



SPECIAL FORCES AND THEIR OLDER BROTHERS

FELLOW AMERICANS AND PATRIOTS: AN INJUSTICE NEEDS YOUR ATTENTION AND DEMANDS ACTION

OUR OLDER BROTHERS

A WWII unit, the First Special Service Force (FSSF), has had the Congressional Gold Medal approved and is in the process of being minted for presentation to the FSSF Veterans and their Assn later this year or in early 2015. This award was not approved for two years, largely because the politicians had not heard of the FSSF, nor has most of the United States to be honest. In fairness, once made aware of Force history politicians of both parties quickly approved the medal. I have seen no U. S. media coverage of this prestigious honor. The Canadians are much more supportive. I happened to see an item in the Toronto Star, when the President signed the award on 12 July 2013, after approval by both the Representatives and Senators.

Every U. S. Army Special Forces Group (SFG) and The Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR) trace their lineage back to the FSSF and have adopted much of the same selection and training. The Force existed from 1942 to 1944. Google any SF Group for their FSSF lineage. The 12th SFG is from 6th Company-2nd Battalion-1st Regiment, or 6-2-1 for example. (See FORCE STRUCTURE below)

The FSSF was an elite, regimental sized light infantry unit composed of half Canadian/half American Soldiers and is the WWII forerunner of today's U.S. and Canadian Special Forces. Organized and trained at Ft. William Henry Harrison, near Helena, Montana, it was commanded by Col. Robert T. Frederick. The unit was formed, trained and equipped in about seven months of rigorous training: parachute; mountain/cold weather; unarmed combat with emphasis on night patrols and the V-42 knife designed exclusively for the Force.

The unit was formed in 1942 to parachute into Norway and disrupt the Germans processing "heavy water" needed for the atomic bomb. (Operation Plough) The Plough mission had to be on the Manhattan Project level, and Force vets will not discuss it, since they'd been ordered not to. The troops never knew they were training for the Norway mission or what that involved. Ordered not to talk about it they just don't.

Clearly the Force's priority level was highest at this time and direct communication with the White House was very likely. An early snowmobile called Weasel was developed for the mission to carry two men and equipment and/or tow a string of skiers.

FORCE STRUCTURE

Their unique structure was tailored to the Plough mission. There was the Headquarters and three regiments; each regiment had two battalions. Each battalion had three companies that had three platoons each. The Service Battalion was cooks, clerks, mechanics and other support personnel. The other half of the Force was the Combat Echelon, the trigger pullers. Manning levels were all lower than in conventional Army (CA) units.

FORCE TRAINING

Not having the luxury of the time taken at Army schools, the Force conducted its own training: Parachute school (1-4 days); Demo School; Ski School at the end of a railroad spur (quarters were empty railroad cars, in the middle of a Montana winter); and Rock Climbing. Hand to Hand Combat was taught by a former Shanghai policeman. ("I'm not here to teach you how to hurt," he would say, "I'm here to teach you to kill.")



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Weapons training consisted of all weapons in the U.S. inventory and those of foreign countries.

Physical Training – double time everywhere on and sometimes off the post to "Muscle Mountain". Daily training was vigorous in itself, but after that training, Soldiers ended the day doing 75 pushups. There were also small unit exercises, then larger unit training. Physical Training was still done during the tough unit training. Soldiers regularly went on their own runs after duty hours "just for the fun of it".

Then word came that Operation Plough was cancelled due to lack of air support from the British, who simply did not have the necessary aircraft. In April 1943 orders arrived for Norfolk, Virginia and six weeks of amphibious training. FSSF was to spearhead the largest amphibious invasion in history up to that time.

After the first three days the Force's superior fitness was so obvious that further training was in full combat gear. After two weeks the required training was completed one week ahead of the schedule. A chance meeting at the NCO club between a Force First Sergeant and a Navy Chief Petty Officer let the Force men know they'd be graded on unit smoothness, crossing a beach silently with weapons, but mainly on how quickly each platoon got down the net into landing craft, ready to head for shore.

