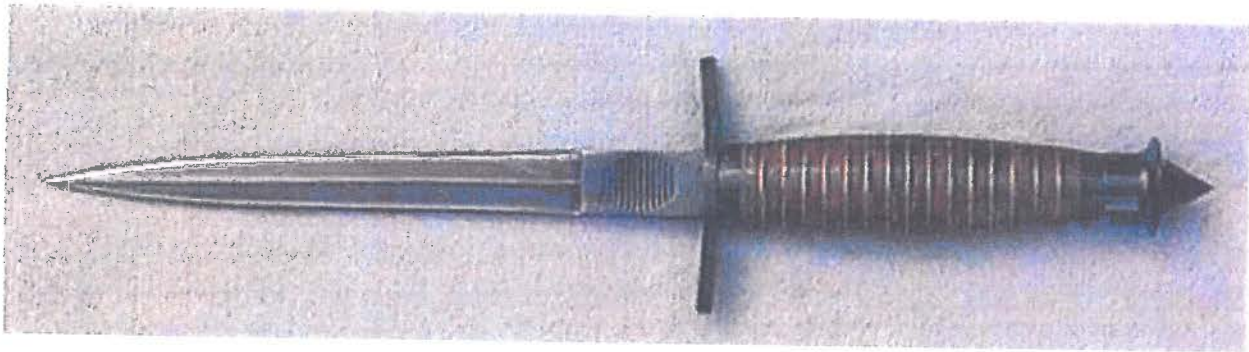


The Story of the V - 42 Stiletto Combat Knife

and the

First Special Service Force



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On Sunday, April 1, 2012, 94 year old former Captain Mark Radcliffe, originally from Farmington, New Mexico, and 92 year old former Sergeant Joe Glass, originally from Sarnia, Ontario — who were Montana’s last surviving members of the First Special Service Force (FSSF) — died just 12 hours apart. After the war, the two men returned to Helena, where they raised families and spent the remainder of their lives.

At the memorial services for each of the two men those attending watched a You Tube video titled “V-42” and listened to the accompanying Jim Rushing song, “The V-42” performed by Brad Walker. The video includes historical footage of the FSSF from its original training at Fort Harrison, Montana to the disbandment ceremonies on December 5, 1944 in Menton, France and portrays the Force’s ties to today’s U.S. Special Forces.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqtRy8wHDag>

For some attending the memorial services who knew the men only as good family men and local businessmen or younger people without vivid memories of World War II, that portion of the service may have been a bit puzzling. Both men had volunteered for hazardous duty when each of their respective countries, the United States and Canada, were fighting for their freedom and way of life against racist and aggressive dictatorships that had declared war on them. Many knew their history as young soldiers who were members of an elite fighting force that had been formed and trained at Fort Harrison near Helena from 1942 to 1943.

Project Plough

In 1940, Winston Churchill created a Combined Operations Command, whose mission was to conduct sabotage and hit and run “commando” (a South African Boer term for “raider”) attacks on German coastal facilities. The raids in France, Norway, and North Africa so enraged Hitler that he ordered commandos shot immediately, if captured. The unit was commanded by Lord Louis Mountbatten, King Edward’s cousin.

In March 1942, just a short time after America had joined Great Britain as an ally in World War II, Geoffrey Pyke, a scientist with Mountbatten’s staff, proposed the creation of an élite guerilla military force capable of fighting behind enemy lines in winter conditions. This would be a commando unit that could be landed, by sea or air, into occupied Norway, Romania, or the Italian Alps on sabotage missions against hydroelectric plants or oil fields. In Norway, now occupied by German forces, the chief concern was German efforts to create “heavy water” a component needed for the production of an atomic weapon. Pyke suggested that attacks on Norwegian power plants, which supplied the country with almost half of its power, might stop the German project, drive the Germans out of Norway, or, at the least, tie down many German forces otherwise needed for the Russian Front. In Romania, the strategically important Ploesti oil field that met one quarter of the Germans’ oil production was another potential target. In northern Italy, Italian hydroelectric plants powered most of southern Germany’s war industry and were another potential target for this unit. Pyke also proposed that a tracked vehicle be developed especially for the unit which would be capable of carrying men and their equipment at high speed across snow-covered terrain.

Winston Churchill had argued for a full scale invasion of Norway early in the war but was over ruled by his general staff. Churchill supported the Norwegian alternative which would parachute this commando force into the Norwegian mountains for guerrilla actions against the German army of occupation. These troops would be equipped with Pyke's proposed snow vehicle. Pyke persuaded Mountbatten that such a force would, at the least tie down large numbers of German troops.

