and again, were left in the shadows. Many pompous generals paraded in their splendor (far away from the enemy lines) or bragged about how difficult their living conditions were in the combat areas, while in reality they lived in splendor and were spoiled by their ranks, which could command anything to their disposal.

This World War II story is not about a pompous general or unit, but the true story of the First Special Service Force, as documented by war correspondents, writers, photographers and newspapermen, who clamored for the chance to exploit this small military unit. These men of the First Special Service Force were the nucleus of the modern day Special Forces and were, without a doubt, one of the best in their time. They proved their explosive ability to overcome the enemy's resistance or counter-attacks and their ability to advance at such a rapid pace that they were repeatedly ordered to slow down as no one else could keep up with them, time and time again. Precariously, they would put themselves in an extremely dangerous position only to beat the enemy and move ahead to their next destination.

This unit never took a step backwards, nor did they ever retreat. Facing overwhelming enemy odds they continued their press forward in their unorthodox method of fighting and struck fear into the enemy that had rarely been known before.

The commander of this unit was Col. Robert Tryon Frederick, who was ordered by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower to put together such a regiment and train them at a rapid pace so as to prepare them to be the most versatile assault group of their time. In the early months of 1942, the British Chief of Combined Operations, Lord Louis Mountbatten, presented to the Chief of Staff U.S. Army Gen. George C. Marshall, a plan conceived by Geoffrey N. Pike for developing special machinery to be used in the snow covered terrain of Europe, primarily to attack and destroy the hydroelectric plants in Norway and Italy as well as the Ploetsi oil fields in Rumania. One of the main problems with the original plan for the Force was after they had been dropped behind enemy lines and completed their missions, how would they get out? Their plan had no provisions whatsoever to get them out, they would have to fend for themselves. Fortunately, Col. Frederick realized the lack of military feasibility in the Plough Project conceived by Geoffrey Pike. It was Col. Frederick who submitted a report to the Gen. Staff informing them that the Plough Project could not work and that Allied bombers could do a better job than a handful

of men. The Gen. Staff in Washington, D.C. agreed, and then assigned the reins of the Regiment to Col. Frederick.

Thus began the joint Canadian-American unit which was to establish itself as perhaps the most elite assault force of World War II. The Forces' ability to assault enemy-held mountains was phenomenal. The men loved the fights and had unbelievable scores of casualties. Nevertheless, they achieved the highest acclaim ever by all who had the privilege to command them or to fight alongside them.

The First Special Service Force was one of very few military units that had served in three combat theatres, the Pacific (Aleutian Islands), the Mediterranean (Italy) and the European Theatre of Operations (Southern France).

The men of the Force possessed military qualities which were beyond the average soldier's imagination and their physical endurance was phenomenal. It was proven time and time again during the winter months in the rugged mountains of Italy when fighting the Germans and Italians.

Their reputation began when they took the mountain LaDifensa in a matter of hours, rather than days, as thought by the Allied High Command. At Anzio (the beachhead), the Germans gave them the widest berth possible of all the Allied units, and it was there the Germans, out of fear, gave them the name "The Black Devils."

The officers leading this group of men were hand picked by Col. Frederick. It was his concept that all leaders should lead, and in the combat areas this proved invaluable, for the men trusted their officers implicitly. Likewise, the officers trusted their men.

In Southern France, on the 5th of December, 1944, the Force was disbanded. The Canadians of the Force returned to the Canadian units in Italy and France, or were sent to England to help in specialized training of the commando units. The Americans were sent to airborne units such as the 17th, 82nd and the 101st. The remaining members of the Force helped form the 474th Infantry Regiment (separate) and were eventually sent to Norway as an occupational force to repatriate German prisoners. Disbandment of the 474th Infantry Regiment occurred on their arrival in the United States on the 27th day of October, 1945.

The legends of the First Special Service Force in combat have been marvelled by many military historians, for how could such a small military unit create such havoc with the enemy. Their phenomenal success of overtaking unsurmountable odds to gain their objectives. Their road to victory was not, however, without hardships and heavy casualties. Yet they pushed on and on until there were no more mountains to assault. No bravado and no parades, just a job that had to be done, and it was done by the bi-national group of Canadians and Americans, "The Black Devils" of the First Special Service Force.



## Dedication

The men of the First Special Service Force are a proud and clannish group, and as the elite unit they were, they had the right to be. In the short time they were in service, they became one of the fiercest combat units of World War II. They became legends in their own time and were both feared and respected by their enemies. They were the culmination of both American and Canadian troops forming the North American Group.

Their story began in Helena, Montana, on the 20th of July, 1942, and ended in Villeneuve-Loubet, France, on the 5th of December, 1944. At the beginning they knew who they were and what they were, but what the future held in store for this small elite group they could never have imagined possible. Their commander, Col. Robert T. Frederick, was a man who was respected by all the Force members, and was never found behind a desk or in the rear during the time of battle. He was wounded eight times and was called a "stupid son of a bitch" by his fellow generals. But, then again, how many generals do you find on line with your men in battle? He was promoted to major general at thirty-seven years of age, the youngest combat officer ever to hold that rank.

The men of the Force gained their reputation in Southern Italy at Mt. LaDifensa. They were given the impossible task of assaulting a 3,300 foot mountain, which they climbed under the cover of night and concealed themselves during the light of day. On the second night they reached a 600 foot cliff that they scaled with their packs and weapons. After reaching the summit, they drove off the enemy within a few hours (which the Allied Headquarters thought would take four to six days) and held the mountain with just 600 men. Their mission was to put themselves on the line and to risk life and death for the completion of the mission. After battles were won, the survivors would bring back the wounded along with their dead comrades, and the countless Purple Hearts given to this small group of men goes beyond reproach as

well as the dangling dog tags picked up to be returned to the families of the never-to-be-seen-again fallen soldier.

They infiltrated enemy lines and dropped off their calling cards, which bore the outline of their shoulder patch which they were so proud of. Inscribed, in German, on the patch were the words "the worst is yet to come." The worst did come for the enemy. As elite a force as the Germans were supposed to have been, this infiltration caused a psychological reaction with the German ranks that put a fear in them such as they had seldom ever known.

The rule of thumb for the First Special Service Force was, as Tennyson wrote in *The Charge of the Light Brigade*; "Yours is not to reason why, yours is but to do or die." And, die a lot of them did, never questioning an order, always responding with their utmost bravado. The qualities of the Force never ceased as being an elite group, as was found out time and time again wherever they fought.

The final day at Villeneuve-Loubet, France was a sad day for all Force members, for this was the day of deactivation. There were many downcast eyes trying to hide tears as they cased the Regimental Colors. This was not just any flag, this was the banner of the First Special Service Force and mighty proud she was to have furled her colors to such a proud and victorious unit. The final order was given and Canadian troops broke rank, formed their own formation, and passed in review before the Americans. Most of the men never regarded the Force as being a dual nation unit; they always thought of the Force as a single combat force and nothing else.

Sad as that day may have been, their story is one of complete bravery for all to know and marvel at. For how so few could have done so much is beyond comprehension. The Germans, at Anzio, gave them the name "The Black Devils," and to Gen. Frederick and his Black Devils, one and all, this pictorial history is dedicated.



# *The Plough Project*

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## "THE IDEA"

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It is unfortunate that wars are created through faults of man, and in the consequences, countless lives are lost, countries are devastated, and some cities even obliterated from the face of the earth. But also, through wars sometimes come along certain persons who achieve the highest acclaim from their fellow man and sometimes gain the respect and admiration of their enemies. Such is the World War II story of the First Special Service Force (The Black Devils) and their commander, Maj. Gen. Robert T. Frederick. As Thomas Carlisle once wrote, "History is the biography of great men." This book is about a great man and his men of the FSSF.

Robert Tryon Frederick was born in San Francisco, California, on March 14, 1907. His father was a doctor, very easy going, and with a strong sense of duty. His mother was Pauline McCurdy, a nurse at the hospital where Dr. Frederick worked. She was taken ill and treated by Dr. Frederick, whereupon she recovered and fell in love with Dr. Frederick and they were soon married.

Robert T. Frederick's childhood was quieter than that of most children. He was gentle and very studious, and like most boys, he craved adventure. He lied about his age when he was thirteen and joined the California National Guard. At the age of sixteen, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Cavalry Reserve. At the age of seventeen, through the persuasion of a senator friend of the family, Robert T. Frederick was accepted into the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The Point was hard and strict, but as he later recalled, "It seemed that I had never left home." He adapted to Academy life and was accepted by his classmates. He was dependable, had a modest personality, held firm opinions and was liked by both his officers and classmates. In 1928 he graduated 124th out of 250 classmates. After graduation he went to New York, where he met and married Ruth Harloe.

His first assigned duty was with the Coast Artillery at Fort Winfield Scott in California with the Harbor Defense Command. He entered the Coast Artillery School at Fort Monroe, Virginia, graduating in 1938. He enrolled in Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, graduating in 1939. In August of 1941, through his ability, he was selected to the War Department General Staff.

In May of 1942, a report was brought back from London, England, hand carried by Gen. Marshall and given to Lt. Col. Frederick for evaluation. This report

had been endorsed by Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of England and Lord Louis Mountbatten. Also, Mr. Harry Hopkins, President Roosevelt's representative in the Plough Project, gave it his blessing on behalf of the President. This project was a condensed report of Mr. Geoffrey Pyke's idea (which was complete and thoroughly detailed) of attaining military advantages in Europe by initiating a heavy diversionary action in Italy, Rumania and the snowfields of Norway. Lt. Col. Frederick was told to evaluate and analyze the operation's feasibility of the plan.

Col. Frederick studied the plan thoroughly for two weeks and found its feasibility had not been implemented with force requirements to operate such a mission. The fact that the men and equipment were to be dropped by plane in geographical areas outlined in the plan, had no evacuation plan upon completion of the mission. The men would be too spread out across Europe to successfully engage the enemy and defend its position. Col. Frederick concluded that Allied bombers could do a better job than a small group of men. He summarized that Norway would be the only consideration for a mission if ever the Plough Project was to be implemented. Col. Frederick submitted his report on the Plough Project and concluded that the project could not be successful and looked better on paper, for in reality, it would be an operational fiasco. He submitted his report to the Chief of Operations Division, Maj. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower. The "Plough Project" was Geoffrey Pyke's idea of developing a snow vehicle which would have the mobility and operational speed on snow comparable to that of a military track vehicle. Mr. Pyke suggested the vehicle be used in Italy, Norway and in the Ploetsi oil fields of Rumania for missions against German installations which provided indispensable materials to Germany and also to the southern slopes of the Alps to put an end to the Italian power plant installations that operated its railways and factories in northern Italy.

In June, 1942, Prime Minister Churchill and Lord Mountbatten were to have a meeting with President Roosevelt and the combined Chiefs of Staff. The Army wanted progress to be shown on the military, as well as the technical, side of the project if it were to be undertaken at all. So Gen. Marshall told Gen. Eisenhower to select a commander to activate such a military force. Candidates arriving for the position



were not acceptable to Gen. Eisenhower, as he considered knowledge and experience in cold weather conditions a prime factor of the candidates. Gen. Eisenhower finally called Lt. Col. Frederick from Operations and ordered him to take the Plough Project as he knew more about the project than anyone else. Col. Frederick was now in charge and whatever he needed for the project, he was to let the General know.

So it was, the officer who had given a negative reply to the Plough Project as not being a workable plan, was given the command of operations for raising and training a task force for the sole purpose of demolishing enemy installations in various parts of Europe, and that this group should be trained as a small group of individuals rather than a regular military force. Also, it was of primary importance that the snow vehicle be developed. Studebaker was given the go ahead to build and perfect the vehicle and it was later to be called the "Weasel." It was proposed by both Lord Mountbatten and Gen. Marshall that before the Force could be effective, the Weasel had to be produced efficiently and ready to go. The Weasel, however, never materialized in the Force except in training in Helena, for when Norway decided to cease its participation in the Plough Project, the need for mechanical control of the snows disappeared.

Lt. Col. Frederick selected his staff officers carefully. They were Maj. Orval J. Baldwin, S-4; Maj. John B. Shinberger, Operations and Training Officer; Capt. Robert D. Burhans, S-2; Maj. Kenneth G. Wickham, S-1; and Capt. Alcide M. Touchette, Cold Weather Training. Col. John G. McQueen of the Calgary Highlanders was appointed, upon his arrival, as the Force's Executive Officer. These men were to be the driving force creating the most elite assault team ever in the U.S. or Canadian armies. Maj. Wickham had the Adjutant General's office post letters to all the Army units in the Southwest and Pacific Coast for single men between the ages of 21 and 35 who had completed three or more years of grammar school within the occupational range of rangers, lumberjacks, northwoodsmen, hunters, prospectors, explorers and game wardens. Inspection teams toured camps in the West interviewing personnel having the needed qualifications. The ones selected were told they would undergo parachute training. Those not meeting the requirements were dismissed. Upon his return from his inspection, Maj. Shinberger reported that Ft. William Henry Harrison, Helena, Montana, was adequate for the project and met all requirements. Lt. Col. Frederick, upon his return from inspecting the latest Weasel model at Ft. Bend, Indiana, had been promoted to colonel. His first order as colonel was to approve the site for their new home. With all priorities given, a project construction began immediately at Ft. William Henry Harrison. However, a problem not visualized by Army Headquarters was the incorporating of another military unit within the nucleus of the project. The mission demanded a variety of skills for the Force to become a combination infantry-parachute-mountain

climber-engineer force. Col. Frederick, visualizing what was coming into existence, established his own table of organization.

There would be two levels in the task force, combat and service. Due to the short time allotted for training, the combat unit would train continuously without interruption for details whatsoever. The service units would supply all clerks, cooks, mechanics, armorers, parachute riggers, supply and base medical men. The units were given full infantry names, regiment, battalion and companies. The combat force was broken down into three regiments corresponding within the element of training. Each regiment was to be commanded by a colonel with the strength of 32 officers and 385 men. The regiments were divided into two battalions with three companies in each battalion and three platoons in each company. The platoon was broken down into two sections; the section was the basic fighting unit throughout the Force, each being exactly the same as to strength and armament. Four Weasels (T-15 cargo carriers) would be assigned to the 108 sections with the balance of the vehicles distributed to various Force headquarters.

A name had to be selected to take the place of the Plough Project in reference, which was a secret operational code. Names thought of were those such as Rangers, Commandos, etc. But, out of the blue, Col. Frederick selected "The First Special Service Force." The name of the Force was to cover an assault force whose handful of men would carry a considerable amount of automatic fire power.

A suggestion had also been made to call all the men in the Force "Braves" and to have a variety of units as that of an Indian tribe. The tribal idea was not selected, although the name "Braves," as applied to a Forceman, stuck to the organization. Also, a separate insignia, with thought in mind that both American and Canadian members were being selected, was needed. A colonel in Services Supply at the Pentagon heard of the Forces' request for an insignia and suggested crossed arrows, the distinct insignia for Indian scouts. The crossed arrows met with approval from the War Department, and the Force was made a separate branch of the service. When there was a need for a shoulder patch to complete the uniform, another Indian feature was added. The Indian spearhead, longer and broader than the stone arrowhead, was selected. So now the patch was completed, red spearhead with white USA-CANADA. It was forwarded to Washington, D.C. for approval. The War Department approved it and 10,000 were ordered for the completion of the uniform of the First Special Service Force.

On 2 July, 1942, Brig. Gen. Edwards, War Department G-3, instructed Army Ground Forces to activate the First Special Service Force and give them the highest priority for housing, equipment and training facilities. The order also specified that duty in each echelon would be designated as parachute duty. A 30 percent overstrength was allowed, as Col. Frederick had requested, to permit replacement strength to undergo training with the unit.

Canada agreed to assign the Force its own pay



and record section so Canadian personnel would be administered exactly the same pay as any other member of the Canadian Forces. A request was submitted for the Canadian pay to be raised to an equal level as that of the Americans, as the American pay was higher than that of the Canadians. The Canadian Headquarters refused, as the pay increase would give the Canadian Force members a higher pay scale than their counterparts in Canada. The decision was taken with a temporary loss of morale by the Canadian enlisted men.

The nucleus for the Force was approved and in order. Army Ground Forces had directed Ninth Corps Area at Ft. Douglas in Utah to activate the First Special Service Force, while Maj. Williamson returned to Canada to establish a similar criteria for acquiring the Canadian groups. The construction at the newly selected site at Ft. William Henry Harrison began immediately.

## *Helena, Montana*

### "THE FORMING OF THE FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE



*Ft. William Henry Harrison as seen in the early days of the Force, from Muscle Mountain.*

The men started arriving at Ft. William Henry Harrison in Helena, Montana, and through the secrecy of the Plough Project, most of them did not know where they were for days. Most of the American trains arriving had their windows painted black to prevent peering out and MP's were assigned to each car to dissuade anyone from looking out. Total chaos was the only way to describe their arrival. The Merrill Construction Company was building tent floors, tearing down old structures and erecting new buildings. As parachute drying towers were being completed, bulldozers and graders were leveling the ground needed to build roads. The variation of uniforms of the men arriving from various parts of the country created a temporary resentment as to who would be in charge of each tent and section. Their counterparts from Canada started arriving and they too thought they would be arriving at a well established fort, instead they found dust, dirt and the wind blowing constantly. They were assigned to their tents and training began immediately.

The confusion of uniforms was quickly settled when the Canadians were given American uniforms and those arriving with rank assumed roles in the

Force matching that rank. This also applied to the American contingents. They were a tired lot that arrived at Helena, but they were good men. Granted, in any group such as this, you will find a few bad apples and some did come from stockades for menial crimes such as theft, assault and AWOLs, but the hard core prisoners were never sent to this uniformed body of men. This rumor probably started to keep the civilian population away so soldiers could tend to their rigid training schedules. There was a Canadian soldier, however, who was a safe-cracker in civilian life and they say he was truly worthy of his profession. His prowess was challenged and, to the amazement of the local bankers, he had their vault door open in a matter of a few minutes.

An air detachment of four C-47's, two Piper Cubs and a Fairchild was assigned to the Force for parachute training and liaison between headquarters. This parachute training began at a rapid pace under the watchful eyes of Capt. Harry M. (Tug) Wilson and



*Forcemen learning how to collapse their parachutes in the wind, Ft. Wm. Henry Harrison, Helena, Montana. (Marshall)*





*As the men first arrived from Canada and various parts of the United States, they were first issued one piece coveralls. The men from Canada are still wearing their Canadian issued caps. Note how the Canadians tilted their caps, while the Americans wore theirs squarely on their heads. 3rd Regt 3rd Co. (Sinclair)*

Lt. Robert Ellis, the parachute experts. Within 48 hours, some of the men were jumping from the C-47 aircraft and within another 24 hours had made their second jump. This pace was set with no interruptions whatsoever for general duties such as guard, KP or police detail. These duties were being accomplished by the companies in the service battalion. At the parachute training, there were no training towers for initial jumping and no preliminary air flights, training was devoted to parachuting only. Col. Frederick made his initial jump with only 15 minutes of briefing. The first military award formation was for the presentation of the 1200 men to receive their jump qualification badges, or buzzard claws as they were sometimes called. The presentation of the jump wings moved the Americans and



*Men of the Force making their jumps over Ft. Wm. Henry Harrison.*



*The "Skull" C-47 carrying members of the Force to their parachute jumps.*

Canadians closer to the one unit assault force. Col. McQueen broke his leg jumping, so he was replaced by Col. Paul D. Adams. One other officer broke his leg during his first jump, however he persuaded Col. Frederick to let him stay and he went up to make his second jump. Just prior to entering the plane they took off his cast and the jump was successful.

There were no deadbeats in the Force. Moving from one training area to another was at double time and punctuality was stressed, regardless of how tight the schedule was. Those who could not meet the pace would often request transfers back to their original units. Training became strict and physical training was stressed for everyone. Boxing was popular and Capt. Pat O'Neill gave substantial unarmed combat training.





Surgeon, Capt. Carl A. Brakel being awarded the coveted (Buzzards Hooks) Jump Wings, after completion of parachute training, Aug. 1942 (US Army # 187749)



Members of the FSSF "Hooked-up" and ready to make their first jump from a C-47 aircraft over Ft. Wm. Henry Harrison, Helena, Montana. 1943 (US Army # SC 187746 S)



Sgt. Major Bill Morrison, 5th Co., 1st Rgt.

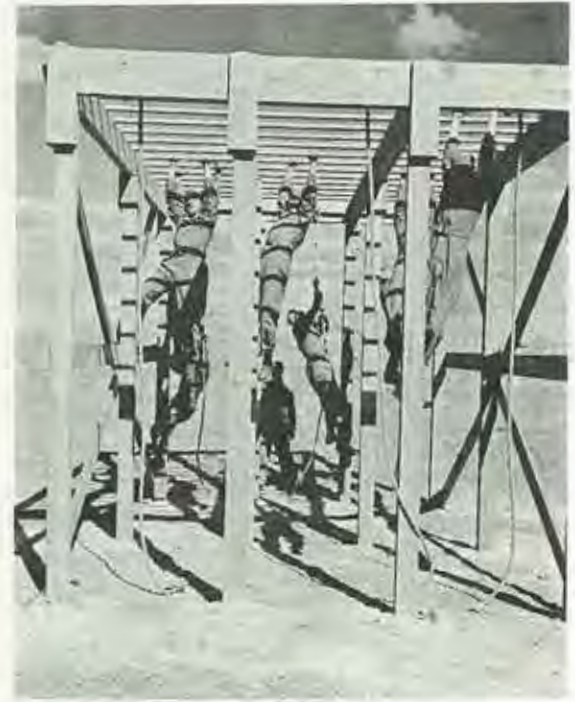


Group of Forcemen in full-dress uniform, complete with Jump-ovals and argulettes. Note Canadian stripes on uniforms. This practice, however, was short lived, for Col. Frederick did not like the idea of mixing uniform wear from both countries. (Helena, Montana. Marshall)

The training schedule was set into three phases. From August to October, parachute training, weapons, demolitions, small unit tactics and constant physical training. From October to November, unit tactics and problems. The final phase was skiing, rock climbing, adaptation to cold weather and operating the Force's combat vehicle, the Weasel.



Reveille was at 04:30, breakfast at 06:30, and by 0800, they had completed the obstacle course. In the evenings, usually four times a week, there were training lectures. Saturday afternoons and Sundays were



*Physical training and endurance was one of the main factors throughout training at Ft. Harrison. (Randall)*

their days off. They would go to Helena for any relaxation available. The people of Helena accepted this mixed group of soldiers as if they were their own sons, and whenever they got into trouble the townspeople were there to bail them out. The relationship between soldier and civilian was really remarkable, for in such a short time they captured the hearts of everyone, including many of the local girls. It was reported that there were over 150 marriages recorded with the Forcemen and Helena women. And to this day, you will find many of the Forcemen still living in Helena, maintaining a high bond of comradeship, pride and always proud of the fact they were the "First Special Service Force."

Marching was an important factor within the Force and Col. Frederick and Maj. Shinberger laid out a 60 mile course to see which regiment could do it the

fastest. Col. Marshall's First Regiment walked the course in 20 hours, complete with pack and rifle. It was not uncommon at the end of a march to see blisters worn through the flesh and rubbing against the bone, but they would never quit, for they knew too well if they did it would let the Force down and their pride was too high to ever let that happen. While Army standards for forced marches was 120 steps per minute, the Force's pace was 140 steps per minute.