Army platoons averaged one minute, but naturally Marines had the best time, 52 seconds. Force guidelines were: a platoon taking longer than 45 seconds would have to explain that to other platoon members, and to their new platoon leaders. During the timed test, because of their superior conditioning, the FSSF went down the net controlling the descent with their arms, not using feet at all. The best time was 32 seconds. The slowest Force platoon was 44 seconds. (FSSF platoons were smaller than the other units, of course.)

For a unit like the Force there was no turning back in an assault and no need for reserves. All hit the beach and drove on the objective together. They were combat ready, but where? Unproven, they were assigned to spearhead the invasion of Kiska, in the Aleutian Islands chain.

KISKA - AUG. 1943

The Japanese had captured these desolate islands, U. S. territory. The Force cold weather, mountain and amphibious training were to pay dividends here. Intelligence had Kiska defended by 12,000 Japanese. As it turned out the Japanese had left undetected a day or two prior to the invasion. Only a hungry dog greeted them. One soldier summed it up best with "there was nobody home." "Friendly Fire" and weather were responsible for deaths and hospitalization. Lessons learned there paid off on the next assignment.

After three days on freezing, damp ground they were ordered back to San Francisco by Admiral Nimitz. Their orders read Italy. They narrowly avoided being split up as individual replacements for Infantry units. Due to Col. Frederick's Washington contacts they were able to be sent to Italy as a complete unit. They were seen as "glamour boys" by those already fighting there.

ITALY - DEC. 1943

The mission after arriving in Italy was to seize two peaks dominating the Liri valley, the route to Rome. Mte. la Difenza, is 3,120 ft and an adjoining lower peak is Mt. Remetania. Held by crack German units that could direct artillery fire onto the entire valley between the two mountain ranges, the American Fifth Army had been held up for weeks at this point known as the Winter Line. After scouting and patrolling they decided not to attack this height from the front as other units had. Two Infantry Divisions were in the rear area after being badly shot up trying that approach. (There is an excellent Winter Line Museum located in Venafro.)



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The Force chose to climb the vertical rear of the mountain, deemed impossible by the 5th Army leaders and local infantry units. It was now December with snow, rain, fog, mud and freezing temperatures. There was no air support and roads were nearly impassable, both due to bad weather. Everything favored the defenders.

The Force was attached to the 36th ID, just returned from the rear area after being reinforced and refitted after their failed assault on Mte. la Difenza. The 36th men they talked to assured them they would be wiped out when they did their assault. The 36th did not know about the route selected by the Force.

The assault began when men carried 75-100 pound rucksacks across the base of the mountain during the night and stopped when they reached the climbing area, about six miles. They took cover in a water filled ravine whose sides were relatively dry, brush on the upper part hiding them from view from the top. They did not dig in lest a shovel hitting a rock would give them away. Rations were eaten cold, if at all. Allied artillery began that night and kept the defenders under cover. German guns were aimed down the front slope, anticipating another frontal assault. Force orders were: no firing before dawn; use knives or bayonets.

The first assault company reached the ascent area just before midnight. An advance party met them and had placed ropes for the most difficult areas. The climb began. The plan was to get three companies to the top, then spread out for the actual assault. There were no serious accidents during the climb. Any noise and they would have been slaughtered. The rain continued and dense fog developed. Supporting artillery shifted to another section of the peak, and the artillery passed over their heads, fortunately with no short rounds.

At 0430 Battalion ordered the companies to deploy and begin the advance. They advanced slowly, due to conditions. At 0530 a German burp gun opened up, beginning the battle for the mountain top. At first the Germans fired downhill, the former attack route since complete surprise had been achieved. When the Germans realized their mistake squad and individual combat began until the Germans ceased resisting.

In about four hours the Force had captured what held up the entire Fifth Army for weeks!

When the expected reinforcements did not appear, some Force officers pleaded to go on to secondary objectives. At that point mortars and artillery began coming in. Support Battalion began up the rear slope with supplies. Some men made three trips a day up the mountain, since mules could not climb such a slope.

After the top was secured maybe they expected leave as reward for doing what they were told was impossible. Fifth Army commander Lt. General Mark Clark instead told them there were more mountains waiting and he kept his word. Their reward was to clear all peaks in the rest of the Liri valley and each one was a repeat of the combat on Mt. la Difenza. The weather remained the same – lousy.