However, given the already great demands upon British forces, including contending with Rommel's Afrika Korps in North Africa, Mountbatten decided to offer the proposal, now called Project Plough, instead to the United States. General George Marshall, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, accepted the suggestion. In May 1942, General Eisenhower asked a member of his Operations Division staff, Lt. Colonel Robert T. Frederick, to evaluate the proposal. Frederick was sent to England to meet with Mountbatten and Pyke to discuss Project Plough. Frederick concluded that the plan would not be feasible: he argued that the proposed 2,000 man unit would not be large enough to accomplish its objectives, it would be impossible to evacuate the forces if the effort went badly, and that there were not enough planes available to drop even such a relatively small force in Norway. However, the plan had such political momentum, with the support of Prime Minister Churchill and now President Roosevelt, that General Marshall and General Eisenhower agreed to work with the British High Command to implement Project Plough.

The First Special Service Force is Born

The first officer picked to lead the unit was removed because he could not get along with Pyke and argued with Mountbatten and Eisenhower about the feasibility of the plan. Mountbatten suggested to Eisenhower that Lt. Col. Frederick instead be given the task of creating the unit and he was promoted to full colonel to command it. General Eisenhower made clear to Frederick that despite his misgivings he was going to make Project Plough a success. Pyke, although brilliant, was an eccentric and opinionated man who initially tried to maintain control over the project; however, by July 1942 Frederick had managed to ease Pyke out of the project.

At the outset, due to its original Norwegian winter warfare mission, it was intended that the new unit should be equally made up of American, Canadian, and Norwegian troops. However, a lack of sufficient Norwegian troops in England resulted in changing the force to half American and half Canadian. The Canadian troops would be paid by the Canadian government but would be supplied with uniforms, equipment, food and shelter and travel expenses by the U.S. Army.

Recruitment announcements were posted to army units across the country and called for single men, aged 21-35 with three or more years of grammar school. Occupations preferred included forest rangers, lumberjacks, North woodsmen, hunters, prospectors, explorers and game wardens. Recruitment teams also visited army posts looking for ideal candidates particularly those with experience in snow and cold climates. Those initially selected were told that they would undergo paratroop training, among other combat skills.

In some cases, American base commanders used the opportunity to rid their commands of soldiers considered discipline problems. This was not necessarily a concern for Colonel Frederick who wanted tough, hard men for what could be virtual suicide missions, so long as they were willing to follow orders and meet the physical and mental conditioning required.



Robert T. Frederick, after promotion to Brigadier General

In contrast, the Canadian government was strongly committed to the mission and selected some of their very best soldiers, including paratroopers from the Canadian First Airborne Brigade, and some who had already faced combat against German troops early in the war.

As the mission was considered top secret, Frederick chose Fort William Henry Harrison, a small, isolated National Guard post just west of Helena, Montana as the new base for the unit. Located at the base of the Continental Divide, far away from prying eyes and close to mountainous terrain, the locale was considered ideal for the skiing and mountaineering training required for this commando unit. The unit was so secretive, that many soldiers did not know where they were when they arrived in Helena for training, because the windows of some of the railroad cars carrying the troops had been painted black. The name of the unit itself was intended to be nondescript: the First Special Service Force. "Special Services" was the term given to the military units that arranged entertainment for troops.

The combat force was to be made up of three regiments. Each regiment was led by a colonel and thirty-two officers with a force of 385 men. The regiments were divided into two battalions

with three companies in each battalion and three platoons in each company. The platoon was then broken up into two sections.

Colonel Frederick had top priority for obtaining equipment, personnel, or anything else required to create the new unit and get it ready on schedule. In the beginning, Fort Harrison had a dust cloud hanging over it as more than 250 construction workers built barracks, runways, roads, offices, medical and training facilities.

At the same time, the U.S. government asked American automobile manufacturers to develop proposals for a tracked snow machine for carrying men and equipment. Subsequently Studebaker built the T-15 cargo carrier, which later became the M29 "Weasel", completing the entire project from drawing board to working machine in only 6 months.

As planned, the Force consisted of roughly 1,800 servicemen who were to be trained in stealth tactics, hand-to-hand combat, skiing, mountain climbing, and cross-trained in a variety of American and German standard and non-standard or limited-issue weapons.

Colonel Frederick did not hesitate to use his influence in procuring weapons and equipment. Requiring transport aircraft for airborne training, he requisitioned C-47's, the military version of the DC-3 passenger plane, which soon arrived at the airstrip bulldozed north of the fort.

The new trainees had all the latest U.S. weaponry available including the recently developed flame throwers and the "Bazooka" anti-tank rocket. The men practiced with .45 caliber Model 1911 Browning designed semiautomatic pistols and Thompson submachine guns, as well as M-2 "Ma Deuce" .50 caliber heavy machine guns and "pineapple" hand grenades. Joe Glass, a bayonet instructor in the Canadian Army, loved the M-1 Garand semi-automatic 30-06 rifle assigned to the infantrymen, for its fire power and range. Trained on the slower bolt-action .303 Lee-Enfield, Glass thought the Garand, fitted with a bayonet, was the perfect weapon.

