

tion appropriate to a light infantry force properly dug in and augmented with artillery. Still it was a surprising mission for an organization like the Force, an organization designed and trained for offensive raiding. Defending the Anzio beachhead put to use only a fraction of the Force's capability. (The dispositions of the units in the beachhead are shown in map 18.)

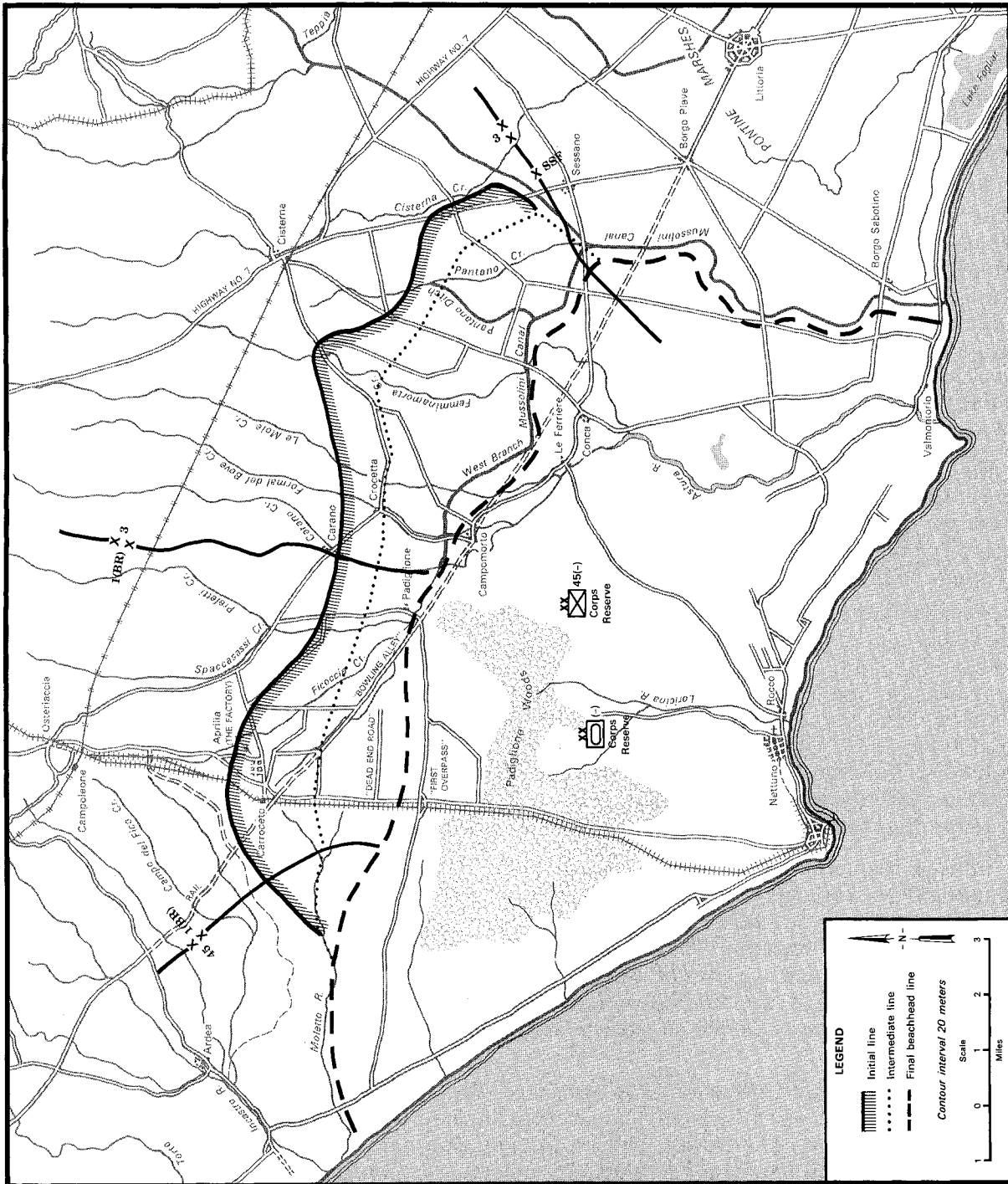
Promoted now to brigadier general, Frederick assigned the 3d Regiment to the upper eight kilometers of the line that ran along the Mussolini Canal. The 1st Regiment occupied positions along the canal from the 3d Regiment's right flank to the sea five kilometers away. The 2d Regiment formed the reserve. The 456th Parachute Artillery Battalion had moved to Anzio with the Force in an association that had now become all but permanent. The FSSF also received the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion (light tanks and armored cars) and some engineer elements in attachment. An additional two to three other artillery battalions supported the FSSF with their fires. The Force occupied this sector with little change for ninety-eight consecutive days.

