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First Special Service Force 1942–44



Bret Werner • Illustrated by Michael Welply

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Dedication

This book is dedicated the men of the First Special Service Force; your sacrifices will never be forgotten.

Author's Note

The First Special Service Force has been an interest of mine since the age of 17, and this interest led to my participation in World War II living history. This did not satisfy my curiosity, but made me more fascinated by this amazing group of North Americans. I then joined the FSSF Association as an associate, and attended a reunion in Helena, Montana. It was there that I gained a true sense of who these men were: they were no average group of soldiers, nor are they an average group of veterans. I have attended every reunion since, and their spirit is alive and well.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Bill Story for answering questions regarding this work. Thanks to my wife Erin, for being so supportive. I would like to express my gratitude to the First Special Service Force Association, for always welcoming us to their reunions. Thanks to the FSSF Living History Group for modeling for the color plates; and to my family and friends, who have always backed my projects.

Artist's Note

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THE FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE 1942-44

INTRODUCTION: PROJECT "PLOUGH"

The First Special Service Force was an elite World War II Canadian/American military unit that pioneered many of the skills that characterize the Special Forces of today. For the first time, the Canadian and American governments realized the need for special operations troops. These men would be trained in airborne, mountain, ski, amphibious, demolition, and hand-to-hand tactics, and would operate in small, multi-skilled combat elements. Although the First Special Service Force was much smaller than a US Army division, in effect it represented its own self-contained branch of the service.

Against the backdrop of a damaged Sherman of 1st Armd Div, Pfc Wall prepares for a raid behind enemy lines at Anzio, April 15, 1944 - the type of activity that earned the FSSF the German nickname of "the Black Devils". Wall wears an M1 steel helmet smeared with paint or mud for camouflage, the winter combat or "tanker" jacket, and M1937 wool trousers. His web gear is reduced to the essential minimum: pistol belt and suspenders, with carbine magazine pouch, the meat can pouch from an M1910/28 haversack hung from his belt to carry magazines and grenades, and - in this case - an M3 trench knife instead of the Force's famous V-42 stiletto. His slung weapon is a wooden-stock M1 carbine; this was not issued to the Force so he presumably brought it with him from the Rangers. (National Archives)



The Force was also a truly unique and successful experiment in the integration of troops from two nations' armies; this was the first and last time that soldiers of the Canadian and US armies served together in a completely integrated unit. No other Canadian or American fighting force during the war had the training, equipment, clothing, or the spirit of the First Special Service Force, whose legacy is still recognized today by the elite forces of both the United States and Canada.

* * *

Geoffrey Pyke was a British scientist of fertile imagination but eccentric manners, who was working for Combined Operations Command when he envisioned a small military force able to fight behind enemy lines in tough winter conditions. His idea was to create a commando-style unit that could be inserted by sea or air into occupied Norway, Romania, or the Italian Alps to conduct sabotage missions on selected hydro-electric plants or oilfields. In Norway the threat came from the creation at Rjukan of deuterium or heavy water, used in the German atomic weapon research program. Romania had the strategic Ploesti oilfields that supplied the Germans with much of their fuel, and Italy had the hydro-electric plants that produced the energy which powered industry in southern Germany. Pyke also suggested that a tracked vehicle should be developed for the unit, capable of carrying the troops and their equipment across snow-covered terrain at high speed.

Pyke's concept received a positive response from Adm Lord Louis Mountbatten, head of Combined Operations, and from Prime Minister Churchill. However, given the many other demands upon Combined Operations and British industry, it was decided to offer it instead to the

Photographed in front of the same tank and on the same day as Pfc Wall, BrigGen Robert T.Frederick (center) confers with LtCol Moore, who has an M1A1 carbine under his arm. Frederick graduated from West Point in 1928 and was assigned to the Coastal Artillery; he graduated from Command and General Staff School in 1939, and that August was assigned to the War Plans (later, Operations) Division of the General Staff. Frederick was given command of Project "Plough" in early summer 1942, and threw himself into the creation and training of the FSSF with great energy and dedication. Frederick was promoted brigadier-general in January 1944 for his success against the Winter Line in Italy, and to major-general after the liberation of Rome in June, taking command of the 1st Abn Task Force; he was given command of the 45th Inf Div in December 1944 - at the age of 37, the youngest divisional commander in the US Army. Frederick was almost solely responsible for the creation and success of the FSSF; Prime Minister Churchill said of him, "If we had a dozen men like him, we would have smashed Hitler in 1942" (Adleman, page 19).



United States, at the Chequers conference in March 1942. General George C. Marshall, US Army Chief-of-Staff, accepted the suggestion for this Project "Plough"; and, since no suitable vehicle existed, in April 1942 the US government began to ask car manufacturers to look into such a design. Studebaker subsequently created the T-15 cargo carrier - which became the M29 Weasel - specifically for "Plough".

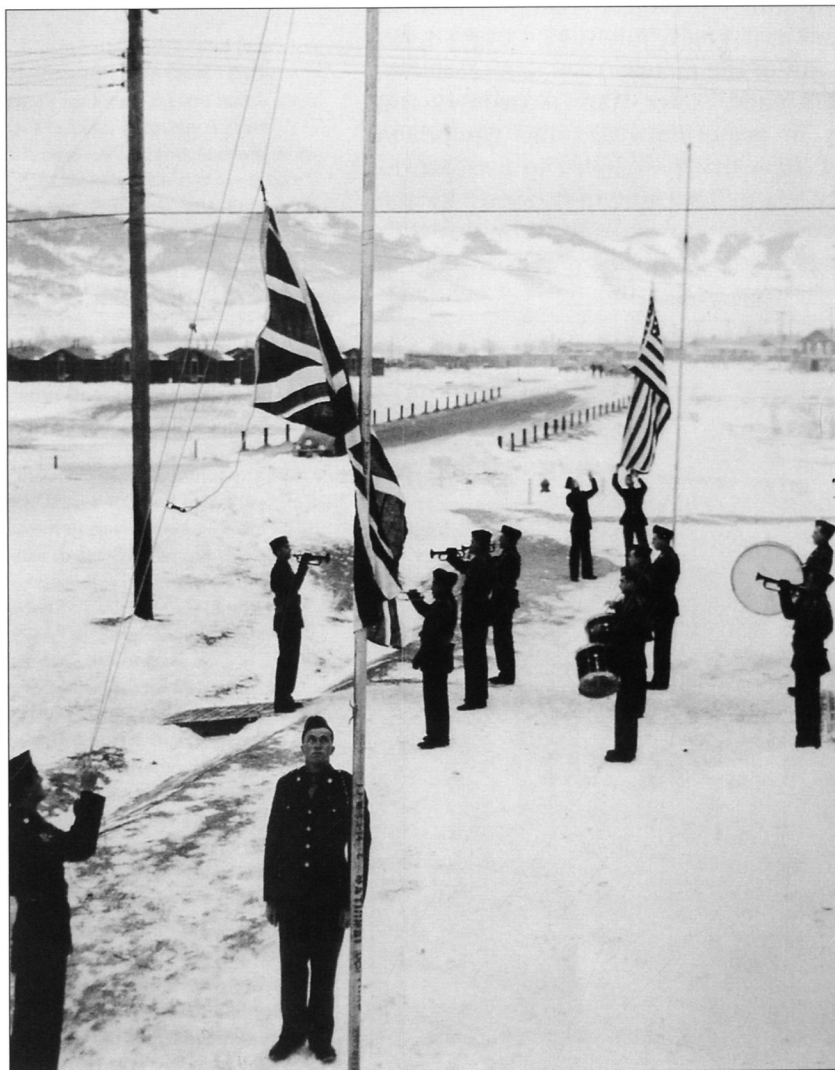
In late May 1942 the concept papers for "Plough" were scrutinized by a young officer in the Operations Division of the US General Staff, LtCol Robert T. Frederick. His report identified many drawbacks, including the unit's organization, and the question of how it was to be withdrawn once its mission had been accomplished. Geoffrey Pyke was a man of great gifts but little interest in practical details, and up to this point no plan existed to extract the raiders from enemy-occupied countries after carrying out their attacks. The first US officer picked to lead the special unit, LtCol H.R. Johnson, resigned immediately after his first exposure to the eccentric Pyke. His replacement was suggested by Adm Mountbatten, and assigned by MajGen Dwight D. Eisenhower, head of the Operations Division: LtCol Frederick himself was given the task of creating an elite fighting unit for Project "Plough", and was promoted to colonel to command it. (By early July 1942, Col Frederick had gently eased Geoffrey Pyke out of the picture.)

Under the direction of the United States War Department, Col Frederick enjoyed top priority in acquiring all of the equipment, uniforms, weapons and training areas that he needed to establish his unit. Originally it had been intended that because of its winter warfare mission the unit should comprise one-third American, one-third Canadian and one-third Norwegian troops; however, the shortage of



The members of the Force were originally termed "para-skiers", and every original Forceman who trained at Fort Harrison was qualified in both disciplines. (National Archives)

A winter evening at Fort Harrison: the FSSF lower the colors of Great Britain – under which the Canadians served – and the United States. The combat echelon of the Force was fully integrated, with roughly 40 percent Canadians and 60 percent Americans. These Forcemen wear service dress with the FSSF aiguillette; they are not parachute-qualified, so have not bloused their trousers into their jump boots. The band, part of the Service Bn, called themselves “Rodehaver’s Rhythm Rascals”. (National Archives)



suitable Norwegians soon saw the composition revised to half-US, half-Canadian. In July 1942 the Canadian Minister of National Defense approved the assignment of 697 officers and enlisted men for the project. Frederick then named this unusual group of American and Canadian soldiers the First Special Service Force (FSSF).

The Canadian Forcemen would serve under the official designation – in Canada – of 2nd Canadian Parachute Battalion; they would be paid by the Canadian government, but be furnished with uniforms, equipment, food, shelter and travel expenses by the US government. (It should be noted that the Canadians were never considered part of the US military; indeed, their lower Canadian pay was a contentious issue for many of them.) Canadians also remained subject to their own army’s code of military discipline.

On July 20, 1942, the First Special Service Force was formally activated. Fort William Henry Harrison at Helena, MT, was chosen as the primary training location, due to its flat terrain for airborne training coupled with the close proximity of mountains for ski and winter training.

ORGANIZATION & TRAINING

The First Special Service Force was set up like no other military organization in the United States or Canada. The Force had a unique mission, so the unit composition and the style of training would be completely new and distinctive. The integrating of soldiers from two very different national armies would inevitably throw up problems, but these would be far outweighed by the unit’s successes in practice.

Organization and unit composition

The First Special Service Force consisted of two components, the combat and the service echelons. The combat echelon consisted of three small mixed US/Canadian “regiments” each under a colonel; each regiment had two small “battalions” commanded by lieutenant

colonels. Each battalion had three companies led by captains; the company was made up of three platoons led by lieutenants, and each platoon had two sections led by staff-sergeants. At every level above the section, the manpower establishment of units and sub-units would be smaller than in conventional organizations; in this, there was an echo of the experience of Britain’s Commandos. The section was the fundamental fighting element of the FSSF, and consisted of nine to 12 men. The original section was designed to include three demolition experts, a first aid man, two mechanics, a navigator, a radio man, two grenadiers, and a light machine-gunner. Each regiment also had small supply, medical and combat communications detachments assigned.

The all-American rear echelon was a Service Battalion made up of three companies. Headquarters Company had an administrative staff, the intelligence section, radio operators, and the Military Police platoon. The Maintenance Co was in charge of all equipment maintenance; and the Service Co handled all other functions needed to keep the combat echelon running smoothly. This included parachute riggers, a field music detachment, supply troops, cooks, and any other necessary support specialists. The FSSF Service Bn were intended to serve as rear support troops, but as the Force was committed to action these men would find themselves in the thick of battle – bringing supplies to the front, acting as stretcher-bearers, and fighting as riflemen when needed.

In the following order of battle, note that the manpower establishment represents average strengths. The establishment of each regiment was increased from 609 to 650 in winter 1942/43, bringing the Force up to 2,608 all ranks. In the field the FSSF was often understrength, but the numbers in its units and sub-units did sometimes exceed establishment.



Two of the Force’s medical officers undergo pre-jump training; they wear leather A2 flight jackets with jump boots and steel helmets. (National Archives)

These Forcemen practice exit techniques on one of the FSSF Air Detachment C-47s; they wear T-5 main and reserve parachute packs, HBT coveralls, jump boots, and standard M1 helmets – M1C airborne helmets would not be issued to the Force until the Kiska operation. The Force Air Detachment (see commentary to Plate B3) was dissolved after the last replacements to arrive before embarkation for Europe had jump-qualified at Fort Ethan Allen in June 1943. (National Archives)



The day before these men make their first jump they get their final instruction in carrying out the "buddy check" of the T-5 main pack of the man ahead of them. These Forcemen all wear the lightweight 1941 field coat over HBT coveralls, the wool knit "jeep" cap, and rubber Arctic overshoes. (National Archives)

Order of Battle

Headquarters Detachment
 Service Battalion
 Combat Communications Detachment (4)
 Headquarters Company (157)
 Service Company (327)
 Parachute Platoon
 Maintenance Company (151)
 Medical Detachment (19)
 Cannon Company (from spring 1944 only)

1st Regiment (609/later 650 all ranks)
 2nd Regiment (609/650)
 3rd Regiment (609/650)

Regimental breakdown

Regimental Headquarters (6 – Col CO, LtCol XO)
 Regimental Supply Detachment (19)
 Regimental Medical Detachment (2)
 2 Battalions (each 291 all ranks)

Battalion breakdown

Battalion Headquarters (6 – LtCol CO, Maj XO)
 3 Companies (each 95 all ranks)



Company breakdown

Company Headquarters (5 – Capt CO, 1st Lt XO)
 3 Platoons (each 30 all ranks)

Platoon breakdown

Platoon Headquarters (2 – 1st Lt CO, Pltn Sgt 2-i-c)
 Mortar Team (4)
 2 Sections (each 12 all ranks)

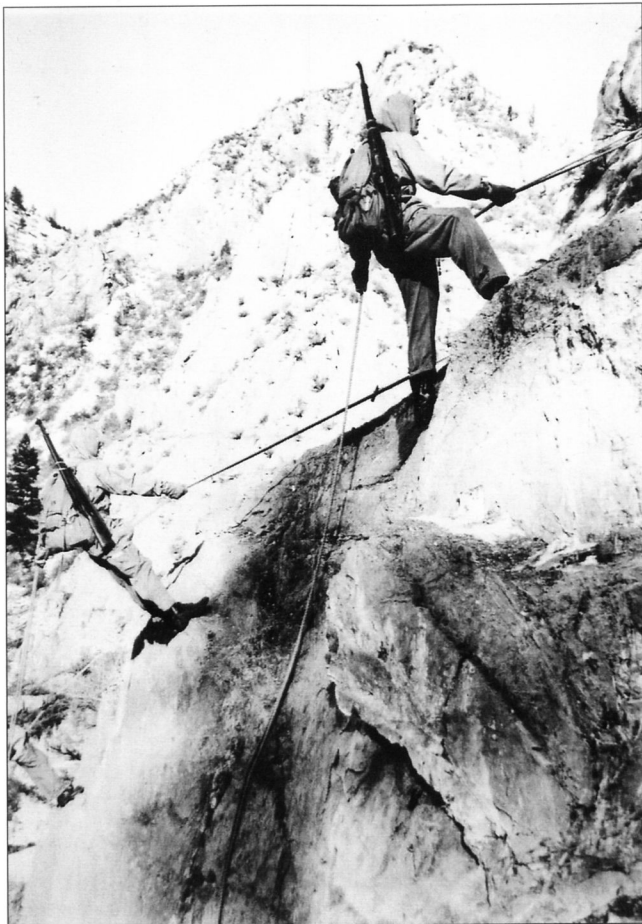
Section breakdown (1942)

S/Sgt – Section leader
 Sgt – Demolitions (x3)
 Tech 4 – Radioman¹
 Tech 4 – First aid man
 Tech 4 – Navigator
 Tech 4 – Mechanic (x2)
 PFC (x3)

These included two rifle-grenadiers and one light machine gunner. The detailed composition of a section often changed; this original establishment reflected the FSSF's initially planned character as a mechanized unit with snow vehicles. Section strength sometimes exceeded 12, particularly when large numbers of casualty replacements had recently been received.