In addition, Frederick secured a shipment of a new explosive called "Ryan's Special" or RS that was twice as powerful as dynamite and two instructors from the Corps of Engineers to train the men in its use. The Force men responded with enthusiasm and were soon rattling windows in Helena with the explosions. Frederick got permission for his men to blow up a railroad bridge near Libby and a highway bridge near Butte. In addition, the men used the RS to blow up mine adits and old mining equipment in the nearby mountains.

The men complained about the heavy weight of the 30-06 caliber Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR's) so Colonel Orvil Baldwin, the FSSF G-4 (Supply Officer) swapped some of the RS explosive to the Marine Corps for a stock of Johnson light machine guns (LMGs) which the men referred to as "Johnny guns." Each platoon was armed with two BARs, two Johnson LMGs, a Bazooka, and a 60 mm mortar. To enhance their weapons training Frederick even obtained a variety of German rifles, submachine pistols, and machine guns with plenty of ammunition to give everyone experience on the German weapons, experience that proved invaluable in Italy when they exhausted their own ammunition and were able to use captured German weapons. This caused considerable confusion among the Germans who heard the distinctive sound of their own weapons being turned on them.

Frederick had apparently been exposed to British commando training methods during his June 1942 visit to England to meet with Lord Mountbatten regarding Project Plough. A high priority was to provide

training in hand to hand combat techniques for his men. One point the British commandos emphasized was that the silent elimination of sentries was a critical beginning for any commando raid.

The G-2 (Intelligence Officer) for the FSSF, Colonel Robert Burhans, recommended that they get Dermot "Pat" O'Neill, an Irish former Detective Sergeant of the Shanghai Municipal Police to instruct the men in close combat technique. Burhans had heard through his intelligence connections about O'Neill, who was working for the OSS (U.S. Office of Strategic Services) training its spies and saboteurs. O'Neill taught "Defendu," a combination of karate, jujitsu, and other oriental martial arts for quickly killing or crippling an opponent developed by a fellow Shanghai policeman, William Fairbairn.

(Later when Colonel William "Wild Bill" Donovan tried to get O'Neill returned to the OSS, Frederick blocked him by getting O'Neill appointed as a Captain in the Force, even though he was not even an American citizen.)

In addition to his hand to hand combat skills, O'Neill was also skilled in knife fighting. He had served with Captains William Fairbairn and Eric Sykes on the Shanghai police force where they developed a unique style of stiletto knife designed for silent killing, based on concepts the two had developed in the 1930's during their China service.

Captains Fairbairn and Sykes taught their "Defendu," silent close hand to hand combat and knife killing techniques at the Achnacarry training facility in Scotland where they trained British and Canadian commandos, OSS agents, and Army Rangers in their deadly arts. They also taught combat pistol and submachine gun techniques.

Note: Readers should be aware that the following text includes graphic descriptions of the use of the V-42 knife as a combat weapon which some may find disturbing.



The Fairbairn – Sykes Fighting Knife (ring grip pattern) of 1941 [Wikipedia]

In his 1942 book, *Get Tough!*, which describes his knife fighting techniques, Fairbairn said it was essential that the knife have a sharp cutting edge because an artery cut cleanly will keep bleeding, causing the wounded man to quickly lose blood pressure and consciousness. Therefore, the Fairbairn-Sykes knife featured a razor sharp double-edged blade. The knife was designed for one purpose: to dispatch an enemy quietly and quickly. The thin blade was designed to slide under or between ribs with a twisting motion to create as much damage to internal organs as possible. If attacking an enemy frontally, the knife could be used with an up

or down stroke to cut a wrist or forearm causing arterial bleeding or with a thrust under the rib cage. When attacking from behind, the attacker could cover the victim's mouth or face and cut across the throat or drive the knife straight downward to the right of the neck cutting the carotid artery.

According to a Military Channel television program, "Weaponology: The British Royal Marine Commandos," the blade was designed by Fairbairn and Sykes to be long enough to penetrate the heavy wool winter coat of a German soldier while still reaching vital organs and blood vessels. Made by the Wilkinson Sword Company, the knife was issued to British Commandos, Airborne Forces, the Special Air Service, and many other special operation units, especially for the Normandy D-Day landings. (The Fairbairn-Sykes knife is still in use today by the British Royal Marine Commandos.)

Surprisingly light, the Fairbairn-Sykes knife was gripped like a fencing foil for thrusts or cuts. To penetrate between the ribs, the knife was held with the blade up and level with the thumb pushed against the blade cross-guard. The knife would be held with the handle up and blade down for downward thrusts, such as between the neck and collarbone to cut the enemy's carotid artery. (German sentries were later advised to carry their rifle sling on the right shoulder to make it more difficult for an attacker to cut their carotid artery or throat.)