The enemy forces facing the FSSF came primarily from the Hermann Göring Division. They numbered about 1,250 men organized into 2 provisional battalions plus separate companies, including a tank company of 12 to 15 Mark IV medium tanks. The enemy was also supported by artillery and 88-mm guns displaced forward into outposts.⁴⁰

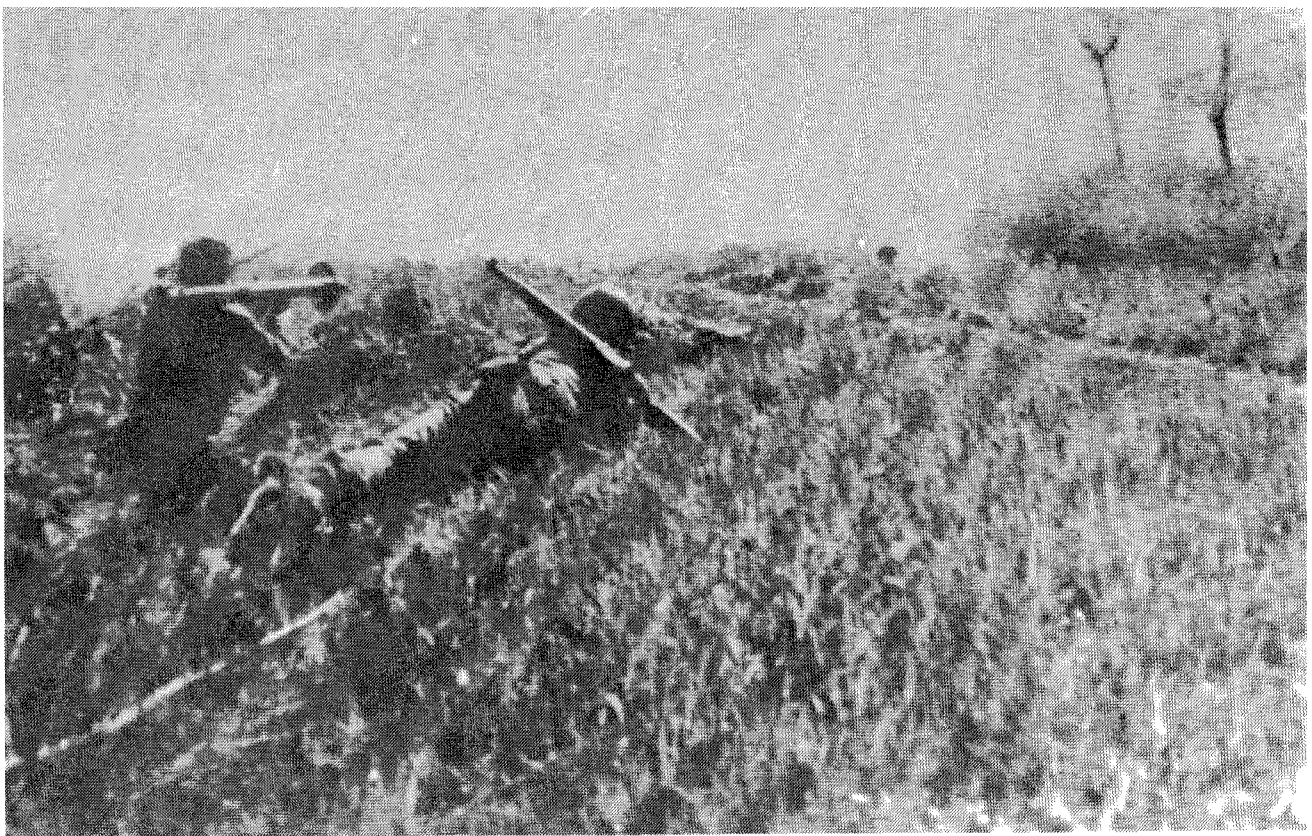
Despite its formidable opposition, the Force began to impress its unique personality upon the beachhead from the first night of its arrival. Taking over the line from the 39th Combat Engineer Regiment, the men of the Force discovered that the Germans had outposts right on its doorsteps, an intolerable condition. That night, the 3d Regiment sent out five patrols to start clearing a buffer zone between the lines. Crossing the canal on improvised foot bridges, the patrols infiltrated to a depth of 1,000 yards. The next day, the artillery used the information the patrols obtained on enemy locations to bombard the Germans. The 1st Regiment followed suit with similar patrols the next night.