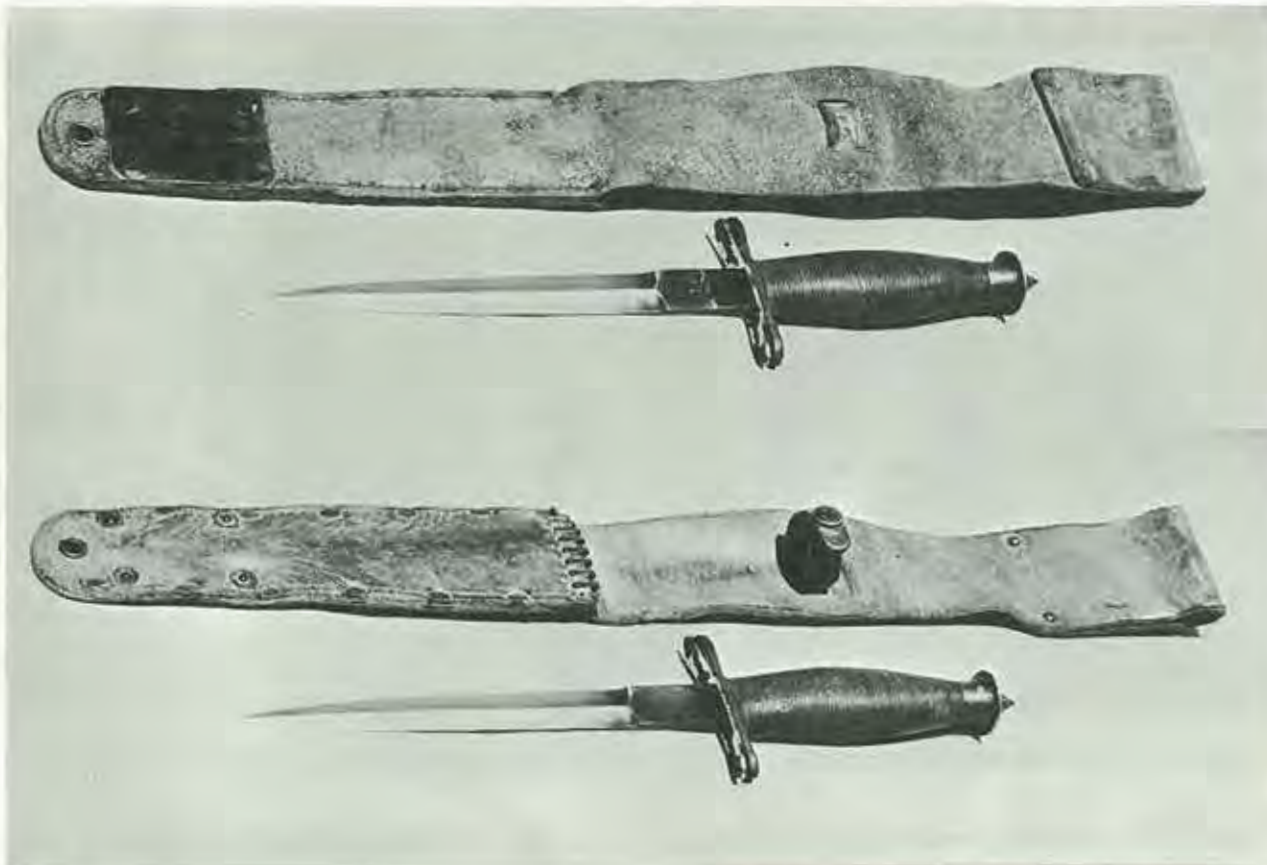
*Learning how to fire the Thompson Machine Gun.*



*Learning how to fire the Browning Automatic Rifle.*

All officers and enlisted men had to qualify and master the infantry weapons such as the M1 rifle, pistol, carbine, BAR, light and heavy machine guns, the Johnson light machine gun, bazooka, mortar, flame throwers and grenades. They also had to be experts with explosives. Everyone had to be familiar with enemy weapons by shooting, assembling and





*The V-42 fighting knife was manufactured by the Case Cutlery Co. and was issued in the early months of 1943. The original sheath did not have a metal plate such as shown in the top photo. The sheath was later modified by its owner with the plate to protect the individual from stabbing himself when putting the knife into the sheath.*



*Learning the use of explosives. (Marshall)*

disassembling them until they knew them as well as their own. They would also have to be expert skiers and able to drive and make mechanical repairs to the Weasel. During this period also, the V-42 dagger was introduced to the men of the Force which would become a formidable weapon in the mountain fighting in Italy.



*Blowing up empty buildings and deserted mining shacks in the Helena, Montana area. (Marshall)*



Capt. Thaxton was temporarily assigned to the Force for the purpose of teaching the handling of explosives. In late September, RS and penolite were introduced to the Force and created a fun-filled period. In the meantime, the Plough Project had been scrapped but had no interference with the Force's training program. After a few days of lessons with the explosives, their first target would be a bridge that was no longer in use. They started with TNT, loading 300 pounds to show what the classic powder could do. Each bridge support was packed and detonated, throwing steel and debris over 100 yards. The next target was an ore stamping mill filled with rusty machinery. They used the new RS stocks in 30 pound packages for demonstration. The resulting explosion was a sight to behold, the steel machinery was reduced to scrap and the building was blown into the air, intact, disintegrating as it fell back to the ground. Abandoned bridges, buildings and railroads in nearby towns were the next targets. After the men became accustomed to handling the explosives, they took delight in blowing up everything. They were allowed to blow up empty cabins, which were not always empty, and other structures withdrawn from use. At night they loved to throw live ammunition into lit stoves and watch the men scatter for protection. They dynamited stoves and blew up tents, only to have everything back in order the following morning, sometimes without a replacement stove. But, of course, there were times when the fun would go too far and somebody would get hurt. Nevertheless, the wounded would remove all shrapnel from their bodies and be at drill formation the following morning. The best targets were garbage cans. In the dead of night there would be an explosion and the cursing of soldiers as garbage would scatter all over them and the cans sometimes came to rest in an unwanted tent. One night, while in downtown Helena, some of the men had gone into Big Dorothy's house for a little relaxation. One of the men had a detonator cap with him and fixed it in the toilet bowl. When the smoke and debris cleared, the toilet was unrecognizable and the event was the chuckle around town for several days.



*Chow time while on maneuvers in the Marysville area near Ft. Harrison. (Marshall)*



*Mr. Arthur Hibbard talking with Lt. Col. Paul D. Adams, the Regimental Executive Officer. Lt. Col. Adams achieved the rank of General and was the Commander in Chief of the U.S. Strike Force 1961-1966. General Adams retired in 1966. (Mrs. A. Hibbard)*

Realism was required and the men having served in overseas theaters before and during the war were invited to Helena to give lectures about the combat conditions of both the Germans and Japanese. The captured weapons proved totally essential for training.



*Realism was stressed in the hand to hand combat phase. (Randall)*



Hand-to-hand combat was introduced to the Force and became a popular sport with them. Their instructor, Dermot (Pat) O'Neill, who was a detective and officer with the Shanghai International Police before the war, was not an American citizen, but it was Col. Frederick's desire to have him in the Force to use his style of fighting. The thumb and kick method proved to be more than effective and every class was taught with no holds barred. One soldier had gone to a distant city and had the misfortune of meeting a squad of four MP's. They told him to get his pants out of his boots as he was out of uniform. The soldier tried to explain where he was from, he was in uniform, and he was not going to take his pants out of his boots. The MP's, feeling safe in number, told the soldier if he wouldn't take his pants out of his boots, they would. This was their mistake, and in just a few minutes the MP's were totally incapacitated. Reinforcements arrived, subdued the soldier, took his pants out of his boots and hauled him off to the Provost Marshall's Office. After searching regulations and calling other stations, the MP's found the soldier was in uniform and that he was also highly skilled in self defense. No apologies were necessary. Just getting him out of their district was sufficient enough.

As cool weather fell over Montana, long marches became a daily factor and wherever the men



*Cross country hikes over the mountainous terrain in the outlying areas of Helena, Montana. Forcemen are carrying ski poles to familiarize themselves for cross country skiing. (Marshall)*



*Cooling their feet after a hike to Marysville. (Marshall)*

marched, they carried two long poles to accustom themselves to ski poles. Hikes up Mt. Helena for rock climbing and rope techniques were plentiful and many of the Forcemen still remember the blisters and cuts from the rocks and the rope burns.



*Forcemen learning mountain climbing in the rugged areas around Ft. Wm. Henry Harrison, Helena, Montana. (U.S. Army # 187838-S)*

The Force was well into the second phase of training by the end of October. Military problems were well under way and simulated exercises concerning enemy operations were precise in detail. Combat courses were laid out, complete with explosives, overhead machine gun firing and barbed wire.

Overnight bivouacs were common and the ranchers in the area opened their land for any use whatsoever for the training required. One bivouac in particular, the men having arrived late at night, pitched their rolls on the ground and went to sleep. The following morning a lieutenant in the group made his report to the officers in charge. When asked by the senior officer how everything was, he replied, "It stunk." The senior officer inquired into the remark of the lieutenant and it was later found that for the previous two days a large herd of sheep had grazed in the area and left their deposits everywhere, which was not well received by the men upon awaking the following morning.

Snowstorms arrived in December and the cold weather phase of training began. Ski training was accomplished with the expertise of Capt. Kill's





*Double retreat ceremony of the First Special Service Force, performed at the Force Headquarters, Ft. Wm. Henry Harrison. (U.S. Army # 187844) DAVA*

Norwegian instructors, lecturing and demonstrating the practical techniques of skiing. The men from Texas and other southern states had never seen snow before and the training had to begin at an easy pace. Two weeks had passed and the majority of the men could ski without much problem. They were then sent to the higher slopes for a more advanced



*"Weasels" in the Motor Pool area, Ft. Wm. Henry Harrison. Courtesy Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham)*

skiing phase. The Weasel was also utilized until everyone could drive it. For Christmas, Col. Frederick gave out 10-day furloughs to the entire regiment (which the men had earned), in stages, regiment by regiment so as not to offset the military balance of the Fort.

Snow began falling and the skiing resumed, this time to Blossburg, where Capt. Kiil and his men worked the regiment in two phases. By skiing from



*Forcemen learning cross country skiing on their (torture boards) in the rugged areas surrounding Ft. Wm. Henry Harrison, Helena, Montana. Dec 1942 (U.S. Army # SC 187841-S)*





*Camouflaging the "Weasel" during maneuver exercises. Courtesy Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham)*

dawn to dusk, cross-country with full field packs and weapons and teaching the men to ski in formation downhill maintaining speed on long cross-country treks. At the end of February, Capt. Kill reported that 95 percent of the men had skied competently up to Norwegian Army standards. The men's quarters for their training at Blossburg were railroad boxcars loaned to the Force by the local railroad company. During their training there, the temperature was always below zero during the day and around -40° at night, a few nights had recordings of -60°. Parachute training never ceased during the winter months and more military problems were staged in and around Helena.

The war in the Aleutian Islands had been brought to the attention of Col. Frederick and the combat troops in Alaska were preparing to land on Adak, Amchitka, Attu and Kiska. The Aleutian Campaign



*Men of the Force parading down the streets of Helena, Montana prior to their departure for Camp Bradford, Va. April 1943 Courtesy Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham)*

promised an opportunity for the Force, as they were trained for both cold weather and mountain fighting.

The Force began its final few weeks at Ft. William Henry Harrison with forced marches, rope climbing, general training and preparation for moving out. By late March, the General Staff ordered the Force to Camp Bradford, Naval Operations Base, Norfolk, Virginia, for amphibious training.

On the 6th of April, 1943, the Force turned out for a final parade through Helena. Almost the entire population turned out for this memorable occasion, as many of these people had opened their homes to these soldiers and entertained them as if they were family. This was to be a parade for the people of Helena. The men dressed in OD's with their USA-CANADA patch on their shoulders, their red, white and blue argulet (shoulder rope) and steel helmet. They carried both the flags of the United States and Canada and a proud lot they were, knowing they had become part of a small city such as Helena and this was their way of saying good-bye and thanks for everything. Most of the 2300 men marched through Helena and were reviewed by Governor Ford of Montana, General Weeks of the General Staff of the Canadian Forces, Colonel Eaton, Great Falls Air Base Commander; Colonel Biles, Post Commander of Fort William Henry Harrison and Mr. A.T. Hibbard of the Union Bank and Trust Company, one of the strongest supporters of the Force in Helena. His home was always open to any member of the Force, enlisted and officers alike. Mrs. Hibbard was always cooking a little snack for them, and to this day holds fond memories of the Force and its men.

As the Force boarded the trains and were to depart Helena, many well-wishers ran along the platform yelling and waving good-bye. Some of the girls managed to snatch a final kiss from their loved one and, for a lot of the men, this was to be the last time they would see these wonderful people. To all the Forcemen, Helena was a wonderful city and its gracious people would never be forgotten.

On the 11th of April, the Force departed Helena, Montana, arriving at Camp Bradford by the 15th of April, 1943. Training began immediately for the



*Amphibious training, Camp Bradford, Va. April 1943 Courtesy Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham)*





*Over the side. Men of the Force loading into landing crafts during their amphibious training at Camp Bradford, Va. April 1943 (Courtesy Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham)*

amphibious phase. They learned how to climb roped ladders, use nautical terms, utilize rubber boats for shore landings, overhead rope walks, and loading and unloading off the landing crafts.

By the 24th of April, the Force received its Regimental Colors. An eagle embroidered on red silk (without inscription) had been selected back at Fort William Henry Harrison the previous fall. Nothing in the U.S. Army Heraldry seemed to fit the quality of the Force. Col. Frederick decided that the double edged fighting knife carried by the Force (V-42 stiletto) should be embroidered onto the shield of the eagle, but there was no motto on the scroll in the eagle's beak. Hopefully, someday, somewhere in battle, somebody would express a line which would become the slogan for the colors. That never came to be, as most words said in battle were not printable, so to this day the flag still has no motto. But, as we know, mottos do not win wars, for the motto of a regimental flag is the regiment's duty to country and men men's duty to the regiment. And, as they had so hoped somebody would have cried an inspiring line in battle, it did not happen. My motto for the First Special Service Force would have been "Bravery Beyond Compare."

## Operation Cottage

After 10 days at Camp Bradford the Force had completed training well ahead of schedule and was then to proceed to the Chesapeake Bay Sector to train for combat beach landings. The first few days were spent learning how to move, with full gear, over the sides of ships onto the waiting landing crafts alongside the mother ships. Proficiency was the objective and each time over the side, the time was sped up. Up to that time, the fastest over the side onto the landing crafts was 52 seconds, which was accomplished by the Marines. A contingent of the 3rd Regiment's FSSF went over the side first onto their landing crafts and pulled away in 33 seconds. This was accomplished with full battle gear and weapons.

The Force received an overall rating of excellence throughout this training period, and then were to proceed to Fort Eathen Allen, Burlington, Vermont. The Force was then under the command of XIIIth Corps at Ft. Dupont, Delaware. Training continued throughout their stay at Ft. Eathen Allen, with parachute jumping for the new replacements and amphibious training at Lake Champlain. Lt. Col. Edwin A. Walker arrived and assumed command of the 3rd Regiment. Word of the battles on the Aleutian Islands was constant as the Japanese had really settled in for a long stay. The Kiska Force was in

combat training in California and were preparing to invade the Aleutians. Gen. Marshall made a request that the First Special Service Force be attached to the Kiska Force for the invasion operation. The request was made to Gen. Bruckner, commander of the Kiska Task Force, and accepted. By the 15th of June, inspectors were at Ft. Eathen Allen to evaluate the Force for combat readiness. The results were phenomenal. The Force was more than capable of handling any physical hardship they might encounter. They departed by train on the 26th of June and arrived at Angel Island, San Francisco on the 3rd of July. No one knew where they were going, as most of the men originally thought they were on their way to the eastern seaports for transfer to the African Campaign. Upon arrival to Angel Island, they were issued cold weather clothing, which then told the men where they were going. Gen. Corlett, Amphibious Force Commander, informed the Force that for this operation they would be part of Amphibious Training Force Number 9 and would be under the Navy operations in northern waters.

On the 9th of July, the Force boarded two liberty ships, the SS Nathaniel Wyeth (1st and 3rd Regiments) and the SS John B. Floyd (Force Headquarters, 2nd Regiment and Service Battalion). They were instructed to remove all insignia from their clothing



while at Angel Island, and no one was allowed to leave the post. The secrecy of the Force still prevailed. On the 11th of July, the Force departed San Francisco and formed with the convoy formation (four destroyers and four more troop transports) and were bound for Adak Island.

The Force's strength which boarded at San Francisco was 169 officers, eight warrant officers and 2,283 enlisted men, together with 42 Canadian officers and 552 enlisted men. The ocean was not kind to the land based men, sea sickness was felt by all as the sea tossed, rolled and pitched. At one time it was so bad that some of the Forcemen had to man the guns for the Navy personnel, who, after a few days, started to show signs of life again. After the fourth day the sea calmed and it was then they heard about the sinking of the light cruiser, USS Helena, in Kula Bay off New Georgia in the South Pacific. News also heard was the shelling of Kiska Island by both the Navy battleships and the Air Force bombers. The men, upon hearing of the loss of the USS Helena, immediately pooled over \$6000 for a fund to help build another cruiser.

Col. Frederick had flown to Adak to help prepare for the bivouac of his men. He found, through overcrowding, that Amchitka Island would be a better



*Guard duty on Amchitka Island. 3rd Regt, Aug 1943. (Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham, special permission Col. R.D. Burhans)*

choice and so his choice was approved. On July 24, 1943, the troop ships Floyd and Wyeth docked at Amchitka. Fog was ever constant and the daylight hours were usually from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. Everything was damp and cold and it seemed like there was always a slight drizzle with the fog. Again, training was the order of the day, beginning with rubber landing crafts, beach assaults and long route marches. The Weasels were brought in and proved indispensable in the muddy terrain. Hunting was initiated, but very little game was ever found. Gambling was the off-duty recreation. It was even rumored one Force member had won over \$1000 shooting craps. Prior to departing for Kiska he buried it near his tent floor. The trouble was, he never returned to recover his bankroll. Who knows, perhaps it is still there waiting for someone to find.

*A member of the First Special Service Force on Amchitka preparing to load for Kiska. Upper patch on sleeve is that of "Amphibious Task Force Nine," also known as Corlett's Long Knives. Aug 1943. Courtesy Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham.*



By August 1st, Kiska was being bombarded by both planes of the 11th Air Force and ships from the North Pacific Fleet, commanded by Admiral Rockwell. Ships were ready to carry the troops ashore and support the landings. Within this element of assault were the Alaska Defense Command commanded by Maj. Gen. Buckner, the 11th Air Force, commanded by Maj. Gen. Butler, and the Amphibious Task Force 9, commanded by Lt. Gen.



*Members of the Hq Det FSSF studying a sand map of Kiska, in preparation for its assault on the island. Amchitka, Aleutians Aug 1943 (Durkee)*



Corlett. The task force had an estimated strength of 30,000 men. The 87th Mountain Infantry was also a part of this Force, but would not arrive until the 5th of August. Col. E.M. Sutherland of the Task Force would command the Southern Sector, securing the hills around Quisling Cove then moving to the Japanese Naval Base at Kiska Harbor. Also under his command would be the 1st Regiment FSSF, the 87th Mountain Regiment, and the 17th Infantry Regiment. Brig. Gen. J.L. Ready, also from the Task Force, was to command the Northern Sector with the 3rd Regiment FSSF, 13th Canadian Brigade and the 184th Infantry Regiment. In reserve would be the 2nd Regiment FSSF, the 602nd Tank Company and the 53rd Infantry Regiment. The plan of action was to bring the Northern and Southern Sectors together and secure the action around the Kiska Harbor defenses while the southern group took up positions around Gertrude Cove. Planes flew bombing missions from captured islands and, on one day alone, dropped over 300,000 pounds of explosives on Kiska.

It had been assumed there were approximately 12,000 Japanese troops on Kiska and due to the heavy casualties of allied troops on Attu, Headquarters was not going to take any chances with a garrison this size. Operation Cottage (the code name for the Kiska Invasion) took place on the 15th of August 1943.

The invasion of Kiska began with the landing of the American and Canadian troops, whose mission

was to secure the beachhead prior to the landing of the main force. They thought they were going to encounter a powerful enemy resistance. Instead, they found empty huts and fortifications. The enemy was nowhere to be found at the Kiska Harbor main camp, where the largest concentration of Japanese naval personnel was supposed to have been stationed. Instead, the scouts found a ghost camp. Patrols of the Northern and Southern Sector Forces met, but



LCIs at port in Amchitka waiting to take the Force men to Kiska Aug 1943. (Durkee)







*Forcemen of the 1st Regiment on the way to Kiska landing. Aug. 1943 Courtesy Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham, special permission Col. R.D. Burhans)*

there was nothing on the island to report. The question was, where did they go so fast? Rather, how did they leave without being detected? Col. Frederick had scouted the island with his reconnaissance units and concluded that the morale had been so low, especially after all the bombing from both the sea and air, they had fled thinking they did not have a chance of standing off the Allied invasion. The scouts found food ready to be eaten and hot coals in the stove. It had not been too long since the enemy



*FSSF Hq S-3 section, Amchitka, Aug 1943 (Durkee)*

had gone. Parts of the island had been booby-trapped and mined. Messages returning to Headquarters read "no enemy," and it was, without a doubt, a hasty withdrawal. The casualties that began

to flow in were from the Mountain Troops which had begun to shoot at one another in the fog. The report read they had seen silhouettes, and without identifying one another, started firing. The destroyer USS Abner Read struck a Japanese mine while patrolling the harbor and 35 men lost their lives when she exploded. The Read was eventually towed to Adak for repairs.



*While waiting on Amchitka, members of the 2nd Regt, Rusty Knoll, Forester, other two men unidentified, talking over and waiting for the tentatively scheduled airborne assault on Kiska. 14 Aug 1943. Assault aborted.*



*Practicing loading C-47 by the 2nd Regt FSSF, for tentatively scheduled jump on Kiska. Mission aborted. 14 Aug 1943 (Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham, special permission Col. R.D. Burhans)*

The 2nd Regiment FSSF, waiting on Amchitka, was to parachute on Kiska and had waited without



realizing what had happened. Had they jumped, as originally planned, and the Japanese had not fled, the 2nd Regiment would have jumped in a well-lit moonlight night and made wonderful targets for the enemy. The intelligence reports from the Navy were not the most accurate and had misled the Force into thinking they were going to land on flat beaches. Instead, they would have landed dodging rocks 16-20 feet high. The beaches also were strewn with the ever constant kelp, sometimes 3-4 feet deep. So, had the parachutists jumped, there would have been heavy casualties.

"The men of the First Special Service Force had proven themselves to be more than reliable, precise in detail and their combat efficiency was of the highest order." These words were remarked by both Lt. Gen. Corlett and Gen. DeWitt. They concurred they had seen the best when they had the opportunity to command the FSSF. The leadership of Col. Frederick was truly an accomplishment.

The Force, upon returning to Amchitka, received orders from Pearl Harbor through Admiral Nimitz Headquarters that the FSSF was to return to San Francisco for further assignment. Meanwhile, Lt. Gen. Mark Clark, Commander of the 5th Division, was in Washington, D.C. pleading for more troops for the future Italian Campaigns.

On the 23rd of August, the SS Bell left Adak with the 1st and 3rd Regiment, while the 2nd Regiment and Service Battalion boarded the SS Heywood. On the 24th of August, and after less than a month in the Aleutians, the First Special Service Force was home-bound.

Upon his arrival at Camp Stoneman, Col. Frederick authorized half the Force a 10 day leave, and they were then to report to Fort Eathen Allen for more training and replacements. They all arrived as ordered, and the training began with more discipline. Promotions were plentiful for officers and enlisted men alike. On the 19th of October, trains

departed for Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia. On the 28th of October, the Empress of Scotland, formerly the Empress of Japan, departed the Army pier at Newport News, Virginia with the entire regiment, two WAC (Women's Army Corps) companies and 3,000 casual replacements.

The Atlantic crossing was smooth and without any contact with enemy submarines or planes. By the 5th of November they docked at Casablanca. Col. Frederick had previously departed the United States on the 14th of October for an advanced detail overseas but was on hand to greet the Force as they landed.

