



## Victory Remembered

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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The idea began in England in the mind of a scientist named Geoffrey Pyke. He envisioned a small, elite and well-trained commando unit that would be able to fight behind enemy lines in winter conditions. It was 1942 when the United States and Canada accepted the challenge to form, train and command the First Special Services Force (FSSF) which was later nicknamed the "Black Devils".

Robert T. Frederick, a young officer who had doubts about the feasibility of being able to create the required special military force was put in charge of the group. His example of never asking any of the troops to do anything that he wouldn't do earned him respect and encouraged those who were assigned to work with him.

Fort William Henry Harrison, a base that is situated near Helena Montana had similar geography and weather conditions to German-occupied Norway. Because of this, it was chosen as the training site for the 365 men who would be prepared for their expected overseas mission. A great deal of secrecy was involved. In fact, many of the recruited volunteers were only told that they were going for parachute training and didn't even know where this would occur until they arrived in Montana.

Despite significant cultural differences, the Americans and Canadians were united by their rigorous training and united dedication to the Force. For six days a week, beginning each morning at 4:30 a.m., the unit developed expertise with martial arts, weaponry, problem-solving, parachuting and skiing. The obstacle courses, mountain climbing and long marches put them in top physical condition. In a matter of only a few months, they had become a fierce and cohesive team with remarkable skills.

Unexpectedly, however, their mission to Norway was cancelled. After a period of uncertainty and fear that the unit might be disbanded, they were sent to Italy and France.

The FSSF were only together for two years. During that time they had 251 combat days, captured 27,000 prisoners and suffered 2,314 deaths. They were feared by the Nazis and are still honoured around the world but especially by the people in Europe for whom they fought.

In 1968 William Holden starred in the "Devil's Brigade" movie that was based on this true story. In 2014, an excellent video documentary entitled "Victory Remembered" was made. I had the opportunity to watch both of these this month. You see I unexpectedly met John Hart who lives and works in Medicine Hat and he gave me a copy of the documentary to review. John is very involved in preserving the memory of the "Black Devils" and supporting veterans and their family members.

As we approach November 11th, I have been thinking about two things. First of all, you can't really remember what you didn't experience or you don't understand. John, the movie and the documentary will help you to gain insight. Secondly, some people love peace but don't know how to make it. The First Special Services Force knew how to make peace and were willing to sacrifice in order to ensure that others could enjoy it.

I hope that Remembrance Day is different for you this year. May your understanding and thankfulness reach a deeper level than ever before!