In this fashion, the Force initiated a pattern that it repeated over the next several weeks. Every night, strong combat patrols eliminated the forward enemy outposts, using the techniques of surprise and attack that they had perfected in the mountains. The Germans did not like it. They soon pulled their outpost line back a distance of 1,500 to 2,000 yards, granting the Force the breathing room it desired. By seizing the initiative in this manner, the Force immediately established its moral ascendancy and tactical superiority over the Germans.

Once the respective defensive lines stabilized, the fight in the eastern sector became a contest to see which side would control the no-man's-land that now existed between them. The terrain had an unavoidable influence on this struggle. The area occupied by the Force and immediately to its front was billiard-table flat. The high water table prevented the digging of foxholes except on the high berm of the canal itself. Protection was available here and there in the form of infrequent tree plantings, scattered farmsteads, and drainage ditches. Farther back, the Germans occupied the hills and low mountains rising above the beach. Neither side could move about on the flat terrain during the daytime without attracting artillery fire. At night, however, the snakes came



Map 18. The plan for the beachhead defense, 5 February 1944



A 2d Regiment bazooka in action, Cerreto Alto

out of their nests. Force patrols moved out to occupy nighttime outposts and to explore and drive the Germans out of theirs. The Germans tried to do the same. The result was a fluid situation in which small bodies of men laid traps and bumped into each other as they circulated within the disputed ground. The men of the Force truly enjoyed this game of cat and mouse—and they were very good at it.

The night combat also took the form of raids and deliberate attacks by the enemy. But German attacks on the canal defensive line were rare and ineffective; the Force detected them early and handled them easily.

Force raids were designed primarily to keep the Germans off-balance and to demonstrate how vulnerable they were. Initially, the raids were small in scale, with specific objectives. For example, on 10 February, a composite company from the 2d Regiment seized the town of Sessuno and held it throughout the night. A week later, another company raid against a suspected enemy ammunition dump near Sessuno resulted in fourteen enemy dead.⁴¹ In late February, a reinforced platoon set a trap in a row of houses used by the Germans to shelter patrols. Over the course of the night, the platoon captured several groups of enemy soldiers, totaling 111 men, at the cost of 2 men wounded. These prisoners told their interrogators that the Germans believed that the Force was a division, apparently because of the strength of the defense and the ferocity and frequency of the night patrols.⁴² The raids were not all one way. The Germans occasionally chased the men of the Force out of buildings that they had occupied as outposts. Thus, the nights were busy with activity; the artillery ruled by day.

In April, however, Frederick decided to escalate the action through the mounting of a number of larger-scale daylight attacks against specific, limited

Brigadier General Frederick, after his promotion



objectives. During the second week of April 1944, the 2d Battalion, 2d Regiment, combined with a platoon of medium tanks, a platoon of tank destroyers, and an assortment of light tanks and armored cars from the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion to form three strong armor-infantry company teams. Supported by artillery and mortars, each company team moved across the canal at night and attacked three separate objectives near the coastline at dawn. Altogether, the raiders captured sixty-one prisoners, killed an estimated nineteen soldiers and burned houses the enemy had been using as shelters. The raiders penetrated to a depth of about four miles and withdrew about 0900.

On 18 April, Frederick directed another raid, this time in the north. A Force company reinforced with a platoon of tanks crossed the canal in the early morning and moved into ready positions. At dawn, the company attacked a string of houses organized into a strongpoint by the Germans. The company overwhelmed the strongpoint, destroyed a number of enemy automatic weapons, took eight prisoners, and withdrew, having suffered only one minor casualty.

These raids had a number of benefits. They demonstrated the tactical superiority of the Force and instilled a defensive, wary mind-set in the enemy. They also inspired other units in the beachhead by fostering a spirit of aggressiveness and offensiveness. Some VI Corps units contacted the Force and asked its officers to lecture their men on raids and patrolling. In addition, news reports from the beachhead emphasized that not only were the Allies holding, they were also giving the enemy a bloody nose. Furthermore, the intelligence acquired during the raids enabled the artillery to attack enemy dispositions more accurately and enhanced the planning for an eventual breakout. Finally, the raids provided the Force with valuable experience in the conduct of tank-infantry operations, experience that would prove useful to it in the breakout from Anzio and the advance to Rome.