¹ For explanation of US Army line ranks and technical grades, see Osprey Battle Orders 17, *US Army Infantry Divisions 1942-43*, page 10.

Free Norwegian Army ski instructors were brought in to train the Force in winter warfare techniques, especially skiing, in the Montana mountains near Helena. The course lasted six weeks, and the instructors declared themselves quite satisfied with the standards achieved. These men wear the second type M1941 pattern reversible parka and the white ski overtrousers over their wool ski pants, ski-mountain boots, and mountain rucksacks with slung M1 rifles. (National Archives)



Climbing was an important part of the three weeks of mountain warfare training received by all Forcemen while at Fort Harrison, and even after the cancellation of Operation "Plough" these skills would prove valuable in the battles they fought in Italy at Monte La Difensa and Radicosa. Although the glare of the sun makes them look very pale in this photo, these men actually wear the second type M1941 pattern parka olive side out, with HBT coveralls and jump boots. Notice how the M1 rifles are attached to the side of the rucksacks. (National Archives)

Recruitment and training

Colonel Frederick and his recruiters were looking for rugged individuals who could handle extensive winter warfare and airborne-type operations. The American recruitment posters called for "Single men between the ages of 21 and 35 who had completed three years or more grammar school, within the occupational range of lumberjacks, forest rangers, hunters, northwoodsmen, game wardens, prospectors, and explorers".² American volunteers were just that – volunteers, not ex-prisoners on a suicide mission, as Hollywood might have you believe. The Canadian call was similar, with the additional requirement that applicants be non-commissioned officer material. The Canadian volunteers were solicited under the pretense that they were joining a (non-existent) 2nd Parachute Bn, and many did not know until they arrived in Montana that they had joined the FSSF. As Canada had been fighting in World War II since 1939, several Canadians in the Force had served in the military longer than their American counterparts, and a handful had already seen combat.

The training schedule fell into three phases: "(1) August 3 to October 3 for parachute training, training in the basic subjects such as weapons, demolitions, small-unit tactics, and constant attention to reaching the peak of physical fitness; (2) October 5 to November 21 for unit tactics and problems; and (3) the remaining time... given over to skiing, rock climbing, living in cold climates and operation of the Force's new snow vehicle."³

The training was extensive and challenging, serving as a weeding-out process for volunteers who could not meet its demands. Life was lived at "double time", with an early emphasis on physical fitness: callisthenics, obstacle courses, and long marches with increasingly heavy packs, culminating in a timed march of 60 miles on the plains, and 30-mile treks in the mountains. At first the Weasel vehicle was not available for training, and (see schedule above) the season did not allow ski instruction. Eventually about 36 T-15s were delivered to Helena, and rotation training began; in the event, the Force would never use the Weasel in combat (see "Vehicles" section, page 54). When winter came, expert Norwegian ski instructors led a six-week course that brought the combat battalions to a high level of competence. They also practiced mountain climbing, map reading and wilderness survival.

Meanwhile the new "para-skiers" had to qualify on virtually every weapon in the US arsenal, and acquire the skills of bayonet and hand-



to-hand combat. Demolitions were another expertise that they had to master; they trained with TNT and RS, blowing up any structures they could find available in the Helena vicinity. (A legacy of "Plough" that would outlast that plan was a very useful and flexible 30lb RS linked charge, devised by Geoffrey Pyke and produced by the US Army Ordnance facility at Fort Belvoir, VA.)

The airborne training was modified from what was being taught at Fort Benning, GA; the Forcemen only had to make two jumps to qualify, instead of the usual five – a decision taken because these men had so many other specialized skills to master. A few Canadians who had been serving in England since winter 1939/40 had qualified for their Canadian jump wings at RAF Station Ringway; and from August 1942, some Canadian Forcemen who had volunteered from the 1st Canadian Parachute Bn had already gone through US jump school at Fort Benning to qualify for their Canadian wings, at a time when Canada herself did not have sufficient facilities. Now they had to jump yet again at Helena for their American wings. Many American junior officers were also gathered from the jump schools at Fort Benning.

The changed role

During winter 1942/43, Col Frederick was informed that Project "Plough" was cancelled, and the existence of the FSSF was in question; but Gen Marshall wanted to keep the Force alive as a special infantry "shock" formation. The Force training would be extended, and more volunteers from both countries would join the ranks, allowing unit strength to be increased. New weapons joined the arsenal for the new role – .30cal Browning machine guns and Johnson light machine guns, 60mm mortars and bazookas at section or platoon level.

Para-skiers set up radio communications in the mountains. All original Forcemen had to qualify in radio communications as well as all the other disciplines in the training program. This emphasis on small combat elements of multi-skilled soldiers clearly prefigured the doctrine of post-war Special Forces. (National Archives)

² Springer, page 3 – see Biblio
³ Burhans, page 23

This Forceman stationed at Fort Harrison in winter 1942/43 wears the first pattern winter hat with the ear/neck flap pulled down and buckled across his chin. The US Army standard issue double-breasted melton wool overcoat, with brass buttons, two slash side pockets and epaulets, was normally worn with the service uniform, and it is unlikely that the Force ever wore it in combat. This T-5 has sewn on his rank and the red spearhead patch. Technician grades allowed the Army to pay men who qualified in specialist skills the same as line NCOs (T-5 = corporal), without giving them the full authority of that rank. There were very few technicians in the normal infantry company, but most Forcemen qualified for these grades. (National Archives)



Training syllabus

The following training syllabus was labeled First Canadian Special Service Battalion

Specialized training:
 Qualified parachutist
 Army skiing (6 weeks)
 Mountain warfare (3 weeks)
 Amphibious landings and rubber boats (6 weeks)
 Demolitions (2 months)
 Special recon track vehicles (1 month)

Tactics and United States weapons:
 M1 rifle .30
 Pistol .45
 Rifle grenade
 Flamethrower
 Johnson automatic rifle
 Browning automatic rifle
 Thompson sub-machine gun
 Browning light machine gun
 Antitank rocket launcher
 Mortar 60mm
 All purpose grenades, US

Chemical warfare [i.e. gas]
 Radio operator
 First aid

Section breakdown (1943-4)

S/Sgt (Thompson SMG)
 Sgt (M1 rifle)
 Sgt (M1 rifle)
 Sgt (M1 rifle)
 Tech 4 (M1 rifle)
 Tech 4 (M1 rifle)
 Tech 4 (M1 rifle)
 Tech 4 (M1 rifle)
 Tech 4 (M1 rifle)
 Pfc (M1 rifle)
 Pfc (M1 rifle)
 Pfc (M41 Johnson LMG)

Some sections had access to the M1919A4 machinegun. Every man in the section was also armed with a V-2 fighting knife and an M1911A1 pistol. The M1A1 carbine in .30 "short" caliber was also carried in Europe by some junior leaders and support weapon gunners.

While still lacking heavy machine guns and mortars, in terms of small arms and light crew-served weapons the 108 combat sections

of the six FSSF battalions thus had the collective firepower of a conventional infantry division.

On April 11, 1943, the First Special Service Force was transferred to Norfolk, VA, for amphibious training; on Chesapeake Bay they practiced transferring from LCTs and LSTs to rubber boats, paddling ashore and immediately scaling the cliffs above the beaches. The following month the formation went on to Fort Ethan Allen, VT, to hone their combat skills and wait for an assignment. In under a year the men of the First Special Service Force combat sections had become not only the most heavily armed but also the most thoroughly trained infantry in North America; no other branch of service could claim that they were paratroops, ski and mountain troops, amphibious troops, and demolition experts. The Forcemen were ready for anything.

OPERATIONS

A summary of the First Special Service Force's operations is as follows:

Pacific Theater:

Aleutians Campaign
 Kiska, Little Kiska Aug 15-19, 1943
 Segula Island Aug 17, 1943

Mediterranean Theater:

Naples-Foggia Campaign
 Monte La Difensa Dec 3-6, 1943
 Monte La Remetanea Dec 6-9, 1943
 Monte Sammucro Dec 25, 1943
 Radicosa Jan 4, 1944
 Monte Majo Jan 6, 1944

Little Kiska, with Kiska in the background. Note the T-15 Weasel cargo carrier at right foreground. (National Archives)



Monte Vischiataro	Jan 8, 1944
Mussolini Canal (Anzio)	Feb 2–May 10, 1944
Monte Arrestino	May 25, 1944
Rocca Massima	May 27, 1944
Colle Ferro	June 2, 1944
<i>Rome-Arno Campaign</i>	
Rome	June 4, 1944
<i>Southern France</i>	
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
Menton	Sept 7, 1944
<i>European Theater:</i>	
<i>Rhineland Campaign</i>	
Franco-Italian border	Sept 7–Nov 30, 1944

Members of the Force clean their weapons after a patrol from Lilly Cove, Kiska, on August 16, 1943. These men all wear the mountain trousers with jump boots. The man on the left, wearing a knit woolen toque and an Arctic field coat, displays his FSSF patch on his left shoulder and the ATF 9 patch on the right. The soldier on the right, sharpening his V-42 knife, has the ATF 9 patch on the left shoulder of his wool shirt. (National Archives)

THE ALEUTIANS

The First Special Service Force was finally called into action for Operation "Cottage" on June 9, 1943. This was the invasion of Kiska island in the Aleutians, the last hold-out of Japanese forces in North America. The landings on Attu had been successful, but only at a heavy cost in US casualties. The Army did not want to make the same mistakes



on Kiska, and the use of specialized soldiers like the FSSF was appealing to the staff of Adm Corlett's deceptively named Amphibian Training Force 9 (the Kiska Task Force). The FSSF would set up camp with the rest of the task force on the island of Amchitka, the point of departure for the assault; in anticipation of heavy casualties, its units were brought up to a strength of 2,460 all ranks.

On August 15, 1943, the invasion of Kiska began. The Force was separated into its three regiments: the 1st and 3rd Regts would land on the island using rubber boats; the 2nd would act as a reserve force, ready to go in by boat or parachute wherever they might be needed. The 1st Regt was the first unit from ATF 9 to land on Kiska, where they encountered no resistance. The next day the 3rd Regt landed on the other side of the island, again without opposition. The 2nd Regt waited with their parachutes beside the C-47s on Amchitka, but the call never came. The 5,000-strong Japanese garrison on Kiska had been evacuated three days beforehand under cover of bad weather, leaving practically all their equipment behind. Despite this anticlimax, the operation had been a superb training exercise for the Force.

ITALY

General Eisenhower requested that the First Special Service Force be assigned to LtGen Mark Clark's Fifth US Army in Italy. The FSSF embarked for Italy via Morocco on September 28, 1943, finally landing in Naples on November 19. The Force would make its new home in an Italian artillery barracks previously occupied by the German "Hermann Göring" Division at Santa Maria di Capua Vetere.

Men of the 3rd Regt at Cervaro, Italy, in January 1944: (center) Pvt Brown of Ontario, (right) Sgt Graw of Ohio. Brown is wearing a Yukon packboard loaded with a mass of equipment; in the Italian mountains motorized transport was almost useless in the front lines, and even mules were in short supply. The Forcemen acted as their own packhorses to bring supplies up to their comrades, and nicknamed themselves "Freddie's Freighters". These men wear M1937 wool shirts, mountain trousers and jump boots. (National Archives)





A machine gun squad of the 2nd Regt prepare a "ten-in-one" ration dinner around a fire in the Appenine Mountains near Radicosa, January 1944. From left to right they are named as T-4 Flannery, Pfc Johnston, T-4 Joiner, Sgt Leonerd and Sgt Thompson. They all wear the third type 1942 pattern parka with mountain trousers. The "ten-in-one" ration was developed in June 1943 and based on the British "compo" ration; it fed ten men for one day. The ration came in one large box that held four smaller boxes; the first half of the rations came in corrugated cardboard and the second half, as here, in laminated bituminized cardboard. The rations consisted of cereals, coffee, jams, fruits, tinned milk, biscuits, meats and vegetables, cigarettes, and other comforts. (National Archives)

The Winter Line, December 1943–January 1944

The question of how to utilize the First Special Service Force was soon to be answered. The German C-in-C in Italy, Field Marshal Kesselring, was conducting his brilliant delaying campaign up the peninsula, holding successive defensive lines across the mountainous spine and the narrow, river-cut coastal plains which flanked it.

His main positions in winter 1943/44 were along the Gustav Line, anchored on the Rapido and Garigliano rivers and the Monte Cassino massif. The Allies' slow approach to these defenses up Highway 6 was hampered by the outlying Winter Line, which dominated their advance from the heights of Monte La Difensa, Monte Camino and Monte La Remetania. Operation "Raincoat" called for a coordinated attack on the Winter Line; and the FSSF were given the task of assaulting its keystone, the 3,100ft Monte La Difensa, whose saucer-shaped crest was strongly defended. The 3rd US Inf Div had already failed in an attempt to dislodge the enemy from these fortified ridges; and in the first week of December 1943, it was the turn of the FSSF.

The 2nd Regt formed the primary assault force, with the 1st Regt as the reserve. On rugged, windswept slopes and in icy rain and fog, where man-packing had to take the place of supply vehicles, the 3rd Regt and a large part of the Service Bn would be used as supply troops and medical personnel. After careful consideration, it was decided that the 2nd Regt would attack La Difensa by the back door, scaling lightly guarded 200ft cliffs that the Germans believed to be impassable. On December 1 the FSSF was taken to the base of Monte La Difensa, where the 36th Inf Div had been dug in for some time; on the evening of the next day the 2nd Regt were ready to go.



