

Fall 2011

VOL. 25, NO. 2

[FIRST SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE – PART III](#)

By
Don Simpson

(**AUTHORS NOTE:** This is the third and final installment in our history of the First Special Service Force).



Crossed Arrows of the 1SSF

The First Special Service Force came off the line on 9 May 1944 to prepare for the breakout from the Anzio perimeter; and ultimately the liberation of Rome. D-Day for the breakout was set for 23 May with H-Hour at 0630. The VI US Corps mission was to seize the high ground east of the Anzio perimeter and link up with attacking Allied forces moving up from the south. The Force was to attack on the right flank, breach the German main line of resistance, advance to cut Highway 7 and consolidate north of the Cisterna railroad. By 1000, 1st Regiment was through the German lines, had cut Highway 7 and was digging in north of the railroad. Unfortunately, they had advanced ahead of other units and were ordered to withdraw 600 meters to more defensible terrain.

The attack continued the next day, and by the 25th, the German defenses had collapsed and

enemy forces withdrew to the northeast. On the 27th, General Mark Clark changed the objective to Rome. The Force was temporarily attached to the 3rd Infantry Division. They remained in attack mode as the Germans went into a full scale retreat. At 0100 on 4 June, General Frederick received a message from the II Corps Commander, Major General Keyes, to secure six bridges over the Tiber River north of the Vatican in the City of Rome. The mission was



MG Keyes, LTG Clark, BG Frederick and others during drive to Rome.

given to 2 and 4 Companies of the 1st Regiment. They climbed on tanks from Colonel Hamilton Howze's 13th Armored Regiment and crossed the city limits at 0620 where they immediately received heavy German anti-tank fire. The two lead tanks were hit and put out of action. The infantry dismounted and a three-hour fire fight ensued. Finally, at 1100, a route around the flank of the German position was

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President's Report-Ian Larson



I hope you are enjoying the great summer we have been having. It came late, but we certainly have had a nice stretch of glorious weather!

Myles Grant has more details in his column,

but the proverbial “light at the end of the tunnel” for the Museum renovation completion is in sight. The interior and exterior work is almost complete. The next major item to make the building ready for occupancy is the procurement and installation of a security system. Artifacts that were stored in a warehouse in Lacey have been moved to temporary storage at a secure warehouse in the Logistics Center at JBLM. Furniture and other items, including Cannon Shop property, have been moved back to the Museum. Following installation of the security system and occupancy of the building by the Army, it will take several weeks to reconstitute the galleries. Reopening is tentatively planned for spring next year.

Our Bylaws were recently revised by the Board to fully meet Army Regulation 210-22 and JBLM guidelines for private organizations operating on military installations. The revised Bylaws were reviewed by the JBLM Staff Judge Advocate office and deemed legally sufficient, following which the Directorate of Morale, Welfare and Recreation office for private organizations authorized the continued operation of The Friends of the Fort Lewis Military Museum as a private organization on JBLM. The Friends have operated continuously on Fort Lewis/JBLM since 10 April 1973.

The Bylaws state objectives of The Friends of the Fort Lewis Military Museum as follows:

1. Foster interest in the historic and continuing role of the United States Military Forces in the development and life of the Pacific Northwest.
2. Inspire enthusiasm in said history by actively supporting the museum at Fort Lewis

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Director's Report-Myles Grant

Dear Friends,



The completion of the museum renovation is drawing to a successful close. The current building occupancy date for the museum staff and volunteers is 23 September 2011 and we should be moving into the building shortly thereafter. Wade Perrow Construction and its subcontractors did an outstanding job on the project and the building looks fantastic inside and out!

While the museum will be open for human occupation this month, we are still some ways off from getting the museum itself open to the public. We obtained funding from the Joint Base Garrison for the museum's security system, but too late to enable us to meet our original goal of opening on 6 December – the 92nd anniversary of the building's first inauguration as the Red Shield Inn in 1919. Contingent upon manpower and materiel resourcing, the new opening target will be late March or early April 2012.