A very high price had been paid. When finally removed from combat fewer than 600 of the original 1800 of the Combat echelon were left. Service Battalion had been reduced about 50%. The stalemated Anzio beachhead was to be their reward for taking Mte. la Difenza. Col. Frederick was promoted to Brigadier General in January 1944 in recognition of the Force's "impossible" achievement.

ANZIO - FEB. 1944

After R & R they got replacements and some men returned from hospital after wounds, exposure, trench foot, or exhaustion. New replacements were placed in training companies for abbreviated Force tactics and skills courses. At the end of January orders came for Naples They would board landing craft and join troops already at Anzio. They were assigned a division's sector of the defensive line on the stalled beachhead.



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On Anzio Force strategy was constant attack, so Germans would not know how thinly held were their lines. Nightly patrols were run and all their training was used here. They regularly surprised German defenders by their noiseless approach. Stickers and cards were left on dead Germans, with FSSF patches or a German phrase meaning roughly, "THE WORST IS YET TO COME". Their knives were mostly used on these nightly forays. This was Force Psychological Operations! Cards were often left in occupied barracks buildings.

After a month on Anzio the Germans moved back from about a hundred yards from the front line to 2 1/2 miles from the front line, trying to escape the deadly night patrols. The Force became the most feared unit on Anzio. The Germans called them Black Devils because of their blackened faces on deadly night patrols/raids.

ANZIO BREAK OUT – May 1944

Now Gen. Frederick's worst fears were realized. The Force was to spearhead a breakout from the bridgehead in broad daylight. This negated all their night fighting skills and reduced their flexibility during an attack. Frederick was still thought of as "eccentric and crazy" by Lt. Gen. Mark Clark, Fifth Army Commander, the same commander who had three Ranger Battalions decimated when ordered to a conventional attack.

During the breakout, the Force advanced much faster than other units due to their unique tactics and had to fall back the first night to keep the front line aligned. The breakout was successful and the Force then resumed their mission of seizing high ground on the way to Rome. Since he knew the Normandy invasion date, Lt Gen. Clark wanted Rome captured before the Normandy landings, to get the headlines. Because of that decision some German units escaped capture. The capture of Rome two days before the Normandy invasion was world-wide news. The FSSF was headlined as being first into Rome. Other units claimed that distinction.

Frederick was being promoted again (23 JUN' 44), and this time out of the Force and to Major General. He would lead the 1st Airborne Task Force in the invasion of Southern France (the Champaign Campaign).

FRANCE - AUG. 1944

The Force's assignment was the Isles D'Hyres (du Levant and Port Cros) to eliminate coastal batteries covering mainland beaches where the 3rd ID was to land. The attack was for the night of 14 August and the morning of 15 August, exactly one year after the Kiska invasion. The Force landed from rubber boats again and captured or disabled the batteries with relatively light casualties compared to Italy

Once on the mainland the Force was assigned to Frederick's 1st Airborne Task Force at Cannes. They followed the coast past the Riviera to the mountains along the French-Italian border. While there was still combat the end of the war was in sight.

THE END - DEC. 1944

Bivouacked at Villeneuve-Loubet, France, they formed up for a parade on 5 December. The Force flag was rolled up and put in a sleeve while they saluted. They were being disbanded! Canadians were ordered out of those ranks and into their own three ranks; the two groups stood facing each other. The Americans honored their Canadian brothers by not filling in the empty spaces in their ranks. As the Canadians were marched away those simple commands did what nearly a year of constant combat could not.

ELIMINATE THE FORCE!



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The next morning the Canadians got onto trucks and as they pulled away, tough American combat Soldiers began running after the trucks, some for a mile or more with tears unashamedly running down their faces, saying goodbye. There weren't dry eyes in the trucks either, as Canadian vets told me decades later.

Never defeated in combat, they were routinely assigned missions in Italy that Infantry Divisions had shown they could neither perform nor wanted. FSSF's continued successes were viewed as impossible by observers. The Force remained effective after casualties (136%) that would have rendered other units ineffective. For every Force man killed they killed 25 enemies. For every Force man captured they took 235.