Using climbing ropes under cover of darkness, one battalion climbed the mountain with only light weapons, followed by the other with full 90lb loads of heavy weapons and equipment – there was no saying when resupply might reach them. T-4 Dawson recalled the punishing weight of a Browning LMG over his shoulder and a load of its ammunition on a packboard. The 2nd Regt reached the top of the cliff without being spotted, and were able to begin spreading out before the quiet of the night erupted into a firefight. Sergeant Glass recalled that they made a lot of progress before the defenders knew what was happening, but that he was glad they had fixed their bayonets, because they were soon "working real close".⁴ The summit of Monte La Difensa was taken in two

⁴ Springer, pgs 76–77 & 79–80



Men of the 3rd Regt pass a mule relay point and a Free French medical aid station in the Cervaro sector, January 1944. These combat troops have been temporarily assigned to bring needed medical supplies up to their buddies, and they display makeshift Red Cross bands on their helmets. The soldier at the front wears a high-neck sweater over his M1937 shirt. (National Archives)

Col Walker and his staff at the 3rd Regt command post on Hill 1090, Radicosa, January 1944. It was impossible to dig in when fighting in this sort of terrain, and stone shelters – *sangars*, in the British Indian Army term – had to be piled up for every purpose; the stone made wicked splinters under shellfire. Walker would later take over command of the FSSF from MajGen Frederick in June 1944. Here, he and two of his aides wear the knee-length first type M1941 pattern parka, with fur ruffs at the hood and cuffs; the man at far right wears the shorter third type M1942 pattern, with plain button cuffs. (National Archives)

Anzio beachhead, April 1944: S/Sgt Kratzer of the FSSF wears the M1943 field coat with mountain trousers, and a net-covered M1 helmet. He carries the M1A1 Thompson SMG but retains the standard M1923 cartridge belt – many Forcemen carried their Thompson magazines in the pockets of the mountain trousers. The other web items visible are the M1936 suspenders, M1910 canteen, and a first aid pouch; he has a Mk IIA1 fragmentation grenade fixed to his suspenders, and probably carries the M1911A1 pistol holstered on his right hip. Note that the spearhead patch has been obscured by the censor; the identity of the Force was never really understood by the Germans, and the “Hermann Göring” Division opposite them across the Mussolini Canal had them down as a full division. (National Archives)



hours' fighting that night; the Germans retreated, leaving about 80 dead. Their surprise was shared by US II Corps staff, who had expected the operation to take a minimum of three days. The 2nd Regt then dug in for the inevitable German counterattacks.

The reaction of the German artillery and mortars was savage and prolonged, against both the soaked and freezing 2nd Regt clinging to the summit, and the 1st Regt as they moved towards the base of La Difensa. Fierce fighting was also going on for Monte Camino, and the FSSF were under fire from that feature, from La Remetanea, and from the saddles between them and La Difensa. The 3rd Regt and the Service Bn came under constant artillery fire as they started to climb the long, broken slopes loaded with water, food and ammunition to resupply the entrenched 2nd, and to carry the casualties down to safety – a grueling 12-hour round trip. The 1st Regt eventually joined the 2nd on the summit of La Difensa. On December 5 both regiments attacked across the saddle and took La Remetanea, and late the next day British troops finally forced the Germans off Monte Camino. After six days of



continuous action, the Force were finally relieved; the battle had cost them 511 casualties, including 116 cases of exhaustion – testimony to the wet, freezing weather, the shortage of supplies, and the appallingly harsh terrain. The attack on Monte La Difensa broke the Winter Line, and would forever be remembered by both sides as the “impossible” mission that the First Special Service Force had accomplished.

On Christmas Eve, after a short rest, the 1st Regt moved out to take Monte Sammucro, operating alongside the 504th Parachute Infantry;

ABOVE Forcemen were presumably posed for this photo of a patrol approaching a “German-held” farmhouse, taken near Anzio on April 14, 1944 – they would hardly risk the encumbrance of taking a photographer along on a daylight mission that exposed them to this much danger. The man on the left uses an M1910/28 haversack meat can pouch as an ammunition bag at his waist, and has a “Y” or “V” in pale tape fixed to the back of his helmet; the soldier on the right carries the Force’s distinctive M1941 Johnson light machine gun. Both wear standard M1937 wool shirts and trousers. (National Archives)



LEFT A Force patrol passes a roadblock marking the edge of an American antipersonnel minefield in the Anzio area, April 14, 1944. They all wear standard wool shirts and trousers; the section leader carries the M1A1 Thompson SMG, the man behind him the bipod for the section’s M2 60mm mortar. (National Archives)

Even the roughest campaign sometimes produces a good laugh – one can easily imagine the Forcemen's reaction on seeing this German prisoner brought into the Anzio beachhead. Military Policeman Spalding of HQ Co, Service Bn, wears the standard M1943 jacket and mountain trousers; his web belt is the M1914 mounted pattern, with a space in front for the double pistol magazine pouch. (National Archives)



the objective was taken on December 25, though the FSSF suffered nearly 80 casualties on the approach march alone. On January 3, 1944, the 2nd Regt with the remaining men of the 1st started a sweep through the Radicosa hills. The next day the 3rd Regt set out in a two-pronged attack to take Monte Majo, becoming fully committed on the 6th; the next day the 1st Regt reached Monte Majo to support the 3rd Infantry Division. Many of the Forcemen began to run out of ammunition on Majo, and were forced to use captured weapons to push the Germans off the mountain; the enemy counterattacked more than 40 times, to no avail. By January 17, when these heights had all been secured and the Force was finally withdrawn from the line, the FSSF had been reduced to between 50 and 25 percent of their establishment.

Anzio, February–May 1944

The Anzio landings of late January 1944, on the Italian west coast about 35 miles south of Rome, were intended to break the stalemate further south in the Cassino sector of the Gustav Line, by forcing the Germans either to strip troops from Cassino, or to leave Rome vulnerable to a quick drive inland from Anzio through the Alban Hills. This Operation



“Shingle” was prepared in great haste, with inadequate resources, due to the pressure to return amphibious craft to Britain for the build-up to the Normandy landings that June. One US and one British infantry division got ashore against very light opposition on January 22; British Commandos and the US Darby's Rangers (1st, 3rd & 4th Bns) spearheaded the landings, and the latter secured the towns of Anzio and Nettuno. However, Marshal Kesselring's reaction was as fast and effective as always; he poured reinforcements in to contain the beachhead, while still holding up Gen Clark's attempted advance further south. On January 29–30, Darby's 1st and 3rd Ranger Bns were annihilated in the fighting for the town of Cisterna. The crowded beachhead turned into a besieged camp with a 30-mile entrenched perimeter, under heavy German bombardment.

On February 2, after only two weeks out of the line, the First Special Service Force landed in the Anzio beachhead with just 68 officers and 1,165 men; the remnants of Darby's Rangers, mostly from the 4th Bn, were absorbed as replacements. The Force would dig in on the right flank of the perimeter, holding a full 8 miles along the Mussolini Canal: the 1st Regt with a front of 3 miles on the right, and the 3rd holding 5 miles on the left of the FSSF sector, with the 2nd behind them in reserve.

Although entire Allied divisions were holding the same amount of real estate, the FSSF were not about to sit idly on the defensive. Brigadier-General Frederick (promoted on January 30) ordered reconnaissance patrols, harassment raids by day and night, and other offensive tactics to demoralize the enemy and energize the men of the Force. The 2nd Regt, not committed to holding a perimeter sector, was given the primary task of conducting intense night raids into enemy

May 25, 1944: Forcemen of the 1st Regt move along railroad tracks through open country two days after the Anzio breakout; this terrain exposed them to fierce counterattacks by German infantry and armor, but in the fighting between Cisterna and Arena they forced the enemy's 715. Inf Div back with heavy losses. (National Archives)

territory; the purpose was to give the Germans the impression that there was an entire division on the Canal. The patrol program began on the first night the Force took over their sector, and continued at a brisk pace. Before the FSSF arrived the Germans had been in the habit of coming right up to the canal to grenade the US lines; within a week their outpost line had been forced to pull back a mile.

At Anzio the Force would gain a reputation as ferocious night fighters, using stealth to prey on unsuspecting Germans deep behind the lines. Initially the targets were usually bridges and culverts, but later enemy-fortified farmhouses. A raiding force could be of any strength between three men, a company, and an entire battalion – latterly, some of these largest raids were even supported by tanks. With equipment lightened to the minimum of essentials, the Forcemen would blacken their faces and hands, and would move quietly through the darkness across the canal. Sergeant Dawson recalled the night raids as “very violent stuff... Almost a controlled chaos sort of affair”; and Sgt McNeese described typical raids:

“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 Tommyguns and others used their bare hands... We carried death stickers and would put these on their foreheads... We messed with their heads on so many different levels.” (For the sticker he mentions, see Plate D4.)

BrigGen Frederick (center) establishes his command post 60 yards outside the city limits of Rome on June 4, 1944. Frederick was revered by his men as a commander who always led from the front; this might explain the fact that he would be the most wounded US general officer of the war, winning nine Purple Hearts. (National Archives)



Another veteran of these raids, 1st Lt Michaelson, recalled: “Our techniques were successful; the Germans never did know how we were doing it. There was no one left – there was *nothing* left after we got through with a raid. We were trained to destroy, and we destroyed everything. We were a bunch of crazy men – nuts! No fear at all...”⁵

The Germans soon became aware that the soldiers facing them were some type of elite formation. It was at Anzio where the FSSF got the nickname “the Black Devils”, from a German diary found on a dead officer; one entry read, “We never hear these black devils when they come.”

By May 1, 1944, the Force had been brought up to full strength with Canadian and American replacements. They were now ready for the breakout from the Anzio beachhead.

The breakout to Rome, May-June 1944

On May 11, Operation “Diadem” unleashed the US Fifth and British Eighth armies against the Gustav Line far to the southeast of Anzio. German intelligence had failed to interpret the preparations correctly; the Allies made fast progress, and on May 17 the ruined Cassino monastery on its dominating hill finally fell to Free Polish troops. In the days that followed the German Tenth Army was forced back up the Liri Valley.

On May 23, the First Special Service Force took part in the Anzio breakout – Operation “Buffalo”. On the right flank of the 3rd Inf Div, the FSSF attacked at 0545hrs along the Mussolini Canal, thrusting forwards southeast of Cisterna across open country. Their first objective was a railroad line and canal bridge on Highway 7; they were digging in there

June 4, 1944: FSSF soldiers dash past a burning PzKw VI Tiger tank on the streets of Rome – the Tiger was operated in Italy by sPzAbt 504 and 508. The original caption on this photograph states that “1st SSF and 88th Division [were the] first troops on the streets of Rome”, and these men certainly wear the Force’s unique mountain trousers. The dispute continues to this day, but most evidence puts the Force among the very first Allied soldiers into the city. (National Archives)

⁵ Dawson & Kutemeier, 1, page 40; Springer, pages 153, 164 & 167



Force medics load wounded onto a half-track ambulance on the outskirts of Rome; they wear the Red Cross left armband and large helmet insignia. (National Archives)

by 1000hrs, but the 3rd Inf Div were held up at Cisterna on their left, and the Force took significant casualties to German artillery and counterattacks with armor. Forced to fall back slightly that night, they were able to resume their advance on the 25th when the 3rd Inf and 1st Armd Divs took Cisterna and broke through the Velletri Gap. The Force were soon racing for the town of Ardena and, beyond it at Valmonte, Highway 6 – the main road to Rome, where there was a chance of cutting off the German Tenth Army retreating from the broken Gustav Line.

The Force took Ardena after extremely heavy fighting but came under fierce counterattacks. In a famously controversial decision, on May 26 Gen Clark shifted the thrust of his advance from Valmonte and Highway 6 towards Rome itself, and gave the Germans the time they needed to extricate Tenth Army. When Valmonte was finally taken on June 1, the right wing units of II Corps turned northwest up Highway 6 towards the Italian capital, with the FSSF at the spearhead, outdistancing the units on their flanks as they approached the city limits.

On June 4 the Force was ordered to take all the eight bridges over the River Tiber within Rome, and the railroad station; they were given tank support from 1st Armd Div's Task Force Howze for this mission, but in the event they ran into relatively light resistance from the remaining enemy rearguards. They entered the city at 0620hrs, and had secured the eight bridges by 1100 hours. The dispute over which unit was actually the first into Rome is still argued today by veterans and historians alike.

The Anzio breakout and the two weeks' intense fighting which followed before the liberation of Rome on June 4, 1944, had cost the Force more than 40 percent casualties from the 1,500-odd men who had attacked on the Mussolini Canal on May 23. The survivors now enjoyed some well-deserved downtime, billeted at the Vatican summer palace on Lake Albano.

It was at this date that the First Special Service Force also had to say goodbye to Gen Frederick, who was promoted major-general and assigned command of the US/British 1st Airborne Task Force. Robert T. Frederick's role in the creation of the Force and its successful employment in combat was unique; he was admired by his soldiers as a real front-line leader, who would end the war as America's most frequently wounded general officer. The elite status of the First Special Service Force was due in large part to his vision, energy and leadership, and he would be greatly missed by his men. On his departure Col Walker of the 3rd Regt would assume command of the Force.

SOUTHERN FRANCE

The First Special Service Force was chosen to spearhead Operation "Dragoon", the landings on the Riviera coast of southern France in August 1944. This operation was planned both to distract German attention and reserves from the main battlefront in the north, where the Allies had just broken out of Normandy and were starting to push eastwards; and to allow the insertion into France of new US divisions which could not be accommodated by the strained port and logistic facilities on the Channel coast.

The mission of the FSSF was to make amphibious landings on the Isle du Levant and Isle de Port-Cros, off the naval base at Toulon, just prior to the main landings, which would take place to the east of these Isles d'Hyeres. On August 15, all three regiments paddled in on rubber boats

The strikingly youthful-looking MajGen Frederick receiving the town flag of Le Muy, France, on August 17, 1944, after his 1st Abn Task Force liberated the town following Operation "Dragoon". He wears the second pattern jump jacket and trousers common among most Parachute Infantry units; the two stars of his rank are soldered onto his M1 helmet and pinned to both collars. (National Archives)



to neutralize their targets: the 1st Regt on the Isle de Port-Cros, and the other two on the Isle du Levant. The garrisons on the islands offered only slight resistance before surrendering.

The Force was then assigned to the 1st Airborne Task Force under the command of Gen Frederick, which was pursuing the German retreat eastwards along the Riviera towards the Franco-Italian border. They would liberate town after town in this attractive theater of war, sometimes encountering stubborn rearguard resistance and sometimes only crowds of welcoming citizens. On eventually reaching the Italian frontier in the high country of the Alpes Maritimes they were ordered to set up defensive positions and to hold the line. German-held fortifications at Sospel and Castillon – in the southern extremity of the old Maginot Line system – were to be starved into submission. The 1st Regt would hold the high ground just west of the Castillon-Menton road, the 2nd the Menton area, and the 3rd would set up roadblocks around Castillon. The Force spent three months in this sector before being relieved; they took part in light patrols and small unit actions, and were subjected to some artillery fire, but it was relatively easy duty compared to their battles in Italy.