The men of the Force were also able to use their demolitions expertise during their operations at Anzio. Blowing up houses became a characteristic patrol function. The targets were houses in no-man's-land that were used at night by the Germans as strongpoints or observation points. The FSSF also blew up culverts and created road craters to impede any attempt by the enemy to conduct a strong armor attack against the canal.

Another interesting aspect to Force operations during this time was its use of local resources to increase the quality of its life along the canal, particularly regarding diet. Members of night patrols often brought back chickens, eggs, rabbits, goats, and other livestock for personal use. Others bought livestock and seed from local farmers. Crops were actually planted and tended; Force soldiers laid down their weapons for a time and took up the plow. Service Battalion even had its own chicken-cleaning plant. The 2d Regiment managed a small herd of milk cows. This kind of improvisation occasionally reached comical proportions, such as when two prisoners were marched in carrying a mattress for some lucky soldier and pushing a wheelbarrow full of potatoes and chicken crates. Through these productive efforts, the FSSF used the long daylight hours in improving the quality and variety of its rations.⁴³

During its three months on the defensive perimeter at Anzio, the FSSF lost only 54 killed in action, 51 missing in action, and 279 wounded in action. Simultaneously, it received 53 officers and 1,408 enlisted men in replacements. These replacements fell into four categories: former Forcemens, now recovered from wounds and injuries; specially trained Canadian replacements from training centers in North America; the remnants of two Ranger battalions that had been disbanded after terrible losses in a failed deep raid at Cisterna; and carefully selected Americans from replacement depots. Because of the high quality and previous training of most of these men, they needed little additional training to come up to the quality of the Force.⁴⁴

In retrospect, one could view the Army's use of the FSSF at Anzio as an opportunity to allow it to recuperate and renew its strength under relatively risk-free conditions while it performed the important service of securing part

Living off the land at Anzio

Courtesy of Colonel Robert D. Burhans



of the beachhead. The nature of the action also permitted the FSSF to sharpen its skills in patrolling and night fighting. On the other hand, once the Force had been committed to the beachhead, it was impossible to pull it out rapidly without endangering the lodgment. Thus, it was not available for any special operation more suited to its talents, had one arisen. A more imaginative Army commander might have found better use for the Force than the essentially static defense of the beachhead perimeter.