When I spoke with to vets at ceremonies honoring them, they said they were "just doing what they trained for and didn't understand what all the fuss was about." Fewer than 150 of these great guys are left.

The Force had been disbanded by the conventional Army (cA); the Canadians returned to their forces, while the U. S. Soldiers were sent to Airborne units as individual replacements. "Special Units" were no longer needed was the reason given by the cA.

Let's fast forward to the next three wars. Ranger Companies had to be hastily formed and sent to Korea. (1950-1953) U.S. Special Forces was founded in 1952 and some of them served in Korea.

Viet Nam had SF teams deployed there and conventional units had to create specially trained troops to be used where necessary. They were usually detested by their own higher headquarters.

In Afghanistan in 2001 after 9-11, and after the cA could not respond for over twelve months, SF teams began operating there weeks later. And faster than anyone thought possible the Taliban were driven from the country. SF and CIA teams accomplished in two months what the Red Army had not in ten years!

The SF teams' reward was to be sent back to Ft. Bragg to shave and shine their boots. Senior officers had been appalled to see pictures of bearded SF soldiers on horseback, blending in with their surroundings and its people as they're trained to do, while waiting for the Taliban to return. Taliban did of course when the vacuum was not filled. Some things don't change in cA thinking, when you look back to WWII's FSSF.

I emailed the Pritzker Military Library urging them to scoop major media and report the award and the incredible events that justify such a prestigious honor. We'll see what happens. Let's try to educate today's backyard patriots that wave their flags and don't really know why. Perhaps signaling for another beer? Why won't U.S. media mention an award of such prestigious honor, instead of showing some of the sorry things that pass as nightly news? Politicians and media at every level should be asked this question by us. Now our weapons are computers, telephones and letters. Korea is the Forgotten War. Our FSSF heroes cannot be forgotten by a country as great as ours. It's just plain wrong! Let me assure you there is not a Force news blackout in Canada. Please email, call or write any level of our news media with these questions.

SOURCES

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2. Underhill, Adna H. (1994) *The Force*, Arizona Monographs, Tucson, Arizona
3. Jim Phillips, *the Devil's Bodyguard*, Phillips Publications, P.O. Box 168, Williamstown, New Jersey 08094
- 4.. Documentary CD, (2003) *Daring To Die*, Canadian Ally.com (Four Stars)



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FSSF COMBAT SERVICE

ALEUTIANS CAMPAIGN, 1943

Kiska and Little Kiska – 15 – 19 August 1943

Segula Island – 17 August 1943

ITALIAN (NAPLES-FOGGIA, ANZIO, ROME-ARNO) CAMPAIGNS 1943–1944

Monte la Difensa, Rocca d'Evandro – 3–6 December 1943

Monte la Remetanea, Rocca d'Evandro – 6–9 December 1943

Monte Sambúcaro, S.Pietro-S.Vittore – 25 December (Christmas Day), 1943

Radiciosa, S.Vittore – 4 January 1944

Monte Majo – 6 January 1944

Monte Vischiataro – 8 January 1944

Anzio – 2 February – 10 May 1944

(Breakout from Anzio)

Monte Arrestino – 25 May 1944

Rocca Massima – 27 May 1944

Colle Ferro – 2 June 1944

Rome – 4 June 1944

SOUTHERN FRANCE, (ALPES-MARITIMES) CAMPAIGN, 1944

Port Cros – 15 August 1944

Îles d'Hyères – 15–17 August 1944

Grasse – 24 August 1944

Villeneuve-Loubet – 26 August 1944

Vence – 1 September 1944

Drap – 3 September 1944

L'Escarène – 5 September 1944

La Turbie – 6 September 1944

Menton – 7 September 1944

RHINELAND CAMPAIGN, 1944

Franco-Italian border – 7 September – 30 November

Source of Combat Record: Wikipedia (FSSF)

See also Wikipedia- General Robert T. Frederick-for references and further reading. More details on the FSSF and his amazing career. [\(Highly Recommended\)](#)

More references on page 8



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FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE ASSOCIATION

This is the only WWII Association whose membership is growing. There have been reunions every year beginning in 1946 and locations alternate every year between Canada and the United States. When the vets felt it was time to end the Association due to their age, their children and others begged to take over the day to day running of the Assn. The vets narrowly approved this change in their by-laws! Entire families are now active and since their children now have children, they also participate.