The end of the march

The 1st Airborne Task Force was dissolved on November 23, 1944; Gen Frederick would go on to command the 45th Inf Div, fighting in the Belfort Gap and on into Germany. His First Special Service Force was also facing deactivation. The Canadian government was concerned by a conscription crisis in the face of heavy casualties in the Low Countries as First Canadian Army fought its way up to the gates of the Third Reich; they needed men in the field, and they no longer believed that the FSSF was serving its intended purposes – an argument that was hard to refute.

On December 5, 1944, the First Special Service Force formed up for the last time. A memorial service was conducted, and the colors were cased. For the first time the Canadians were ordered to fall out, and marched past their American comrades. The First Special Service Force no longer existed.

SUCCESSOR UNITS

The Canadian infantry replacements to the Force went back to their previous units. The parachute-qualified Forcemen were temporarily designated the 1st Canadian Special Service Bn, but in January 1945 this was disbanded. Many of its members became instructors, some went to officer candidate schools, and the rest joined the 1st Cdn Para Bn fighting in the Low Countries and Germany.⁶

Many of the parachute-qualified American Forcemen were assigned to or volunteered for Airborne units, serving with the 82nd, 101st or 17th Airborne Divisions for the remainder of the war. The 474th Inf Regt (Separate) was formed to accept all the American Forcemen who did not transfer into the Airborne, the surviving Darby's Rangers who had been assigned to the Force, the Norwegian-American 99th Inf Bn (Separate), and the 552nd Antitank Company. The 474th was assigned to the Third US Army on April 1, 1945, and worked in the rear of the

⁶ See Elite 143, *Canadian Airborne Troops since 1942*



advancing front lines on security duties, to guard against the sabotage and espionage which it was feared would be launched by diehard Nazis. On May 9, the day after the European war ended, the 474th was assigned to Norway, where they would disarm and repatriate some 300,000 surrendered German garrison troops. On October 25, 1945, the 474th returned to the United States.

* * *

When the guns fell silent, the story of the First Special Service Force did not fade from memory. The legacy of the FSSF is alive and well today, and both the United States and Canadian special forces still carry the Battle Credits won by this elite formation. The crossed arrows insignia, and the spearhead shape of the shoulder patch, were revived for the new US Army Special Forces in 1955–60. The First Special Service Force Association still holds reunions every year, and their spirit is as strong today as it was more than 60 years ago.

UNIFORMS

The First Special Service Force was intended from the beginning to be a separate branch of the US and Canadian militaries, under direct authority of the two nations' war departments. Colonel Frederick's priority status in acquiring clothing and equipment led to the FSSF receiving unusual combinations of items, some of them unique.

Oslo, Norway, May 18, 1945: Col Walker (right), former commander of the First Special Service Force and current commander of the 474th Inf Regt (Separate), photographed with Gen Owen Summers. The white "wave" detail identifies the 474th spearhead patch on Col Walker's M1943 field coat. The occasion of the photograph was uglier than it might appear: Norwegian women are being identified as "quisling" collaborators (National Archives)

Service uniforms

The standard uniform items issued to the Force – like everyone else in the US Army – were the parts of the olive drab (OD) wool uniform. These consisted of a shirt, trousers, and an “overseas” or “garrison” hat (sidecap).

The 1937 *pattern wool/flannel shirt* was worn by almost every American in the European Theater of Operations; it had seven front buttons, two patch pockets and button cuffs; an internal “gas flap” behind the front opening was added later during the war, and the officer model had epaulets (shoulder straps). This shirt was worn in combat, and could be worn for walking out or under the service coat with the 1940 *pattern khaki mohair tie*.

The wool/serge 1937 *pattern trousers* had two slash side pockets, two hip pockets and a watch pocket, and a button fly; the officer model had flaps on the hip pockets. These trousers were worn with combat dress, especially by the infantry, and in dress or walking-out uniform by most American soldiers during the war.

The 1926/40 *pattern service coat* – like the trousers, in OD Shade No.54 – was a tunic with an open collar having peaked lapels, and epaulets. The earlier pattern coat had “bi-swing” pleats behind the shoulders, removed in 1942. The coat had four brass front buttons;



Two Forcemen escort their friends through downtown Helena. The man on the left wears standard Canadian battledress without insignia, the Balmoral bonnet (tam-o'-shanter) of a Scots regiment, and American jump boots. The soldier on the right wears US service dress; although clearly an enlisted man, note the strongly contrasting shades of his coat and shirt, and necktie and trousers, in clear imitation of an officer's “chocolates and pinks”. He displays collar discs, jump wings, and the FSSF oval and aiguillette. His service dress hat will shortly be replaced with the overseas hat. The town of Helena, MT, would never forget the First Special Service Force; indeed, after the war many Forcemen, both Canadian and American, returned there and remained in Montana for the rest of their lives. (National Archives)



A 1943-dated photo showing the newly designed red spearhead patch being sewn to a service coat. The shape recalled an Indian flint spearhead, honoring the warrior tradition of the native peoples of both the United States and Canada. Note the plaited construction of the red-white-and-blue aiguillette worn on the left shoulder. (National Archives)

patch breast pockets and internal waist pockets, with straight flaps fastened with brass buttons.

The matching olive drab *garrison or overseas cap* was worn with the wool uniform in barracks, for walking-out and on dress occasions. The edge of the lower “curtain” bore branch-color piping for enlisted men, and gold-and-black piping for all officers. The round-topped, visored (peaked) service hat is seen in some early photos of Forcemen in walking-out dress.

This wool uniform, with the addition of insignia and special features peculiar to the FSSF, was the standard service dress of the Force. The issue shirt was worn on all occasions. The wool trousers were worn primarily for walking-out, but were also used in combat when other trousers were unavailable.

Standard US Army *footwear* issued at Fort Harrison were the russet leather “service shoes”, actually ankle boots, with a rubber sole and heel; and low quarter dress shoes.

Officer's service uniforms

Officers of the Force wore the standard “chocolates and pinks” of the US Army. The *wool drab officer shirt* for winter wear came in either OD Shade No.50, dark Shade No.51 – the so-called “chocolate” – or lighter Shade No.54; they might also wear cotton summer shirts in khaki Shade No.1. A *khaki mohair tie* was regulation, but photos show that dark greenish drab Canadian ties were also worn. The wool/elastique trousers for everyday and field wear came in dark OD Shade No.51 matching the coat; but officers were recommended to acquire at least one pair in “drab” wool/elastique, which was of a paler shade giving the so-called “pink” appearance, and the combination of dark and light shades in the uniform became very fashionable.

The “chocolate” OD Shade No.51 *officer's service coat* had an open collar with peaked lapels, epaulets, and four brass front buttons; pleated patch breast pockets and internal waist pockets all had three-point flaps fastened with brass buttons. The officer's coat had an integral cloth waist

Capt Brakel, one of the Force medical officers, receives his jump wings; note on his left shirt collar the officer's cut-out crossed arrows branch insignia of the FSSF, inherited from the old Indian Scouts of the 1890s. The captain wears his M1 helmet liner, and a "chocolate" shirt with khaki necktie under his olive drab HBT coveralls. (National Archives)



Enlisted men's brass discs for service dress collars. (Top to bottom) right-hand national insignia for US personnel; left-hand branch insignia for both nationalities; and screw-back example of right-hand disc for Canadian members of the Force.



belt with a brass frame buckle. Photographs show some officers wearing instead the enlisted men's OD Shade No.54 service uniform with officer insignia (e.g 4th Co, 3rd Regt parading through Helena, MT, in April 1943). The officer's "chocolate" wool or khaki cotton *overseas caps* were piped in gold-and-black.

For all parachute-qualified ranks, the trousers were bloused into a polished pair of "Corcoran" jump boots to complete the service dress.

Insignia worn on service uniform

(For color detail illustrations of insignia, see Plate H.) The availability of different insignia varied in the early days at Fort Harrison, and photos show many exceptions to the definitive system.

The most distinctive item worn by the First Special Service Force was the red Indian spearhead *shoulder sleeve insignia* or patch, with the words "USA" and "CANADA" in white lettering. Designed by the Heraldry

section of the Office of the Quartermaster General and officially described on September 3, 1942, this was worn at the top of the left sleeve, in the conventional position for formation patches.

The Force's unique *branch colors* were red, white and blue, in reference to the national colors of both the United States and Great Britain, under whose flag Canadian troops then fought. The overseas cap piping for enlisted men was in red-white-and-blue cord (officers retained the standard gold-and-black piping of their status).

The Force also had a *shoulder cord* or *aiguillette* made from plaited parachute shroud lines dyed in the three colors, worn around the left shoulder of the service coat; authorized in fall 1942 at Fort Harrison, this was locally produced and privately purchased.

All parachute-qualified Force members wore their US "jump wings" on the left breast pinned through a horizontally striped red-white-and-blue *parachute oval* or backer hemmed with gold-yellow thread; this was first issued at Fort Harrison in spring 1943. Canadian jump wings were worn by some Canadian members of the Force who had qualified prior to arriving at Fort Harrison, and some photos show them being worn above the US wings on the left breast.

US regulations specified that officers display brass national insignia on both upper lapels of the service coat, and branch-of-service insignia on both lower lapels, all in cut-out form; one of each was also to be worn on the left and right shirt collar respectively when in shirtsleeve uniform. All officers wore *cut-out crossed arrows* on the lower lapels. Authorized by the Heraldry section on August 27, 1942, this was formerly the branch insignia of the US Army's Indian Scouts, and it would be revived after World War II as the branch insignia of the US Army Special Forces. American officers wore a *cut-out "U.S."* insignia on both upper lapels; Canadian officers wore *cut-out "CANADA"* insignia, of which both large and small patterns existed.

Similarly, regulations called for the wear of brass disc branch-of-service insignia on the left lapel of the enlisted men's service coat, and national insignia on the right lapel. All enlisted men of the FSSF wore



The first pattern one-piece olive drab herringbone twill coveralls worn by all Forcemen during training at Fort Harrison. Note the flapped right hand chest pocket, flapless left hand pocket, and cloth integral belt. (National Archives)



Bayonet practice at Fort Harrison, 1943; the Canadians wear the Balmoral bonnets of their former regiments, the Americans overseas caps without branch-color piping. These men all wear the leather A2 flight jacket, wool ski trousers with zipped slash pockets, and ski-mountain boots, with trouser legs bloused into winter socks. They carry the M1 rifle with the M1905 bayonet, and its plastic M3 scabbard hangs from the M1923 cartridge belt. (National Archives)



Lt Washington, the Technical Officer at Fort Harrison, demonstrates the proper packing technique for a rucksack. Here we can see winter socks, scarves, drawers, undershirts and sweaters. The M1941 cooking stove is visible on the left, with crackers and Choclettos beside it; ski wax is also in evidence. (National Archives)

crossed arrow discs on the left lapel. The American Forcemen wore the standard "U.S." disc on the right lapel. At first the Canadian personnel had no equivalent and wore the branch disc only, but a specially made "CANADA" disc was introduced in early 1943.

After training, the standard rank insignia would be American for both officers and enlisted men of both nationalities, worn in regulation fashion – on the upper sleeves by enlisted men, on the epaulets and overseas cap for officers. American members of the Force also wore marksman badges on the left pocket flaps of their service uniforms.

Other insignia worn by the First Special Service Force included the *Amphibian Training Force 9* patch worn during the Kiska operations; this was required wear by all members of the task force, usually on both sleeves, but many Forcemen wore either the spearhead alone or below the task force patch on the left sleeve. The patch was light blue, with a silver-white edge; centered vertically was a black and silver-white Bowie knife, blade down.

After the deactivation of the Force a new shoulder sleeve insignia was produced for the successor *474th Infantry Regiment (Separate)*. This commemorated the former units of the regiment's personnel – the FSSF, Darby's Rangers, and the Norwegian-American 99th Infantry Battalion (Separate). The patch of the 474th was the red spearhead of the Force, bearing a small black Ranger scroll above the blue-and-red Viking ship of the 99th, on a white wave.

(continued on page 41)

TRAINING, MONTANA, 1942–43

- 1: Canadian Forceman, Ft Harrison, fall 1942
- 2: Forceman, summer service dress, August 1942
- 3: Forceman during ski training, January 1943





ALEUTIANS & VERMONT, SUMMER 1943

- 1: Fornicer, 1st Regt; Op "Cottage", Kiska, August 1943
- 2: Sgt, 2nd Regt; Amchitka airfield, August 15, 1943
- 3: 1st Lt, FSS Air Detachment; Ft Ethan Allen, VT, September 1943



WINTER LINE, ITALY, 1943-44

- 1: Fornicer, 3rd Regt; Mte La Difensa, December 1943
- 2: Fornicer; Radicosa hills, January 1944
- 3: Fornicer, 1st Regt; Radicosa hills, January 1944



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ANZIO, FEBRUARY-MAY 1944
 1 & 2: Sgt & Forceman, 2nd Regt, April 1944
 3: Forceman, 3rd Regt; Mussolini Canal, February 1944
 4: "Death sticker"

ANZIO BREAKOUT & ADVANCE TO ROME, MAY-JUNE 1944

- 1: Forceman, 1st Regt; Anzio breakout, May 25, 1944
- 2: Staff sergeant; Rome, June 4, 1944
- 3: Forceman, Cannon Co; Rome, June 1944



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SERVICE UNIFORMS, & SUCCESSOR UNITS

- 1: Canadian Forceman; Helena, MT, 1943
- 2: 1st Lt, 1st Cdn Special Service Bn, January 1945
- 3: 1st Lt, 474th Inf Regt (Sep); Norway, July 1945



INSIGNIA & COLORS
See text commentary for details



Service awards and decorations

The Americans in the First Special Service Force were awarded the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign medal, with a battle star; the American Campaign medal; the American Defense medal; the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign medal, with invasion spearhead and a battle star; the Good Conduct medal; and the World War II Victory medal.

The Canadians were awarded the Canadian Volunteer Service medal with the silver maple leaf for overseas service, plus any appropriate decorations. It appears, however, that most Canadians received their decorations retrospectively after the Force had been deactivated, unless they were already recipients of American gallantry decorations.

Americans were also awarded service stripes for up to three years of service, and an overseas service bar for every six months overseas, worn on the left forearm of the service coat. The Canadians had their own pattern of service stripes, worn retrospectively on their Canadian battledress uniforms.