Captains Fairbairn and Sykes taught their students how to cause maximum damage to organs and blood vessels as silently as possible. Arterial cuts were intended to cause as rapid blood loss as possible to cause a quick drop in blood pressure and resulting loss of consciousness. Fairbairn even developed a time table from the time of attack:

<u>Location of Knife Cut</u>	<u>Time from Cut or Stabbing to Death</u>
Carotid artery (Neck)	12 seconds
Subclavian artery (collarbone)	3-4 seconds
Heart	3 seconds
Brachial artery (Inside Forearm)	1.5 minutes
Stomach	Depends upon depth
Radial artery (Inside Wrist)	2 minutes

(How Fairbairn developed the timetable was not explained.)

Fairbairn told his student to forget about fighting fair. He said their job was to "Get tough, get down in the gutter, and win at all costs." He said, "There's no fair play, no rules except one: *kill or be killed*,"

Development of the V-42

Based on the British Fairbairn-Sykes commando knife, the *Fighting Commando Knife, Type V-42*, was adapted by officers of the FSSF, who wanted a combat knife that could be used to

silently eliminate enemy soldiers as well as perform the role of a close-quarters combat knife. (See photo on cover page.) The blade's design has been attributed to Col. Frederick, who had encountered the Fairbairn-Sykes commando knife while meeting with Lord Mountbatten and British commandos in England regarding Project Plough.

While the V-42 had a double-edged blade like that of the Fairbairn-Sykes knife, it had a narrower stiletto blade profile designed to optimize penetration when used for thrusting. Unusual for military combat knives of the period, the V-42's twin sharpened edges were double hollow-ground for increased cutting effectiveness. The thumb grooves on the V-42's blade just ahead of the blade guard were designed by Frederick himself to promote a flat grip with the thumb over the blade guard, which positioned the double-edged blade horizontally. In this manner a Forceman could slash an opponent with either a forehand or backhand stroke with the double-edged blade, while ensuring that his blade would slip between or under the ribs when used in a thrust or stab.

The handle of compressed leather discs ends in a pointed "skull crusher" pommel at the butt of the handle, a feature which was attributed to Major Orval J. Baldwin, the FSSF Supply Officer. Both the blade and the pommel were blued to reduce any reflection.

The V-42 was manufactured in the United States by W.R. Case and Sons Cutlery Co. of Bradford, Pennsylvania. The V-42, a designation probably assigned by Case, weighed 7 ounces, with either a 7.250-inch or 7.125-inch long blade and 5.5-inch handle, for a total length of approximately 12.5 inches. Case factory records indicate that approximately 3,000 V-42 knives were actually produced, in four slightly different variations: only one shipment of 1,750 knives to the FSSF was recorded by the Force's supply officer. Captain O'Neill recalled that Frederick personally selected the Case prototype from among a couple of alternatives and gave authority for its acquisition.

The V-42 was the standard fighting knife issued to the First Special Service Force members who generally referred to it as the "*Force Knife*." All members of the Force were trained extensively in its use by Pat O'Neill (typically with bare uncovered blades), though only members of the Force's combat echelon were actually issued their own V-42 knife. In combat, the V-42 proved itself an excellent thrusting weapon that could easily penetrate leather and heavy clothing, though its narrow tip would occasionally stick when contacting bone after a deep thrust, sometimes making the knife difficult to withdraw.

After a series of leg injuries incurred during parachute training, the original leather sheath was reinforced in later versions with a metal tip designed to prevent the sharply pointed tip from penetrating the leather sheath. Since the force was originally trained for fighting in cold weather conditions, the sheath was designed to be long in order to hang below the bottom of the reversible white/olive drab G.I. parka typically worn by Forcemen in cold weather, such as during the fighting in the Italian mountains. With its relatively thin, narrow blade, the V-42 was prone to breakage when used for utility chores such as opening ration tins or prying open ammunition crates.

Sgt. Bill Story:

Our knife, the V-42 stiletto, was basically designed by group effort. It appears that Frederick himself designed the blade. He went to England and met with Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the British chief of special operations, and I'm sure he had the opportunity to look at the British commandos and their equipment. They had their Fairbairn-Sykes commando knives at that point, and I'm sure that may have been an influence.

And the skull-crusher design of the V-42's pommel was Colonel Baldwin's idea....We actually never knew them as V-42's. We simply knew them as the "Force knife." It is part of our history. The knife is on the Force flag, our colors. We never had time to create a motto for the flag, but our knife is represented...

Sgt. Joe Dauphinais:

The V-42 stiletto is a very impressive blade. When you hold it in your hand it is as if it were alive. O'Neill had us practicing on each other with our blades all the time.

