



The Story of the 474th Infantry Regiment

The First Special Service Force of World War II was also known as the "Devil's Brigade." The Force was formed and trained at Fort Harrison, Montana from 1942 to 1943. Handpicked U.S. and Canadian soldiers trained in American and German weapons, skiing, mountaineering, airborne, and hand-to-hand combat skills, they never numbered more than 2,300 total, including support troops, and saw action in the Aleutians, Italy, and the south of France. It is considered the predecessor for today's special operation forces for both the U.S. and Canada.

As the result of cumulative combat losses the decision was made to deactivate the Force. On December 5th, 1944 at 2 p.m. the First Special Service Force (FSSF) gathered for a final time at Villeneuve-Loubet, France. The Force colors were cased and the Canadian members of the Force fell out under the Canadian flag and marched past the remaining American Forcemen in salute. Almost 400 enlisted men and officers chose to go to the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions as replacement paratroops.

On January 6, 1945 the 474th Regiment (Separate) was formed, not part of any division. The new regiment was formed of many of the remaining officers and enlisted men who had served as part of the FSSF. In April, one of the new regiment's first major assignments in Germany was to secure and transport the famous cache of Nazi gold bullion and stolen art works found in the Merkers salt mine (as depicted in the book and film, "The Monuments Men,") to the Reichsbank at Frankfort. The treasure amounted to one-third of the entire German gold reserves and required two convoys to accomplish. With the end of hostilities on May 7th, the 474th was ordered to Le Havre, France to ship to Oslo to disarm and accept the surrender of 100,000 German troops occupying Norway and assist with the transition to Norwegian government control of the nation. On October 25th, the regiment arrived home in New York and was disbanded two days later.

This keychain medallion commemorates the 1985 40th Anniversary of the Liberation of Norway by the 474th Regiment. The 474th adopted as its insignia the red arrow of their former unit with a dark blue and white Viking ship superimposed on it. The reverse side of the medallion depicts the crossed flags of Norway and the United States.