Twenty Distinguished Service Crosses, five Legions of Merit, 121 Silver Stars, one Air Medal, and one Soldier's Medal were awarded to American and Canadian members of the Force. Canadian soldiers could be awarded American gallantry decorations but not campaign ribbons. One question that remained contentious until as late as 2005 concerned the awarding of the US Combat Infantry Badge to the Canadian members of the Force. American Forcemen received 2,416 CIBs; the Canadians who fought alongside them never received one. After more

A Forceman's bunk space in barracks at Fort Harrison, with an assortment of footwear worn during the training period lined up underneath. (Left to right) low quarter dress shoes, two pairs of service boots, square-toed ski-mountaineering boots, parachute jump boots, and all-rubber Arctic overshoes. After training the Force would only retain the jump boots and Arctic overshoes. (National Archives)

than 60 years the Force has finally won another battle: in summer 2005, as a “special exception”, Canadian FSSF veterans who saw combat in Italy and France received the CIB by order of the Secretary of the Army.

Training uniforms

When the FSSF was first formed in August 1942, Fort Harrison and the streets of Helena were enlivened by a variety of uniforms. The Americans arrived in their standard Army summer khakis or their OD herringbone twill work uniforms. The Canadians arrived in an exotic medley of uniforms, including summer khaki drill shirts and bush jackets, shorts worn with long wool socks and ankle puttees, and wool field service (overseas) caps. The Canadians of Scottish regiments attracted fascinated American curiosity with their kilts and bonnets (Balmoral tam-o’shanter or Glengarry sidecaps).



A Quartermaster Corps photograph dated January 28, 1942, shows details of the new ski dress; the Force would wear this uniform while training in Montana. Both men wear the second type 1941 pattern parka with zipped neck, reversible from white to olive drab; ski caps are worn under the hoods. White overtrousers and wool ski trousers are both shown, with ski-mountain boots, and trigger-finger mittens; the Force does not seem to have used the white ski-gaiters shown here. Note too the white hickory skis and white poles. (National Archives)

This curiosity was mutual, and it was not long before the trading began. The Canadians liked the American service coat and garrison hat because they resembled Canadian officers’ uniform. The Americans liked the Canadian khaki drill bush jacket, and the different types of headgear. For weeks a cheerful mixing and swapping of uniforms was common within the Force. As the uniform started to become standardized, it was still not uncommon to find Canadian insignia being worn on American service dress. Canadian rank insignia, headgear and former regimental badges were commonly retained throughout training.

The First Special Service Force was to be supplied by the US government, and all uniforms and equipment were therefore to be of American issue. Despite a visible reluctance to give up the “tribal” headgear and badges of the British regimental tradition, this was not a major problem for most Canadians; they appreciated the smart, modern look of American uniform as compared with the “King’s Burlap” they had worn in the Canadian Army. The FSSF was always equipped with the best clothing and equipment that the US Army had to offer, and the uniforms issued for training were as unusual as those the men would later wear in combat.

The most common uniform item worn during training was the one-piece 1938 pattern OD herringbone twill (HBT) coveralls. These had two patch breast pockets with a flap on the right pocket only, two slash waist pockets, and two patch rear pockets. The buttons were of black-lacquered “13 star” design, and the coveralls had an integral cloth waist belt and buckle. The 1941 pattern HBT cap (baseball style) was also commonly worn with the coveralls.

In the colder months the FSSF were issued two types of jacket to be worn over the HBT coveralls. The OD “M1941” pattern field jacket was waist length, with a front zip fastening and buttoned fly, two slash hand-warmer pockets, epaulets, and buttoned cuffs. This lightweight, flannel-lined jacket would still be used by some members of the Force in Italy. The other type worn during training was the leather A2 flight jacket. This was of brown horsehide, with a zip front, wool knit waistband and wristlets, epaulets, and two patch front pockets with single-point snapped flaps. The A2 was a true



The M1943 field coat was issued to the Force – who were the first unit to receive it – in the fall of 1943. It would not appear with other units in Europe until a year later; contrary to popular belief, it was not the Parachute Infantry who were the first to be issued this jacket.



The mountain trousers were first adopted in 1942, and were issued to the Force during their winter training in 1943. The trousers were made from of a cotton sateen material and were extremely durable. Note the two-button waistband, belt loops, zipped slash pockets, cargo pockets with two-button flap and internal expansion pleat, and tapered ankles. The baggy mountain trousers became as much of a "trademark" of the FSSF as were the V-42 knife and the spearhead patch; no other unit in Europe was wearing them while the Force was active.

The legs tapered in at the ankle and had elastic foot stirrups to hold them snugly inside the boots; they were of much looser cut than the 1937 pattern wool trousers.

The *second type 1941 pattern reversible ski parka* was issued during the ski training at Helena. (The terms used to describe the parkas worn by the FSSF can be confusing; note that in this text the terms "first, second and third types" refer to the *sequence of manufacture*, and *not* to the order in which they were issued to the Force, which seems to have been "second - first - third".)

All parkas were reversible, from white on one side to olive drab on the other, and this second type was made from windproof but not waterproof cotton poplin. It was capacious, and reached to mid-thigh length. It had a drawstring hood large enough to fit over a cap but not a helmet, a zipped neck, and drawstrings at the cuffs. A large single patch pocket panel on the chest had a central vertical dividing seam and diagonal openings at each upper side. This second type parka had no

specialty item for members of the Force; in other branches only pilots and officers were permitted to wear it, but in the Force all ranks of the combat echelon were issued with it. However, after training it was no longer worn by enlisted men; officers were able to keep theirs, and photos show that they were worn in Europe.

The *M1941 wool knit hat* or "*jeep cap*" soon became very popular with the Forcemen, for whom it would remain the favored headgear. It could be folded down over the ears, had a short front brim, and could be worn under the steel helmet.

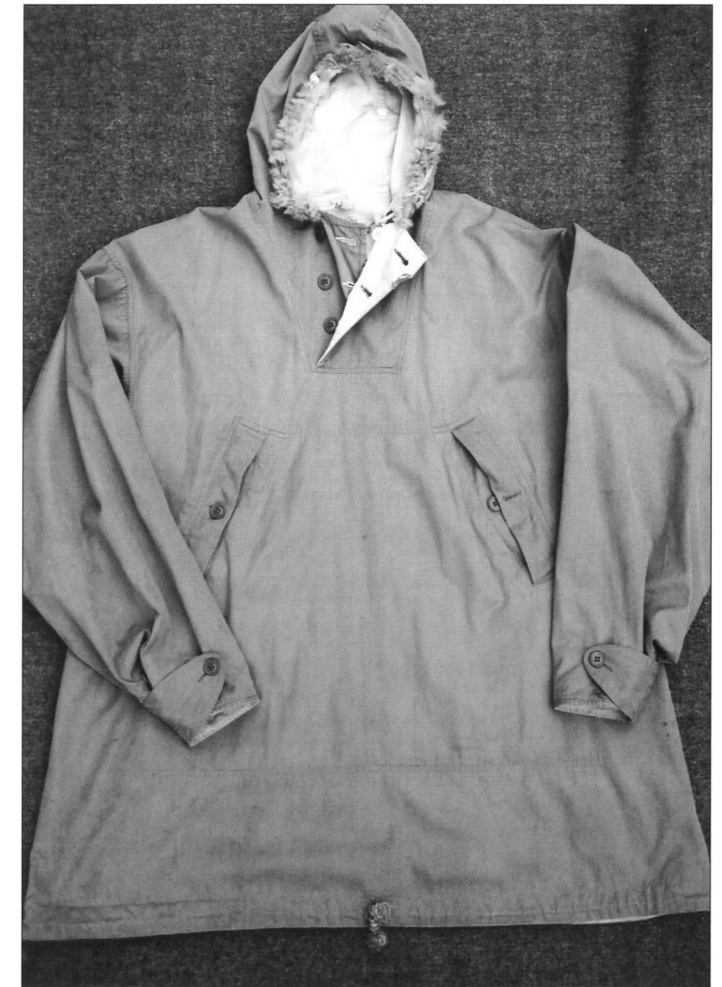
The Force had a unique summer service uniform that consisted of the *1938 pattern cotton khaki shirt* with sleeves cut to elbow length, and the *1937 pattern cotton khaki trousers* cut to knee length; this was clearly influenced by the Canadian equivalent seen when the two nationalities first mixed at Fort Harrison. With this dress the Forcemen would wear OD socks that came almost to the knee, jump boots, and the *khaki cotton overseas cap*. This uniform was only worn while in training at Fort Harrison.

Ski, mountain, and winter warfare training brought a new set of uniforms for the FSSF. The Forcemen were issued the olive drab *1941 pattern wool ski trousers*, with a zipped fly and zipped slash pockets, and three buttons and large belt loops on a broad waistband.

fur trim on the hood or cuffs; it was supposed to be issued along with a separate OD synthetic wool liner, which had wolf fur trim to the hood, a zipped neck with buttoned overflap, and no pockets or drawstrings.

The parka came with the *white ski overtrousers* that were meant to be worn over the wool ski trousers. The ankle-length *ski-mountain boots* were also worn during ski training; these were of greased light brown leather with a high, square toe, and a leather (later cleated rubber) sole.

The ski hat worn during this period had its origins in the older winter hat. The *winter hat* was made of cotton duck with a wool lining; it had a visor (peak), a high crown, and an ear-and-neck flap that could be worn either up or down. A buckled cloth chin strap could be worn across the brow to hold the flap up, or down over the chin. The *first type 1942 pattern ski hat* was based on this previous type; it had shorter ear flaps and a lower crown, but retained the chin strap. The *second type ski hat* had no chin strap, the flap folded up inside the cap, and it had two ventilation holes on each side. All three types were worn by the Force during training, but the second pattern ski hat was the most common.



The reversible parka would also come to symbolize the Force. This is the *third type 1942 pattern parka*, the type most commonly used by the FSSF; it is identifiable most immediately by the fur trim around the hood but not the cuffs, the buttoned neck, and the buttoned flaps over the slanted openings to the front pockets. It was made of water-resistant poplin, and could be worn long or hitched up around the waist by means of the drawstring; the hood was large enough to be worn over the helmet. The *first type 1941 pattern parka* also issued in Italy had fur trim around both cuffs and hood, was longer in the body, and did not have a button neck. The *second type 1941 pattern parka*, with a smaller hood and without fur trim, was used primarily for training in Montana.

Combat uniforms

The Force would soon be issued their "trademark" *mountain trousers* with which they would forever be identified; these would be worn from the end of training, through every campaign until the break-up of the FSSF in November 1944. The mountain trousers were made from a sateen cotton of OD Shade No.3. They had two waistband buttons, belt loops and a zipped fly; zipped slash pockets, two flapped hip pockets, and two large cargo pockets with two-button flaps. The legs were tapered and had elastic foot stirrups to keep them tucked into the boots. The trousers were cut loosely because they were meant to be worn over the wool trousers. "The ski pants (also known as mountain pants), virtually white from many washings while in reserve, and quickly turning greasy black in combat, were the Force mark of distinction within the 5th Army. They were the original baggy pants with their large side pockets and elastic bottoms."⁷

The *Arctic field jacket* was issued to the Force for their landings on Kiska, and was only worn by them during that operation. This was a longer, heavier version of the "M1941" field jacket, made of water-

⁷ Story, page 12



The reversible parka overcoat; unlike other parkas this long coat opens all the way down, with a zipped and buttoned closure. This item can cause confusion when studying wartime photographs; it was never an official issue to the Force but – like many other non-regulation items – it was acquired by many Forcemen.

resistant twill with a blanket wool lining. The coat had buckled adjustment tabs at the wrists and each side of the waist.

The Force was then issued with the M1943 field coat before leaving for Italy in the fall of 1943 – and was thus very probably the first combat unit issued this item. (Although it arrived in the QM Department's Philadelphia facility in May 1943, it did not become standard issue with other US Army units until the fall of 1944 or later.) The M1943 field coat was made from a sateen cotton in greenish OD No.7 shade, and had four pockets, a drawstring waist, adjustable buttoned cuffs, and seven brown plastic front buttons concealed by a fly. This jacket would be worn by the Force throughout their European service.

(A photo shows that at least one Forceman at Anzio, John R. Dawson, acquired a US-made War Aid British Army battledress blouse and added the FSSF shoulder patch, wearing it with wool trousers and overseas cap when out of the line. This was probably an individual case; but half the Allied force in the beachhead were British, so opportunities certainly existed for trading.)

Forcemen were also issued with various types of knit sweaters, including the sleeveless crew-neck, and the long-sleeved pattern with a

low stand collar and five-button V-neck. These were worn under the M1943 field jackets and over the wool shirts.

The reversible parka would soon be issued again in the mountains of Italy. The first type 1941 pattern reversible parka was noticeably longer, reaching to the knees. Of windproof poplin, it had drawstrings around the larger hood and cuffs, which were all trimmed with wolf fur. It had open patch front pockets, and a closed neck. This first type 1941 parka was worn to a limited extent by the Force.

The third type 1942 pattern reversible parka was the most commonly used in the FSSF, although both first and third types can be seen worn within group photos. Shorter than the first type, it was made of a two-ply water-resistant poplin. Only the larger hood had wolf-fur trim; it also had snap

closures at the rear for size adjustment. A drawstring at the bottom hem allowed it to be worn long or hitched up. It had buttoned cuffs, buttoned flaps to the front pockets, and a three-button opening at the neck – examples with a zipped neck are also known. This type of parka would be issued again on the Franco-Italian border late in 1944.

From training at Fort Harrison until deactivation at the end of 1944, the First Special Service Force always had parachute jumper boots as their primary footwear. These "Corcorans" (actually manufactured by a number of companies) were first authorized in 1942 – again, the Force was one of the first units to receive them. Of brown leather, smooth side out, these calf-length boots had reinforced heel and toe caps, gusset-type tongues, rubber soles with checker patterns, sloped heels, and between 11 and 13 pairs of lacing eyelets depending upon the size (they came in many different fittings).

The Arctic overshoes were used in training, on Kiska, and again in the mountains of Italy. During training the Force wore the all-rubber pre-war model, and in Italy the second pattern with a rubber sole and black water-resistant canvas top; they fastened with four spring-loaded metal clasps engaging with flat buckles. The overshoes were worn over the jump boots.

The final type of footwear worn by many in the FSSF were the 1943 pattern combat service boots or "buckle boots"; these began to appear at Anzio and would become very common in Southern France. They were of brown leather, "flesh" or rough side out for greasing rather than polishing, with an integral leather ankle cuff fastened by two buckled leather straps and lined with canvas. The soles were of brown leather, and to save expense they had no separate toe caps.

In all, the Forcemen had an impressive appearance when compared to soldiers of other branches in the field, with the M1943 field coat covered by an oversized reversible parka with a fur-trimmed hood, and the baggy mountain trousers with their bulging cargo pockets, tucked into jump boots. They might also be seen to carry certain weapons that were genuinely unique to the FSSF (see pages 52–53).