Sgt. Bill Story:

"He (O'Neill) taught us how to use our V-42. The V-42 has a thumbprint in the top of the blade to keep the blade flat. It had to be flat because it had to slide in through the ribs when going for the heart. If you didn't, the blade would get stuck in the ribs and you'd cut into the bone or the cartilage, and then you couldn't get it out. O'Neill also taught us how to reverse the knife quickly to utilize the skull crusher on either temple, the most vulnerable place."

The Force is Ready

By September 1942, the Force was organized, trained and equipped and Frederick traveled to England to finalize plans for the planned winter drop into Norway. He was stunned to learn that his own early reservations about the mission were now shared by other English and American military leaders.

Lord Mountbatten had strongly promoted a commando raid in force on Dieppe, France on August 19, 1942. The landing force consisted of 5,000 Canadians from the 2nd Canadian Division, 1,000 British commandos, and 50 U.S. Army Rangers. It was an unmitigated disaster; none of the attack's goals were accomplished. The Canadians lost 3,367 killed, wounded, or taken prisoner and the Canadian public blamed Mountbatten. A total of 1,946 Canadian soldiers alone were captured. The RAF lost 106 planes. Mountbatten's reputation was seriously diminished and he had little influence left to push Project Plough forward.

Frederick found that the British Chiefs of Staff were uninterested in risking their scarce transport aircraft on a paratroop drop into Norway that they considered, like Dieppe, brave but ill considered. Even if the Americans provided all the transport planes required, which they could not, the British feared that the lumbering aircraft heavily loaded with men, weapons, and war

material, along with the Weasel snow machines, would be easily shot down by German fighters. They argued, as Frederick had in his initial review of the proposal, that even if landed successfully, the FSSF would be difficult to resupply and impossible to extract if the mission went badly. The final straw was that the Norwegian government-in-exile had come to oppose the plan because of the unnecessary suffering it could cause the Norwegian people and the destruction it could wreak on Norwegian infrastructure and industry.

When it was apparent that the Norwegian mission was dead, the Canadian government sought the return of their now highly trained men to the Canadian armed forces, now depleted by the losses at Dieppe. General Marshall, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, asked the Canadians to defer arguing that the now highly trained force might be effectively used elsewhere. For now the FSSF was still alive.

The Force launched into winter training in December at Blossburg, Montana on the Continental Divide using skis and the Weasel tracked machines which worked well for snow travel. In April 1943 the FSSF departed Helena for amphibious training at Norfolk, Virginia. The FSSF justified General Marshall's confidence by achieving the highest proficiency scores ever assigned to any unit to go through the Navy amphibious training program. From there the unit was sent to Fort Ethan Allen in Vermont for their final training where they again received top scores for their military skills.

A New Assignment

General Marshall had come up with another mission that he believed was a good match for the Force's winter fighting skills: the invasion of Kiska Island in the Aleutian Chain. In June 1942, Attu and Kiska islands, part of American territory, had been invaded and taken by the Japanese. The Japanese believed that control of the Aleutians would prevent a possible U.S. attack on Japan from the Northern Pacific. Attu was only 650 miles from a large Japanese naval base in the Kuril Islands. The Roosevelt Administration was under strong political pressure to drive the Japanese from American soil as soon as possible. Many Americans feared that the Japanese could use the islands as bases for aerial assaults against the West Coast or even an invasion. The next travel for the Force was a long train ride to San Francisco where they were issued arctic gear, confirming suspicions of many Forces members about their coming mission.

The earlier invasion of Attu had not gone well and casualties had been high. U.S. intelligence estimated that from 5,000 to 12,000 Japanese troops were on Kiska. Given the fierce level of resistance and difficulty encountered on Attu with only 2,500 Japanese defenders, the Kiska campaign was expected to be especially bloody. The invasion fleet consisted of 95 ships, including three battleships and a heavy cruiser.

The FSSF was chosen to be the first wave ashore: the 1st Regiment to land on the south shore on D-Day, August 15th followed by the main invasion force of 30,000 American and Canadian troops. The 3rd Regiment was to land on the north shore the next day while the 2nd Regiment waited in reserve to be parachuted in where needed. Fortunately, for the sake of the

FSSF, when the Forcemen paddled their rafts to shore they were shocked to find no opposition at all. The Japanese, anticipating that the Allies would soon follow the Attu assault by an invasion of Kiska evacuated their forces with destroyers three weeks before during a period of heavy fog.

Frederick had little time to ponder what this development meant for the FSSF. Three days later he received a radio message from Admiral Nimitz, Commander of the Pacific Fleet, ordering the FSSF to return to San Francisco as soon as possible. General Eisenhower had decided that the unique mountaineering and winter warfare skills of the Force could best be used for the tough fighting in Italy's Apennine Mountains where battle-hardened German troops were stubbornly resisting Allied efforts to advance north toward Rome.