The Force was to depart by rail for Oran, a seaport in Northern Algeria, on World War I type trains (40 men or eight horses to a car). During the trip to Oran, many eventful episodes developed, such as selling mattress covers to the Arabs. They would cut holes for the arms and head and use them as outer garments, but as the train would start moving, the Forcemen would grab the mattress covers away from the Arabs and repeat the process at the next stop, getting richer at every station. The best episode occurred when they came upon another train which was side-tracked to allow the Force train to pass. This train had kegs upon kegs of wine on its flatcars. The Force train passed within a few feet of this train and the men took delight in stabbing the kegs with their knives and bayonets, which started the wine flowing. The men caught the wine in their hands, canteen cups, helmets and even drank directly from the gushing kegs. It was a loud and happy group arriving in Oran. Col. Frederick, upon hearing and seeing the men, found out what had happened and restricted them to the post upon debarkation.

The Force stayed at Assembly Point Number One for two days. On the 16th of November they departed Oran for Naples, Italy, arriving there on the 19th of November 1943.



Casablanca, Morocco, loading onto the 40 and 8 cars for overland trip to Oran, Algeria. (Randall)



Oran, Algeria, assembly point #1 where the Force stayed for a few days, departing on the 16th of Oct., 1943 for Naples, Italy. (Marshall)



# Italy

## "THE BAPTISM"

On the 19th of November 1943, just over two months after leaving the Aleutian Campaign in the Northern Pacific, the First Special Service Force arrived in Italy. Col. Frederick reported to the commander of the 5th Army, Lt. Gen. Mark Clark, and he was mighty happy when he had learned that the First Special Service Force under Col. Frederick was definitely coming to Italy for assignment with the Fifth Army. Having been G-3 and Chief of Staff of the Headquarters Army Ground Forces in Washington, he was aware of this specially trained unit and of its capabilities. He contacted General Marshall, from Italy, when it was ready for deployment, requesting that it be sent to him. He welcomed Colonel Frederick when he arrived, told him how welcome he and his unit were, and that it was in for some tough work, and operations for which it was specially trained. We spent one day with them when they first went into combat. They accomplished their mission. From then on, Gen. Clark knew what a prize he had. They were in the midst of every tough fight and they were one of the finest combat units he had ever seen, and Col. Frederick was a great leader. They accomplished all assignments they were given. Col. Frederick looked like a man singled out by destiny to lead a group of men who required leadership of the highest caliber.



*The First Special Service Force arriving in Naples, Italy on the 19th of Nov 1943. (Marshall)*



*Loading Forcemen and equipment at Pozzuoli, bound for Anzio 31 Jan 1944. (Durkee)*

The Force had arrived from Naples and moved into the Italian Artillery School Barracks at Santa Maria (Capua-Vetere) located 20 miles north. Although the buildings were bombed they would still provide adequate housing for the Forcemen. The 5th Army Head-



*Forcemen arriving at their barracks area Santa Maria (Capua-Vetere) 21 miles northwest of Naples, Italy, 21 Nov 1943. (Courtesy Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham)*



quarters was located at Caserta and was preparing for Operation Raincoat, an assault to be implemented in early December breaching the mountain passes held by the Germans.



*Forcemen moving into their barracks at Santa Maria (Capua-Vetere), demolished by the retreating Germans, 21 Nov 1943 Courtesy Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham)*

Field Marshal Kesselring's Winter Line had some of the fiercest German Army Units at hand to form a stand of resistance for Rome which had stopped the advancing 5th Army almost everywhere in Italy. In order for the Allied Forces to advance, they would have to penetrate two mountains, Monte La Difensa and Monte La Remetanea. These two mountains were held by the German Panzer Grenadier Division (armored) and the Herman Goering Paratroop Division in reserve (this division had been reorganized and was now an armored division). The Germans had repulsed every assault thrown against the mountains and had inflicted heavy casualties against the Allied Forces attempting to advance through these well dug fortifications.

On November 22, Headquarters 5th Army assigned the FSSF to this sector under the command of Maj. Gen. Fred Walker of the 36th Division. Monte La Difense had an elevation of approximately 3100 feet. This mountain was to be assaulted by the First Special Service Force. Immediately, Col. Frederick, with his chosen scouts and staff personnel, started looking for the most advantageous route.

This is what made the Force so special. There was no protocol with the Colonel or his men while in a combat zone. They were all in the same situation and knew, from day to day, some would be killed or wounded. The unity of the Force established a raporte that they could depend upon one another as

equals rather than demands from officers to enlisted men.

The reconnaissance was accomplished under the cover of night. The rain, which seemed to always be there during the last few days of November, helped conceal every movement and allowed the group to make a more thorough reconnoiter of the objective. Upon completion of the mission, Col. Frederick surmised the only route to the top of La Difensa was a small trail on the north side of the mountain. This is where he found the Germans to have the least firepower. As he had realized, this was the German escape route should they be overrun. It seemed obvious the Germans thought there would never be an assault from this side of the mountain. It would be seemingly impossible for even a handful of men, let alone a full-sized attack from the Allied Forces.

Col. Frederick decided the assault day would be December 2. Meanwhile, at Santa Maria, the regiment was still training with mountain climbing, testing weapons and route marches. The regiment was now in full combat ready. When the long-awaited order came for the Force to take the objective, the mountain called La Difensa, the men of the Force were thrilled to know they were now going to try to prove to the Army, and to themselves, what caliber of men they really were. Would all the special training learned in Helena, Montana, now pay off or would they be faced with disaster? This was the thought of many, mixed with the excitement of knowing they were going to have their first real taste of combat. The main talk of the assault was that the hardships they would encounter would be so ferocious there would be heavy casualties. This was definitely not another Kiska. The Germans were there repulsing everything the Allies could throw at them. The Force was not going to walk in and take over as easily as they had done in the Aleutian Cam-



*La Difensa looking south (Glass)*

paign. They knew the attempts by experienced troops to take the mountain had been repulsed time and time again. How could they do the impossible on their first assignment? But do or die, that was the





*Monte La Difensa (3120 ft. high). On the assault of this mountain the legend of the First Special Service Force was born. (Glass)*

order and there would be no turning back. The Second Regiment was to be the first to assault La Difensa, under the command of Lt. Col. Williamson.

On the 1st of December, at 16:30 hours, the 2nd Regiment moved out in full gear for its destination—La Difensa. They were trucked to within six miles from the base of the mountain, where they proceeded to force march 12 hours to a point of protection from the mountaintop. The march was through muddy roads and the ever present rain. While waiting for their baptism, the day was spent drying clothes, checking weapons and ammunition, and preparing for the attack on the mountain. The 1st Regiment was assigned in reserve with Headquarters 36th Division. The 3rd Regiment was given a double duty mission; the 1st Battalion would be litter bearers and supply carriers for the 2nd Regiment and the 2nd Battalion would be the reserve for the Force to be used wherever they might be needed. The men were told to remove all identification from their clothing except for their dog tags. Col. Frederick then told the men what lay ahead as they had the right to know what was in store for them. The staff sergeants were also told that in the event the officers became casualties or killed, they were to be temporarily in command.

Some of the mines the Forcemen were made aware of were the S-mine (shrapnel-minen) or "Bouncing Betty" as it was called by the Allies. This anti-personnel mine, when stepped on, would leap 4-7 feet in the air and explode, spraying everyone in the immediate area with shrapnel. The other mine, which was even worse than the Bouncing Betty, was the Schu mine. This mine had a wooden case so it could not be detected with a mine detector. It would not kill outright, but it would blow off a foot or a hand if crawled over and accidentally set off. Also, a new weapon the Germans had brought into the area was the Nebelwerfer, or "Screaming Meemies," as called by the Americans.

A soldier had drawn a picture of a heavily burdened soldier with a pack he was to carry to the front, and labeled it "Freddie's Freighters, La Difensa or Bust." This was just one of many names the Force would have tagged on them for their accomplishments and unorthodox methods of fighting.

It was positive a lot of the men were somewhat afraid of what lay ahead and knew they would not come back. However, one of the most gratifying things they could think of was Col. Frederick's respect for them, which meant everything toward accomplishments. The Colonel was a man who believed in his men and gave them the equal trust and honesty that they in turn gave him. The officers and enlisted men were a unification of one unit and they too could be thoroughly depended upon to get the job done.

While the hour of departure neared, some of the men prayed, some wrote letters home and some gambled. These men of the Force were not supermen, nor were they mechanical creatures you could wind up when they wound down. They were human beings; soldiers who had been highly trained in a new type of warfare. Soldiers who knew, come hell or high water, they were going to give the Germans a shot in the ass that would let them know forever who they were and what they stood for.

The 1st Regiment moved out, settled in at the base of the mountain and deployed for perimeter defense and reserve position. The 3rd Regiment sent one battalion to the base of the hill in reserve to back up the 2nd Regiment. The rest of the battalion got into position to start their packing assignments. The 2nd Regiment started their grueling climb up La Difensa. The night was cold and rainy, and with their objective half way up the mountain, they climbed, swore and wondered when the fighting would begin. They arrived at the base of the ravine and dug in around 3:30 a.m. By the time the last man of the 2nd Regiment arrived in position and was concealed from the enemy, it was dawn. The rain had stopped and the sun finally shone.

Gen. Mark Clark and Col. Frederick had a brief meeting and the Colonel was informed that all available air and artillery firepower would be used to provide a diversion and weaken the enemy entrenched on La Difensa. Mid-afternoon on the 3rd of December, Col. Frederick and his chosen staff, Capt. Pat O'Neill, Lt. Finn Roll, Sgt. Grey, Chief Scout Wright, Pulley and Hill, set off for the mountain where they were met by the men already in combat readiness.

The artillery barrage began firing at sunset and the 2nd Regiment moved out and reached the base of the La Difensa Crown by 10:30 that evening. All other units at the base of La Difensa waited patiently for what was going to happen up there. The field phones were laced everywhere and the men were eager to join in the fighting that was about to start.

By midnight, the lead company, with Sgt. Van Ausdale, chief scout and Sgt. Fenton, second scout, had led the 600 men of the 2nd Regiment into concealment among the rocks well within range of the German positions. The artillery barrage that was laid down for cover was probably one of the fiercest in



the war. It was reported that within one hour over 22,000 rounds had been dropped and fired and for the men crawling up toward the top, it was a nightmare. As one of the men recounted later, "It looked as if we were marching into Hell. The whole goddamned mountain was being shelled and the whole mountain seemed to be on fire. God, what a sight." The lead company started its last climb, which was the most precarious. The cliff of La Difensa started just over the 2,000 foot elevation and shot upwards at an angle of approximately 65 degrees for another 900-1000 feet. The local peasants never attempted this route for grazing their flocks, only the well used routes of the opposite side of the summit. Two young men of a nearby village had tried to climb this formation of rocks and became stranded. The local peasants who had to help them down cursed their stupidity for trying such a climb. This was the route the 600 men of the 2nd Regiment were now climbing. With ropes tied to one another they climbed with frozen fingers and aching bodies. When they finally reached their positions, they waited. The second group to arrive was Col. Frederick and his staff. They too waited for the rest of the men to take their positions. When they had all arrived at their assigned positions, the Colonel signaled for the forward section to move to a depression approximately 100 by 300 feet. In front of them were dug in Germans; some of the best.

The men of the Force slid steadily forward, their faces blackened and their uniforms filthy with mud and dirt. They blended well into the concealment of darkness. The only other sound heard in the distance besides the artillery was the gurgling sound of German sentries' throats being cut by the Forcemen as they silently moved by them in the darkness.

Col. Williamson told his men they were to hold their fire until 6 a.m. and the V42 dagger and bayonets were to be used on any sentry who might wander into the Force's positions. Lady Luck works in mysterious ways, as she led the men of the Force all the way to within inches of the final position without mishap. At the last minute, Lady Luck let them down when loose gravel and rockfall gave their positions away. The Krauts had loose stones all around their emplacements, so if anybody would come near they would slip and cause a signal to open fire. As some of the men began slipping and falling, flares went up and all hell broke loose. The fight for La Difensa was on.

Shots came from everywhere. Men were hollering and screaming as mortar rounds landed all over the area. German snipers were picking off the men left and right. The Forcemen pushed on, placing machine guns in advantageous positions to annihilate the enemy. The element of surprise was on the side of the Force as the Germans never realized anything could happen so quickly. In the early moments of battle, Col. MacWilliams was killed. The fighting was so ferocious that the officers fought hand to hand as hard as the enlisted men. They prepared to take prisoners, for this was their first encounter with the enemy; however, this ceased immediately. Capt. Rothlin had just taken a German machine gun nest

and the men had come out waving a white flag with their hands up for surrender. When Capt. Rothlin went to take one of the men, he was shot and killed instantly. His men opened up on the Germans and killed them all. The reluctance of being mellow to the enemy no longer existed. They were to kill them all and only if specified for a special reason were prisoners to be taken. The battle continued, and Col. Frederick, muddy and dirty, seemed to be everywhere; directing orders, running from one point to another making sure his men were still organized and pressuring the battle to the enemy. The fog sometimes seemed to be on the side of the Germans, but the men of the Force were now everywhere on the mountaintop and it was just a matter of time before the victory would be theirs. The tommy guns and Johnson machine guns were their biggest assets. The firepower they emitted was tremendous. The Germans knew defeat was at hand and started running down the mountain across the valley to the Force's second target, Monte La Rementanea.

This battle did not take three or four days, as the experts had anticipated. It lasted about two hours. To this day, had it not happened, the historians would still be arguing that it would have been impossible to have taken such a mission. The fog was now lifting and the Germans on La Rementanea had spotted the 2nd Regiment, still together in the basin they had just won. The artillery started to come in with expert marksmanship. Col. Frederick shouted for his men to take cover in the fortifications left by the Germans on their retreat from La Difensa.

Supplies, ammunition and the litter bearers were the next to start for the top of La Difensa. The men carried the loads and this was a test of strength beyond all endurance, as the mules could not climb the trails because they were too steep. The trip took about six hours and the mud and the steepness of the trail did not make matters any better. The men loaded up with what looked like tons of equipment per load and moved out. Col. Adams was a man with foresight and knew what was needed and when. In record time he had everyone mustered into carrying loads to the top. This, without a doubt, was a leading contributor to the success of the mission. Sgt. John Marshall, who maintained a daily diary, remembers how the trip seemed to take an eternity. Bodies of Germans and Americans were everywhere. It was a nightmare that had to be lived. They loaded, delivered, returned and loaded again to go back into Hell. Yes, the battle for La Difensa was over and the enemy had been driven off, but now for the counter-attack. If the Germans could mass their forces and combine their strength for an attack, it could isolate the Force on top of La Difensa and cut them to shreds. News of the battle progression was brought up with every packer, as the wires to the field phones had been cut during the battle and contact between Col. Frederick and Col. Adams was temporarily out of commission.

Col. Frederick had just received word from Col. Adams that the British had been routed from their position in a monastery on an adjoining hill. This



news gave Col. Frederick all the more reason to take La Rementanea as soon as possible. He sent patrols out toward La Rementanea to clean out snipers and bring back information regarding the enemy's strength. He told everyone to dig in, as he still considered a counter-attack inevitable. At this time, Col. Frederick did not know the reason why the Germans did not counter-attack. The Rapido and Garigliano Rivers had flooded. Bridges were washed out and most of the banks were under water. The Germans ahead of this line had also come under heavy artillery fire and it became apparent that Field Marshal Kesselring decided to abandon the southern support of the Winter Line rather than commit troops to cross the flooded valleys. Col. Frederick would attack La Rementanea at dawn.

The Germans now started firing the "Nebelwerfer," also known as the Screaming Meemies, at the Force. This was a six barreled rocket rack which fired electrically one rocket at a time and screamed like a banshee when fired. Night had come to La Difensa and the men were about to suffer more hardships. This time the wind and the unrelenting rain and ice. The men had no food, blankets or shelter and the goddamned mortars never seemed to let up. La Difensa was now cut off from everybody. Drenched in rain and fog, the men waited for the inevitable counter-attack from the enemy.

The 1st Regiment was now being shelled by the Germans, and it seemed wherever the regiment moved, the German spotters would fire a burst from their machine guns into the direction of them. The artillery spotters would zero in on the regiment, which made movement almost impossible. When Col. Frederick heard of the 1st Regiment being hit by the German artillery, he left his command-post to be with his men of the 1st Regiment to try to do something, anything, to help them. The barrage was heavy, rounds were landing everywhere. Seeing the Colonel there just as muddy and dirty as they were gave them all a sense of confidence and somehow they knew they would survive the artillery onslaught. There were men now exposing themselves to the enemy, trying to find the snipers who were controlling the artillery fire. By exposing themselves, the snipers would fire at them and expose their positions. Some of the Forcemen were hit. Nevertheless, this type of bravado did pay off, as most of the snipers were shot. Other Forcemen crept up into the snipers' area and eliminated them with grenades. The artillery barrage lasted approximately 45 minutes. During this time the 1st Regiment suffered almost 40 percent loss of productivity. This loss of men from the artillery barrage forced Col. Frederick to wait one more day before assaulting La Rementanea. In the meantime, he had his patrols reconnoiter the enemy's situation and eliminate sniper action wherever possible. He then moved up his reserve units for attack position.

The men of the First Special Service Force had won the battle of La Difensa. They now sat and waited for whatever the Germans would throw at them. The wounded and dead were being removed from the battlefield and taken back to the base of La

Difensa to the aid stations and the grave registrations. John Marshall recounts that he could not fully understand how, without the grace of God, so much firepower could create so much havoc by killing and wounding so many. Yet, how could so many survive without a scratch and be prepared to fight another battle within another day.

Some of the patrols ran into trouble when the fog banks blew away and exposed them to the German snipers who immediately opened fire, killing and wounding some of the patrol. On other occasions the fog lifted and the Germans were exposed to the Forcemen who in turn repaid the Germans their dues.

It was rumored that Col. Frederick had been taken prisoner during the battle. This created a feeling never before felt by some of the Forcemen. They started chasing Germans until they were cut off. They ran until they were told the Colonel was alright and that he had not been captured at all. They might have run all the way to Berlin and even annihilated the enemy entirely before they would have given up the chase to get the Colonel back. He was a man loved by the entire Force and they were not going to let the Germans take away someone so close to them all.

The Force had a policy of silence in combat. However, when a German machine gun nest cut down one of the men who had just knocked out two or three German machine gunners, the remainder of his crew, without regard to cost of life, started screaming and hollering and running toward the enemy throwing grenades and firing their guns until the enemy was dead. This type of attack really confused the enemy and became an effective attack thereafter.

After three days on top of La Difensa, the men were cold and many suffered from frostbite. They had no blankets to keep them warm, they had to use rocks for bedding. They stayed on that mountain for what seemed like an eternity and never complained. The human spirit is really astonishing. Col. Frederick requested whiskey from Headquarters 5th Army. After all, who was to question this when the FSSF had just taken such an important objective. Col. Adams immediately secured the whiskey and also requested condoms (prophylactics) for the men to keep their rifle barrels dry from the rain.

The 2nd Regiment was finally relieved by Col. Becket and the 1st Regiment. Down at the rest area the mail was distributed. Getting the clean, dry clothing was almost like Christmas. We looked around and noticed a very large gap within our ranks. Almost half our regiment had been killed or wounded. What a price to pay for glory. Why must men die in a God-forsaken place such as this? Now came the hard part, writing to the friends, wives and families telling them that their loved ones had been killed. It was harder to write these letters than it had been to fight on the mountain. This was their first encounter with the enemy. How many more would die before the war was over?

The dawn of a new day showed the Force's patrol had cleared all the Germans from the southern



slopes of the mountain. Col. Frederick decided rather than waiting for night to attack, he would have a head-on attack in the afternoon. The saddle area is where the Germans' main mortar concentration had fired on La Difensa. There were also two to three companies of German infantry occupying a monastery in the middle of that area. Advance by either the Americans or the British without clearing out this saddle area would be almost impossible. A rapid push down on the saddle would unite the II Corps and the X Corps, and an assault toward La Rementanea would assist the British in their advance.

By midafternoon the 1st Regiment was ready for the attack on the saddle. The 36th Division had relieved the 1st Regiment of its reserve duties and had moved into attack position at the saddle area. Monte Maggiore had been cleared of all enemy and it was comforting that there would be no more harassments from this area during the assault on the saddle area. The saddle area objectives were two small, fortified hills nicknamed "The Warts" and controlled by the German Panzergrenadiers. Mortar fire was the only preparation for their advancement toward The Warts. The men started moving out and upon leaving the overhead cover the Germans opened up on them with machine guns and mortars. The Germans fought valiantly, defending this isolated parcel of land, knowing they would be overrun at any time. However, they left no doubt that they would inflict as many casualties as possible on the Force.

What the Germans had not counted on was the likes of men such as Lt. Wayne Boyce, a platoon leader in 5 Company, who led his men to the attack. With bayonets and grenades they killed snipers and machine gunners and managed to flank on three sides on the initial hill. Determination and courage were what supported Lt. Boyce and his men toward the enemy. Lt. Boyce used as much cover protection as possible to advance and keep his men organized. Again, he led his men on the final assault approximately 200 yards down the slopes. In full assault and now without any cover support whatsoever, they were hit. With the loss of half his platoon, and Lt. Boyce having been hit three times, he continued his attack, commanding his sections on the flanks and then leading the final charge over the hill. He was killed leading a very courageous charge. Lt. Boyce was what the men of the Force were made of: bravery and determination. He did not question "Yours is not to reason why, yours is but to do or die." His heroic leadership was felt by all who knew him, and his death was painfully felt by all.

The two hills had been taken and now the two battalions waited throughout the night on each hill. The 1st Battalion met with little resistance from the enemy on their way to La Rementanea and the enemy's withdrawal was imminent. On occasion, Col. Moore and his men on The Warts would receive sporadic firing from the slopes of Monte Camino across the saddle area. By dawn the enemy had retreated but German concentration was still reported on Camino. The 1st Battalion attacked La Rementanea and with little resistance or firepower,

had taken the mountain by noon. Patrols were sent out to see where the enemy was and to consolidate their holdings. Snipers were still in the area, but by nightfall all had been dispatched. That night the British had taken Monte Camino and British officers who had entered the saddle area remarked on the amount of high ranking American officers in the combat area. When asked why so many, they were told that the Force's concept was that leaders should lead their men.

The men of the First Special Service Force now waited for their relief and their walk down the mountain to the waiting trucks. What a filthy bunch they were. Mud and blood and whatever else that might have clung to their clothes. They were a sorry looking lot but they had won what others thought was impossible.

The cost was very high, however, casualties for the six days totaled 511: 73 dead, 9 missing in action, 313 wounded or injured and 116 exhaustion cases. This represented one-third of the entire fighting strength of the Force.

Were those six bloody days worth the price? Some say yes. For the first phase of Operation Raincoat had been to open up the Winter Line and form an allied strength for the assault on Rome—the Gustav Line. The southern hinge, consisting of the Camino-Difensa-Maggiore mountain groups, was now firmly in Allied hands. Mt. Lungo, San Pietro and Mt. Summucro, the northern hinge, would be in the next phase of operation.

During the six day battle Col. Frederick had been wounded twice, but had kept up the pace with everyone else. Not to be forgotten are the men of the 3rd Regiment and the Service Battalion, whose relenting desire was to bring the needed supplies to the men at the top of La Difensa. These men were shot at on almost every trip to the top, yet they continued their trips, six hours up and sometimes longer to come down, especially carrying the wounded. These men worked beyond physical endurance yet there was an element of sheer bravery within each and every packer making the trip. Without their determination, perhaps the battle for La Difensa would have been a disaster. The magnitude of the human pack service was astonishing as it was estimated that in a 10 day period they had packed close to 100,000 pounds of supplies to their men on top of the mountain. If one could have seen the steepness of the mountain and the top part of the trails, anchored with ropes so the men could pull themselves upward, this act of unselfishness goes without saying. They were heroes one and all. The men of the Medical Corps also aided the wounded day and night in the middle of all the fighting and gave comfort to the ones in need. It is only fitting that the men of the Force had a strong sense of respect for these men who did what was expected of them and much, much more.