EQUIPMENT

The top priority enjoyed by the Force meant that they received the newest and best equipment that the Army had to offer; the FSSF was one of the best equipped units of World War II.

Standard field gear

The following is the standard individual web equipment set for a Forceman carrying an M1 rifle.⁸ The M1923 cartridge belt had ten pouches each holding one eight-round en bloc clip of .30cal M1 rifle ammunition. The belt consisted of two side sections with five pockets each, joined by a plain adjustment section in the rear; like most web gear it was initially issued in OD Shade No.9, a tan color lighter than the greener Shade No.7 introduced in 1943. To distribute the weight, adjustable M1936 suspenders could be hooked onto the belt front and back, and the pack could be

⁸ See Osprey Men-at-Arms 205, *US Army Combat Equipments 1910–88*; MAA 342, *The US Army in World War II (1) The Pacific*, MAA 347... (2) *The Mediterranean*, and MAA 350... (3) *NW Europe*



attached to the suspenders by means of straps over the shoulders hooking to two D-rings on the front of the shoulders.

The common pack was the M1936 *field bag* or "*musette*". Originally designed as an officer's haversack, this was later issued to all ranks of airborne and armored units, and the FSSF was one of the first to receive it. When not hooked onto the suspenders it could be worn as a shoulder bag. Of light OD canvas, it had two large internal compartments, a large outside back pocket and a small side pocket; the flap closed with two buckled straps.

The aluminum M1910 *canteen* fitted inside the M1910 canteen cup; pre-1943 canteens still used aluminum screw caps, but from that year black plastic caps became standard. The canteen and cup fitted into the canvas M1910 cover; like all gear intended to hang from the cartridge and pistol belts, this attached to eyelets along the bottom edge of the belts by M1910 wire double hooks. The M1941 *Carlisle model first aid packet* came in a tin case, and consisted of a bandage and sulfanilamide crystals to put on wounds; the tin case was carried in M1910, M1924, or most commonly

M1942 pouches, the latter British-made.

Forcemen would typically carry an entrenching tool, and before Anzio the old T-handle M1910 "*entrenching shovel*" and carrier were the most common; the carrier was closed with a strap and buckle, and could be attached to the belt or the pack using wire hooks. The M1943 shovel was also used by many Forcemen from spring 1944; this had a fold-over head secured by a screw collar, and the M1943 carrier was a canvas pouch with a hole in the bottom through which the straight shovel handle passed.

Forcemen using the M1 rifle would typically carry a disposable *six-pocket cotton bandoleer* for extra ammunition.

A junior leader carrying the M1A1 carbine or Thompson sub-machine gun would wear the same equipment with the exception of the belt, which would be replaced with the M1936 *pistol belt*, which had eyelets but no integral pouches. Soldiers armed with the carbine would have any number of *double magazine pouches* that slid and snapped onto the pistol belt, each holding two 15-round magazines in pockets under a single flap with a lift-the-dot (LTD) snap. Men carrying the Thompson SMG might have a web *five-pocket magazine pouch*, which also slid onto the

pistol belt, holding five 20-round magazines and secured by individual snapped flaps. It was common to use 30-round magazines, in which case the individual top flaps of the pockets had to fasten around the sides of the protruding magazines (though a 30-round magazine case with a shoulder strap was also used). All these had LTD flap snaps.

The *MIC airborne helmet and liner* was first issued to the Force at the end of training, in time for the Kiska invasion; the liner was characterized by A-shaped web chin straps with a leather chin cup buckled at each end. The *M1 steel helmet and liner* was used by the Force thereafter once it was realized that they were probably not going to be used as airborne troops. Helmet netting and the neoprene elastic band were commonly worn on Forcemen's helmets.

Every Forceman in the combat echelon was issued with the M1911 .45cal semi-automatic pistol complete with its holster and magazine pouch. The M1916 *holster* was made of brown leather, with a wire hook attachment for the eyeletted pistol belt and two slits for sliding onto other belts; it was stamped "US" on the flap, and had an eyelet at the bottom for a leather tie-down lace. The web M1918 *double magazine pouch* holding two 7-round magazines slid onto the pistol belt, with a securing snap on the back to engage one on the belt; it had double LTD snaps on the flap, while the otherwise similar M1923 type had only one central snap.

Every combat echelon Forceman was also issued the V-42 fighting knife with a horsehide sheath (see "Weapons", below).

Other field gear

It was not uncommon to see a Forceman carrying the M6 *gasmask bag* as a general purpose haversack. The mask itself was not needed, but its satchel accommodated rations or ammunition; the top flap closed with three LTD snaps. Another common item in the ETO was the *M1 ammunition carrying bag*, intended for grenades, boxes of ammunition, carbine clips, machine gun ammunition, or whatever else the soldier could shove into it. The bag had a buckled strap closure, and was worn over the shoulder using a web strap.



OPPOSITE
"Outside" and "inside" views of standard web gear as worn by Forcemen carrying the M1 rifle; this is a composite rig assembled from items in both the early tan OD Shade 9, and the darker, greener OD Shade 7 ordered in late 1943. The M1923 cartridge belt is supported by M1936 suspenders. The M1936 field bag or musette attaches to the suspenders by straps over the shoulders which hook to D-rings on the front of the suspenders; in the inside view, note the buttoned back pocket on the bag. Attached by M1910 wire hooks to metal eyelets along the bottom edge of the two pouch sections of the belt are (left to right in outside view) a compass in a waterproofed canvas case; an M1942 British-made first aid pouch; an M1910 canteen; and a T-handle M1910 shovel.

A Forceman at Fort Harrison is shown the proper technique for wearing the rucksack. Here we can see the straps on the side of the pack for attaching the rifle and other items. This soldier wears the second type 1941 pattern reversible parka, with the second pattern ski cap without a chinstrap; its ear/neck flap is tucked up inside. (National Archives)



“Outside” and “inside” views of the mountain rucksack used by the First Special Service Force. It has three outside pockets, one large interior compartment with a drawstring neck, and a zipped pocket for maps, etc, under the main flap. The inside view shows the tubular metal frame, broad shoulder straps and waist belt that helped to disperse the weight of the pack.

Officers in the FSSF carried the *M1938 dispatch case*, which had two large internal compartments for documents, with a clear plastic insert marked with gridlines for maps. The flap closed with two LTD snaps, and the shoulder strap had a slide-on pad.

Many Forcemen had the *lensatic compass and carrying case*. The latter was of waterproofed canvas, closed with two LTD snaps, and had wire hooks for attachment to the cartridge or pistol belts.

Specialized equipment

In training, the Force used the *T-5 parachute with reserve chute*. The Force never did make a combat jump, but were always ready to do so at a moment's notice.

In training the Force were also issued white skis made from hickory; the bindings used the Kandahar steel cable tightening system. The poles were made from white laminated wood.

All members of the Force were provided with the standard QM issue *mountain rucksack* of OD canvas; this had three large external pockets with buckled leather straps, a large internal compartment with a drawstring neck, and a zipped pocket under the large top flap, which was closed with long canvas straps and buckles. The rucksack had a metal tubular frame that fixed to the back of the pack to disperse the weight, with broad web shoulder straps and a web waist belt. Two side tabs with eyelets accepted entrenching tools, bayonets, or anything else fitted with wire hanger hooks; and side straps allowed the securing of

the slung rifle, or any other necessary kit.

The other unusual pack issued to Forcemen was the *Yukon packboard*, which was a natural-color wooden frame with a leather-reinforced olive drab canvas covering. A securing rope could be strung through a series of five metal hooks up each side and tied over whatever load the soldier had to carry. In the Italian mountains the men were always loaded to the limit with their rucksacks and packboards.

An item originally designed specifically for the Force was the *M1943 mountain sleeping bag*. The bag itself was “mummy-shaped” and very light in weight, with a half-length zipped fastening; it was made of OD pleated cotton and filled with down feathers. The bag came with a water-repellent OD cotton case that enclosed it; two tapes at the foot of the bag passed through slits in the case, to secure the whole assembly when it was rolled for carrying. The case laced to eyelets in the bag, and had a snap-fastened flap covering the zipped and laced area of the latter.

WEAPONS

Special weapons

The First Special Service Force had a variety of weapons to meet their specialized needs. The original idea was to arm the entire FSSF with M1A1 carbines, which were light enough to be carried easily during airborne drops. When Operation “Plough” was sidetracked, it became feasible to arm the Force with standard and not-so-standard infantry weapons. The FSSF had two weapons that no other unit in the European/Mediterranean Theater could claim: the V-42 fighting knife, and the Johnson light machine gun.

The *V-42 fighting knife* is one of the primary symbols of the Force; partly designed by Col Frederick himself, it was cherished by Forcemen and coveted by other troops (photos show that some paratroopers of the 504th and 509th PIR acquired them at Anzio). In 1942 the design, based on the British Fairbairn-Sykes stiletto-type commando knife, was sent to W.R. Case & Sons Cutlery Co in Bradford, PA, for production; the “V” stood for Victory and “42” for the year.

The V-42 had a blued, double-edged, double hollow-ground stiletto blade of high-carbon steel; lengths may vary slightly, as each was ground by hand. The grip was of leather washers serrated with fine V-grooves, secured by a pointed steel “skull-crusher” pommel. There was a grooved “thumbprint” rest on the ricasso of the blade, above the manufacturer's name “CASE”. The crossguard had a leather cushion on the upper side.

The horsehide scabbard was acquired from existing stocks for the US Marine Corps stiletto; it had seven metal rivets down each edge, an eyelet for a tie-down lace at the bottom, and a series of vertical metal reinforcing “teeth” across the throat. A belt loop, and a leather strap with snaps, attached the scabbard to the belt and the hilt to the scabbard. It hung roughly 20in long from the belt – this low position was for easy access when wearing a parka.

A total of 3,500 V-42 knives were made during 1942 and 1943, of which 3,420 were issued to the First Special Service Force. Bill Story wrote that, “We simply knew them as the Force knife. It is part of our history. The knife is on the Force flag, our colors.”⁹ The V-42 would later adorn the spearhead patch of the postwar Special Operations Command.

The other weapon especially associated with the FSSF was the .30cal *M1941 Johnson light machine gun*. The Johnson was originally purchased for and issued to the Marine Corps, after Army tests deemed the weapon impractical. The Marines wanted a light yet reliable automatic weapon for their paratroopers – and so did the FSSF. In May 1943 a trade was agreed between the Force and the Marine Corps: the FSSF would get 125 Johnson machine guns, and in return the Marines would receive two tons of the new RS plastic explosive, from the generous issue that the Force had received for training.

The Johnson LMG was produced by the Cranston Arms Co of Providence, RI. It fired the standard US Army .30-06 round, but the feed system was ingenious. A 20-round detachable box magazine was inserted into the left side of the action; but there was an additional

Weapons issue scale per platoon (regulation)

- 1x M1A1 carbine
- 21x M1 rifles
- 2x M1A1 Thompson sub-machine guns
- 2x M1941 Johnson light machine guns or M1918A2 Browning automatic rifles
- 1x M2 60mm mortar
- 2x M1919A4 Browning light machine guns
- 30x M1911A1 pistols
- 30x V-42 fighting knives
- 4x M7 rifle grenade launchers
- 2x M1 bazookas

⁹ Springer, page 34

A soldier of the FSSF poses with his M1941 Johnson light machine gun in the Radicosa hills, Italy, January 1944. The Johnson became one of the symbols of the Force, since they were the only Allied unit to carry it in the European Theater of Operations. This weapon's ingenious feed mechanism is described in the body text. It is said that a favorite trick in the Italian mountains was to fire eight single shots, then to throw an empty Garand clip into the rocks – and wait. Any German tempted to risk movement on hearing that well-known “tinkle,” which announced that a GI needed to reload his M1, found himself facing another 17 rounds of full automatic. (National Archives)



5-round internal magazine. This could be loaded or topped up, either with individual rounds or from a stripper clip that fed into the right side of the action while the 20-round magazine was still attached to the left. The Johnson utilized a combined recoil and gas (blow-back) system, so it fired single-shot from the closed bolt, or fully automatic from the open bolt; this gave improved accuracy for single shots, and improved cooling for automatic fire – the cyclic rate was 400–450rpm. The pistol grip had a safety catch built in below the trigger guard, and the fire selector switch was just above the grip. The weapon weighed only 14lb fully loaded, and had a removable bipod. The Marines never took to the Johnson, but the Forcemen liked it a lot – particularly the Canadians, who had not had much training with the BAR.

Standard weapons

Every member of the original Force combat echelon was issued with the M1911A1 semi-automatic pistol. This weighed 2½ lb loaded, and took a 7-round magazine of .45cal ACP cartridges.

The M1 semi-automatic rifle – or “Garand”, after its inventor – was the most commonly used rifle in the Force, as throughout the US infantry. Weighing about 9lb, this gas-operated weapon could chamber 8 rounds of .30–06 ammunition held together in an en bloc clip; the clip was ejected with the last empty cartridge case, and the bolt would remain open. The Garand took the old M1905 16in bayonet as well as the new

10in M1. The muzzle-attached M7 grenade launcher was created to allow this rifle to project the M9A1 spigot-type rifle grenade; in the FSSF it was issued to two men in each section.

The M1A1 semi-automatic carbine was used by officers, service personnel and heavy weapons crews in the Force; this was the version also issued to airborne troops, with a pistol grip and a folding skeleton butt. It took a special short .30cal carbine cartridge, feeding from a detachable 15-round magazine. Its lack of stopping-power made it unpopular with many, but at less than 6lb its light weight and relatively longer range made it superior to the pistol as the personal weapon for mortar men, bazooka men and machine gunners.

A favorite weapon with many Forcemen for its handiness and short range stopping-power was the M1A1 Thompson sub-machine gun, firing the same .45 ACP cartridges as the pistol at roughly 700rpm. It took both 20- and 30-round magazines, weighed about 11lb loaded, and could be fired either semi- or fully automatic.

The M1918A2 Browning automatic rifle (BAR), the standard infantry squad automatic weapon, would eventually find its way back to the Force in Italy. Replacements were not available for the 125 Johnsons originally acquired; and many of the Rangers who joined the FSSF at Anzio brought their BARs with them. The FSSF much preferred the Johnson while they could get it; at 22lb the BAR was 30 percent heavier, and it could only fire fully automatic. It fired the standard .30–06 cartridge fed from a 20-round detachable magazine, at a cyclic rate of around 500rpm.

One M1919A4 Browning light machine gun was issued to every Force combat section. This air-cooled, tripod-mounted weapon fired the standard .30–06 cartridge from 250-round canvas belts at a cyclic rate of about 500rpm; it was recoil-operated and fired from an open bolt. It weighed around 45lb complete with tripod, and could be carried and set up easily by a two-man team; two other men in the section would also help carry ammunition.