The FSSF in Italy: Anzio

After taking what were considered impregnable German positions on several mountains, the FSSF was incorporated in the landing force for the invasion at Anzio, Italy where the undermanned force was assigned the same length of defensive perimeter as other full Army divisions of 12,000 or more soldiers. At Anzio, the V-42 came into its own as a weapon for silencing German sentries and spreading terror among German soldiers.

(Readers can request a reprint of an article from the spring 2013 Big Sky Guardian, "The First Special Service Force Assault on Mount La Difensa" from the Montana Military Museum which describes some of the history of the Force's experiences in the Apennine Mountains campaign against the Gustav and Winter Lines of the German Army.)

It was at Anzio that the V-42 became a basic working weapon for the Force. The January 22, 1944 landing at Anzio or "Operation Shingle," as it was named was Winston Churchill's proposal to leapfrog the brutally effective obstacles of the German "Gustav" and "Winter" defensive lines across the Italian peninsula by landing Allied forces north of them on the west coast. As conceived, the Anzio landing would effectively split the German forces and open the road to Rome north of the German lines.

Although the landing itself was initially successful, the inland advance under Major General John Lucas bogged down in the face of immediate and tough counter attacks by the experienced troops of German Field Marshal Kesselring and failed to take the higher ground overlooking the beachhead. The invading force was now pinned down near the beach within a 32-mile long crescent-shaped defensive line all too similar to World War I trench warfare. Kesselring mobilized 40,000 experienced troops from all over Italy and the Balkans to pin down the Allied forces and to try to drive them into the Tyrrhenian Sea.

The beachhead, a low lying area along the coastal plain, seven miles deep, was under constant German artillery attack from dug in positions on higher ground to the east. On February 1, the First Special Service Force, was assigned a defensive line on the right flank along the Mussolini Canal, a fascist public work project of Benito Mussolini constructed in 1926 to drain the malaria-infested Pontine Marshes along the Italian coast.



Facing the FSSF was the tough and experienced Hermann Goering Division, an oddity in that it was composed of Luftwaffe personnel who had been drafted to fight in the Wehrmacht ground army. The Force also faced hard bitten and fanatical members of two SS regiments. With its ranks depleted by its casualties from the Battle of Monte La Difensa and other subsequent mountain combat, the Force's under manned three regiments were assigned an eight mile front along the canal; less than 1,300 men had to cover a front comparable to those assigned to full divisions on the rest of the Anzio beachhead. The Force was responsible for covering one-fourth of the entire perimeter with the equivalent of only one man per every eleven yards.

Night Patrols Begin

Colonel Frederick concluded that with such an out numbered fighting force he would have to keep the Germans off balance and buffaloed by conducting deep and aggressive night time infiltration patrols and raids on enemy front line positions. The reconnaissance raids were intended to sow terror and capture prisoners to interrogate to learn German intentions. (During one evening alone in February, the FSSF captured 111 German prisoners.) The raids were conducted at night because the flat, sandy farmland, referred to by the men as "the Billiard Table," offered little cover for military operations except for a few scattered farmhouses. The reconnaissance patrols also had to be stealthy and quiet to minimize fire fights that could be costly if they were caught on open ground by German machine guns or mortars.

When night fell, the Forcemen would blacken their faces, necks, and hands with boot black and cross the Mussolini Canal on improvised foot bridges over the swampy ten foot deep ditch. The patrols would carry automatic weapons and RS explosives to demolish any buildings that the Germans might otherwise use for artillery observation posts or mortar or machine gun positions.

In addition, the men also laid mines to help protect the thinly manned FSSF defensive positions along the canal. They tried to identify any enemy strong points for Allied artillery shelling or later assault by company-sized FFSF units.

Sgt. Bill Story:

Their role was to go out, raise hell, and scare the Germans. Mainly their mission was to give the Germans the impression that there were thousands of soldiers at the Mussolini Canal when we were only a handful.

Sgt. John Dawson:

What we called a raid was anything from a three-man patrol to a battalion....Most commonly, they were platoon size with eight to a dozen to twenty guys. ... These raids were pretty violent.



FSSF men being briefed before setting out on a night raid. The Forcemen have blackened faces and are heavily armed with automatic weapons.

Sgt. Joe Dauphinais:

Before we would conduct a raid, we were assigned to scout the terrain....We would locate German positions to knock out later, to target for a raid or artillery....the Germans always knew we were around there somewhere. They couldn't figure out how many men were in front of them or how we got away. It drove them mad.