The Breakout from Anzio and the Drive to Rome

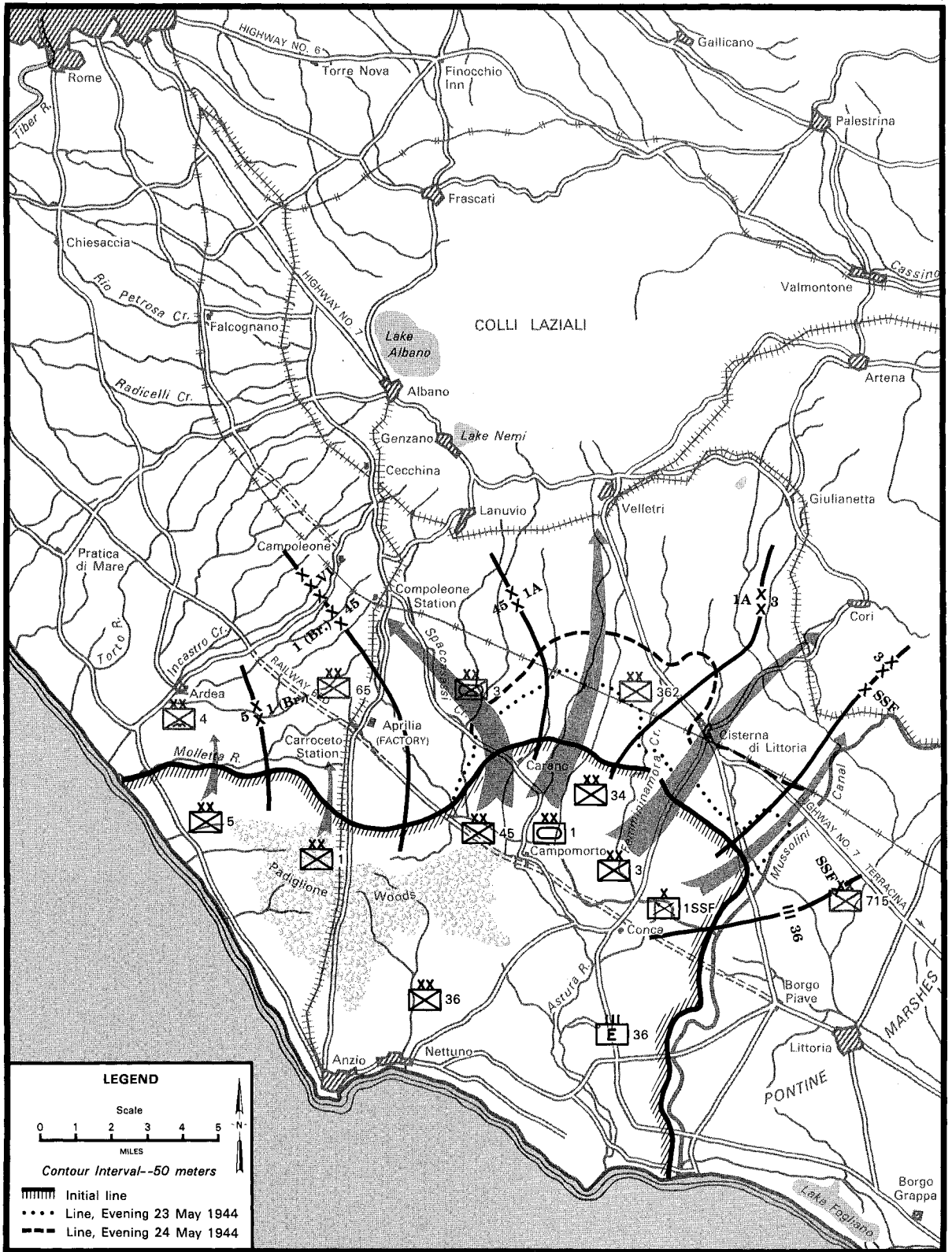
From January to May 1944, the forces in the Anzio beachhead had thrown back every attempt by the Germans to push them into the sea. Now, the balance of combat power had turned. New Allied divisions had come ashore, while the Germans had thinned their lines at Anzio to shore up other sectors farther east. Orders to prepare for a breakout of the beachhead went forward to all units, including the FSSF. On 9 May, the 36th Combat Engineer Regiment replaced the FSSF in the line. The FSSF pulled back into an assembly area and entered into an intensive retraining period. In particular, the Force needed to sharpen its edge of physical fitness (through exercises and marches), to perfect its assault tactics against strong positions, and to gain more experience in tank-infantry operations.⁴⁵

The breakout plan directed an attack by three spearheads to pierce the German lines. The 3d Infantry Division made the main attack in the center to Cisterna. The 1st Armored Division on the left and the FSSF on the right were to advance parallel and cut Highway 7 on either side of the town. Thereafter, the 36th Infantry Division would pass through the 3d Infantry Division and take Cori, while the FSSF drove on Mount Arrestina to secure the right flank. The longer term objective of the VI Corps was Highway 6 in the region of Valmontane. From here, it was envisioned that the VI Corps would turn northwestward toward Rome (see map 19).

Reinforced by approximately two companies of tanks and two companies of tank destroyers, the Force initiated its attack at 0630 on 23 May, following a 1 1/2-hour artillery barrage. Around 1000, the leading regiment cut Highway 7, its initial objective. In advancing so rapidly, the Force had taken some significant casualties and had exposed its left flank, because the 3d Infantry Division had not been able to keep pace. The men of the Force had also advanced more rapidly than their supporting armor. Consequently, a German counterattack of infantry and twelve Mark VI tanks forced the FSSF to fall back a small distance. Faulty coordination (or execution) with the attached tank and tank destroyer units caused part of the problem.

At 0300 on 24 May, the 133d Infantry relieved the FSSF in place. That night, the Force continued its advance toward Mount Arrestino. By the evening of the 25th, the FSSF occupied the mountain, and the 3d Infantry Division pushed into Cori. The corps breakout had succeeded.