The M2 60mm mortar was also issued one per section and operated by a four-man team consisting of a gunner, assistant gunner and two ammunition carriers. It broke down for carriage into the tube, baseplate, bipod and sights, and weighed 42lb assembled. It fired the M49A2 high explosive, M302 WP smoke, and M83 illumination rounds. Carrying enough ammunition for this hungry weapon was, as always, the main problem for infantry moving across country.

Many of the original trials of the M1 2.36in rocket launcher or “bazooka” were carried out by the Force at Fort Harrison. The bazooka had a 61in tube, weighed about 13lb, and fired M6 and M7 antitank rockets (which also proved most effective against bunkers and in street fighting.) The rockets carried a propellant charge ignited by a battery-powered electrical firing system in the launcher.

VEHICLES

The Weasel

Geoffrey Pyke's original concept of an elite group of para-skiers to jump into enemy-occupied mountains also included the requirement for a vehicle that could carry equipment and supplies, tow skiers, and be durable enough to survive the worst winter conditions. It had to be able to maneuver in snow and non-snow environments, to be fast



One of the Force's T-15 cargo carriers or Weasels on Kiska. Originally designed for Operation "Plough", the T-15 and later T-24 model went on to serve throughout the US Army after the cancellation of that project. It proved effective in both snow and mud conditions, although its suspension was inadequate to cope with the rocky terrain of the Italian mountains in summertime. (National Archives)

enough to outrun enemy skiers, and to be armored against at least small arms fire. The first task for Project "Plough" was to develop such a vehicle.

The Office of Scientific Research and Development designed a tracked vehicle that was contracted to the Studebaker Corporation for production. The T-15 light cargo carrier, or "Weasel", was $10\frac{1}{2}$ ft long by $6\frac{1}{2}$ ft wide, and weighed 4,077lb; it had broad rubber tracks, and was steered with tiller bars. The T-15 could seat four men, or a driver and a large amount of equipment and supplies, and had a collapsible canvas tilt (roof). Fully loaded the T-15 could reach about 36mph, with a range of over 170 miles. There were originally to be enough Weasels for the entire combat echelon of the Force, but when Operation "Plough" was cancelled the FSSF no longer needed such a large number.

The T-15 and its successors would continue in the service of the Force and the US Army throughout the war, proving to be an excellent workhorse in snow or mud – the latter capability being useful on Kiska. An improved T-24 model was used to some extent by the Force in Italy and Southern France.¹⁰ The final version of the Weasel, the M29, was used by the ex-Forcemen in the 474th Inf Regt (Sep) in Norway – the environment for which the T-15 had originally been created.

¹⁰ Dawson & Kutemeier (see Biblio), quoting Col O.J. Baldwin, the Force's former Supply Officer, state that some 750 were shipped to Italy for the FSSF, but most remained crated at Santa Maria, though a few were used for training FSSF replacements. FSSF veteran John R. Dawson remembered a call for volunteers to drive Weasels for the Rapido crossing, but he is unaware that any were actually used.



Cannon Company

Prior to Cannon Co joining the Force at Anzio in spring 1944, when the survivors of Darby's Rangers were folded into the FSSF, the motor pool consisted of just a few jeeps and Weasels. Cannon Company consisted of four M3 halftracks mounting old French M1897A4 75mm field guns, plus two motorcycles and more jeeps. Colonel Darby had referred to Cannon Co as his "ace in the hole", and the M3s were later identified by club, spade, diamond and heart symbols painted on the fenders or gun shields. Cannon Company was led by a first lieutenant, with a second lieutenant as executive officer (XO.) The company headquarters consisted of a clerk, a scout, a radio operator and a medic; there was also a motor pool section headed by a sergeant. Each M3 had a crew of a commander, gunner, assistant gunner, loader and driver.¹¹

The M3 75mm Gun Motor Carriage, originally fielded as a stop-gap tank destroyer, was of much more use as an all-purpose self-propelled gun. It had a rate of fire of anything between six and 26 rounds per minute depending upon urgency and the skill of the crew, and carried about 200 rounds. In the FSSF company each M3 also mounted an M1919A4 light machine gun and an M2HB .50cal heavy MG mounted on the rear, and carried additionally a 60mm or 81mm mortar. These halftracks provided the infantry of the Force with much needed mobile artillery; they could halt, lay down a barrage, and move before retaliatory fire could arrive. Cannon Company was a perfect fit for the fast-moving regiments of the FSSF.

¹¹ Ross, page 237

First Special Service Force veterans march on with pipes and drums at a ceremony held during their 58th annual reunion in August 2004. The idea of a Force Association began almost as soon as the FSSF was deactivated; it held its first reunion in Helena, MT, in August 1947, and this has been repeated every year since then, alternating between the United States and Canada. With their blue blazers displaying their jump wings and decorations, gray slacks and white shirts, the veterans now wear the green beret of Special Forces with a red-white-and-blue flash.

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PLATE COMMENTARIES

A: TRAINING, MONTANA, 1942-1943 **A1: Canadian Forceman, Fort Harrison, late fall 1942**

The typical dress for training at Fort Harrison, except that this Canadian has retained his old regimental bonnet from the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. Canadians were proud of their regimental histories, and many chose to retain their Canadian Army headgear throughout training - and even while serving overseas. He wears the leather A2 flight jacket which was issued to all Forcemen during training, but which they were not permitted to wear off the post. The wool ski trousers have zipped slash pockets, a zipped fly and a three-button waistband; elastic loops secure them inside the ski-mountain boots, which could be attached to skis or used for mountain climbing and other winter activities. His only web gear is his M1923 belt; his weapon is the M1 rifle with the long M1905 bayonet. Only the web gear and rifle would be retained after training; the clothing would be traded in for a combat uniform. This figure is based on a Signal Corps photograph.

An American and a Canadian Forceman play checkers in the barracks at Fort Harrison; both wear the A2 horsehide flight jacket (see Plate A). Enlisted men had to turn their jackets in before going to Europe, but many officers retained theirs. The American wears the wool overseas cap with the Force's red-white-and-blue cord piping round the flap; the Canadian has kept his Balmoral bonnet, with the regimental badge of the Canadian Scottish set on a tartan patch. (National Archives)

A2: Forceman, summer service dress, August 1942

This soldier has just received his wings for completing two consecutive jumps; jump training was conducted first, to weed out anyone who did not have what it took to become a member of the Force. (In the event, the Force never made a combat jump.) He wears a uniform that was prescribed for the FSSF during the summer months of training. The sleeves of the khaki cotton M1938/41 shirt have been cut short just above the elbows, and the khaki cotton M1937 trousers at the knees; long hose-style knee socks are worn with his new parachute jump boots. The hat is a khaki cotton garrison hat - at this date without branch-color piping. This dress was unique to the Force; Col Frederick had them ordered exclusively for the summer months. "The quartermaster was asked to supply shorts. What arrived turned out to be summer khakis cut off at what someone thought was the knees" (Story, page 12.) This figure is based on a color photograph taken at Fort Harrison.

A3: Forceman during ski training, January 1943

This illustration is based on a Signal Corps photograph taken in the mountains surrounding Helena, MT. The soldier wears the second type 1941 pattern reversible ski parka, with the white side out and the hood up over his ski cap; zippers have been added to the pockets. The wool ski trousers are worn under the white overtrousers. The ski-mountain boots are used with skis of white-painted hickory and steel cable bindings of the Kandahar model. This Forceman carries a





One of the rubber boats used by the 1st and 3rd Regts for the landings on Kiska. The FSSF trained in amphibious assaults while based at Norfolk, VA; they would use rubber boats again to assault the Iles d'Hyeres off Toulon during the Southern France invasion of August 1944. (National Archives)

rucksack with a white cover hiding the olive drab color, and a slung M1 rifle. In the event the Force would never use skis in a combat situation.

B: ALEUTIANS & VERMONT, SUMMER 1943

B1: Forceman, 1st Regiment; Operation "Cottage", Kiska, August 1943

This soldier wears the Arctic field jacket with the shoulder patch of "Corlett's Long Knives" (ATF 9) on both sleeves; the jacket was a longer, warmer version of the so-called M1941 field coat, with adjustment straps on the sides and wrists and a lining of blanket wool. His newly issued mountain trousers would become a trademark of the FSSF; they have zipped slash pockets and fly, two large pleated cargo pockets with buttoned flaps, and two rear hip pockets with buttoned flaps. Elastic loops under the feet keep them secured inside the jump boots. The knit wool "jeep" cap remained a favorite among Forcemen. His equipment is the standard M1923 cartridge belt with M1936 suspenders and M1942 first aid pouch, and he carries the holstered M1911A1 pistol. This figure is a composite of several Forcemen photographed on Kiska.

B2: Sergeant, 2nd Regiment; Amchitka airfield, August 15, 1943

This NCO of the 2nd Regt, prepared to jump onto Kiska if he is needed, is based on a photograph taken on the runway at Amchitka. He wears the Arctic field coat with mountain trousers and jump boots; note the Force shoulder patch below the ATF 9 patch. His parachute equipment consists of T-5 main and reserve chutes, the packs on this occasion being white and OD respectively – the canopies were all white; and around his neck he wears a yellow B4 life preserver. The airborne-modified M1C helmet has a net cover. Under the parachute gear this soldier wears the M1936 pistol belt and suspenders, M1910 canteen and shovel, first aid pouch, and five-pocket magazine pouch for his M1A1 Thompson SMG. The V-42 fighting knife is carried at his ankle, with the long sheath tucked under itself for easier access.

The summer uniform prescribed for the Force during training (see Plate A), and presumably copied from the example of the Canadian khaki drill uniform worn by some personnel when they first arrived in summer 1942. The uniform was nothing more than the standard khaki cotton shirt and trousers cut off at the elbows and knees, worn with high socks and jump boots, and the khaki cotton overseas hat. (National Archives)



One of "Freddie's Freighters" (see Plate C): Pvt Wilson Lynn, who is carrying blood plasma and blankets up to the wounded on the Cassino front on January 15, 1944, provides an example of just how much can be lashed to a Yukon packboard. (National Archives)

B3: First lieutenant, FSSF Air Detachment; Fort Ethan Allen, VT, September 1943

This pilot was one of six to fly for the FSSF Air Detachment between summer 1942 and fall 1943. The detachment had two C-47 Skytrains, three Stinson airplanes, two C-78 Cessnas and an L-74 Fairchild; the C-47s were used for parachute training and the smaller aircraft for reconnaissance and liaison. The detachment was eventually disbanded after the final parachute training at Fort Ethan Allen in the fall of 1943; it was decided that it was surplus to requirements after Operation "Plough" was cancelled and

the Force was reconfigured as assault infantry, and only one pilot and a Stinson were retained. This pilot, based on a studio portrait, wears the officer's service coat with pilot wings, and his Force jump wings and red-white-and-blue aiguillette. His rank is displayed on his epaulets, the "US" insignia on his upper lapels and the Force's crossed arrows on the lower lapels. His officer's service hat has had the wire stiffener removed to produce the pilots' favored "crush" appearance. He wears the officer's drab shirt; the trousers, generally referred to as "pinks" because of their shade, are tucked into jump boots – a rarity amongst Air Corps pilots. Based on a studio photograph of a FSSF pilot.

C: THE WINTER LINE, ITALY, 1943-44

C1: Forceman, 3rd Regiment; Monte La Difensa, December 1943

This figure is based on several photos of the 3rd Regt and the Service Bn, which both contributed to the task of resupplying and sustaining the 1st and 2nd Regts holding La Difensa after the successful assault – a round-the-clock job that lasted several days, and exposed "Freddie's Freighters" to enemy fire on harsh terrain in miserable winter weather. This Forceman wears the third type 1942 pattern reversible parka with M1 helmet, mountain

trousers and jump boots; he has his V-42 knife tied to his leg. The mountain rucksack is filled with supplies; his M1 rifle has been attached to it to leave his hands free to grip ropes. His web gear is the standard M1923 cartridge belt with M1936 suspenders and M1910 canteen, and he carries an ammunition box.

C2: Forceman; Radicosa hills, January 1944

Based on a photograph, this figure wears the first type 1941 pattern reversible parka, characterized by its longer length, the wolf-fur ruffs around both the hood and the cuffs, and the lack of a neck opening. The parka was designed to be worn over another jacket, and by this date the Force had already been issued the M1943 field coat. He wears the mountain trousers tucked into Arctic over-shoes with waterproofed canvas tops – an economy modification of the all-rubber first pattern; these were readily available to Forcemen during the mountain campaign in Italy.

C3: Forceman, 1st Regiment; Radicosa hills, January 1944

Another figure based on numerous photographs taken in this area; like C1, he wears the third type reversible parka with mountain trousers, jump boots and the M1 helmet. This Forceman carries the Yukon packboard loaded with a Browning M1919A4 machine gun and three steel 250-round ammunition boxes. On top of these is his folding stock M1A1 carbine. He wears an M1936 pistol belt with suspenders and an M1943 folding shovel. After sustaining heavy casualties on Monte Sammucro at Christmas 1943, the remainder of the 1st Regt joined up with the 2nd Regt to make a sweep through the hills around Radicosa. The winter conditions were appalling, and German resistance was determined.

D: ANZIO, FEBRUARY-MAY 1944

D1 & D2: Sergeant and Forceman, 2nd Regiment, April 1944

While the 1st and 3rd Regts held portions of the front line on the Mussolini Canal, the 2nd was employed for reconnaissance, intelligence-gathering, and raids to demoralize the enemy. They always operated at night, in patrols of widely varying strengths. The Germans soon learned to fear these "black devils", as they called the Forcemen from their blackened faces and hands. Here, based on photos of Forcemen preparing for such a raid, a sergeant (D1) wears the old "M1941" field coat with mountain trousers and jump boots; this jacket was not then issued to the FSSF, but many acquired it while at Anzio. The sergeant carries the M1A1 Thompson SMG, a popular weapon on raids, and has two Mk IIA1 grenades on his suspenders. The Forceman (D2) wears the winter combat or "tanker" jacket normally issued to armored crews - another non-regulation item that often found its way into the possession of FSSF men. He too wears the mountain trousers and jump boots, and his M1 helmet shows camouflage paint. This mounted troops' M1910 cartridge belt had a space specifically for the M1918 pouch for two pistol magazines; he carries the .45cal M1911A1 in an M1916 holster on his right side, and on his left the V-42 knife in its tied-down scabbard, in addition to his M1 rifle.

D3: Forceman, 3rd Regiment; Mussolini Canal, February 1944

From February to May 1944 the 1st and 3rd Regts held nearly 8 miles of the Anzio perimeter on the Mussolini Canal. In February the Germans made many dangerous assaults against the Allied lines, but the Force's grip on their sector never faltered. This soldier wears the M1943 field coat with mountain trousers and jump boots; the M1943 jacket was issued to the FSSF as early as the fall of 1943, well before being used by the Airborne in late summer 1944 and the entire US Army in winter 1944/45. He wears knit gloves, and a wool scarf generally donated by the American Red Cross. His gear is mostly standard; note the neoprene foliage band around his helmet, the OD wool blanket shoved under his suspenders, and the M6 gasmask bag filled with ammunition and grenades.