Among the items recovered from enemy dead was a diary of a German lieutenant from the Hermann Goering Division who wrote: "Reports of ...Black Devil raid last night....We never hear these devils when they come." The result of the continued night attacks was that the Germans were convinced that they were facing an entire division and, in response, they pulled their troops back some distance from their original positions near the Mussolini Canal area.

Sgt. Kenneth Betts:

It was because of these techniques the Germans began calling us "Black Devils." ... But the Krauts also called us "The devils in baggy pants with dirty faces," because our mountain trousers were real baggy. They were much baggier than regular jump pants and much more comfortable.

Sgt. Lorin Waling (a Scout and Joe Glass' partner on many raids):

Some used different tactics to knock out these Kraut positions, but I personally never had to use my dagger because our hand-to-hand combat was pretty handy.

Sgt. Gil McNeese:

We began going out every night in small teams, working behind the German lines and knocking out as many positions as possible. Everyone had their own technique for doing this. Many used their knives, some used their Tommy guns and others used their bare hands...O'Neill didn't believe in the over-the-head slash; he attacked from behind with holding his knife down low. You can't defend yourself against that. We would go for the kidney, too. I know of one instance when one of the guys used the skuli crusher on a Kraut sentry, behind his ear, just to see what would happen. It was instantly very quiet and very quick....

We carried death stickers and would put these on their foreheads. One was the Force spearhead. The one I used was "DAS DICKE ENDE KOMMT NOCH" was means, "The worst is yet to come."...We messed with their heads on so many different levels.



Staff Sergeant Victor Kaisner:

We used our knives many times. This was the way to do it because it was usually quiet. And we were trained for it. This is what it was all about. We would just sneak up and get a hold of their helmets and cut their throats....One night...I could actually hear the Kraut trying to say "Schwartzter Teufel" (Black Devil) as they were slicing his throat. Then they gave him a sticker. But that really surprised us that he knew who was killing him.



"The devils in baggy pants with dirty faces" returned from a raid

1st Lt. Walford Michaelson:

Captain O'Neill taught us how to kill a human being with our bare hands, and it's nothing to kill with hand-to-hand combat. ... The one we used most was very simple. If we had a German sentry with his back toward us, we would just put our hand underneath his chin and step backwards real quick and jerk, and that was it. It was very quiet. We used this technique all the time and only used the knife towards the end if we had to. Then we would stick those stickers on their foreheads, to put the fear of God into them.

Sgt. Joe Glass (a Scout and Lorin Waling's partner on many raids):

We loved that night fighting because it evened the odds....For me, I never had to use my knife. I had it always very sharp, and I could have used it very easily, but I never had to. I know guys who did and loved it. They loved to kill, but I didn't. I just killed because I had to, and only then.

Sgt. Joe Dauphinais:

We learned a hell of lot on those night marches in Montana. At the time, when we were taking the training, we thought it was all just a bunch of crap. Boy, did it come in handy on Anzio.

Sgt. Bill Story:

....But you must realize that it's one thing to train and talk about what you're going to do to the enemy and quite another to take a guy who is no older than you are, maybe even younger, and do this to him – even if he's wearing a different uniform.

1st Lt. Walford Michaelson:

I think the whole thing that drove us was that we all thought, "Let's get this thing over with and go home." I heard it said many, many times.

Captain Mark Radcliffe was captured one night in March on a patrol behind enemy lines by five soldiers from the Hermann Goering Division. Bound and gagged, he was taken to headquarters for interrogation. His interrogation was interrupted by an Allied artillery barrage that sent the German soldiers running for cover, leaving only one guard. When the guard went to a window to check on the shelling, Radcliffe grabbed a board and knocked him cold. He freed two other Allied prisoners in the next room and they ran down a road and hid in a large tree all night and the next day. Radcliffe was later shot in the foot by a German patrol that spotted them and the other two soldiers took off. He found cover in an abandoned farmhouse where he was found by Forcemen sent to look for him. His technique in taking out the guard might not have used Pat O'Neill's close-quarters combat instruction but it worked.

Breakout from Anzio

Finally, on May 11, 1944, the combined Allied 5th and 8th armies began their successful but bloody offensive to successfully break out of the Anzio Beachhead. After 98 days of facing dug in German troops along the Mussolini Canal, suffering daily artillery and mortar barrages, and brutal night raids on Wehrmacht positions, the FSSF joined the other American and British forces to resume the tough fight to push north towards Rome

On June 4, 1944, members of a FSSF unit led by Captain Mark Radcliffe were the first Allied troops to enter Rome. Their accomplishment was overshadowed by the D-Day invasion of Normandy two days later and received little public notice by in the States .