For the next two weeks, the VI Corps continued its advance to Valmontane and Rome. The FSSF was employed almost continuously in the role of a separate brigade on the corps' right flank, on high ground, to cover the main attack by a larger, heavier unit moving along the road nets. This covering



Source: U.S. War Department, General Staff, *Anzio Beachhead (22 January—25 May 1944)*, American Forces in Action Series, Washington, DC, 1947, map 8.

Map 19. The breakthrough, 23—24 May 1944

role usually meant that the Force advanced on a wider frontage. It also covered more distance, since it had to swing wider as the corps made its slow westward turn toward Rome.

These Force operations were indistinguishable from those of regular infantry brigades or divisions. Enjoying more combat support than it was accustomed to, the Force not only had its habitually attached artillery battalion but also acquired the Ranger Cannon Company (75-mm howitzers mounted on half-tracks). Adjacent division artillery and corps artillery also supported the Force with fires. In the breakout, the Force took on a combined arms structure, with tank destroyer, tank, armored-reconnaissance, and (sometimes) other infantry units. In order to give the FSSF more firepower, protection, and mobility, its task organization changed frequently, depending on the factors of mission, enemy threat, troops available, and terrain. Frederick and his regimental commanders showed exceptional skill in handling these task forces. In fact, it was probably Frederick's performance as a combined arms commander during the advance from Anzio to Rome that earned him his next promotion to major general and identified him as a likely division commander.

For the final dash into Rome, the corps attached Task Force Howze, a two-battalion, armor-heavy task force commanded by Colonel Hamilton Howze, to the Force to form a spearhead for the corps advance. The corps' order directed Task Force Howze to lead the advance by day and the Force by night. Frederick, however, later said that these orders were silly. Instead, as the senior commander, he used the armor and infantry together in a coordinated, continuous advance.⁴⁶

Men of the 504th Parachute Infantry at the Mussolini Canal



Entering Rome proper, the Force had orders to secure a number of bridges over the Tiber River on the west side of the city. The situation in Rome was confused. The Germans had declared that Rome was an open city, yet they were defending it in different places in order to permit units retreating through Rome to escape from the advancing Fifth Army. Hidden strongpoints guarded many of the major intersections and the Tiber bridges. In addition, the Roman citizens were filtering out of their homes in anticipation of a generous welcome to the Allies, not realizing that they were clogging the streets and interfering with a rapid occupation.

Under these conditions, the Force—still coupled with Task Force Howze—moved through the city along multiple routes in small armor-infantry teams. These small elements avoided contact. Well-briefed officers and NCOs scouted out unguarded routes along which they might quickly lead their columns to the Tiber bridges. They cleared resistance where they had to and posted signs for the main body to follow. In this decentralized fashion, the Force (primarily the 3d Regiment) slipped past the German defenses and seized and held eight of the sixteen Tiber bridges. This feat of arms permitted the Fifth Army to continue pursuit of the Germans west and north of Rome and is a good example of the flexibility and initiative of the Force.

The Assault on the Hyères Islands

The FSSF held the Tiber bridges for two days, then turned them over to troops from the 3d Infantry Division on the night of 6—7 June. From Rome, the Force moved to a bivouac area beside Lake Albano for a well-deserved three-week rest. On 29 June, fresh orders alerted the Force to prepare for a new mission. The Seventh Army was planning Operation Anvil (later known as Operation Dragoon), the invasion of Southern France. The FSSF had been selected to be the spearhead of the invasion by conducting a nighttime amphibious assault against two islands flanking the invasion beaches. So, the Force moved to Santa Maria di Castellabate, a small fishing village in southern Italy to get ready for the operation. Colonel Edwin Walker was now the Force commander. General Frederick had earned a second star and been given command of the 1st Airborne Task Force.

Naturally, the nature of the impending operation influenced the training program of the Force. The naval convoys for the invasion planned to land three divisions of the VI Corps on beaches between Toulon and Cannes in the Cap Saint-Tropez area. In so doing, the convoys would pass to the east of two islands, Port Cros and Levant, which lay about seven miles off the coast. These islands had been occupied by the Germans in 1943. Aerial photography suggested the existence of a coastal battery with antiaircraft weapons on the western end of Port Cros. Levant, it appeared, had significant fortifications on its northeastern tip: three or four 164-mm guns, machine guns, pillboxes, a searchlight, and four medium coastal guns on the west end.⁴⁷ These weapons posed a threat to the landing forces and naval vessels; they had to be eliminated. The Force was given the mission.