The 142nd Infantry relieved them and the men from the 1st and 2nd Regiment returned down the mountain, some falling and some staggering down the trails of La Difensa. They came down that God-forsaken mountain never looking back to see what



they had conquered. The battle was now over and they looked only on the accomplishment of the First Special Service Force. They did what had to be done

and learned a lot from this mission. This was their baptism under fire and they would now pray for their fallen comrades.

## Mountain Fighting

The men of the First Special Service Force returned to Santa Maria for a well deserved rest. They enjoyed the Red Cross tours to the local historical sites and islands, as well as the touring USO shows. Lt. Gen. Mark Clark came to Santa Maria to commend the Force for its achievements and was delighted that the Canadians were assigned to this bi-national group under his command. Col. Frederick also praised his men for their heroism and conquest of routing the enemy from the mountains of La Difensa and La Rementanea.



Medics treating wounded Forcemen in the Mt. Sammucro area. Dec 1943 (Durkee)

By the 21st of December 1943, the Force left Santa Maria and was assigned to the outskirts of a small town called Venafrò. It seemed to the men every time they moved, the weather was raining. They wondered what the weather would be like in the higher regions where they would be fighting. An artillery duel between the Allies and Germans at Venafrò had been described as "the hottest spot in the world." Whenever the mountain fighting began, they always found another obstacle behind the mountains assaulted; generally another mountain. They also encountered some of the best German soldiers entrenched in these mountains.

The mission of the Force in the Sammucro Mountains north of the Monte Majo Range, was to attack and seize the peaks where the Germans had their artillery guns situated. Assisting the Force would be the 141st Infantry and the 504th Parachute Infantry. Another problem faced by the Force was that the mules used to carry the supplies up the mountain had not yet arrived. Again, the men would have to carry the needed supplies themselves.

On the 22nd of December, the Force Headquarters was situated in Ceppagna Village. As the Force bivouaced in a nearby olive grove, Col. Frederick ordered the 1st Regiment to assault Monte Sammucro. At daylight, Col. Marshall moved his regiment uphill as ample cover protection was given by clouds that hovered over most of the mountain. The cold and dampness was always there, and the trench foot casualties never seemed to improve, just worsen.

Unlike La Difensa, the Regiment would be attacking the enemy in a downhill attack. The 2nd Regiment had assigned three companies for the packing of supplies and litter bearers. Throughout the day, prior to attack, the 1st Regiment received heavy artillery shelling. At nightfall, the 1st Regiment moved out and was again hampered by the shelling. The defender of the mountain was the 3rd Battalion of the 71st Panzergrenadier Regiment, and they too were under-strengthened from the constant attacks of previous fighting. Around 6 a.m. Christmas Day, the Forcemen took their first objective, a small hill which took only 30 minutes. The Germans were there in good position, and the Braves caught hell. They shot everything they could and the casualties started mounting. The Germans started shooting





Three members of the FSSF moving along a mountain trail through a cluster of peasant homes near Venafro, Italy. Early Jan. 1943 (Public Archives Canada # 128979)



Sgt. O.S. Wolsborn bringing in a German prisoner near Venafro, Italy. Jan 1944 (Public Archives Canada # 128983)



Italian mule train transporting ammunition to Mt Corno, north of Venafro, Italy. Jan 1944 (PA Canada # 128977)



their "Screaming Meemies." Nevertheless, the Forcemen managed to get to the top of the ridge of Sammucro. One company had started with 25 men and had only six left when they reached the top. One officer was reported to have been shot seven times and still managed to help a wounded man up the mountain. It took nearly an hour of heavy fighting to take the ridge, but by 7 a.m., all the hills were cleared. The Germans counter-attacked but were driven off, and the 1st Regiment was under heavy shelling the rest of day.



*Bringing in wounded Forcemen and German prisoners through a Force Clearing Station near LeNoci, Italy, Jan 1944 (PA Canada # 128982)*

By the 26th of December the Force was relieved by the 141st Infantry and left Sammucro for a rest at Ceppagno. Again, the Force had won another mountain range by overwhelming the enemy with speed and unwavering attacks.

The next missions given the Force were those given the 3rd Regiment to take Monte Majo and the 2nd Regiment to take Monte Radicosa. By now, winter had firmly set in Central Italy, the weather proved to be no friend at all during the assaults, however, during the scouting patrols it provided perfect cover during the infiltrations. Snow was in the mountains and in some areas so deep that penetration was almost impossible. The winds blew unmercifully, never ceasing. The men of the Force suffered severe hardships in those winter months. Many times the men thought back to the strictness of Col. Adams in their winter phase of training in Blossburg, Montana. It was now paying off, a lesson of great value. All objectives were assumed without any comfort whatsoever.



*Forceman, Pvt N.L. Shaver, 3rd Regt, with frozen feet and shrapnel wound in hand brings in German prisoner. Near LeNoci, Italy, Jan 1944 (PA Canada # 128980)*

It seemed as though the Germans had placed mines everywhere. The Force's scouts had to uncover and diffuse them. One scout in particular, Chief Wright, ran into a German patrol while searching for mine fields with his men. The Germans opened fire and Wright and his men ran back down the trail. They turned the German direction signs in the opposite direction, hoping the Krauts would become confused and walk into the Force's lines. Although it never happened, it was a hopeful gesture.

On the 3rd of January, the men moved out for Radicosa. The 1st Regiment would be held in reserve for wherever they might be needed, although almost two-thirds down in total strength from their assault on Sammucro. Lt. Col. Bob Moore replaced Col. Williamson, commander of the 2nd Regiment, which had been sent back to Canada due to lack of "military behavior." It was Col. Frederick's policy that a leader would lead while in the Force and should think of himself as being the best ever.

One by one, the hills were taken as the men bypassed Radicosa where the Germans had small outposts. By midday of the 4th, the 1st Regiment had taken Monte Radicosa and the men were clearing the areas of mines and demolition charges which the





*John Marshall, Hq Det 2nd Bn 3rd Regt, one of the packers in the Mt Stephano area, taking 10 prior to going back up the mountain. Jan 1944 (Marshall)*

Germans had left behind. Clearing out one German machine gun nest resulted in four prisoners being taken. They just couldn't understand how the Forcemen had sneaked into their area undetected while they were alert, manning their guns.

One irritating event happened to Col. Frederick while he was commanding his Command Post on top of Radicosa. He was requested to report to Head-



*Pvt D.M. Hill and Pvt G.L. Wright, both of the Forct Hq Det, preparing to cut trip-wire and defuse a German booby trap in the Radicosa area. Jan 1944 (Durkee)*

quarters 5th Army in a snowstorm, which took him approximately six hours to reach. Upon reporting, he was introduced to two officers who started questioning him about recreational equipment and activities. Col. Frederick could not understand what they were talking about until he realized the name of the First Special Service Force and the Special Services (Recreational Division) were almost identical in name only. Col. Frederick, being thoroughly irritated, excused himself as courteously as he possibly could and went back up to Radicosa, swearing all the way.

After five weeks of delaying the 5th Army with unsuccessful attempts to clear the mountain by



*Forcemen, l to r, M. Flannery, C.E. Joiner, B. Leonard, and J.R. Thompson, all members of a machine squad of the 2nd Regt, located on the summit of the Appenine Mountain in the Radicosa area, prepare to eat a ten in one ration supper. Jan 1944 (DAVA U.S. Army # SC 228336)*





*Pvt J. Johnson, a member of the 2nd Regt, FSSF, manning a 30 cal. Johnson light machine gun in the Radicosa area, Italy. Jan 1944 (DAVA U.S. Army # SC 228335)*



*Harlan Morgan, a member of the 3rd Regt, FSSF, leading men up mountain, passing mule relay station and French medical aid station. In the Cervaro area, Italy. Jan 1944 (DAVA U.S. Army # SC 218510)*



other units, the 3rd Regiment succeeded in routing the enemy and taking Monte Majo. This area was the key to the northern and southern countryside that the Allies would use as a center of movement for their attack on Monte Cassino. The Allies had called this mountain area, guarding the road to Rome, "Highway 6," for this was the German lifeline from Rome to Cassino.



*J. Walton and Les Shelton 2nd Regt, 1st Co, loading mules and preparing for the assault on Mt. Majo. Jan 1944 (Marshall)*

The 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion relieved the 3rd Regiment on Monte Majo and was now temporarily assigned to Col. Frederick. The 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion had just turned over its M-7 tracked tank destroyers to the First French Corps element, the 3rd Algerian Spahi Regiment, commanded by Col. Bonjour.

The 1st Regiment had taken Monte La Difensa, the 2nd Regiment had taken Sammucro and the 3rd Regiment had now taken Monte Majo. The victory of Monte Majo was truly a work of art. Col. Walker's men had moved rapidly and steadily toward the enemy and even though they were outnumbered two to one, the Forcemen still overran the Germans and took the mountain within a matter of hours. During the Monte Majo assault, a large amount of German ammunition and machine guns was found intact. When the Germans counter-attacked the Force's positions, they were repelled by their own guns. It was estimated that Col. Walker's 3rd Regiment had stopped 27 German counter-attacks in one day.

On Christmas Day 1943, the First Special Service Force had approximately 1800 fighting men, but by the 17th of January 1944 they had almost 1400 casualties. The packers and litter bearers who had brought down the dead and wounded were reduced to almost 50 percent due to fatigue and wounds. Col. Frederick had been wounded three times during the fighting.



*Communion services held by Father Essig, before offensive on Mt. Majo, Ceppagna, Italy. Jan 1944. (Marshall)*

The men started moving off the mountain and few vehicles were needed to transport them to their bivouac area. The casualty rate was tremendous. With this phase of combat over, Col. Frederick was promoted to brigadier general.



*German propaganda dropped on the Allied Forces in the Casino area.*

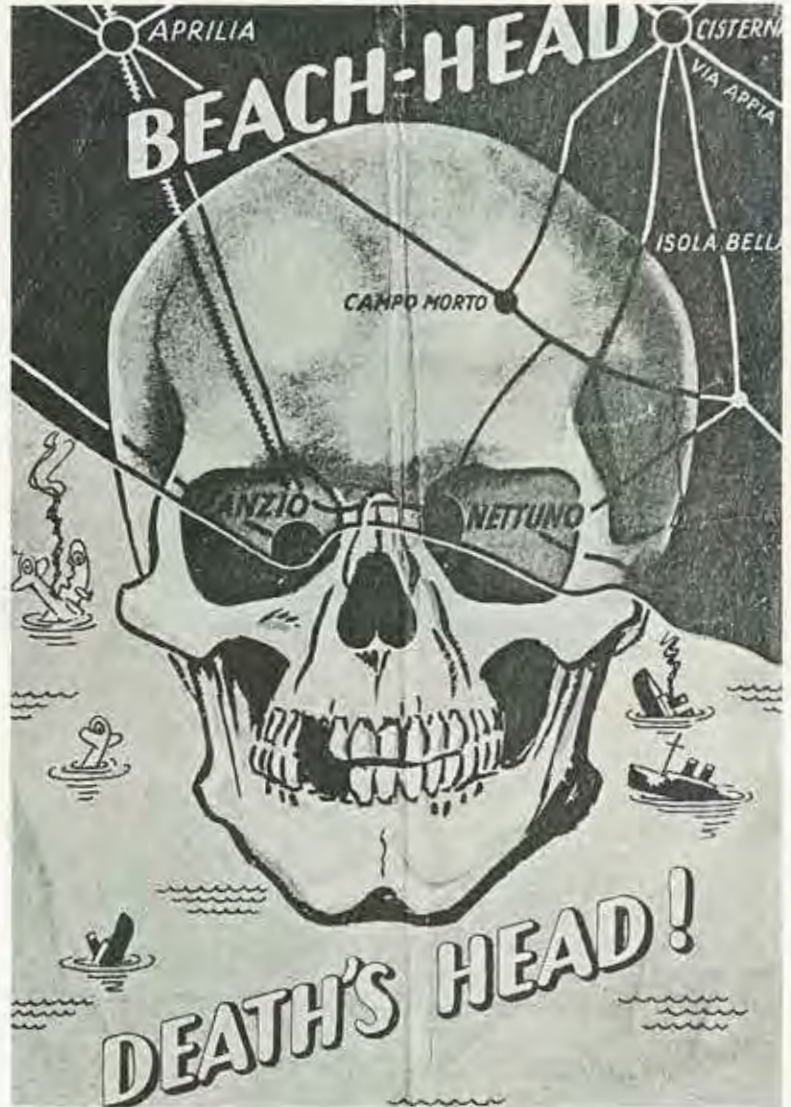


# Anzio

## "THE BLACK DEVILS"



Physiological propaganda leaflets dropped by the Germans to deter the fighting minds of the Allied Forces in the Anzio area. (Marshall)



German leaflets dropped on the Allied Forces in the Anzio area. (Durkee)



The Force spent 10 days at Santa Maria, during which time they reorganized with replacements and trained. Rest and recuperation from the fighting in the mountains and passes, were granted in Naples. Word had come that the Force was going to make an assault crossing the Rapido River. However, at the last moment the orders were changed and they were instead sent to the Port of Pozzuoli, bound for Anzio.



*Arriving into Port of Anzio.*



*The First Special Service Force arriving at the beachhead of Anzio, 1 Feb 1944, unloading men and equipment. (Marshall)*



*The Pontine Marshes of the Anzio beachhead, north of the Mussolini Canal. (Force Museum, Helena, Montana) (Durkee)*

The Force loaded LCI's and LCT's and departed at sunset. The convoy traveled all night, arriving at Anzio Harbor on the morning of January 31, 1944. The Force docked, unloaded and marched to the assembly area where they proceeded to the bivouac area by truck. Nettuno, south of Anzio, was selected for the Service Battalion and the Force's rear area.

Gen. Eisenhower was convinced the only way to defeat Hitler was to have a frontal attack launched from England into France across the channel. Eisenhower always questioned the continued campaigns in Italy as it was also Gen. Marshall's evaluation that the Italian Campaign was nothing more than partially wearing down the men and equipment of the German Army. However, the Ottawa Conference between Roosevelt and Churchill resulted in the continued Italian fight in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations. Eisenhower was ordered to London to assume command of his future invasion force and to turn over his present command to the British General, Sir Harold Alexander, who in turn gave the bulk of his fighting to Lt. Gen. Mark Clark of the 5th Division.

In the immediate perimeter were four German divisions commanded by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the supreme commander in Italy. Among these units were the Herman Goering Division, the Reichsfuhrer (SS) Division, the 35th Panzer Grenadier (SS) Regiment, and numerous Italian units totaling well over 70,000 men. A continuous stream of enemy forces arrived daily.

Gen. Alexander had selected Anzio for a seaboard landing, which put the Allied Forces well behind the enemy lines. Gen. Alexander's intention was to split the German and Italian forces to draw more manpower into Italy and speed up the capture of Rome.

On the 27th of January a tragedy had unfolded at Anzio. It would strengthen the front on the Cisterna Canal and press the right flank out of the beachhead. Gen. Truscott, 3rd Division Commander, had ordered the 1st and 3rd Ranger Battalions (Darby's Rangers) to infiltrate and make contact with the enemy in Cisterna. The Rangers departed at night, working their way up the Cisterna Canal hoping to get into



the city before daybreak. Unfortunately, before the Rangers could get into position, daylight penetrated the early morning mists and the Rangers found themselves totally surrounded and in the middle of the Herman Goering sector. There they stood with infantry, tanks and guns on all sides, totally cut off. The Rangers fought, but to no avail. They were wounded, killed and taken prisoner. They fought valiantly until they could fight no more. On the 28th of January, the following day, those who could, returned. The two Ranger Battalions had been reduced to less than a company of men.

On the 2nd of February, the First Special Service Force was placed under the command of the VI Corps and took its position from Bridge 5 to the sea along the Mussolini Canal, which took up 13 kilometers or one-third of the entire beachhead. This



*The banks of the Mussolini Canal on the beachhead of Anzio.*

area, called the Pontine Marshes, was flat and barren and the Force was constantly under surveillance by the German artillery spotters located in the nearby mountains. The Mussolini Canal was a large drainage ditch built in 1926 and located across the Littoria Plains. To try to conceal themselves from the Germans in this area was virtually impossible. To dig a foxhole in this area was also futile, for as soon as the digging started, the water would fill up the holes. Any concealment had to be done by digging into the side of the canal. The canal, at its widest, was approximately 60 yards, and it would sometimes rise to a depth of 8-10 feet. The canal, as expected, became a barrier for the Force. It prevented the German tanks from moving into the area. This area was soon known as "The Billiard Table."

The First Special Service Force was not the only fighting unit at Anzio that gave the Allies their victory. However, their continual strikes against the Germans forced Field Marshal Kesselring to support his area with more German troops than he had originally planned to maintain. The Force's nightly penetration in the German lines, without detection, gave the Allies the intelligence reports that con-

cluded the ability of the Allies to hold a position originally thought impossible to hold.

The Germans could have forced their adversaries back to the sea, for the Germans in this area were the very best. But even the veteran units, such as the Herman Goering Panzer Division, squared off with the Force. Numerous skirmishes ensued during a period of 100 days and the Germans came out second best.

The 3rd Division, one of the best in the U.S. Army, was given half as much area to defend as the Force. Upon taking hold of the situation, Gen. Frederick immediately put the 1st Regiment on the Force's right front, which was one-third of the entire line. The 3rd Regiment was given the remainder of the line on the left front, constituting the remaining two-thirds defense. The 2nd Regiment was placed in reserve as they had suffered heavy casualties during their assault on Mt. Radicosa and had not been fully reinforced. The Service Battalion was situated directly behind the 2nd Regiment and was kept on alert for the possibility of being put into direct combat duty.



*Lt. H. Rayner, 2nd Regt, 5th Co., briefing a Black Devils patrol prior to moving out. 20 April 1944 (P.A. Canada # 128986)*

The Force's first night in position began with operations against the Krauts. They had to be moved from their present positions because they were too close to the Force for comfort. Some of the Force's penetrations were as deep as 1500 yards into the enemy's territory. Bringing back prisoners and valuable information gathered on their sorties resulted in the Germans pulling back almost half a mile. The areas controlled by the Force became a real sore spot for the Germans. Some of the local farms and hamlets were blown up, as they had no real value as observation stations. Most of the houses were in an area called "no man's land" and Gen. Frederick gave

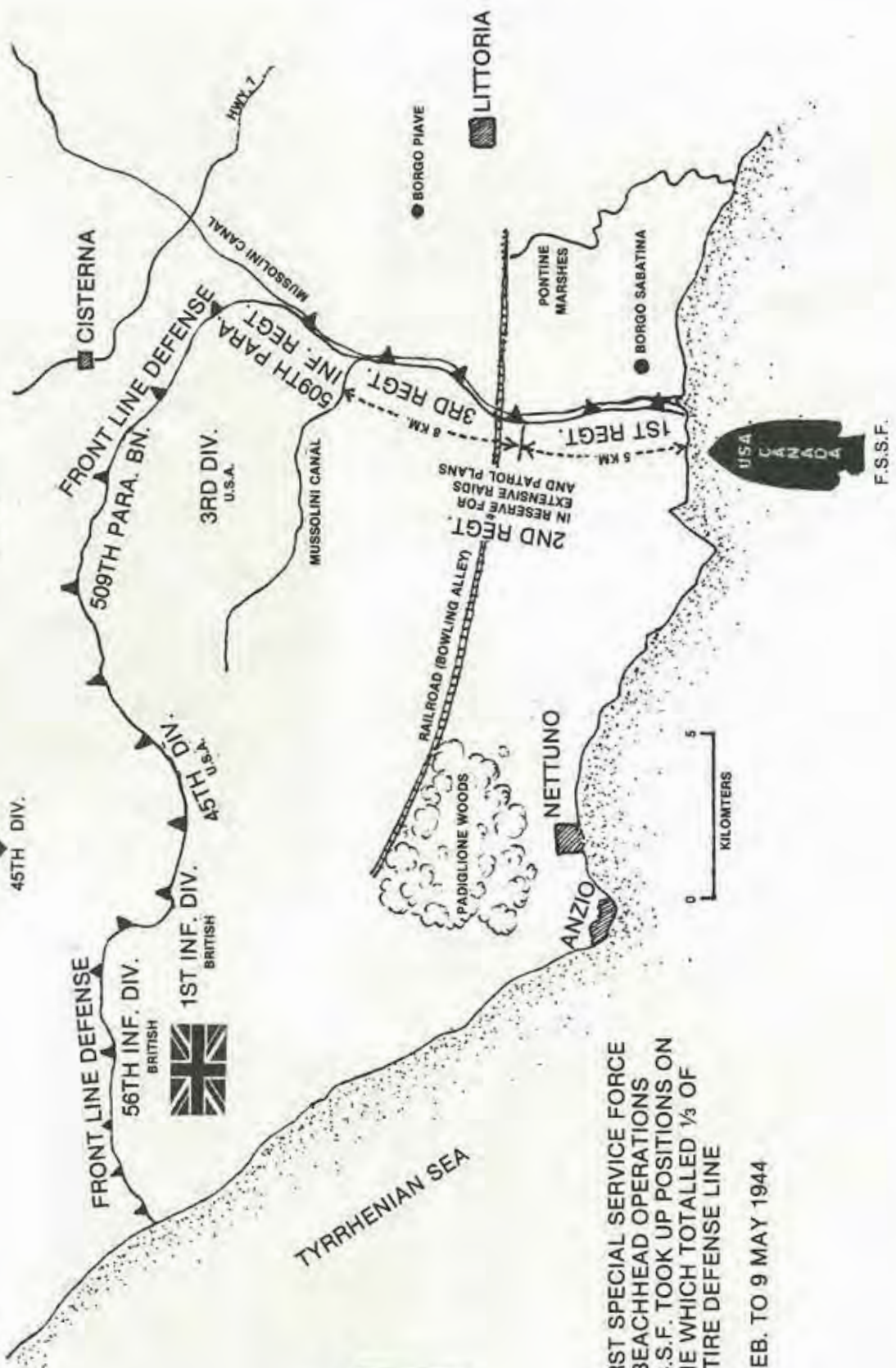




45TH DIV.



3RD DIV.



FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE  
 BEACHHEAD OPERATIONS  
 F.S.S.F. TOOK UP POSITIONS ON  
 LINE WHICH TOTALLED 1/3 OF  
 ENTIRE DEFENSE LINE

2 FEB. TO 9 MAY 1944





Members of the FSSF carrying logs across the Mussolini Canal to be used for bridgework and bunker fortifications. April 1944 (Durkee)

the men permission to blow them up to prevent the Germans from setting up listening posts in them.

One nightly patrol stumbled upon a deserted village called Borgo Sabotino. Lt. Gus Heilman and his platoon crossed Bridge 1 and combed the entire village. Finding it deserted, they decided they would move in and keep it for themselves. The men in the platoon named it after their platoon leader and so it was called "Gusville." Thus, the 2nd Company of the 1st Regiment had penetrated the enemy lines at Anzio and established a foothold in the enemy's sector. This small town made headlines in the *Stars*

and *Stripes* and was the base of operations for the "reckless commandoes" as the Germans first called them on the beachhead. The men of the 5th Army called them "the wild men of the beach."

Within a week the men of the Force had grabbed the conditions of beachhead warfare and minimized movement by groups in the daytime, which would draw fire from the enemy across the canal. At night, however, they would go to their designated houses used as outposts and listen in on the enemy's movements. Gusville, in the meantime, had started publishing a newspaper called *The Gusville Herald*



Beachhead, Anzio. Two men of the FSSF preparing to fire their 2.36 bazooka toward a German target. April 1944 (Durkee)



Forcemen preparing a meal on the Anzio beachhead, late April 1944. (P.A. Canada # 128973)





*The crossroads of Anzio. Sheep are grazing in the foreground while artillery shells are bursting in the background. (Marshall)*

*Tribune*. It gave an account of the activities around and beyond the beachhead and even named streets after them. One, in particular, was called Tank Street. A German tank would, at random, move to the end of the street and fire a burst to the opposite end of the street. Another street was named Prostitute Avenue, for anybody walking a short distance down this street would find themselves without any visual means of support.