D4: "Death sticker"

These were left behind enemy lines by FSSF raiders from the Anzio beachhead in spring 1944; the German slogan roughly

translates as "The Worst is Yet to Come." It was common for Forcemen to place these in buildings where Germans were sleeping, or on the foreheads of enemy dead. General Frederick realized the value of psychological operations; the Germans opposite the Force became extremely jumpy, and never did find out that the FSSF, holding a divisional front, was only of regimental strength.

E: ANZIO BREAKOUT & ADVANCE TO ROME, MAY-JUNE 1944

E1: Forceman, 1st Regiment; Anzio breakout, May 25, 1944

This soldier, a composite from several photos, is dressed and equipped lightly, for quick movement in open-country fighting. He wears the M1937 wool trousers with the M1937 wool/flannel shirt, both standard US Army issue. Both resupply difficulties and the warm weather prompted many Forcemen to wear the wool trousers in place of the mountain trousers during spring 1944. His helmet, jump boots, web gear and weapons are all conventional; he carries extra rifle clips in a use-and-throw-away cotton bandoleer.

E2: Staff sergeant; Rome, June 4, 1944

Based on a photograph taken on the evening that the Force entered the city, this section leader wears the standard issue FSSF uniform and equipment, including the M1943 field coat whose use the Force had pioneered the previous year. One point to note is the five-pocket pouch for 20-round Thompson M1A1 SMG magazines, with the longer 30-round magazines shoved into it. The Thompson was usually carried by section leaders, but was also popular with any other Forcemen who could get their hands on one.

E3: Forceman, Cannon Company; Rome, June 1944

This private, previously of Darby's Rangers, is a crewman from one of the company's four M3 75mm GMC halftrack self-propelled guns. The Force inherited the halftracks after Darby's Rangers had been almost annihilated during the battle for Cisterna in the Anzio fighting at the end of January. The halftracks were identified as Diamonds, Hearts, Clubs, and Spades, each having the appropriate emblem painted on the fender or gun shield. The former Ranger wears the standard M1937 wool shirt and trousers with jump boots. The battle-hardened Rangers naturally did not want to lose their identity when they joined the FSSF, and it was common practice for a while to wear their old Ranger scrolls above the Force shoulder patch, as here.

F: SOUTHERN FRANCE, 1944

F1: Sergeant, 2nd Regiment; 1st Airborne Task Force, September 1944

The FSSF was assigned to the inter-Allied 1st Airborne Task Force on August 20, 1944. This NCO wears the airborne troops' M1942 jump jacket with his mountain trousers, jump boots and M1 helmet. The jump jacket was worn by most of the airborne units in the 1st ATF; it was not issued to the Force, but photos prove that many Forcemen did acquire them in southern France. The web gear comprises the M1936 pistol belt, field bag or "musette", and suspenders with an M1918 pistol magazine pouch looped on sideways; a rain poncho is carried under the flap of the musette. His weapon is the M1941 Johnson LMG, unique to the FSSF in the European theater.

F2A & 2B: Private Snyder and T-4 Owen, 3rd Regiment; Alpes Maritimes, fall 1944

Based on the cover illustration of *Yank Magazine* of December 29, 1944. Private Snyder, left, wears an M1C airborne helmet, a sweater over his M1937 wool shirt, mountain trousers, and M1943 "buckle boots." His equipment is an M1936 pistol belt, suspenders, and a rucksack draped with his "M1941" field jacket. The M1 rifle

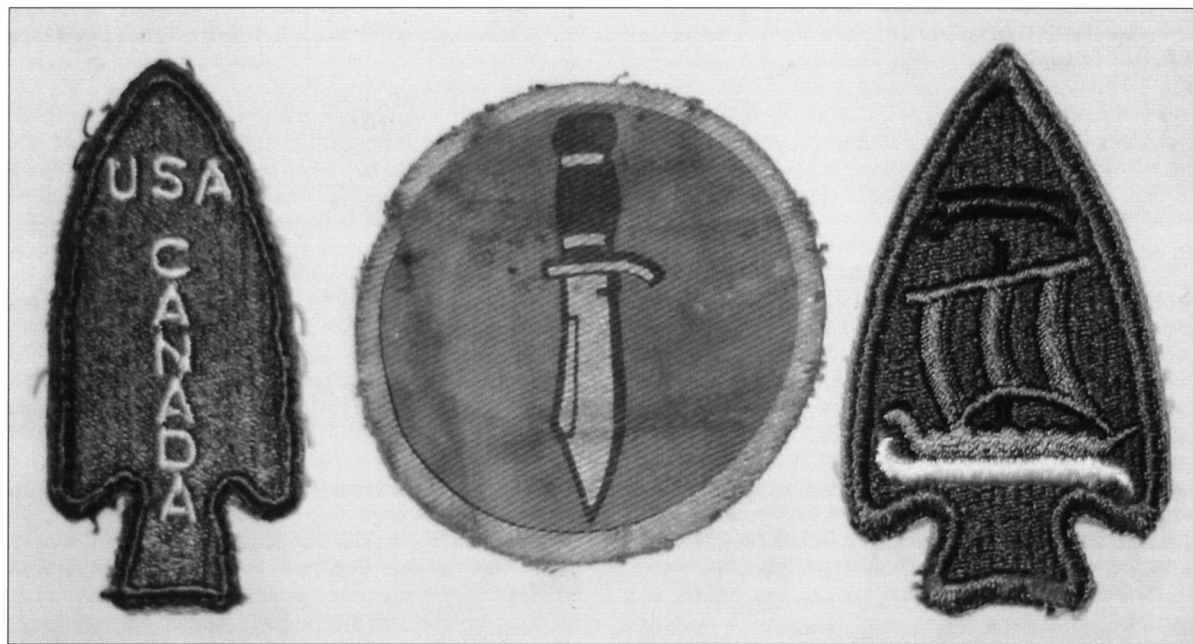
The three Forcemen in the foreground are parading to be awarded the Silver Star at Nettuno in the Anzio beachhead on March 14, 1944. The recipients wear a variety of uniform combinations: (left), the M1943 field coat and mountain trousers; (center), M1943 coat and M1937 wool trousers; and (right), the so-called M1941 field coat with mountain trousers - all three wear jump boots. The color guard wear wool shirts and trousers. The arrangement of the colors in this fashion was standard for the Force: the American flag on the right, the Union flag of the Canadians in the center, and the Force colors on the left - see Plate H1. (National Archives)

cleaning rod case hangs from his belt. Owen, right, wears the M1 helmet, wool shirt, mountain trousers with M1943 trouser suspenders, and "buckle boots"; in his pocket are antitank rifle grenades. The gun in the foreground is an M1919A4 Browning MG that has been adapted with a BAR bipod and a German MG13 stock. The Force was never issued with the M1919A6 Browning incorporating a bipod and shoulder stock, and battlefield adaptations to weapons and equipment were common in the FSSF.

F3: First lieutenant, 1st Regiment; Alpes Maritimes, November 1944

On the mountainous Franco-Italian border parkas were issued once again; this platoon commander wears the third type M1942 pattern, white side out, with mountain trousers tucked into M1943 boots. His helmet has a lieutenant's bar painted in white. On his M1936 pistol belt are two double carbine magazine pouches, a canteen and a first aid pouch. Slung over his shoulder is an M6 gasmask bag for personal items. He has white leather horsehide gloves, and carries the M1A1 folding-stock carbine issued to all officers in the Force; he also has a holstered M1911A1 pistol and the V-42 fighting knife.





G: SERVICE UNIFORMS, & SUCCESSOR UNITS
G1: Canadian Forceman; Helena, MT, 1943

Based on photographs of the Force while stationed in Montana, this figure wears the M1942 wool service coat, M1937 wool shirt and trousers, and a khaki mohair tie. The trousers are tucked into a pair of polished jump boots, a fiercely prized prerogative of airborne troops. The wool garrison or "overseas" cap is adorned with the red-white-and-blue branch color piping of the Force. The brass "CANADA" and crossed arrows discs are worn on the right and left lapels. Later American Forcemen would wear US decorations and Canadian Forcemen Canadian decorations. All qualified Forcemen wore the silver US "jump wings" on the striped red-white-and-blue oval backer; and all members of the Force wore the red-white-and-blue aiguillette round their left shoulder, and the red spearhead patch at the top of the left sleeve.

G2: Second lieutenant, 1st Canadian Special Service Battalion, January 1945

After the break-up of the Force, all jump-qualified Canadian Forcemen became the 1st Canadian Special Service Bn, although this unit would last only a month. During this time the Canadians were reintroduced to Canadian Army battledress and insignia, "being allowed to keep only our treasured and distinctive parachute boots... one small compensation was that we were issued the cherry berets of the Airborne regiments" (Cottingham, page 180.) Based on photos of the 1st Cdn Spec Svc Bn deactivation ceremony, this officer wears the Canadian BD with American jump boots, the maroon beret worn by all British Airborne Forces, and M1937 web pistol. His insignia are a mixture of Force and Canadian items. The beret is adorned with a special insignia created by the ex-Forcemen themselves – a piece of red felt with the FSSF crossed arrows insignia. He wears his rank "pips" on infantry-red backing on his epaulets; at the top of each sleeve is the "CANADA" national title. Below this on both sleeves, in British style, is the FSSF spearhead

Shoulder sleeve insignia – see Plate H3A, 3B & 3C. (Left) First Special Service Force; (center) Amphibian Training Force 9 or Kiska Task Force, of which both this printed type and embroidered examples are known; and (right) 474th Infantry Regiment (Separate).

(seen worn on the left only.) Above his right breast pocket are his US jump wings, and above the left pocket his Canadian wings, over his Canadian Volunteer Service Medal ribbon. Many of these men went on to be instructors in England, retaining elements of this uniform; others would go to the 1st Canadian Parachute Bn and would adopt that unit's insignia.

G3: First lieutenant, 474th Infantry Regiment (Separate); Oslo, Norway, July 4, 1945

The 474th was made up of former members of the FSSF, Darby's Rangers and the Norwegian-American 99th Infantry Battalion (Separate). Based on a photo taken during a parade on this date, this particular officer was a member of the original Force from Fort Harrison. Some jump-qualified Force members were given a choice; others were selected to go into the Airborne, and those not selected were transferred into the 474th Infantry (which meant foregoing jump pay) – more than three-quarters of the original jump personnel would go into the Airborne. The lieutenant wears the new wool field jacket or "Ike" jacket as his service dress, M1937 wool trousers bloused into jump boots, and the wool/flannel shirt and khaki mohair necktie. The parade was conducted under arms, so he wears his M1 helmet with a lieutenant's bar painted in white on the front, and his holstered M1911A1 pistol and magazine pouch on his web pistol belt. The insignia on his jacket consist of the first lieutenant's bars at the end of the epaulets, and on his lapels the US national insignia above the infantry's crossed rifles. Above his left pocket he displays his jump wings without an oval backer, above ribbons for the Good Conduct, American Campaign, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign, and European-African-Middle

Eastern Campaign medals. Below the ribbon bars on the pocket flap are the Combat Infantry Badge above the Expert shooting badge with qualification bars for individual weapons. On his left shoulder is the 474th Infantry patch, and on his left forearm the four overseas service bars representing six months apiece – i.e. two years. On the right shoulder he would wear his former First Special Service Force patch.

H: INSIGNIA & COLORS

H1: Colors of the First Special Service Force

The Force colors were approved in February 1943 and were received in April of that year. The colors were cut from scarlet wool with the standard US Army regimental eagle in the center. The coat of arms is simply the V-42 fighting knife designed specifically for the Force. The bottom scroll bears the name of the Force, and the motto scroll in the eagle's beak was left blank.

H2: Company guidon of 1st Company, 2nd Regiment

Company guidons were introduced to the Force after training at Fort Harrison. The device, in white on a scarlet wool field, consisted of the crossed arrows in the center, below the regimental number and above the company number.

H3: Shoulder sleeve insignia (patches):

(3A) The Force patch was designed by the Heraldry section of the Office of the Quartermaster General in September 1942. The National Defense Headquarters in Ottawa approved the patch with the word "CANADA" as a suitable replacement for the national title worn by all other Canadian soldiers overseas.

(3B) The patch ordered worn by all members of ATF 9 or Kiska Task Force, on both shoulders; many Forcemen wore it on the right only, or with the FSSF patch beneath it on the left.

(3C) The patch of the 474th Inf Regt (Separate) perpetuated the red spearhead of the FSSF, the scroll of Darby's Rangers, and the Viking ship of the 99th Inf Bn (Separate).

H4: Branch color piping

The red-white-and-blue combination had been used during World War I for Citizen Training Camp hat cord, and later by the Citizens Military Training Corps. When Col Frederick requested a branch color from the Quartermaster, it was recommended that the Force use up the readily available piping of the disbanded CMTC.

H5A: FSSF shoulder cord

The aiguillette was made from dyed parachute suspension lines, and attached to the left epaulet button by tape loops; the Forcemen were required to purchase these lanyards at their own expense.

H5B: Parachute oval

The oval backer for the US jump wings was striped red, white and blue; the edge and pin holes were outlined in yellow-gold thread.

H6: Canadian and American jump wings

Prior to joining the Force some Canadians had passed through jump schools at RAF Station Ringway in England and/or at Fort Benning, GA, to qualify for Canadian jump wings with the 1st Cdn Para Bn, before volunteering to transfer to the FSSF. A handful of such men displayed their Canadian wings while at Fort Harrison, sometimes above their later US wings. All Forcemen who successfully completed jump training at Fort Harrison were issued the US jump wings. The majority of Canadians earned American, not Canadian wings; but after the deactivation of the FSSF all jump-qualified Canadian Forcemen were given their Canadian wings.

H7: V-42 fighting knife

The V-42, which partially designed by Col Frederick himself, is described in detail on page 51. It was issued only to Forcemen in the combat echelon.

H8: 4th Ranger Battalion shoulder scroll

After the disbandment of Darby's Rangers following the annihilation of the 1st & 3rd Bns at Cisterna, the remaining men – mainly from the 4th Bn – were assigned to the Force. Many continued to wear their unit scroll above their new FSSF spearhead.

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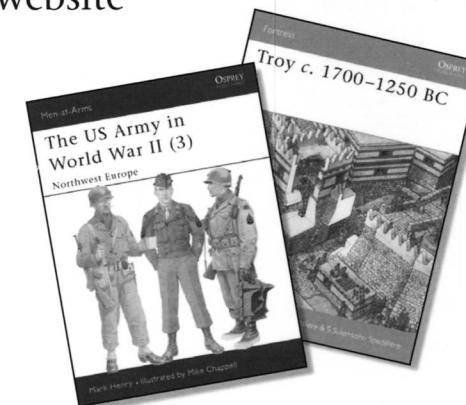
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