Aftermath

In August 1944 Brigadier General Frederick, who had commanded the force since its inception, was promoted to Major General in command of the 1st Airborne Task Force. On 14 August 1944, the FSSF, now under the command of Colonel Edwin A. Walker, landed on the islands of Port Cros and Îles d'Hyères during Operation Dragoon, the invasion of southern France. They captured the five forts on the islands from the German Wehrmacht. On August 22nd, the FSSF was attached to the 1st Airborne Task Force, under Major General Frederick, their former commander.

The FSSF was disbanded on December 5th, 1944 in a field near Menton called the Loup River Flats, on the extreme southeast Mediterranean coast of France. After General Walker announced that the Force was being disbanded the Force's colors, red with a white shield with the black V-42 in the center, were furled and cased. By this time, the Force had suffered the loss of many of its original members who had trained together in Montana. The U.S. Army brass now saw little need for small special operations units, such as the Force. The Canadians were ordered to step forward and fall in separately. Many very tough soldiers had tears in their eyes thinking about having to say goodbye to close friends they had lived so intensely with for almost three years, night and day. They had been together for training and combat, living together in bitter cold and wet, and watching close friends be wounded and die.

After the unit's break up, the Canadians members were sent to other Canadian units, many to the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion. Many American members were sent to the 82nd or 101st Airborne Divisions or to Ranger battalions. General Walker took many of the remaining members of the FSSF with him to his new command, the 474th Infantry Regiment, including Captain Mark Radcliffe, the first Allied soldier to enter Rome. In a final ironic turn of events, the 474th was ordered to Norway to accept the surrender of the German troops remaining there.

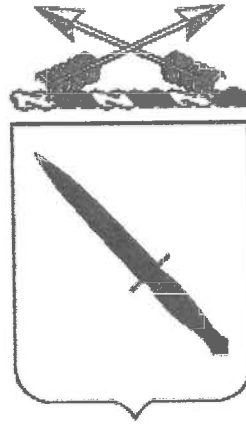
During the War, the 1,800-man unit accounted for some 12,000 German casualties, captured approximately 7,000 prisoners, and, including later replacements, suffered 2,777 dead and wounded during the its brief existence. During that time, fewer than 30 Forcemen were ever captured.

The Force's Legacy

The FSSF V-42 knife was part of the organizational colors of the FSSF. Colonel Robert Frederick also adopted the crossed arrows insignia from the former insignia of the U.S. Army Indian Scouts for the shirt collar insignia for FSSF uniforms.

In 1960 now retired General Robert Frederick and a group of the surviving members of the First Special Service Force were invited to special ceremonies at Fort Bragg, North Carolina to officially transmit the FSSF campaign history and battle standard to the U.S. Special Forces.

In 1960, the V-42 knife and the distinctive crossed arrows collar insignia of the FSSF were both incorporated in the unit insignia for the U.S. Army Special Forces which traces its lineage to the FSSF



*First Special Service Force Insignia
featuring the V-42 knife and crossed arrows insignia*

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy officially designated the Green Beret as the headgear for U.S. Special Forces stating:

"The green beret is a symbol of excellence, a badge of courage, a mark of distinction in the fight for freedom."

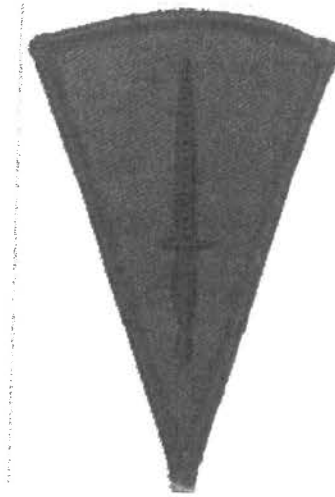


*U.S. Army Special Forces unit crest featuring the V-42
and crossed arrows insignia and the Green Beret motto
("To Liberate the Oppressed")*

Conclusion

In the U.S. Armed Forces, the green beret can only be worn by soldiers that have been awarded the Special Forces Tab, signifying they have been qualified as Special Forces soldiers.

In the United Kingdom, all Royal Marines who have passed the Commando Course wear the green beret. The Commando Badge of a Fairbairn – Sykes Fighting Knife on a triangular patch is worn on the sleeve in perpetuity by those who have passed the course.



Today's Canadian Special Operations Regiment also traces its roots to the FSSF.

In 2006, the Canadian members of the FSSF were awarded the Bronze Star Medal for Service, equivalent to the United States Army's Combat Infantryman Badge, for participation in front line combat.

In July 2013, the U.S. Congress awarded a Congressional Gold Medal, Congress' highest honor, to the First Special Service Force for its heroic achievements in World War II. The effort to secure this honor was strongly supported by the Government of Canada whose Ambassador to the United States said that "the legacy of bilateral defense cooperation that they inspired continues between our two countries to this day." The Force paved the way for today's special operation units of both the U.S. and Canada. Approximately 175 of the original members of the Force are still alive today.

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