A United Press reporter named Robert Vermillion wrote, "With the 5th Black Devils at Gusville, the patrol had gone into no man's land and returned with a wounded German soldier, a wheelbarrow full of sweet potatoes, bushels of peanuts, two dozen eggs and one rabbit. The livestock at Gusville now has eight cows, 14 chickens, six pigs and three horses, all stolen from the Germans." A sense of humor was greatly prized by all the Force members. This humor would elevate their spirits and give them a momentary sense of relief from the war.

The artillery harassment from the Germans kept the Forcemen on their toes. The Germans had the high ground advantage, especially beyond Littoria in



*Forcemen at Anzio. April 1944 (Story)*

the Monte Lipini area. Also, from the Laziali hills came the long range artillery, Anzio Annie, which kept the beachhead buttoned down.

During the beachhead operations a German lieutenant from the Herman Goering Division was killed by one of the Force's patrols. A diary was found on his body and one of the entries written was, "The Black Devils are all around us every time we come into the line. We never hear them come." Thus, the name Black Devils was given to the First Special Service Force at Anzio. Gen. Frederick, upon hearing about the diary and its contents, ordered calling cards with the outline drawing of the Force's



*The Black Devils calling card, "The worst is yet to come." These calling cards would be dropped off in unsuspecting German positions and created a psychological fear with the enemy. (A. Olson)*

shoulder patch. In red and to the right of the patch, in German, was written "DAS DICKE ENDE KOMMT NOCH!" Translated this means, "The worst is yet to come." The Forcemen would blacken their faces and move silently in the dark of night, leaving these cards on the bodies of dead Germans or momentarily vacated German observation outposts. The enemy feared the men of the Force, for they were told they were all murderers and convicts and they took no prisoners. Other correspondents wrote about the Force and their being called the Black Devils. They referred to the Force as one of the world's best Army fighting units. So, in just a few months, the First Special Service Force had risen from total obscurity (which was mostly due to their secrecy) to one of the best fighting elements in the entire U.S. Army. Gen. Frederick had created a masterpiece when he formed the Force, and every man was the product of a master's stroke. Each man





*The "Black Devils." Capt. A.H. Underhill, center, talking to members of the 1st Armored Division prior to patrol action, in the Cerreto Alto area. Beachhead April 1944. (FSSF Museum)*

was a specialist beyond compare to be utilized in any and all phases of combat beyond the average soldier's imagination.

The Force sent its patrols to probe the enemy defenses and movements. Prisoners taken were often recruited into carrying the vegetables picked along the way and carrying or pulling an animal back to the Force's area. Some of the patrols returning would resemble a bedouin wedding rather than a military fighting unit. One prisoner, a German lieutenant, was surprised at the size of the Force. He had

been under the assumption that the Force was a division, but when he saw they were an understrengthened regiment, he was totally amazed that so few could do so much to so many. It was Gen. Frederick's idea that if the Force sounded like a division, then no one would bother them. He had ordered that many trucks should move about in the Force's area. Another prisoner taken, had on his person an order from higher headquarters informing the Germans in the Anzio area that they were "fighting an elite Canadian-American Force. They are treacherous, unmerciful and clever. You cannot afford to relax. The first soldier or group of soldiers capturing one of these men will be given a 10 day furlough."

Forcemen captured by the Germans totaled less than 30 and when one looks at fighting units of approximately 4000 men at one time or another, these statistics show an impressive percentage of being the lowest count of capture by the enemy ever in the entire U.S. Army. The men of the Force never knew the meaning of surrender and would rather fight to the death than be taken prisoner. Of course, some of the men were totally overwhelmed in combat and it was inevitable that some men would be taken prisoner. Lt. Taylor Radcliffe was one. While on patrol one night, he was overpowered by five German soldiers. They tied him and took him to their headquarters for interrogation. During the interrogation he was beaten with a piece of hose and struck heavily across the throat, which caused him temporary voice loss. However, an artillery barrage had started landing close to the area where Lt. Radcliffe was being held and he saw his opportunity for escape. He overpowered his captors and untied two other prisoners being held in another room, one French and one British. They jumped out a window



*Unidentified Forceman holding "Anzio," a colt taken in by men of the Force. Colt's mother was killed during shelling of the beachhead. The colt was kept by the men and was carried all the way into Rome in trucks and then finally to Lake Albano where the colt was given to children to keep. May 1944 (Durkee)*





*Two members of the FSSF firing Thompson machine guns at the German position a few hundred yards away. Anzio Beachhead, April 1944. (DAVA U.S. Army # SC 189582-S)*

and ran to find a place to hide. They found a huge tree and hid out until darkness. They then resumed their escape, but Lady Luck was not with them, as they ran into another German patrol. In the meantime, Lt. Radcliffe had been wounded in the foot and rather than hold back the other two soldiers, he parted from them and found a bombed out building to hide in. He was later found by a patrol from the Force who had volunteered to look for him. Lt. Radcliffe recovered from his beating by the Germans and within a week was back on patrol. However, it was a standing regulation that any man

taken prisoner would automatically be transferred to another unit. It was believed that the enemy would kill that particular soldier if he was captured again. Lt. Radcliffe argued and pleaded to be allowed to stay in the Force. He had more than once proven to be an indispensable member of the Force and he was finally allowed to remain with his unit.

Raids were an every night ritual which never occurred at the same time. They were always unscheduled and with different destinations for each patrol. The Braves would go out and raise hell with the Germans by making assaults on the small



*Brig. Gen. Frederick, commander of the FSSF, talking with Lt. Col. Moore after raid in enemy territory. 5th Army tank in background burning after being hit by German fire. April 1944. Anzio Beachhead. (DAVA U.S. Army # SC 437683)*





*FSSF patrol advancing on an enemy held house in the beachhead area of Anzio. Soldier running by fence carries a Johnson light machine gun. April 1944. (DAVA U.S. Army # SC 189580)*

farms and villages. This created a large amount of casualties in the Force's ranks. However, the Germans lost a lot more men than they too could afford, and the constant harassments from the patrols proved to be a large physical factor in the demoralizing of the German ranks. The Forcemen were now being called "Devil's Brigade," "The Black Devils," "Devils in Baggy Pants" and, by our own troops, "Frederick's Freighters." The reputation of the Force had matured to the point that most correspondents wanted to write about this famous fighting unit. The exploits were too numerous to mention and each one had a story within itself. The comfort in their foxholes, which were normally six feet wide, six feet long and five feet deep, were matted with burlap or rugs. Some installed homemade radio sets and reinforced them with jerry cans (gas cans) or walled them with ration boxes. These caught the attention of Bill Mauldin of the *Stars and Stripes* and he made numerous cartoons about the men in his Willie and Joe series.

The situation on the beachhead seemed dim for all the Allied Forces at times. Counter-attacks by the

enemy were constantly being fought off at various points of the Allied defense lines. The Force, however, was always probing into enemy territory. Gen. Frederick would also go on patrol, either alone or with a few chosen men. The General's primary concern was to check the condition of the patrols that he had sent out. It was not surprising for the men to find the General in the forward position of the patrols they were checking out. The calculated risks taken by many of the members of the Force led the men from other units to believe that the Forcemen were lunatics. Others thought them to be too reckless. Nevertheless, what stood out most was their total dependability in combat situations.

Sgt. Ralph Randall recalls one night, when on patrol, they accidentally walked into a mine field. The Germans immediately started firing their machine guns at them and casualties were mounting. The litter bearers were trying to get the wounded out of the area when one of the bearers was hit. Another yelled out to the nearest soldier to grab the other end of the litter. One immediately did. They removed the wounded soldier from the mine field.



When they arrived at the rear, the litter bearer found out that the man who helped him remove the wounded soldier from the mine field was Gen. Frederick. Wherever he was needed, he helped. The men reciprocated with their devotion to him.

There never seemed to be a lull at the beachhead during the daytime. The Allied bombers and fighters would seek out their targets and in the evening and early morning the German Luftwaffe would pay them a visit. The German bombers would strike ammunition and supply ships in the harbor and turn around toward the Force's area and drop their "popcorn bombs." These were small fragmentation bombs that were packed with approximately 100 to a cylinder. They would open up when released from the aircraft and scatter. When they hit the ground they sounded like popcorn popping.



*A Force officer inspects a German bomb used as a pod for numerous smaller bombs (cluster bombs). (Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham)*

The Germans spared no emotions at Anzio. This was proven during the middle of February when their bombers hit the 95th Evacuation Hospital located at Nettuno. Six doctors, 35 patients and nurses were killed or wounded. One of these patients was Sgt. Alf Olson, lead scout with the 1st Battalion, 1st Regiment. He was originally in the hospital for wounds in the neck and leg from tank shrapnel. As he recalls it, the sirens sounded to take cover and the bombs fell, landing closer and closer. When he came to he had been wounded again. Sgt. Olson, prior to his separation from the Force, had been wounded five times.

The patrols were continually going out at night seeking and probing the German interiors and bringing back information of the enemy's every move. One night, Sgt. Joe "Buddy" Glass, lead scout with the 1st Regiment, 1st Company, and Sgt. Loren Waling, also lead scout, had their patrols scouting for observation posts. They heard Germans walking behind them. The Germans had loud hobnail boots and could be heard at some distance. The patrol leaped into the ditch alongside the road. The Germans passed them, laughing and talking aloud. One of the Germans spit and hit Sgt. Waling in the face. The moon was shining and the ditch was shallow and the Germans were no more than four feet away from the patrol. They had not been detected, probably due to their darkened faces and the mud and dirt smeared on their tattered uniforms. That same night, they were returning to the lines when they ran into another German patrol. They waited until the Germans had passed them and ran across the road in a file. The Germans never once turned around. They started whistling louder and picked up their paces away from the area.

One patrol had managed to capture three Italian soldiers. It was from them they had learned the Herman Goering Division had left the beachhead for a rest in Florence. These Italian soldiers were the San Marco Marines from the Barbarigo Battalion.



*A FSSF patrol passing a road block which identifies the end of the American mine fields, where they are now entering enemy territory. April 1944 (DADA U.S. Army # SC 189578-S)*



The Militia Armata (Italian Battalion) was also in the area to help support them. It was reported that the enemy had well over 1200 men facing the Force's flank.

The Force's front area resembled a gypsy camp. The men had scrounged and stolen everything imaginable, including makeshift stills for moonshine and, of course, the herd of animals. The herd was growing steadily. The men had a pro (prophylactics) station because as they patrolled they found women, both single and married, at various farms and villages. They figured an ounce of prevention was worth a pound of cure. It was also reported that one patrol had infiltrated Gen. Keyes' headquarters and stolen his best wine. The patrol commander allowed the men to keep the wine, providing it was evenly distributed; half for them and half for the commander.

Toward the end of March, reinforcements came to the Force from the 4th Ranger Battalion (remnants from Darby's Rangers). There was resentment from the Rangers at first for they had come from a strict, disciplined unit and had fallen into the Force's more relaxed mood of military discipline. However, the Rangers adapted to the conditions and a more peaceful co-existence arrived between the two battle-weary units. A courtesy was extended to the



*Art Agre, Sv Bn, milking old "Bossie" on the beachhead at Anzio. (FSSF Museum)*



*Anzio Beachhead. Foremen in front of dugout, Lt. Gordon, Sgt A.C. Mack, John Rose, Krichlow, Watson, Sam Eras, Joe Dauphinais, and Jeff Hart. 1st Co., 2nd Reg. (P.A. Canada 12896)*

Rangers, allowing them to wear their Ranger patches. Shortly thereafter, Gen. Frederick ordered them to wear the FSSF patch.

In early April, Gen. Frederick elected to step up the harassment on the German outposts and defense lines in the Force's southern area. Patrols were sent out to the German listening posts and to

houses which held enemy machine gun emplacements. Some patrols were found and attacked by the Germans, which began a see-saw battle between the Braves and the Krauts. The 2nd Regiment, in the meantime, had extended their outposts and given support to the patrols in the houses by eliminating the machine gun emplacements concentrated at the





*FSSF Rodeo, Peaceful Valley, Anzio, May 1944 (Durkee)*



*A wounded Forceman being loaded on a medical jeep for transportation back to an aid station. (FSSF Museum)*



*German prisoners being escorted by Forcemen back to holding area for interrogation. (FSSF Museum)*

Litoranea fortifications. Daylight raids had become daily and the Germans had dug themselves in for the ever present raids from the Force. It was evident that the Germans had no desire to attack the Force's area, as the fortifications they had built implied they were on the defensive.

The Germans had now introduced another of their secret weapons to the Force. This was their version of a miniature self propelled tank called "Goliath." It weighed approximately 750 pounds, was two feet high and the tracks operated electrically by a cable that unwound from a rear spindle as it moved to its destination. It had approximately 1000 yards of direct movement. In the center of the Goliath was placed a 300 pound charge of explosive, detonated by its operator, who directed its driving capability by electric control. When the Forcemen first came into contact with this strange weapon, they gave it the nickname "doodlebug." The 3rd Regiment, while on outpost duty, first saw them as they were moving toward a house near their outposts as it exploded. One was reported to have hit an outhouse and the Forcemen thought it had begun raining Germans. Another had been fired at with a machine gun and exploded. These poor, misguided weapons had to be used on even, level ground, and the terrain and high water areas at the Anzio beachhead did not allow them to be fully utilized for their vulnerability.

Tanks from the 1st Armored Division were loaned to the Force for support and were held in reserve and hidden in the Padiglione Woods. It seemed for awhile the only thing the tanks accomplished was drawing the enemy's artillery fire. A combined assault by both the tanks and the Force was initiated against the Germans in Cerreto Alto and the Litoranea positions. The tanks immediately moved into position with the Forcemen and started firing point blank into haystacks, which were concealments for the German and Italian machine guns. These emplacements were silenced very rapidly as they caught on fire from the tracer rounds fired from the tanks. Gun emplacements in other houses and buildings also were silenced. The Germans started firing their artillery in the area of the assault but they too were annihilated when the Allied artillery zeroed in on them. The assault resulted in the taking of over 60 prisoners and the death of 21 enemy soldiers.

More raids were sent against the Germans. The Force, together with the tanks, moved into the Red Road area. This area was fortified with farmhouses between Sessuno and Borgo-Piave. The patrols were concealed by heavy artillery fire, but as they moved toward the houses they were hit by German machine gun nests as the smoke cleared. The Forcemen were also hit by Flakwagons during the assault. The tanks assaulted and cleared all but two positions, which were silenced by the Braves. The 20th of April was Hitler's birthday and an artillery section had accumulated an excess of shells. For the Fuhrer's birthday present they decided to fire at a target in Borgo Piave. The target was a German flag that was flown from the top of a house. The firing into the house left it in total rubble, but the flag still remained flying when the barrage lifted. The end of April finished with routine probing patrols.

Rumors from Headquarters were heard that a major action was being planned and that a drive toward Rome was imminent. The Germans had pulled back three divisions to reinforce their Adolph Hitler line through Pontecorvo-Pico to the Casino



defenses. Also heard were plans that the Force was to be relieved by the 36th Combat Engineer Regiment by the 9th of May. The Force was patrolling and house-raiding. Everything seemed normal, except for some limited enemy resistance. Artillery from the Germans was almost nonexistent and movement in front of the canal was accomplished without confronting enemy fire.

The 36th Engineers took over the Force's positions on schedule and the First Special Service Force was finally moving off the line after almost 100 continuous days facing the enemy. The Service Battalion was not put into service at the beachhead, but always remained on status alert. When word came to move out, it was gratefully appreciated by all.

The statistics between the 1st of February to the 1st of May 1944 for the First Special Service Force, during their campaign at Anzio, was 54 killed in action (or later dying of wounds), 51 missing in action and 279 wounded in action. The men and replacements returning from medical convalescence were 53 officers and 1408 enlisted men, which now increased the Force's strength to 104 officers and 1966 enlisted men.

Gen. Alexander set his plans for the capture of Rome. Three operations would be implemented; Operation Grasshopper, to drive east across the marshes and join the southern forces in the mountains above Littoria; Operation Turtle, to send the VI

Corps northwest into Rome independent of the southern advances; Operation Buffalo, to drive north and surround the Lazziali and Lepini Hill masses to prevent the enemy from retreating to the north and advancing on Rome. These three operations were manifested and primed to join the beachhead forces and join the drive at the exact time so the separated ends of the 5th Army could effectively be joined and seize Rome together.

The First Special Service Force had finally been removed from the beachhead positions. However, their contributions on the line had proven invaluable. While other units were being attacked and pushed back, the Force was always taking a little of the enemy's ground or capturing a large number of prisoners. They had utilized a constant offensive spirit against the enemy and had proven extremely effective. The Germans never knew how large the Force really was. They had thought for the longest time that they had confronted a division and were totally amazed to find that their adversaries were less than a normal regiment. When the Germans and Italians had finally found out the credibility of the Black Devils at the Anzio beachhead, they gave them the widest berth possible so as not to make contact with them if at all possible. They were called named, many unprintable, but they overcame all obstacles in their path to success.

The Breakout was only days away.



*Three members of the FSSF, awaiting Silver Star awards in the Nettuna area, Italy. Mar 1944 (DAVA U.S. Army # SC 244751)*



# The Breakout

## ROME AND BEYOND

In preparation for the coming action, the First Special Service Force spent 12 days reorganizing with replacements from the U.S. Army and Canadian Forces. For the coming breakout, training was established at an extremely vigorous pace, with tanks and half-tracks being assigned to Gen. Frederick's command. The Force was at its greatest strength

the Breakout, they had amassed to seven divisions, including an armored division. The beginning of the Breakout began on the 23rd day of May, 1944, at 6:30 a.m. The Allied artillery fire signaled the beginning of the assault. Upon the advance, the Force penetrated the enemy defenses at such a rapid pace that it put them far ahead of the other attacking units and in a precarious position for support. The enemy machine guns were everywhere, but one by one they were silenced. The enemy mortars were falling with an increasing pace. The German 88's were finding their range and raising hell in the Force's area. By 10 a.m., the 1st Regiment had crossed Highway 7 and cut off Cisterna, but the Polish Support Forces had run into



*Sgt. C. Krotzer, Hq. 3rd Regt, taking a final look at the beachhead prior to the Breakout. Note FSSF patch censored out by U.S. Army Signal Corps. (FSSF Museum)*

with 2000 men. Col. Marshall was commanding the 1st Regiment, Lt. Col. Akehurst from Canada was commanding the 2nd Regiment and Col. Walker was commanding the 3rd Regiment. As the officers were planning the fast coming offensive, the men enjoyed recreational activities such as sports and rodeos.

By the time all the units had arrived at Anzio for



*24 May 1944, the Breakout, men of the FSSF 1st Regt, using a halftrack to lay out their communication wires. A half hour prior to this photo being taken, the Germans had control of this area. (FSSF Museum)*

heavy fire and were unable to back up the 1st Regiment's left flank. German Mark IV (Tiger) tanks, located on the Ninfa Road, had set up superiority and were hitting the 1st Regiment with everything they had, causing heavy casualties. The 1st Regiment finally pulled back their forces where they linked up with the Polish forces. In the meantime, some of the men had been cut off from their withdrawal and were without communication and with





*24 May 1944, the Breakout, in the Cisterna area. Halftrack from the FSSF Cannon Co. shows a busy night's work by their shell casings strewn about. (FSSF Museum)*

minimal ammunition. Patrols from the 1st Regiment found them later that night and brought them back to the Force's defense lines.

The 1st Armored Forces had cut off the Cisterna-Velletri Road and taken a large group of German prisoners. Meanwhile, the 3rd Division had moved into the Cisterna area and were pressing forward, while the British armored force had entered Littorio. The Germans were now retreating toward Cori and



*Jeeps and ambulances located in the Colle Ferro Square, for the Breakout and overland march to Artena. June 1944 (FSSF Museum)*

the Velletri Gap. Allied fighters and bombers were having a field day bombing and strafing trucks, tanks and any other motorized vehicle in retreat. Germans were everywhere in their attempt to get out of the way of the rapidly advancing Allied force. At one point in the drive, a Jeep commanded by Gen. Frederick was seen herding about 15 German prisoners. The Force, now advancing toward Cori, which was a mess from all the shelling, had routed and driven the enemy into the hills toward Highway 6. The 7th Infantry had taken Cisterna.



*Men of the Force taking ten near Cori on their drive towards Rome. June 1944 (FSSF Museum)*

The Force was now moving rapidly toward the Lepini Mountains to cut off the retreating Germans. Gen. Frederick directed his men through the mule trails of Rocca Massima toward Artena, which was located in the Alban Hills and known as the Gateway to Rome. Italians in the villages were being freed and volunteering their donkeys for packing up the mountain terrains. The Germans had not elected to protect their rear action of retreat so the Allied advance moved steadily without much resistance. The plains of Valmontone were entered by the Force while the outskirts of Colle Ferro was being settled by the retreating Germans, who had stopped momentarily to catch their breath. German tanks and artillery counter attacked the advancing FSSF and again inflicted heavy casualties on them.

After four months of fighting, Anzio was no longer an isolated beachhead. The Allied Forces, together with the First Special Service Force, had succeeded in penetrating the German defense lines and uniting forces in their push toward the Breakout. By the 25th of May, Artena was entered, but not without difficulty. The Germans had centered their artillery on the town and pounded the Force as they were regrouping and picking up more supplies. The Germans had massed all possible weapons and fired on the Force as they came into range. Tanks and .22



mm Flakwagons were set up along the railroads north of Artena. The snipers picked off many of the Forcemen as they left their concealments. Artena became a temporary wall for the Force and the 1st and 3rd Regiments suffered heavy casualties. Former Rangers who had been with Col. Darby at Cisterna, relived their battle. For a while it seemed they might meet with the same fate as had Col. Darby's Rangers.

Allied artillery began a heavy fire concentration on Artena and with the Force's constant penetrating drives, they finally succeeded. The dead Germans lay everywhere, and the Force's casualties mounted with every inch of ground taken. Gen. Frederick had made his command post in the Palace of Princess Margharita Borghese, situated on a hill overlooking the plains and the battle going on below. Patrols were constantly being sent out to probe and make

contact with the enemy and to destroy them when contacted. Bridges in the Colle-Ferro area were blown up and the railroads were wired for detonation. The Germans were trying to stop the advance of the Black Devils but were not succeeding. The Force's nemesis had been the German 88's and the Nebelwerfer, which had done the most harm to the Force's advance.

By the end of May, the Force had enough time to build up their strength and supplies for the drive to Valmontone. The Albano Hill masses were in the final stages of capture by the Force and II Corps. Highways 6 and 7 were now controlled by the Allies and Valmontone had been taken by the 3rd Division. The push toward Rome began with determination from all the Allied units for this city, the "Eternal City," would be the biggest prize of the entire war.

Gen. Frederick and the First Special Service Force



*Lt. Gen. Mark Clark, C.G. 5th Army, Maj. Gen. Keyes, C.G. 2nd Corps, Brig. Gen. Robert T. Frederick, C.G. FSSF, and Brig. Gen. Donald W. Brann, studying situation maps of Rome as Allied troops move in on the city. Note V-42 dagger hanging on General Frederick's belt. 4 June 1944 (DAVA U.S. Army # SC 191385)*



were given the honor of leading the way to Rome. Previously, it had been speculated that Rome was to be an open city and undefended. However, Lt. Gen. Mark Clark informed Maj. Gen. Keyes that the II Corps would lead the drive to Rome. In turn, Gen. Keyes gave the honor of the lead to Gen. Frederick and the Force. The Forcemen were informed to be prepared for the enemy. It seemed they were bracing to defend the city from being taken by them.