Another significant event this quarter was the second relocation of the museum's collection of artifacts, this time from an off-post storage location to a secure location on post hosted by the Directorate of Logistics. The move was required because funding to continue the storage of the artifacts off post was tied to the building renovation contract which was drawing to a close. In addition to relocating the artifacts, the museum staff and volunteers also oversaw the delivery of the museum's office furnishings, display cases, library and archive materials back into the main building. The moves were conducted by A & E Moving and Storage Company in a very professional manner. The moves were planned and very effectively and efficiently conducted and I want to deeply thank all the volunteers who assisted with the orchestration and oversight of these projects – we could

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found and they were on the move again. Fighting and movement continued throughout the day with both 2nd and 3rd Regiments getting into action. By 2300 that evening, the Force



held eight bridges across the Tiber. General Frederick was hit three times during the day, bringing his total number of wounds for the war to nine. He could lay claim to being the most shot at and hit general

officer in American history.

BG Frederick in Rome, riding on M-8 Light Armored Car, known as the "Greyhound"

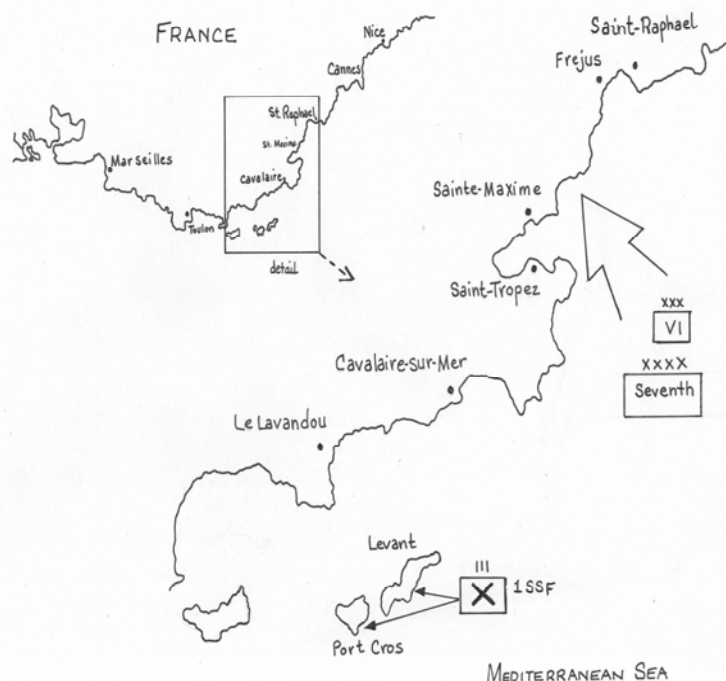
On 6 June 1944, word was received that the long awaited Allied landings on the coast of occupied France had begun. That same day, the Force was relieved by elements of the 3rd Infantry Division and moved into a bivouac area at Lake Albano, south of Rome, the site of the Pope's summer retreat. Evidently, the Force stole the Pope blind in order to improve their living conditions. General Frederick had to put out the word that everything must be returned or it would forever be a black mark on the reputation of the Force.

During this period, General Frederick was alerted for reassignment. He was selected to command the First Airborne Task Force during the landings in Southern France in August. The 1ABTF was made up of the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, the 550th Glider Infantry Battalion, the 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion, known as the GOYAs (Get Off Your Backsides), the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment and the British 2nd Parachute Brigade. Frederick was promoted to Major General upon as-

suming command. Colonel Edwin Walker, the 3rd Regiment Commander, replaced Frederick.

The amphibious landings in Southern France would be conducted by units of the US VI Corps under the command of Lieutenant General Lucian Truscott. The landings for what was code named Operation Dragoon were to take place along the French Riviera between

Map of Southern France invasion



Cannes and Toulon. D-Day was 15 August 1944. The 1st Airborne Task Force was to be dropped behind the landing beaches to block enemy counterattacking forces.

The Force was given the mission of seizing two islands in a three island group known as the Isle d'Hieres located on the left flank of the landing area. These islands were believed to contain coast artillery units that could engage the invasion force from the west flank.