I made a trip to Italy in 2010 to meet some of the FSSF guys that set the bar so damn high for those of us who followed in their footsteps. There was to be a climb of Mt. la Difensa, up the "easy" side. I'd been in the Austrian and Italian Alps for one year each during Active Duty with the 350th Infantry Regiment, and thought I'd seen mountains. Mte. la Difensa is steep and unbelievably rocky. A bulldozer that had been hired to make a rough path for us could not get all the way up the "easy" German side. I was surprised that ninety or ninety five percent was able to be done.

After vets failed to make the climb to the top of Mte. La Difensa on an earlier trip a camouflaged wheelchair was brought by a Canadian family to get them to the top. Six vets were now gotten to the top, as I saw. Family members and friends to the front and rear of the wheelchair's stretcher-like arms, pushing, pulling, and lifting made this possible.

Seeing the vets standing once more where they had been so many years ago defies description. There was raw emotion at the top of this peak and others, as battle sites on the trip were honored. It was something tangible, I could almost taste it. Families roamed the various peaks trying to find the spot where a loved one might have died.

One vet I spoke to said he had voted against others running the Assn and was very happy to admit he was wrong. I jokingly asked him if there was a peak in the Liri Valley without a monument to the FSSF. He gazed at the peaks on both sides from Mt. la Difenza's top, and then answered "No, I don't think so." Some I learned were erected by local Italians.

Italian "Friends of the Force" travel to the U.S. or Canada every year for reunions. Trips by the FSSF Association to Italy could not have as rewarding without their informed and generous assistance. The Mte. la Difensa climb in 2010 would simply not have been possible without their intervention and experience in dealing with the red tape involved. You think our government is bad. The FSSF Association and reunions could not be the same without them.

Having eight days to be with the vets in Italy was priceless. Getting to know Assn members was equally rewarding, and new friendships were easily formed. After this experience I vowed to myself to watch their backs.

Now it appears that time has come since I have seen no U.S. news coverage of this award of a Congressional Gold Medal. That's just plain wrong! Korea is the forgotten war. We should all honor our "older brothers", the forgotten heroes of WWII. This whole story is too incredible not to be known.

The Force kept a low profile because of their original highly classified mission. It's only natural good Soldiers would remember those orders and not talk about it. The Special Service Force was chosen as their name since Army Special Services were entertainers. FSSF were contacted by other units wanting entertainers, so it worked, at least on our guys.

Col. Frederick got the idea from Col. David Sterling's WWII Special Air Service (SAS), now the British "Delta Force". Neither officer wanted to have a unit's name that attracted attention. This country must be educated about the FSSF and their unbelievable combat record. There is no further need for the media blackout we see..

Please share this information with family, friends, co-workers, politicians or anyone else you think can help. Let's use social media and have a blizzard of messages received by the media before the Congressional Gold Medal is given to surviving FSSF vets this fall or early next year. Don't forget the politicians either. It's a big election year.



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Where are the anger, disgust and disapproval for this shameful lapse? How can a story like this be ignored? When you turn your back on its Soldiers, you turn your back on America. Let us not be diverted from taking action because of the small number of vets still with us; please take action because of it.

The people in this country are fine. Our government and today's media bosses don't seem to get it.

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU

When this saying was told to me one day in Italy I was warned I should be prepared for eerie coincidences connected with the Force. Sure enough, about a month later I stumbled onto a direct tie between my former SF unit and the FSSF. Now I find myself with a self imposed project to make known to those in this country the entire FSSF story. I'm starting to think it doesn't end. But then not doing this would make me a lesser man and Soldier.

MSG Frank, Special Forces Assn Life Member and FSSF Member

All the above regarding the FSSF Association from:

Documentary CD, *In the Footsteps of the Force*, (2011) RiMo (Mountain Girl) Productions LLC, (9 days-six veterans- 3 nations – 1 Force) Made during the 2010 FSSF Assn's return to Italy's Mte. la Difensa, other shrines and locations, and some personal recollections.

LEARN MORE

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