On the 3rd of June, II Corps assigned to the Force, for Assistance in the Rome entry, the Task Force Howze, a small armored group of the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, and the 13th Armored Infantry commanded by Col. Howze. As expected, Gen. Frederick moved into the forward-most position with his task force. This sometimes resulted in being directly in front of his Regiments and getting fired upon by both the enemy and his own units. The drive to the Eternal City by the Force was met with little or no resistance. However, arriving at Finnocchio, they did meet with some sporadic fire from the Germans. The Force was now only 10 miles from the Eternal City and all the divisions wanted the privilege of being the first Allied unit into the city. They were moving their units as fast as they could to get into position for the sprint. The Allied planes were flying and strafing enemy vehicles that were found on either Highway 6 or 7.

As the First Special Service Force arrived at its final objective prior to Rome, Gen. Frederick met with his regimental commanders and instructed the 2nd and 3rd Regiments to proceed up Highway 6 to Tor Sapienza, a suburb of Rome. The two regiments moved out and, in their advance, captured numerous Germans who had been cut off from their units. At 1:06 a.m. on the 4th of June, the order to get into the city as fast as they could was given by Maj. Gen. Keyes to Gen. Frederick. The rapid message from Gen. Keyes read, "Secure bridges over the Tiber River above 68 Northing within the City of Rome."

Gen. Frederick ordered Col. Alfred (Cooky) Marshall to utilize two companies from his 1st Regiment and have them mount the tanks from the Howze Armored Task Force to secure the six bridges assigned to the Force. They moved out toward their destinations with Gen. Frederick in the lead in his half-track and Col. Marshall behind on the lead tank. Col. Walker sent out patrols from his 3rd Regiment and, as they entered the railroad yards at Pietralata, they encountered heavy enemy resistance and had to withdraw. The lead assault force passed into the city limits of Rome approximately 6:20 a.m. When the signal was passed that Rome had been entered, they received heavy fire from hidden anti-tank guns which knocked out two of their tanks and stopped the column from further movement. The Forcemen dismounted their tanks and moved into position to eliminate the enemy resistance.

All morning the enemy fire increased and the 2nd and 3rd Regiments assembled in Tor Sapienza for a coordinated push into the city. This was just north of where the Force's lead assault unit was meeting with heavy resistance. By noon, the push into Rome was still stagnant. The resistance was primarily to

allow the remnants of the German 14th Army and their headquarters to retreat across the northern bridges across the Tiber River. The Germans' 4th Parachute Division and part of the Herman Goering Division were giving rear guard action, covering escaping units in the northern part of the city. Italian civilians, seeing the Germans retreating, came out and offered their services to the Forcemen as they entered each street and plaza. This raised the morale of the Forcemen as they pressed on into the city. However, at times it created a precarious situation for both the soldiers and civilians when the Germans and the hard core Facists returned fire toward the advancing units.

One by one, German positions were being terminated by the 1st Regiment as they were in the process of meeting up with the 3rd Regiment. However, when the 1st Regiment arrived at Acque Bollicante, a flak-wagon firing its 20 mm rounds hit Col. Marshall and killed him instantly. Italians found the colonel and another soldier and moved them to a schoolhouse where they laid them out and surrounded them with flowers as a final tribute to brave warriors. The loss of Col. Marshall was grieved by all who knew him. He was one of the most liked persons in the entire regiment. Whatever tanks left by the Germans in the direct area of the Force's front were knocked out, and those resisting were quickly taken care of.

The 1st Regiment linked up with the 3rd Regiment and their areas were totally cleared of opposition. The 1st and 2nd Regiments were sent back to Tor Sapienza for a rest while the 3rd Regiment secured the bridges over the Tiber. Snipers were still in some of the suburbs, but after a lengthy search they were located and dispatched. The Force had secured eight of the 16 bridges crossing the Tiber River and, again, Gen. Frederick was everywhere, directing commands to his men. Gen. Frederick had been wounded twice, once in the leg and once in the arm. He personally made his own reconnaissance and was concerned at the possibility of the Germans blowing up the bridges leading into the city. Patrols were sent out to cut any demolition charges found on any of the bridges. The Germans had made such a hasty retreat that all the bridges were left intact.

By 11 a.m. on the 4th of June, 1944, the First Special Service Force had secured all the bridges assigned to them. The remaining eight bridges had been secured by the 85th Division. Rome was finally under the complete control of the 5th Army. It was, without a doubt, Gen. Frederick and his First Special Service Force entering Rome first. The honor of being the first Allied unit into Rome was on every Allied commander's mind. Divisions, racing one another, regiments, battalions and even companies, were vying for the individual honor of being first into the Eternal City. Gen. Keyes, seeing what was happening, formed a patrol of 60 men in 18 Jeeps to "get into Rome at all costs; any way possible." The purpose of the patrol was to establish a route that was to be easily followed by the patrols setting up blue-colored II Corps signs along the way, reading "Follow the Blue to Speedy II." Cameramen, photographers and correspondents were also in with the



patrol to confirm their action and the time each patrol reached and entered Rome.

Selected to lead this patrol was Capt. Taylor Radcliffe of the 1st Regiment, FSSF. He was to move out as fast as possible to catch up with the various units spearheading toward Rome and, at the opportune time, to break out in the lead. Capt. Radcliffe and the patrol moved out toward Via Tuscolana, passing everything imaginable, finally coming to rest in the movie studios on the outskirts of Rome. Prior to dawn, the patrol of 60 men moved out again toward the city. They arrived at an overpass which had been mined and booby trapped. Capt. Radcliffe, sensing the possibility of the area being mined, stopped, searched and found wires leading to a demolition charge. They were cut and the men raced through Porta San Giovanni, within the city proper. Capt. Radcliffe noted the time as 6 a.m. on 4 June. Then they came under heavy machine gun fire which forced them to move back and kept them pinned down most of the day. Not before the photographers took pictures confirming the time and position of the patrol in Rome, however. The second unit to record its entry into Rome was, ironically, another patrol of the First Special Service Force, which had entered at the railroad yards of Pietralata at 6:25 a.m.

Throughout the 5th of June, the men of the Force made their way back to Tor Sapienza for a well earned rest. The following day, the 6th of June, the invasion of Normandy began.

One interesting incident took place at the gates of Rome between Gen. Frederick and Maj. Gen. Keyes, II Corps commander. The First Special Service Force's forward group had encountered Germans on the outskirts of the city with their self-propelled guns. War correspondent Eric Sevareid recalled that Gen. Keyes had driven up in his Jeep and asked Gen. Frederick what the hold up was. Gen. Frederick replied, "The Germans." Gen. Keyes then asked, "How long would it take to get across the city limits?" Gen. Frederick replied, "The rest of the day." Gen. Keyes then stated, "That will not do, for Gen. Clark has to be across the city by 4 o'clock." "Why?" asked Gen. Frederick. Gen. Keyes replied, "Because he has to have a picture taken." Gen. Frederick stared at Gen. Keyes in disbelief, wondering if he was serious. He then replied, "Tell the general to give me an hour." Gen. Frederick and his men silenced the machine guns and Gen. Mark Clark had his picture taken on time. After the photo session, Gen. Clark mentioned to Gen. Frederick how he would like to have the ROME sign in his headquarters. Gen. Frederick had a few of his men take the sign down and presented it to Gen. Clark after the capture of Rome. Later, Gen. Frederick asked Gen. Keyes why Gen. Clark was so impatient to have his picture taken. Gen. Keyes replied, "France is going to be invaded from England day after tomorrow and we have got to get this picture in the paper before then."

The men were completely exhausted and, because of their inability to keep clean those past hectic days, were infested with lice. The DDT stations took care of them. The following day, the 7th of June, the



FSSF Hq., Lake Albano R & R, north of Rome. B.G. Frederick congratulating officers of the Force for their accomplishments on the drive and the capture of Rome. Lt. Col. Wickham, arm in sling, wounded during the Battle of Artena 28 May 1944. (Durkee)



Officers of the FSSF being driven around Lake Albano by Red Cross women after capture of Rome. (Durkee)



Men of the Force enjoying a swim in Lake Albano just after the capture of Rome, June 1944. (Durkee)



Force moved out to Lake Albano for a three week rest. Also, on the shores of the blue watered lake was the summer residence of the Pope. Gen. Frederick instructed his officers not to follow regulations regarding the uniform too closely while at Lake Albano. He also instructed them to ease up on discipline wherever minor altercations might arise. The general then went to the hospital, had his wounds tended, and returned to the lake for his recuperation.

The men, while at Lake Albano, found delight in borrowing Army Jeeps. The incident that caused this venture to cease was when the Jeep of a general had been found in one of the Forcemen's tents. All identification had been removed, but the rumor got around and resulted in an inventory being taken of all vehicles in the Lake Albano area. The results showed that the Force had somehow acquired two to three times as many Jeeps as they were authorized.

Another incident at the lake concerned the Papal summer home. Whenever the Forcemen would roam in the area of the Papal residence, they would return to their bivouac areas with furniture, embroidered sheets and anything else which could be carried. After an embarrassing shakedown, all items removed from the Papal home had been confiscated and returned. The men finally stopped their rummaging for souvenirs and enjoyed the swimming, tours and passes to the Eternal City.



*Col. Edwin A. Walker, newly appointed commander of the FSSF, awarding medals to men of the Force at Santa Maria Castelabate, 40 miles south of Salerno, Italy. July 1944 (Durkee)*

On the 23rd of June the Force held a formation for awards and decorations. Gen. Frederick then informed his men of the First Special Service Force that he was leaving for another command. This hit the men like a ton of bricks. How could someone like the General leave them after all they had been through together? Many thought back to LaDifensa, Anzio and the Breakout. Many, upon hearing of the General leaving, cried openly. They were all pleased, however, when they were informed that the General

had been promoted to major general and that Col. Walker of the 3rd Regiment would take command. Maj. Gen. Frederick's new command would be that of the 1st Airborne Task Force to prepare them for the invasion of Southern France. Also, Maj. Gen. Frederick requested permission from Col. Walker to acquire Lt. Col. K.G. Wickham to go with him to his new command of the First Airborne Task Force to become his chief of staff.



*Lt. John Redd, amphibious training, Santa Maria Castelabate, in preparation for the Hyeres landings. July 1944 (Marshall)*

Their rest period over, the Force moved out for Anzio on the 1st of July. The men boarded ships bound for Naples which were then ordered to change and head south for Salerno. They would proceed 40 miles south for Santa Maria Castelabate where they would strengthen the Force with new arrivals. The American and Canadian replacements arrived and a rapid six week training in Force operations and skills were immediately undergone. Training consisted of amphibious training from ship to shore, day and night landings on rugged shorelines, cliff scaling, route marches and compass study. Admiral Davidson, commander of the Sitka Force, ordered the Navy personnel ashore to train with the Force in all aspects of beach landings. The First Special Service Force and elements of the U.S. Navy would help cover the left flank of the main invasion force of Southern France.

Upon departing Lake Albano, the Force was re-assigned to the 7th Army under the command of Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch. Gen. George C. Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, had requested the 5th Army to give the 7th Army their pick of units to build up. Gen. Patch, upon his choice, immediately chose the First Special Service Force, VI Corps, 3rd, 36th and 45th Divisions. He also chose the parachute units that were already in Italy. The 7th Army was now preparing for Operation Anvil. This was the invasion of Southern France through the southern beaches of

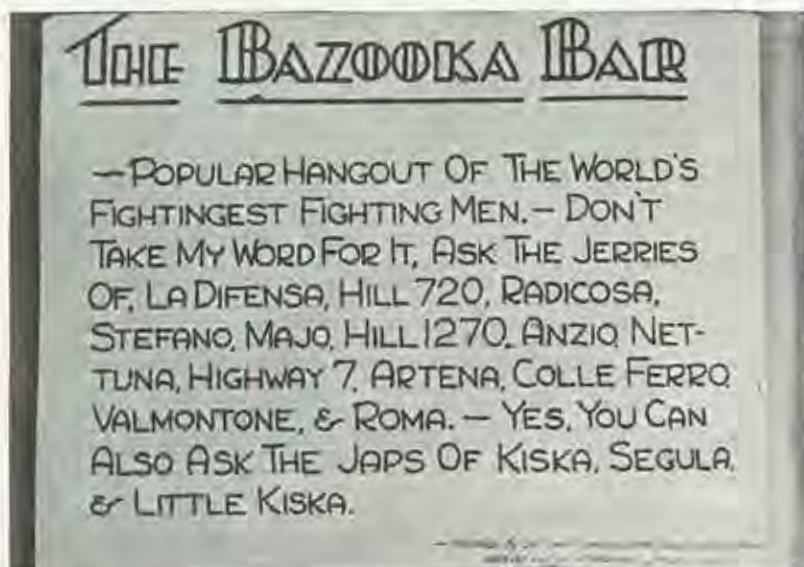




Bar menu which hung in the Officers Bar, 1st Regt, Santa Maria Castelabate, Italy. Prepared by Sgt. "Jake" Walkmeister.

the Riviera and extending from Hyeres to St. Raphael and on to the Marseille-Toulon area. In the early days of August the Allies would contact the French Resistance to evacuate as many civilians as possible from the Marseille-Toulon area to again deceive the enemy. The VI Corps, with three divisions, would line on the beaches from Cavalaire to St. Raphael. The 1st Airborne Task Force would secure the area around LeMuy prior to the seaborne landings. French commandoes would land early for the destruction of beachhead defense batteries. The First Special Service Force, considered the left flank of the Invasion Force, would then take two of the Hyeres Islands. Isle du Levant and Isle de Port Cros had German artillery batteries and troops stationed on the islands. The mission of the Force was to secure the two islands and clear the path for the coming invasion. On the 11th of August, the Force boarded five American destroyers and two Canadian troop ships for their destinations. Prior to the invasion, the Sitka Force would stop for two days on Corsica for rest and also to receive a final briefing on the operation. The Force's 1st Regiment was given Port Cros and the 2nd and 3rd Regiments, Isle du Levant.

The Force departed Corsica at 10:45 a.m. on the 14th of August. They arrived at Levant and were over the side by 2330 hours. By 0130 hours on the 15th, the 1st Regiment landed on Port Cros. Col. Walker and the Force's headquarters, together with the 2nd and 3rd Regiments, landed on Levant. The date and time of the assault of the Hyeres Islands was also the first anniversary of the Force's landing on Kiska



Bar sign, prepared by Sgt. "Jake" Walkmeister, hung on the wall of the Officers Club, 1st Regt, Santa Maria Castelabate.

in the Aleutians. The 2nd Battalion, 3rd Regiment moved toward beach defenses behind Yellow Beach which was heavily mined and strung with barbed wire. As they advanced, they received mortar and machine gun fire. The French commandoes were also having difficulty in their assault areas as the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Regiment was now moving in on Levant and started to receive the first strong resistance on the islands. The 2nd Battalion, attacking an outpost, prepared to move in on Port del Avis. The islands' defenses were limited to one company of German soldiers for each island. Their preparation for defense on Port Cros was excellent as they had strong defenses in their northern front, but neglected defenses on the southern approach. Col. Akehurst, operating at Orange Beach, had his battalions inland and met with no resistance. On the assault of Levant, some of the Germans escaped by boat, which left a small group of about 100 men to defend the island. The 1st Regiment was also having difficulty attacking Fort del Eminence, as it was the German Company Headquarters. The fort was built during the reign of Napoleon with walls 10-12 feet thick and a surrounding moat. Two other areas of resistance were the Chateau in the port district and Fort De Letissac. Gunfire from the ships was ordered on Port Cros, but the effects were nill, as the walls of the fort were too thick to penetrate. An interesting development, yet very important news, was when Maj. Huffts radioed Headquarters and informed them the lighthouse was manned by stuffed dummies holding wooden rifles and not by Germans. Lt. Col. Moore had assaulted Port del Avis, the last resistance on Levant, and succeeded in routing the enemy and taking prisoners. By 11 p.m. on the 15th





*Dummies used by the Germans on the Isle De Levant, southern France, to fool the Allied Aerial Reconnaissance. Aug 1944 (Marshall)*

of August, Levant was secured and all enemy contained. Force casualties were immediately put on board waiting ships to be transported to Corsica. The 7th Army sent dive bombers in to hit Fort Lestissac and Fort del Eminence. They shot rockets at the forts but did no damage. It was now inevitable that the men would have to storm Fort de Lestissac. During the night the 3rd Company, 1st Regiment, moved into position, climbed the hill and surrounded the fort. They attacked the fort around 11 p.m. and were met with machine guns and grenades. The men kept up the attack until they had gained the inner defenses, whereupon the Germans surrendered the garrison. In the meantime, the 6th Company, 1st Regiment started its assault on Fort del Eminence,

but was held by the Germans' firing machine guns and mortars from the fort. Bazookas could not penetrate the doors of the fort, and again the ships were called to fire on the fort. This time del Eminence. The battleship fired approximately 10 rounds into the fort and the 15 inches had penetrating success. By 1:45 p.m. on the 17th of August, Port Cros had been secured. As a French unit arrived to take control of the islands, the last of the Force unit, the 1st Regiment, moved to the mainland of Southern France.

The First Special Service Force had once again been called upon to assault an enemy controlled position, and had once again proven its capability. The officers and men functioned superbly and heroically throughout their assault and routing the enemy from the islands. Now the Force would be prepared to make its assault on the mainland of Southern France.



*Dummy cannons used by the Germans on the Isle De Levant to fool the Allied Aerial Reconnaissance. Aug 1944 (Marshall)*



## Southern France

### GERMANY AND NORWAY

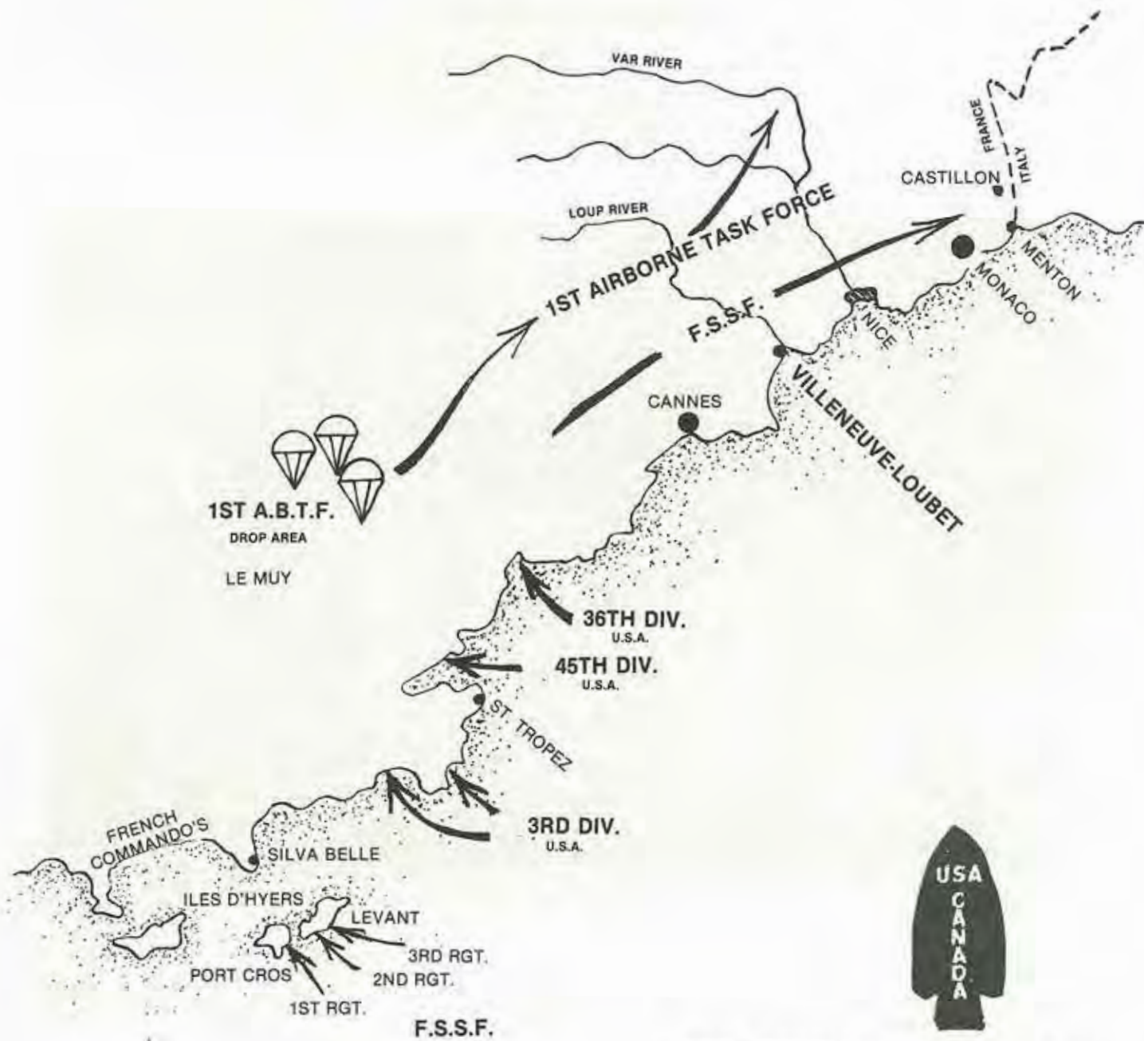


*Staff of the 1st Airborne Task Force; first row, l to r, McCaw, unidentified, Bunch, Bassett, Evans, Maj. Gen. R.T. Frederick, Col. K.G. Wickham, C. of S.; Ellis, Blythe, McCall, Smith. 2nd row, Welch, Higgins, Isenberg, James, Keegan, Lt. Col. Eschenberg G-3, Reiss, Campbell, Scholl, Colquit, Paricer. Photo taken in front of the Hotel Alhambra, Nice, France. Oct 1944 (Maj. Gen. K.G. Wickham)*

Upon securing the two islands of Levant and Port Cros, the men of the First Special Service Force were sent to Sylvabelle for recuperation and a well deserved rest. The next three days were spent relaxing and soaking up the sun on the beaches of Southern France. It also gave them a chance to look over the invasion beaches which had just recently been invaded by the Allied Forces, gaining them a successful foothold on Southern France. The news concerning Gen. Frederick and the 1st Airborne Task Force had gained the interest of everyone in the Force. They were especially concerned for the

General's welfare. The Task Force had jumped near LeMuy, which had enabled the 4th Division to land easier on the beachhead near St. Tropez. The Task Force had cut off the enemy's reinforcement routes and also their reserve support units. Over 5000 men, both British and American, had made the drop at LeMuy. Gliders had brought another 4000 men into the operation to relieve the 36th Division and to press eastward toward the Italian border. Thus, the American and British units organized to execute the airborne phase of the invasion of Southern France successfully.





FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE  
SOUTHERN FRANCE

15 AUG.-9 SEPT. 1944



7TH ARMY



6TH CORPS



Col. Walker was informed by Headquarters 7th Army that the Force's next assignment would be with Gen. Frederick and his Task Force. On the 21st of August the Black Devils relieved the British 2nd Parachute Brigade, the "British Red Devils." While in the St. Raphael and Cannes areas, the 1st ABTF relieved the 36th Division. The Force was to move north to LeVeyans, then into Grasse and finally to



*Lew Merrim, one time seen without his camera. FSSF photographer.*

the Var River. The advance by the Force toward the Riviera met with little resistance. No matter how small the skirmishes were with the enemy, they still caused casualties within the Force's ranks. Most of the action encountered was from the Germans' rear guard. They were protecting their retreat from the coastal areas, moving inland toward Lyon.

Col. Walker was then informed by the Free French of the Interior (FFI) that the enemy concentration at Grasse was well fortified and their positions overlooked the approaches from the south. Col. Walker had the 1st and 2nd Regiments work into a hinge-like assault on the town and before the Germans realized what had happened to them, the Force had taken Grasse. The Force, moving toward the Riviera, was more of a diversion for the 7th Army while the main force of the VI Corps and the 3rd Army were moving up the Rhone Valley to Dijon.