The d'Hieres are composed of three islands twenty-five miles east of Toulon and some seven miles offshore. The two islands to be taken were Isle de Port-Cros and Isle du Levant. The third island, Porquerolles, was farther to

sea and to the west and was not considered a threat to the landing beaches. Both islands were rugged and movement would be difficult. Once seized French troops would replace the Force and garrison both islands.

The plan of attack was for three regiments to attack simultaneously, the 1st taking Port-Cros and the 2nd and

3rd taking Levant. They would attack from the seaward side up steep cliffs.

Walker reasoned that any obvious landing beach would be heavily mined and defended. The landings would be made by rubber boats after being towed to within 1000 yards by landing craft.



**MG Frederick as
Commander, 1st Airborne
Task Force**

During the remainder of July and into August, the Force concentrated on amphibious training. On D Minus One, PT boats took up positions on the flanks to act as early warning and provide protection for the landing parties. The Force cast off shortly after midnight on D-Day, 15 August, exactly one year after the landings on Kiska. The first party landed on Levant at 0130 and the Forcemen began moving up ravines to the top of the island. Both regiments were ashore by 0200. Atop the cliffs, they occupied assembly areas and then moved out for their objectives, three 200 year old French forts. One objective, believed to contain a battery of four 164 mm guns, was found to contain nothing but mockups. There was, however, resistance from the Germans and it was not until 2034 hours that Levant was secured. 110 Germans were captured.

On Port-Cros, surprise was achieved and by 0630, the eastern half of the island was secure.

Fighting was a bit tougher than on Levant and it wasn't until 1315 hours on the 17th that the last German resistance was overcome and the residents of the last of three fortresses surrendered. They were encouraged to give it up by naval gunfire from the British battleship HMS Ramilles.

On the 19th, the 2nd and 3rd regiments were relieved by the French on Levant and 2nd Regiment moved by landing craft to the mainland. 1st Regiment remained on Port-Cros until the situation stabilized. On the afternoon of the 17th, the last two regiments moved to the mainland and joined the 2nd Regiment in a bivouac area at Sylvabelle.

On the 19th, the Force was alerted to move to St. Raphael to join Major General Frederick's 1st Airborne Task Force that was then sweeping east along the coast toward the French-Italian border. On the 21 August, the Force relieved the British 2nd Parachute Brigade. During the drive east they fought alongside the 509th and the 517th. On 2 September, the Force reached Nice. Six days later, they reached the French-Italian border.

Operations continued until 28 November when the force was relieved by the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the highly decorated Nisei Japanese unit. The Force would now fall victim to what was known as the Canadian Conscription Crisis of 1944. Casualties had far exceeded the Canadian War Headquarter's forecasts. The Canadians also felt they had lost control when the Force was transferred from Italy to Southern France, which was essentially an American show. Sixth Army Group wanted to retain them because of the heavy mountain fighting ahead. However, the decision was made to disband.

On 5 December 1944, the deactivation occurred. The Force paraded en masse at their encampment at Villeneuve-Loubet. After the deactivation order was read and the colors cased, the command "All Canadians Fallout" was given. The Canadians broke ranks and moved to the rear of the formation where they formed for the first time as a



1SSF Veterans in Halifax, Nova Scotia Canada for the 63d Reunion, 25 August 2009

separate Canadian unit, the 1st Canada Special Service Battalion. The Americans remained at attention in ranks leaving vacant the openings left by their departing comrades. As the 442nd Regimental Band struck up a march, the Canadians passed in review in front of their American comrades. The following evening the Canadians boarded trucks for Marseille and subsequent movement back to Naples.

The remaining American contingent was redesignated the 474th Infantry Regiment (Separate) under the command of Colonel Walker. On 6 January 1945, a draft was received from European Theater Headquarters for all parachute qualified soldiers to join the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions. These two units had suffered heavy casualties during the Battle of the Bulge. Three days later, 8 officers and 345 enlisted volunteers departed for their new assignments.