The men of the Force took one town after another without encountering much enemy fire. The town inhabitants cheered all of the Forcemen as they entered each town. They were welcomed by mayors or delegated townsmen; always with wine and champagne. By the 27th, the Force had pushed to the Var River with little opposition from German rear

guards. Col. Walker and his staff made their command post in the town of St. Paul, using a small inn called the Colombe d'Or as their headquarters. On the 30th of August, the Force received permission to cross the Var River. The 1st and 3rd Regiments made the river crossing without contact with the enemy, while the 3rd Regiment proceeded north toward Colomars. Again, no enemy. Meanwhile, in Nice, the Free French had intercepted a German courier with dispatches concerning the German withdrawal of their 148th Division. Their plan was to move rapidly through the areas of Sospel and Turin, across the Po Valley to Bremmer Pass, and then form a line of defense in the Italian Alps.

By the 1st of September the Force had moved inland toward the mountains near L'Escarne where the 3rd Regiment was chasing two companies of German soldiers who had hidden in a railroad tunnel. The skirmish lasted close to four hours. The Germans, using their self-propelled guns and machine guns, set up a defense that again inflicted more casualties upon the Force. However, their position in the tunnel was not as secure as the Germans had previously anticipated. The men of the 3rd Regiment, firing their 75 mm recoilless rifles, totally annihilated the enemy opposition, and again secured the escape route.



*Actual photo of a Force patrol attacking a German outpost on the French "Maginot Line" near Italian Border. Sept 1944 (Marshall)*

The eastward advance of the Force put them on the Italian border and the "Little Maginot Line." The entire regiment was in full operation. The 1st Airborne Task Force's 517th Parachute Combat Team relieved the 3rd Regiment operating in the L'Escarne sector. The 3rd Regiment then proceeded up Mt. Meras and eliminated enemy held fortifications (pill-boxes) and captured numerous German prisoners. It was evident they no longer wanted to fight for their Fatherland. Their morale sapped and reached the bottom of the barrel. To most of them it was better to sit out the war in a POW camp rather than be killed in



a senseless situation. The frontier fortifications were everywhere and had to be cleared one by one. Some were hard fought, hand to hand. Nevertheless, the Forcemen succeeded in taking every fort in their areas of control.

By the 10th of September, the 3rd Regiment's ridgeline commanded the Menton-Sospel Road but was still in enemy hands from Sospel to Castillon. Col. Walker, rather than send his units in against the Fort at Castillon, requested gunfire from the French cruiser "Lorraine." It was standing by in Menton Harbor to periodically fire on the fort to soften the German resistance and enable the Force an easier assault on the fort.



*Ration breakdown, So. France, 3rd Regt. Sept 1944 (Marshall)*

On the western slopes above Menton, the 2nd Regiment was having difficulty routing the enemy. Some of the positions had to be reached by rope, climbing 300-400 foot cliffs, only to be met head on by the well entrenched Germans. The western slopes were extremely steep and some of the areas were over half a mile high. This enabled the Germans to command their well stationed troops. However, the determination of the men of the 2nd Regiment enabled them to take their objective and overcome all obstacles set up by the defending enemy. The 1st Regiment was now northeast of Monti and controlling the high ground observation on Castillon. The 3rd Regiment, also situated above Castillon, would move down at night and set up booby traps and mines to prevent any attempt by the Germans to reinforce or move supplies into Castillon.

The ships, laying off the coast of Menton, helped the Force enormously by firing into the mountain strongholds held by the enemy. The Germans, when they could, would fire their 88's toward the ships resulting in the ships laying a smoke screen and shifting positions to resume firing on the mountain again. A German one-man sub was sent out to



*Entering the town of Sospel, So. France 28 Oct 1944 (Marshall)*

torpedo the ships beached on Cape Martin, while two other one-man subs were captured in the Menton Harbor.

By the end of September the enemy concentrated more on artillery than infantry. Menton was being hit harder and harder, so it became necessary to evacuate the entire population. On one day over 400 rounds were fired into different areas of Menton. The 1st and 3rd Regiments were continually sending out patrols to keep a location control on the Germans while the 2nd Regiment, maintaining an observation line on the Italian border, kept the German artillery batteries in check along the Roya River.

By October, the Force's operation on the front was on a day to day basis. The villages of Grimaldi and Mortala were frequently patrolled for enemy activity. On Mt. Grammondo, observation patrols noticed heavy enemy fortifications and motor movements to the valley east of the mountains. One evening, on Mt. Ours, a Force patrol took an enemy outpost without firing their weapons. The prisoners were secured and sent back to the Force's rear area. Meanwhile, the patrol decided to stay on the ridge for the rest of the night and went to sleep. Upon waking, to their surprise, a German cook was preparing breakfast in the middle of the patrol. He was unaware the Forcemen had taken the position that night. When he realized what had happened, all he could do was meekly surrender without a word.

Toward the end of October, enemy activity in the



Sospel area was reported as a lot of vehicle movement and Force patrols were sent out to investigate Castillon and Sospel. The enemy had totally withdrawn from both the fort and the village. On the 28th of October, patrols informed FSSF Headquarters that Germans were no longer in the Force's area. So, on the 31st of October, Col. Walker set up his headquarters in Menton. Lt. Col. Eschenberg was then reassigned to Maj. Gen. Frederick's Task Force as the operations officer while Maj. Tate, 1st Regiment, took over Regimental S-3 and Lt. Col. Whitney took command of the 1st Regiment. Lt. Col. Akehurst still commanded the Canadians in the Force, but was now making preparations for them to transfer to the Canadian Forces in Italy. Washington sent an order to Col. Walker informing him they were deactivating the First Special Service Force as soon as it was relieved of its present position.

On the 15th of October, when Southern France changed from General Wilson's Mediterranean Theatre to Gen. Eisenhower's European Theatre, the 1st Airborne Task Force came under the command of the 6th Army Group. In the Riviera, the 7th Army withdrew all its air coverage so it could be utilized on its own front near Djon.

After the departure of the German 34th Division from Castillon and Sospel, the fighting slowed down considerably on the Force's left flank. The first few days in November had the 3rd Regiment patrols pushing forward to make contact with the enemy. The patrols were as close to the Italian border as possible and made no contact with the enemy whatsoever. After a few days, patrols were sent across



A. (Frenchy) Levesque on French-Italian border.



Forcemen leading mules up Mt. Ours, So. France to resupply men on the line. Sept 1944 (Marshall)



Lt. R. Smith and MSgt. Rutledge interrogating German prisoner. Mt. Razet, So. France. Sept 1944 Man in background unidentified. (Marshall)





Members of a 1st Regt outpost digging in the area of Monti. Oct 1944 (Durkee) Special permission Col. R.D. Burhans)

the Italian border to Olivetta and San Michele where they encountered enemy concentrations in the two villages. The Force was now patrolling Italy on a daily basis and the 3rd Regiment maintained surveillance on Olivetta and German defense positions.



Maj. Gen. Robert T. Frederick, commanding general of the 1st Airborne Task Force, pins on the Silver Star medal for heroism on Col. Edwin A. Walker, commander of the First Special Service Force. Menton, So. France. Nov. 1944



Medical forward aid station, French-Italian border above Menton, So. France. Oct 1944 (Durkee)

The 1st Regiment secured Mt. Mulacier while the 2nd Regiment fired on Mt. Bellenda with no enemy activity being reported. By the 6th of November the First Special Service Force had established a solid defense line on the Franco-Italian border. The 1st Regiment had assaulted Mt. Grammondo, routed the enemy and secured the mountain. The final advance of the First Special Service Force had been com-



FSSF Headquarters, Nov. 1944. Menton, So. France. 1st row, l to r; Maj. Tate, Lt. Col. Baldwin, Col. Edwin A. Walker, Lt. Col. Burhans, Lt. Col. Akehurst, Lt. Col. Becket. 2nd row, Capt. Hess, Lt. Col. Hufft, Capt. Gallagher, Lt. Col. Whitney, Lt. Col. Moore. 3rd row, Maj. Holt, Maj. Mair, Maj. Clay.



pleted by routing the Germans and securing the mountain. By the middle of November the Force's patrols had made no contact with the enemy and artillery duels also dwindled. Only one battalion from each regiment was on the line, while the rest of the men were on rest and recuperation in Nice.

The 1st Airborne Task Force was now being terminated. All parachute elements were being assigned to the north to reinforce the First Allied Airborne Army. Maj. Gen. Frederick came to Menton to award decorations to the Forcemens and to say good-bye. On the 23rd of November, 1944, he departed for Nice and the Airborne Task Force ceased as a military unit. On the 26th of November, the 100th Battalion of the 442 Regimental Combat Team (the Japanese Americans) relieved the Force of its positions. All three regiments moved back to the Loup River Valley near Villeneuve-Loubet while the Force Headquarters moved to Les Esperes, the chateau of Count de Pas. The last few days of the Force were spent here.



*Villeneuve-Loubet, breaking up of the Force. Standing, l to r, 1st man unidentified, T. Fenton, N. Otis, H. VanAusdale. Kneeling, Tony Ross, J. Polley. Fenton and VanAusdale were the lead scouts on the assault of LaDifensa and were given credit for firing the shots of the FSSF in combat. 4 Dec 1944 (VanAusdale) 1st Co., 2nd Regt.*

The U.S. Army no longer needed small assault units, as they now employed divisions and corps against the enemy's final struggle to stay alive. As the men of the First Special Service Force rode back to Villeneuve-Loubet to disband, the few who had survived from the original ranks thought back to Helena, Montana. The casualty list had taken care of the changes of over 2300 men wounded and over 400 killed or missing in action. The amazing fact was, the



*J. McCrank, Red Presswell, Roy Sousey and W.M. Porchak prior to Force break-up, Nice, So. France. Dec 1944 (Marshall)*



*P.L. Prorise, J. "Buddy" Glass and L.O. Walling, members of the 1st Co., 3rd Regt, FSSF. So. France. Dec 1944 (Glass)*

Force seldom ever numbered more than 1800 men at one time. The replacements would arrive, go into battle and the procedure would repeat. The replacement turnover was almost 600 percent. The men, upon arriving to fill the casualty slots, came from both the American and Canadian ranks. They all knew they were in an elite unit. The new replacements proved that they, too, could uphold the tradition of the Force. The officers and men of the Force gave unimaginable accounts of bravado while in combat. The war correspondents writing about the Force had nothing but praise for this small group of men who never took a step backward, only forward.





*Lt. Col. Orval J. Baldwin, Nice, So. France. Nov-Dec 1944 (Baldwin)*



*Three members of the FSSF, B. Icesterke, B. Rablin and J. Kures, all of the 3rd Regt, manning an outpost in So. France. (Pelletier)*

The last few days of the First Special Service Force were spent with the men going to various companies and battalions to seek out old friends and comrades, or reminiscing about the early days, or having a drink with one another and even praising the accomplishments of the individuals and units within the Force. The men of the Force were remembered over a glass of wine as tears of remembrance



*Maj. Neeseman, Hq. 1st Regt Medical Doctor. Upon deactivation, was reassigned to the 101st Airborne.*



*Art Agre, talented accordionist, and W. Duval, Sv Co, in front of the Montana Hotel, Nice, France. (Agre)*



*Bob Durkee, Hq 3rd Regt passing out Pro-Kits to the men going on pass in Nice, France.*



were shed for those left behind in the cemeteries of Marzenella, San Vittore and Provence.

Strange as it may seem, it was Gen. Eisenhower who instructed Lt. Col. Frederick to establish and command the versatile unit which would become the First Special Service Force, and now it was Gen. Eisenhower's SHAEF Headquarters which no longer needed the requirements of such a Force. So the experiment in military co-existence between two nations, Canada and the United States, came to an end. The two and one-half years of their existence from Helena, Montana, to the Aleutians, to the mountain fighting in Italy and their being the first of the Allied Forces to enter Rome and finally to Southern France, ended. But not before gaining the reputations of becoming the North Americans The Black Devils.

Around 2 p.m. on the 5th of December, 1944, the final parade for the First Special Service Force had assembled on the Loup River at Villeneuve-Loubet.

The Force's Chaplain read a prayer for the Forcemen killed in action in the various campaigns during the Force's existence. The colors of the United States, Canada and the Regimental Standard of the First Special Service Force were then held proudly and defiantly against the wind by the Color Bearers. The Force's adjutant read the order of inactivation. All three flags slapped in the wind and, as the men looked at the banners, some thought of the deep respect and love to the symbol of the Regiment, its duty to country and the men's duty to the Regiment. The Regimental Colors were then lowered so the adjutant could case this proud red flag with white shield and black dagger. A command from the Canadian ranks was heard and the Canadians withdrew from the main ranks and formed their own battalion. They marched ever so proudly behind the Canadian Colors passing in front of the American ranks (who were still at attention) in tribute to their American comrades.



*Loup River Flats, Villeneuve-Loubet, Southern France, 5 December 1944. On a warm December afternoon at 2 p.m., the entire regiment of the First Special Service Force assembled for the last time. In a few moments, the deactivation was read and the Force ceased as a military unit. However, through the merits and achievements of the Force, this unit will long be remembered as one of the most elite military units ever assembled in the history of the U.S. Army.*





*FSSF casing the colors, Dec 1944, Villeneuve-Loubet. (Durkee)*



*Villeneuve-Loubet, Dec 1944, deactivation of FSSF, Canadian "march-past." (Durkee)*





Villeneuve-Loubet, breaking up of the Force. Group shot of Hq. 1st Regt. Dec 1944



L to r, Art Duebner, Bob Horst, Bob Engle (Engle)

It was hard to imagine that these men, as hard as they had fought and the inhuman feats they had accomplished, would stand there and openly cry as the Force disbanded. They had become brothers of the ranks and never looked upon the other as being either Canadian or American, and the respect for one another formed a bond of friendship that would never die.



L to r, Charles, Sgt. Locke, R. Stenpien (Stenpien)



Villeneuve-Loubet, breaking up of the Force. Group shot of the 3rd Co, 3rd Regt. Dec 1944 (Pelletier)





**Montana-Trained Special Troops Fight at Anzio**  
**Force Moved Up From South Front**  
 Nine Killed When German Bombs Hit Evac Hospital

**Canadian-American Fighting Team in Italy One of Most Unusual Units in World War 2**

**Capt. Adna H. Underhill, First Special Service Force Officer, Receives Silver Star for Gallantry in Italy**

**First Special Service Force Without Doubt One of the Greatest and Most Famous Units of This War**

**Black Devils in Baggy Pants**

**Christmas Celebrated in January by Special Service Men**

**Fabulous Force Revealed Combined Unit Made History**



**Canadian-American Combat Troops Fought Kisses From Guys And Guns—But Not Signoritas**

**Where Montana-Trained Men Fight**



**First Special Service Force, Which Trained Here, Is Now Dealing Nazis Misery; Holds Unique Record**

**MOUNTAIN UNIT BATTLES NAZIS**

**Brig. Gen. Robert T. Frederick Tells How Special Service Troops Were First Allies to Enter Rome**

**YANKS GRAB KISKA FORTRESS**

**Maj. Gen. Robert T. Frederick Awarded Distinguished Service Cross for Action**

**Sgt. Alf Olsen Gets Two Wounds in Italian Fighting**

Group of newspaper clippings honoring some of the achievements of the First Special Service Force.



Achievements are listed below for some of the men of the Canadian ranks who served above and beyond the call of duty.

## *1st Canadian Special Service Battalion*

### HONORS AND AWARDS

<b>Distinguished Service Order</b>		
	LtCol	John F.R. AKEHURST
	Maj (A/LtCol)	Thomas Pope GILDAY
<b>Member of the Order of the British Empire</b>		
	Maj	John Vincent J. BISCOE
<b>Distinguished Conduct Medal</b>		
L-86683	Pte (A/Sgt)	Melvin Foster McAULEY
<b>Military Medal</b>		
H-25272	Pte (A/Sgt)	Thomas PRINCE
H-3328	S/Sgt	Allan Leslie WRIGHT
<b>Mention in Dispatches</b>		
B-61753	Sgt	Joseph BODNER
B-127695	Pte	Norman Edward BROWN
H-17510	Sgt	George Albert CAMPBELL
M-17307	Sgt (A/S/Sgt)	George Oliver GODIN
	LtCol	Thomas Pope GILDAY
H-100435	Pte(A/Sgt)	James Herman LAUGHREN
K-53659	S/Sgt	Donald J. McLACHLAN
	Maj (A/LtCol)	Thomas Cail MacWILLIAM
	Capt	Weldon Bray PERRY
F-43879	Pte	James D. SCHOFIELD
	Maj	John Myer SECTER
<b>Distinguished Service Cross (United States)</b>		
	Lt	Frederick Blake ATTO
B-111439	Sgt	Jack Travis BARLOW
L-86555	Sgt	Edgar Stewart FINES
B-92211	Cpl (A/Sgt)	John Willard McINNIS
C-75979	Sgt (A/S/Sgt)	Ross William ORR
M-3328	Sgt	Allan Leslie WRIGHT
<b>Silver Star (United States)</b>		
D-109795	Pte	Robert Bruce AITKEN
M-11122	S/Sgt	William Elmer BROTHERTON
D-72006	S/Sgt	Solomon BIBLOWITZ
	LtCol	Ralph Wilson BECKET
D-81272	Pte	Cédric Ambrose BOWMAN
M-51553	S/Sgt	Roy Nesbeth CUFF
F-28951	Sgt	Vernon Joseph DOUCETTE
H-19234	S/Sgt	Fayne Lamont ELLIOT
D-158509	A/Sgt	Camille GAGNON
D-132112	Sgt	Atelia GENTILE
	Lt (A/Capt)	Thomas Coy GORDON



D-119648	Pte	John Joseph GRIFFITH
D-49301	Cpl (A/Sgt)	William A.F. HARRIS
A-20717	Cpl (A/Sgt)	William HANRAHAN
A-62067	Pte	Robert James SCULLY
U-1805	S/Sgt	Daniel SERRICK
G-60658	Sgt	James Edward KELEHER
M-34048	S/Sgt	John Lloyd KNIGHT
	Lt	Joseph Conrad LEGAULT
B-131211	Pte	Cecil W. LITSTER
B-53066	Pte	William James Francis Ernest MAGEE
	Lt	Clarence Johnstone McNAIR
	Lt	John David MITCHELL
D-7744	Pte	Cletees MURDOCK
M-31330	A/Sgt	John Allison PARFETT
F-85014	Sgt (A/S/Sgt)	George Herbert PEPPARD
H-25272	Sgt	Thomas PRINCE
M-35060	Sgt	Douglas Ferrin PETERSON
A-29576	Sgt	George RAINVILLE
L-41387	Pte (A/Sgt)	Walter Henry William REEVE
H-205057	A/S/Sgt	Leopold Henry RUDOLPH
M-102270	Sgt	Ronald Alexander STIRLING
C-10146	Pte (A/Sgt)	Lindsay SCHARFE
	Maj	Stanley Charles WATERS
	Capt	William Edgar WATT
	Capt	Walter M.W. WILSON
C-5053	Sgt	George William WRIGHT
B-128511	Pte (A/Sgt)	Samuel Jack ZAMARA
<b>Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster (United States)</b>		
	Lt	William Reynolds BENNETT
<b>Bronze Star (United States)</b>		
H-42002	Sgt	William Gilbert BAGLEY
D-72202	Pte	John BARNETT
B-80158	Pte	Raymond George BRIDDON
L-86836	Sgt	Kenneth George CUTT
F-33186	Sgt	Lawrence Henry DEVISON
F-30467	Pte	Douglas Earle DICKIE
A-58613	Sgt	George Thomas DUNDY
D-71519	Cpl (A/Sgt)	Thomas E. FENTON
L-36407	Pte	Philip Thomas FILLEUL
A-117875	Pte	Donald L. FITZPATRICK
	Lt	Truman Harry HARRISON
M-66360	Sgt	Geoffrey A.M. HART
F-13255	Sgt	Joseph Thomas JAMIESON
M-106249	Pte	Thomas Reginald KINCH
B-53066	Pte	William James Francis Ernest MAGEE
D-132238	Pte (A/Sgt)	William MALCOM
M-25848	Sgt (A/S/Sgt)	Keith R.S. MEIKLEJOHN
B-128506	S/Sgt	Gerard Hugh McDONALD
C-54124	Pte	Orvest Miles OUDERKIRK
	Maj (A/LtCol)	John Pemberton E.D. PAGE
H-40708	S/Sgt	James Alexander PLAYFORD
B-137590	Sgt	Thomas Charles POTENZA
M-30931	Sgt	Harold Emery WEBB

*This roster was used by special permission from Major Louis E. Grimshaw, author: The Badges and Insignias of the Canadian Airborne Forces, "Ex Coelis."*



The Canadians, 37 officers and 583 enlisted men, departed for Marseille to board a transport bound for Naples. Then, on to Aldershot, England for replacement in other parachute units. Several Canadian officers volunteered for the Canadian Parachute Regiment which came under the 6th British Airborne. These men saw a lot of action up until the end of the war. They ended their fighting on the Baltic Sea. They were the first Canadians to return to Canada, sailing home on the Isle de France.



*Lt. Col. J.F.R. Akehurst  
Commander Canadian Bn FSSF  
(Stenpien)*

The men of the Force then waited for their orders of re-assignment with some being transferred to the 17th 101st Airborne and others to the 82nd Airborne units. Others were assigned to the 194th Glider Infantry Regiment. The remainder of the men of the Force had been assigned to the 474th Infantry Regiment (Separate), independent from all divisions and to be commanded by Col. Edwin A. Walker. This regiment would be utilized for two purposes, to prepare for a mission in Norway and to become a coastal security force in Northern France, near Cherbourg. During the invasion (Operation Overlord) the Allied Forces bypassed nearly 2000 German soldiers near the Channel Islands and they were all in combat readiness as they still had their weapons, ammunition and a small maritime force. The 474th assignment would be to prevent the Germans from leaving their island garrisons for raids on the French coastal areas off the Channel Islands.

On the 6th of January, 1945, the 474th Infantry Regiment officially came into existence with their temporary headquarters being at Barneville-Sur-Mer. By the 19th of January, the Norwegian-American unit of the 99th Infantry Battalion was assigned to the 474th. Other replacements from the United States and European Theatre of Operations would amass to over 3000 enlisted men and 160 officers of which 74 officers and 610 enlisted men were from the Force's ranks.

The training for the regiment would continue through mid-February and would maintain the same standards as those of the First Special Service Force. On the 22nd of February, Col. Walker received orders to set up his regiment for a security screening force which would be utilized behind the 12th Army Group as an anti-sabotage-espionage force preventing hostile German actions behind the Allied Army's rear sectors. Communications and mobility were to be prime factors for the newly formed 474th Infantry Regiment. Jeeps, weapon carriers, armored cars and the latest in long range communication radios would



*Men of the 4th Co, 2nd Regt. First row, l to r, Humble, Bier, Peaslee, Derese, Horvat, Kures, Harrison, Woods, Paquette, Schultz, Glasse. Second row, Houston, Dempster, Stalcup, Jensen, Willison, Flannigan, Rathbun, Wiesencaur, Steciak, LaFleche, Bush. Standing, Shufflebotham, Buff, Waggoner, Lt. Gary, Stoppelberg, Reed, Juback, Turner, Galarneua, Miller, Lt. Story. Villeneuve-Loubet, S. France. Dec 1944 (Story)*





*Col. Edwin A. Walker, FSSF commander, saying goodbye to men of the Force on their way to the 82nd Airborne. Eight officers and 345 men departed on the 9th of Jan, 1945 from La-Haye-du-Puits, France, to fulfill airborne obligations throughout the European Theater of Operations. (Durkee)*

be part of their inventory. Orders arrived in the latter part of March for the regiment to move behind the 12th Army Group, now located in Aachen, Germany. On the 5th of April, the regiment moved out for its new destination. Col. Walker, irritated at the prospect of having his regiment scattered across Germany, argued with 3rd Army Headquarters and won, in keeping the regiment intact and under the 3rd Army command.

One of the first assignments of the regiment in mid-April, was to move a recently captured gold and art treasure cache found in a Merkers salt mine. The entire lot totaled almost one-third of the entire German gold reserve. It was to be escorted by the 99th BN, of the 474th and taken to the German banks in Frankfurt. The regiment was then assigned to rear action guard in Nurnburg, protecting Gen. Patton's Headquarters and the immediate areas. The



*99th Bn providing escort for the gold bullion and art treasure horde being delivered to the German Reich Bank in Frankfurt. 12 April 1945 (Durkee)*



*Men of the 474th Inf Regt (Sep) unloading gold bullion and art treasures from 24 10-ton trucks, into the Reich Bank at Frankfurt, Germany. The horde, found a few days before in a Merkers salt mine, totaled one third of the entire German gold reserve. 12 April 1945 (Durkee)*



*Former members of the FSSF, now with the 474th Inf Regt (Sep) guarding a street in Nurnburg, Germany. Probably in the area of General Patton's headquarters. April 1945 (Durkee)*



Officers and men of the 474th Inf Regt (Sep) loading transport ships to take them to Oslo, Norway for Operation Nightlight to help repatriate German POWs to Germany. 4 June 1945, Le Havre, France. (Durkee)



Col. Edwin A. Walker awarding the Bronze Star Medal for heroism to MSgt. Robert Durkee, Oslo, Norway. (Durkee)

regiment then moved south toward Regensberg to search for hidden German die-hards such as SS members and Nazi party officials who were on the run from the Allied Forces. They were also to disarm all the civilians along the countryside. They took truckloads of sporting rifles left behind by fathers and husbands to be destroyed and dumped in the U.S. Army dumps.

On the 7th of May, 1945, VE Day, the regiment, then located in the Regensberg area, was ordered to Norway by way of Le Havre, France by ship to Oslo, Norway. On the 11th day of May, they departed Le

Havre, arriving the following day at Oslo and taking up the occupation of Norway.

The 474th Regiment, along with a British Airborne unit and division, formed Operation Nightlight. The U.S. Task Force "A," under the command of Brigadier General Owen Summers (who was later replaced by Lt. Gen. Andrew Thorne, the British Commander) was to help disarm the German Army and return them to Germany. The Task Force controlled the Oslo area as the British controlled the remainder of Norway except the extreme north which came under the Norwegian Army command. By July, screening camps had been made available to start processing the German prisoners back to Germany. By August, over 100,000 prisoners had been returned to their homeland by ships from the 474th area. The total number of prisoners in Norway had amassed to over 300,000 strong, who had given up to the Scottish Command on the 12th of May, 1945.

The 474th Infantry Regiment then took up the occupation of Norway and on the 4th of July, 1945, Task Force "A" paraded into Oslo to celebrate the American holiday and give the Norwegians a chance to see the U.S. fighting force. In the early days of October, orders from Frankfurt, Germany reached Col. Walker informing him that all American troops would be withdrawn from Norway. Prior to departure, the Americans held a parade and presented the Regimental Colors of the 474th Infantry Regiment to King Haakon as a goodwill gesture between Norway and the United States. On the 15th of October, the regiment boarded the Dominican Victory, a wartime victory ship, arriving in New York on the 25th of October, 1945, and on the 27th of October, 1945, the 474th Infantry Regiment was disbanded.

In final tribute to Maj. Gen. Frederick and the men of the First Special Service Force, "The Black Devils," and to the Canadians and Americans who formed this highly prized elite unit, it is only fitting to say, you gave your best, you did your best, and you





*French Croix de Guerre presented to SSgt. Glenn Lee by Commandant Jacque Robert, military attache, French Embassy, Oslo, Norway.*

were the best. You faced death squarely in the face and never took a step backward, nor did you let your fallen comrades go unattended in battle. You gave the inspiration to future soldiers who would become the Special Forces of the modern era. Your devotion and trust toward one another helped mold what was thought to be the impossible. The fact that all officers had to lead inspired all the men to rally behind their leaders and push forward into the lairs of the enemy, annihilating any and all opposing elements. You men who formed the Force can never be equaled, nor can your courage in battle be forgotten. You, who formed the First Special Service Force and wore the uniform ever so proudly, your achievements have not been forgotten, and in the hopes of the future historians, your legends should be placed in history along with the Legions of Thermopylae.

THE END



## Appendix

While sailing home from Norway on board the Dominican Victory, the Forceman began soliciting by forming the First Special Service Force Association to keep their spirit alive. Col. Walker began by appointing an officer and an enlisted man representative from each regiment. Upon their arrival in the United States, Col. Walker sent a letter to Lt. Col. Akehurst in Canada. He answered, assuring full Canadian cooperation, and he too appointed Canadian representatives to serve with the American group. Maj. Gen. Frederick, upon hearing of the association idea, gave his blessings and supported it one hundred percent.

By spring of 1946 the Bond Committee in Helena, Montana, had received over \$10,000 for the erection of a monument honoring the Forces' dead. The City of Helena turned over a centralized area of the Memorial Park to the Force Association where the monument would be erected. On the 15th of August 1947, following a parade by veterans of the First Special Service Force, the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the ceremony of the dedication began. The unveiling of the War Memorial was completed by Mrs. May DeMarcedo of Victoria, British Columbia (next of kin to Sgt. L.C. DeMarcedo) and Mrs. J.H. Fitzpatrick of Westerly Rhode Island (mother of J.H. Fitzpatrick, Jr.). The dedication speech was delivered by Brigadier General Edwin A. Walker.



*Brig. Gen. Edwin A. Walker delivering dedication speech at the First Special Service Force War Memorial, Helena, Montana, Aug 1947*

The dedication had veterans of the Force coming from all over the United States, Canada and Nova Scotia. The civilian population of Helena was very receptive to this day honoring the First Special Service Force War Memorial, as most of the stores

closed. The streets were lined with thousands of people watching the remainder of the men of the First Special Service Force march proudly down the streets where they had left only four years and four months earlier.

The weekend was filled with memories as old comrades saw each other for the first time since Villeneuve-Loubet, Southern France, as they had a lot to reminisce about. The Association then appointed Taylor M. Radcliffe as president and Eugene MacCormick as Executive Secretary, the position he held until his death in 1976. Bill Story was then elected Executive Secretary, the position he still holds today.



*Eugene MacCormick, executive secretary, 1947-1976.*

Every year since the forming of the association, they have had reunions in both the United States and Canada in the following cities:

UNITED STATES	CANADA
1947 Helena	1948 Toronto
1949 Chicago	1951 Winnipeg
1950 Helena	1954 Montreal
1952 Minneapolis	1957 Ottawa
1953 San Francisco	1959 Calgary
1955 Helena	1962 Edmonton
1956 New Orleans	1965 Winnipeg
1958 Pittsburgh	1967 Ottawa
1960 Detroit	1969 Edmonton
1961 Cleveland	1970 Toronto
1963 Washington, D.C.	1973 Montreal
1964 Helena	1974 Kitchener



1966 Minneapolis	1976 Thunder Bay
1968 Pittsburgh	1978 Calgary
1971 Washington, D.C.	1981 Vancouver
1972 Helena	
1975 Seattle	
1977 Burlington, Vt.	
1979 Chatanooga	
1980 Helena	
1982 Pittsburgh	

In 1947 Lt. Col. Robert D. Burhans wrote a superb book about the Force, appropriately titled "The First Special Service Force" a War History of the North Americans 1942-1944. I highly recommend this book to any person doing research on the Force, as I found it to be the most precise and detailed books pertaining to the First Special Service Force in existence.

In 1955 General Robert Frederick was severely injured in an automobile accident.

In 1960 a ceremony entitled "The Honor and The Heritage of the First Special Service Force" was held at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Major General Robert T. Frederick, at that time, presented the original Regimental Force flag to the 7th Special Forces Group. General Frederick was also the guest of honor at the ceremony and was highly praised for his initiative in developing and commanding the First Special Service Force.

In 1968 a movie entitled "The Devils Brigade" was made about the First Special Service Force. It starred William Holden as General Frederick and also starred Cliff Robertson and Vincent Edwards. The movie was filmed in the Intermountain areas of Utah, was directed by David Wolper and released through United Artist Corporation. It premiered at the Marlow Theatre in Helena, Montana.

On the 29th of November, 1970, Major General Robert T. Frederick died at the age of 63. He left behind him a legacy that military tacticians and historians still marvel at. The military awards he earned included eight Purple Hearts, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, Legion of Merit with one Oak Leaf cluster, the French Legion of Honor, the Croix de Guerre, the Order of St. Charles of Monaco and the Italian Victory Medal. His service and campaign medals included the American Defense Medal, the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, the European-African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal and the Army of Occupation Medal (Germany).

In December of 1944, upon taking command of the 45th Division, he became the youngest division commander in the U.S. Army. In May 1948 he became Commanding General of the Headquarters Command U.S. Forces in Austria. In February 1949 he became Commander of the 4th Division at Fort Ord, California. General Frederick also command the Air and Ground Force training at Maxwell Field, Alabama. His last tour of duty, prior to his retirement, was in May 1951 when he was named Chief of the Joint U.S. Military Aid Group (JUSMAG) to Greece. General Frederick was a man of destiny with

military qualities that will never be equaled again. His passing has left a terrible void in all the men who knew him, and he will never be forgotten as the Commander of the First Special Service Force.

For the first time, in 1973 at Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, the Canadian Airborne Regiment held a ceremony of Trooping the Colors by the Premier Commando Aeroporte and the Second Airborne Commando. During the ceremony tribute was given to their airborne predecessors, the First Canadian Parachute Battalion and the First Special Service Force.



*Lord Louis Montbatten of Burma, wishes the men of the First Special Service Force Association a happy 30th anniversary of the Southern France landings. Aug 1974 (FSSF Museum)*

In 1977 members of the 1st Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces paid tribute to the men of the First Special Service Force who had died in battle. The ceremony was held at the War Memorial Park in Helena.

In 1980 Mayor Richard D. Brown proclaimed the week of August 11-16 as "First Special Service Force Week" which was held in conjunction with the Force's annual reunion.

In March of 1981, President Ronald Reagan, while delivering a speech in Ottawa, Canada, praised the First Special Services Forces' Americans and Canadians who had formed the elite unit it had come to be.



On the 27th of June, 1981, a dedication for Colonel Alfred "Cookie" Marshall, Jr. was held. He was killed in action entering the outskirts of Rome on the 4th of June, 1944. The drop zone at Fort William Henry Harrison was named Marshall Field and Drop Zone, in honor of a valiant soldier and commander.

As long as we remember the achievements of the First Special Service Force, the Regiment will never die.

The First Special Service Force captured and secured the following mountains and hill masses.

#### ITALY

Monte La Difensa  
 Monte La Rementanea  
 Monte Maggiore  
 Monte Camino  
 Monte Rocca d'Evandro  
 Monte Sammucro  
 Monte Lungo  
 Monte Vischiataro  
 Forcello del Moscoso  
 Monte Radicosa  
 Monte Corno Vetese  
 Monte Arcalone  
 Monte Le Cappezate  
 Colle Steffano  
 La Chisia  
 Caparo  
 Castillon  
 San Croce  
 Monte Majo  
 Ascensione  
 Le Voglio  
 San Croce  
 Lepini Heights  
 Monte Illirio  
 Monte Rocca Massima  
 Albano  
 Laziali Heights

#### FRANCE

Touet L'Escarene  
 Little Maginot Line  
 Tete de-la-Lavina  
 Mont Meras  
 Mont Agel  
 Mont Ours  
 Mont Carpano  
 Mont Razet  
 Mont Roulabre  
 Mont Grammando  
 Mont Barbonnet  
 Mont Pic de-la-Sella  
 Plan Germain  
 Graia D'erch  
 Mont Diaurus  
 Mont Mulacier  
 Mont Bellanda  
 Mont LeCuore

The following elements of both the German and Italian Forces opposed the First Special Service Force in Italy and Southern France.

#### GERMAN UNITS

1st Parachute Corps  
 1st Parachute Division  
 5th Mountain Division  
 6th Herman Goering Division  
 7th Luftwaffe Battalion  
 15th Grenadier Division  
 16th SS Regiment  
 26th Panzer Division  
 29th Panzer Grenadier Division  
 34th Division  
 36th SS Regiment  
 44th Division  
 67th Panzer Corps  
 71st Panzer Grenadier Regiment  
 76th Panzer Corps  
 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment  
 115th Reconnaissance Battalion  
 125th Panzer Grenadier Regiment  
 132nd Regiment  
 148th Division

253rd Grenadier Regiment  
 362nd Division  
 382nd Panzer Grenadier Regiment  
 463rd Panzer Regiment  
 715th Division  
 725th Division  
 735th Division  
 917th Regiment  
 1028th Grenadier Regiment  
 Herman Goering Panzer & Parachute Division  
 SS Reichfuhrer Regiment  
 Alarm Companies (there were only 3)

#### ITALIAN UNITS

Italian SS Infantry  
 Militia Armata  
 Barbarigo Battalion  
 San Marco Marines

#### CAMPAIGNS OF THE FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE

ALEUTIANS CAMPAIGN  
 Kiska—Little Kiska . . . . . Aug. 15-19, 1943  
 Segula Island . . . . . Aug. 17, 1943

#### MEDITERRANEAN THEATRE

##### NAPLES—FOGGIA CAMPAIGN

Monte La Difensa . . . . . Dec. 3-6, 1943  
 Monte La Remetanea . . . . . Dec. 6-9, 1943  
 Monte Sammucro (Height 720) . . . . . Dec. 25, 1943  
 Radicosa . . . . . Jan. 4, 1943  
 Monte Majo . . . . . Jan. 6, 1943  
 Monte Vischiataro . . . . . Jan. 8, 1943  
 Mussolini Canal (Anzio) . . . . . Feb. 2-May 10, 1944  
 Monte Arrestino . . . . . May 25, 1944  
 Rocca Massima . . . . . May 27, 1944  
 Colie Ferro . . . . . June 2, 1944

##### ROME—ARNO CAMPAIGN

Rome . . . . . June 4, 1944

##### SOUTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN

Iles D'Hyeres . . . . . Aug. 14-17, 1944  
 Grasse . . . . . Aug. 27, 1944  
 Villeneuve-Loubet . . . . . Aug. 30, 1944  
 Vence . . . . . Sept. 1, 1944  
 Drap . . . . . Sept. 3, 1944  
 L'Escarene . . . . . Sept. 5, 1944  
 La Turbie . . . . . Sept. 6, 1944  
 Mentone . . . . . Sept. 7, 1944

#### EUROPEAN THEATRE

##### RHINELAND CAMPAIGN

Franco—Italian Border . . . . . Sept. 7-Nov. 30, 1944  
 Deactivation . . . . . Dec. 5, 1944  
 Villeneuve—Loubet . . . . .

During the campaigns of Italy and Southern France it was estimated that the First Special Service Force had taken over 7,000 prisoners and had killed an estimated 12,000 enemy soldiers.



## POST CAMPS AND STATIONS OF THE FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE

FROM	ACTIVATION
Fort William Henry Harrison Helena, Montana . . . . .	July 20, 1942-April 13, 1943
Camp Bradford, NOB Norfolk, Virginia . . . . .	April 15-May 22, 1943
Fort Eathen Allen Burlington, Vermont . . . . .	May 23-June 27, 1943
San Francisco Port of Embarkation . . . . .	July 4-10, 1943
Aleutian Islands . . . . .	July 25-Aug. 19, 1943
Camp Stoneman California . . . . .	Sept. 1-4, 1943
Fort Eathen Allen Burlington, Vermont . . . . .	Sept. 9-Oct. 19, 1943
Camp Patrick Henry Norfolk, Virginia . . . . .	Oct. 20-27, 1943
Casablanca French Morocco . . . . .	Nov. 5-7, 1943
Oran, Algiers . . . . .	Nov. 8-19, 1943
Santa Maria di Capua Vetere, Italy . . . . .	Nov. 20, 1943-Aug. 20, 1944
Lake Albano, Italy . . . . .	June 6-30, 1944
Santa Maria di Castelabate Italy . . . . .	July 4-Aug. 11, 1944
Propriano, Corsica . . . . .	Aug. 12-14, 1944
Nice, France . . . . .	Sept. 6-27, 1944
Villeneuve-Loubet France . . . . .	Dec. 5, 1944

## *Uniform and Restriction Wear of the FSSF*

Uniform wear of the men of the mixed units arriving at Fort William Henry Harrison was somewhat varied, especially the Canadians. Issuing the clothing of the U.S. uniform to this mixed lot of military men became very significant in all aspects of wear. When the Canadian NCO's were first issued their clothing they immediately sewed their Canadian stripes on these U.S. jackets. Col. Frederick ceased this immediately, as he did not want to have a mixture of both American and Canadian accouterments on one uniform. The only exception was the wearing of the Parachute Badge. If an individual from the Canadian ranks had earned his wings, either through Canadian or British airborne training, he was permitted to wear either one or both on the U.S. uniform together with the American Jump Wings.

Some Canadians arriving at Fort Harrison wore berets with their Canadian uniforms and also started wearing them with the U.S. uniform. However, this also was ceased immediately and never allowed at any time whatsoever. Contrary to belief, the First Special Service Force never allowed the beret to be a part of their uniform.

When going home on leave, the Canadians, being proud of the fact they were training with an elite unit such as the Force, would wear Canadian stripes and the Canadian collar brass on the U.S. uniform, as well as wear their berets. Nevertheless, when they returned to Fort Harrison, all resemblance of Canadian military wear on the U.S. uniform was removed and replaced with the proper U.S. wear.





Variety of FSSF patches, extreme left theater made in Italy, others are standard issue by U.S. Army.

Enlisted men's collar brass (disc) of the First Special Service Force.



Officer's collar brass. At left, American pin back, at right, Canadian lug back.

The original issued collar brass of the enlisted man was a single piece construction, round and flat in appearance, and was clutch backed. Both the U.S. collar disc and the crossed arrows collar disc were approximately 1 inch in diameter.

In the early days of the issuance of clothing, there appeared a CANADA collar disc, worn solely by the enlisted Canadians. This practice ceased within a few short weeks as Col. Frederick disliked the idea of having two separate discs signifying two groups within his one regiment organization. The U.S. officers' collar brass was a one piece constructed cut-out crossed arrows, clutch back. The Canadian officers' crossed arrows were also the same, however they were of the typical Canadian lug fasteners.

In 1966 the U.S. Special Forces were trying to gain status separate from the U.S. Infantry. During this period there emerged a new crossed arrows (officer style), hallmarked N.S. Meyers Inc., New York. These were made specially for the Special Forces and worn for only a short period of time. While the request for

separate status was being considered, the request was denied and the use of the newly made collar brass was discontinued.



Top argullette is original issue. Bottom argullette is a reproduction used in the movie "Devils Brigade."



The FSSF Argulette (shoulder cord) was manufactured by the Dondero Co. of Washington, D.C., and only approximately 5,000 were sent to the Force upon the approval of Col. Frederick. The argulette was made from silk parachute shroud lines and were a light red, white and blue in color.



*Jump Wings  
(buzzard claws as  
called by  
Forcemen) and  
wing oval.*

The FSSF Jump oval was oval in shape with a fine gold border and a three colored section of red, white and blue. Two holes balanced in the center of the flasher, hemmed in gold thread, were to hold the Jump Wings in precise position when worn on the uniform jacket.

The FSSF overseas cap had a red, white and blue braid sewn into the rim. The color bars were one-fourth inches long and interwoven blue to red on white silk. There were four color bars diagonally woven into the silk braid and one-eighth inch separated the color bars. After the capture of Rome there appeared another cap braid. However, it arrived too late to be worn by many members of the Force. This second braid was a solid three sectional color strand of red, white and blue.

The V-42 dagger was manufactured by the W.R. Case & Sons Cutlery Co. and the daggers were issued to the men of the Force in the early months of 1943. The U.S. Government came directly to the Case Co. as it was made to their specifications. Approximately 3,200 daggers were manufactured with the first 500 having serial numbers. This numbering of the daggers ceased as the continued issuance of the daggers was not a controlling factor. The original specifications called for a double concave grind with a razor edge. However, this made the dagger so sharp that it penetrated bone and became difficult to remove from the victim. The daggers were then modified so the point was more rounded. The butt of the dagger was designed to be pointed, and sharp, so it could crush skulls. Many men of the Force rounded off the pointed ends of the daggers. Due to the length of dagger sheath their knuckles would often strike the pointed end and cause them to bleed. Another modification made by some of the Forcemen was to add a small metal plate behind the sheath in the area of the point of the dagger. This plate would reinforce the back of the sheath, pre-

venting the dagger from penetrating it and eventually stabbing its owner. The dagger had a serration area by the handle guard above the name CASE, called the thumb print. Holding the dagger by the handle and letting your thumb rest in the thumb print gave better control for stabbing the victim. The V-42 dagger was also called the Commando knife and the Ranger knife.

The foregoing information on the V-42 dagger was submitted to me by the Case Cutlery Co. and was researched from the memory and personal records of Mr. John O'Kain, former Chairman of the Board at the Case Cutlery Co.



*The Black Devils Christmas card for 1944, drawn on a blank V-Mail letter and printed in Nice, France for the members of the Force. (Marshall)*

As a FSSF Christmas card for 1944, a cartoonist drew a Black Devil motif on a V-Mail and gave it to contract printers in Nice, Southern France. By the 15th of November all the Black Devils Christmas cards had been mailed out to both the U.S. and Canada. A mother in Ohio received notice that her son had been killed in action. The following day she received her V-Mail Christmas card. Immediately she wrote to the Force Commander telling him the Force had been a bad influence on her son, saying he had been killed, gone to hell and sent her a Christmas card in the disguise of a devil.



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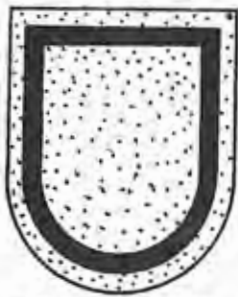








## FLASHES ACTIVE ARMY SPECIAL FORCES GROUPS



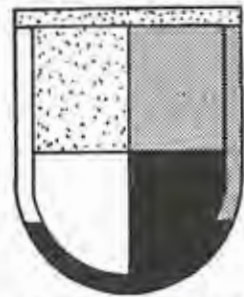
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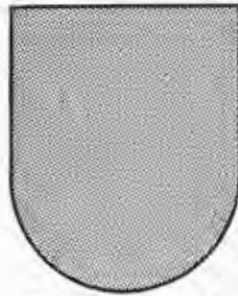
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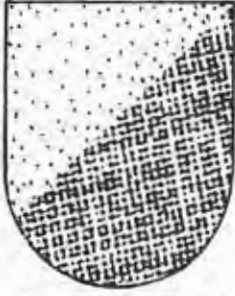
5TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP



6TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP



7TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP



8TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP



10TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP



1ST BATTALION  
10TH SPECIAL FORCES



46TH SPECIAL FORCES COMPANY

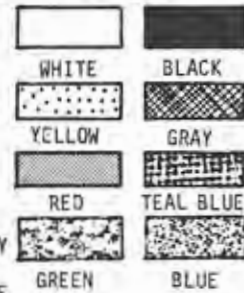


SPECIAL FORCES SCHOOL

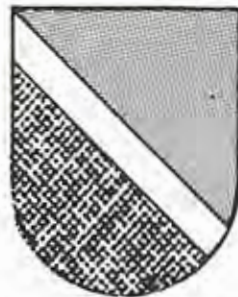


US ARMY JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER AND INSTITUTE FOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE

### LEGEND



## FLASHES RESERVE COMPONENT SPECIAL FORCES GROUP



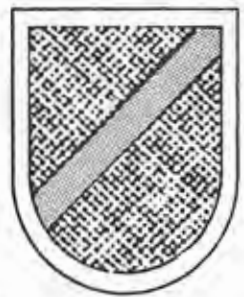
11TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP  
UNITED STATES ARMY RESERVE



12TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP  
UNITED STATES ARMY RESERVE



19TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP  
ARMY NATIONAL GUARD



20TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP  
ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Courtesy: Public Affairs Office  
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