On 1 April, the 474th was reassigned to Third Army and carried out security duties until the

end of the war. On 9 May 1945, two days after V-E Day, the 474th was sent to Norway as part of an organization known as Task Force A to undertake the disarming and repatriation of the 300,000 Germans in that country. It is ironic that an outfit that was initially formed to take the fight to the Germans in Norway would end up there after the close of hostilities to manage their surrender and repatriation.

The First Special Service Force was in being from 20 July 1942 until they deactivated on 5 December 1944, just short of two and one-half years. In that time, they sustained 401 killed, 2,253 wounded and 124 missing, a number that exceeded its highest strength of 2400. Their soldiers were awarded numerous decorations for valor and as a unit they were awarded three US Presidential Unit Citations.

Their heritage and lineage lives on in today's Special Forces Command.

**SOURCES For Part III, First Special Service Force
Final installment.**

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Ross, Robert Todd. The Supercommandos: The First Special Service Force: 1942-1944. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 2000.

Map of Southern France by Alan Archambault.



Movie Playbill, 1968

President's Report cont. from pg. 2

with special funds not normally authorized by the Government, procurement of historical items and such other assistance as may be requested.

3. Provide gifts and financial contributions

4. Operate exclusively for charitable, literary, scientific, and educational purposes within the meaning of Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Comments on the Bylaws are welcome. We will make the Bylaws available on-line for those with internet access. For those who do not have on-line access and wish to receive a copy of the Bylaws in the mail, please call our Secretary, Mr. Joe Koczur at 253-584-2699.

Friends Treasurer Don Simpson concludes the three part series on the First Special Service Force with the article in this issue of The Banner. This interesting and informative article covers the breakout from Anzio, liberation of Rome, the invasion of Southern France and deactivation of the organization in December, 1944.

Our next Brunch meeting will be on 2 October 2011 at Patriots Landing. Our guest speaker will be COL (Dr) Kris Petersen, Chief of Psychiatry at Madigan Army Medical Center. His topic is on a subject of current importance to the Army. It is "PTSD: Impact on Soldiers and Their Families." Please mark your calendars and plan to join us!

Ian Larson

Directors report cont. from pg. 2

not have done it without your help!

As for the way ahead, the museum staff will be relocating from our temporary quarters in building 7913 back to the museum in late September. The next step will be the design and installation of the museum's security system which is scheduled to be complete by 26 October along with preparatory work and securing funding to enable the return of the museum's collection of artifacts. By early November we hope to be able to relocate the artifacts to the museum and then start the task of reconstituting the museum's eight galleries – consisting of over 200 exhibits and displays – in order to make the museum ready for a grand reopening in spring 2012.

Myles Grant

**FRIENDS OF THE FORT LEWIS MILITARY MUSEUM
ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2011**

Place: Patriots Landing
Time: 1145-1230 Social Hour
1230-1330 Brunch
1330-1412 Program

Program: Our guest speaker will be COL (Dr) Kris Petersen, Chief of Psychiatry at Madigan Army Medical Center. His topic is on a subject of current importance to the Army. It is **"PTSD: Impact on Soldiers and Their Families."**



Please return your reservation form and check by Wednesday, 28 Sep 2011. Last minute reservations may be made by calling Paul Knoop at (253) 279-2598.

Return this form to LTC (Ret) Donald A Simpson, 6615 79th Street W
Lakewood WA 98499. Make checks payable to "The Friends".
Cost of Brunch for members and Guests: \$16.00 each.

Number of Reservations: _____ Total Amount Enclosed: _____

Name of Member: _____ Telephone Number: _____

Names of Guests: _____

Residents of Patriot's Landing do not need to make payment for the meal, but should make reservations for seating.

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The *Banner* is printed four times a year and is mailed to all members of The Friends of Fort Lewis Museum. Articles may be submitted to the Editor or left with the Director of the Fort Lewis Museum. The Friends assume no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or other materials submitted for publication.

Editor.....Paul Knoop
 Assistant Editor.....Don Simpson

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***Friends of the Fort Lewis Military Museum
PO Box 331001
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