For the most part, the islands were beachless. Steep cliffs descended into the water in most areas, except for a few small areas on the northern side. Scrub-covered hills and some cultivated land characterized the interior. After

a visual reconnaissance by submarine and rubber boat, Colonel Walker decided to assault the island from its cliff-strewn southern (seaward) side. Some French officers who knew the islands said such an approach was impossible, but they had not been at Difensa. The very difficulty of the seaward approach made it a logical choice for the Force.

The Force conducted six weeks of training at Santa Maria di Castellabate prior to the operation. All ranks received a refresher course in basic training. Recent replacements underwent instruction in the use of Force weapons and techniques. Physical fitness again drew a lot of emphasis to put the men in special combat form.

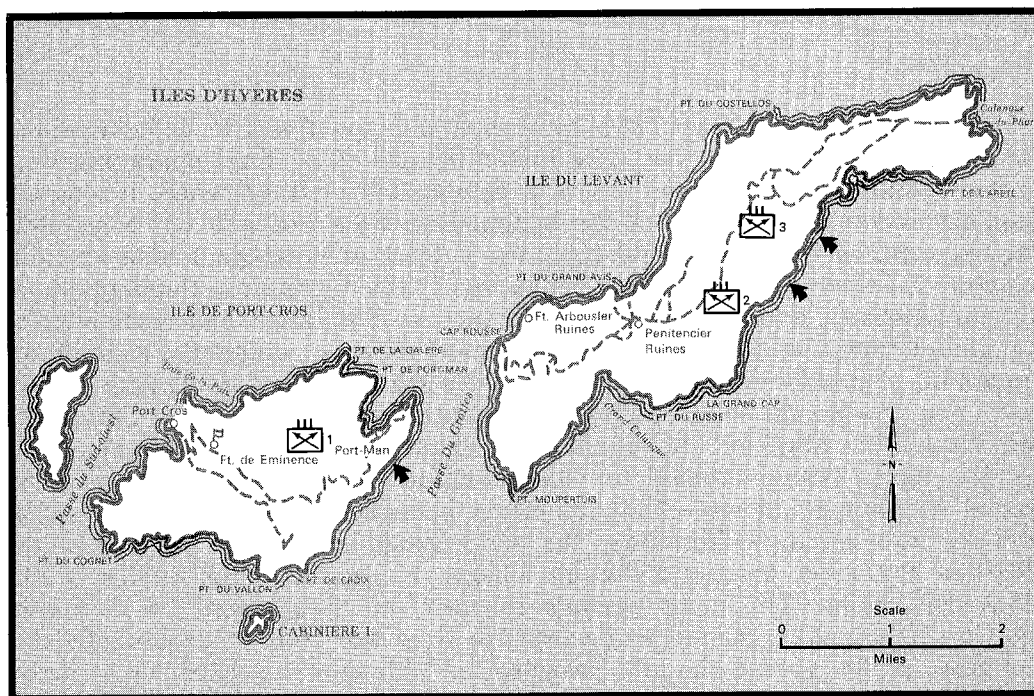
In August, the Force began intensive assault and amphibious training under the direction of the Invasion Training Center. The program included organizing boat teams and demolitions squads; wire breaching by boat teams; cliff scaling by day and night; use of rockets and flamethrowers; employment of waterproofing equipment; handling of mines and booby traps; swimming; training for infiltration; route marching; navigation; and landing techniques against a beachless shore.⁴⁸ Attached naval beach-marking parties and shore fire-control parties accompanied the Force during this training.

Several landing exercises also took place, including a night assault against two islands above Naples. Each regiment went through a full-scale dress rehearsal. Motorboats towed 10-man rubber boats to within 1,000 yards of the shore. Then, the boat teams paddled in, climbed the beach cliffs with full combat loads, prepared for counterattacks, and landed supplies. Critiques and corrective actions followed each exercise.⁴⁹

On opening night, Force combat strength stood at 2,057 men. Its naval support force consisted of five transports, three medium and two small landing ships, a French battleship, one heavy cruiser, five light cruisers, three destroyers, sixteen PT boats, and fifteen small craft. (This naval force also supported a small French commando unit landing on the mainland.)⁵⁰

The weather was ideal, the sea calm, and the night dark when the troop transports halted 8,000 yards offshore on the night of 14–15 August 1944. At the appointed time, the men of the Force climbed into their rubber boats and tied on to motorboats—three rubber boats to each tow line. Scouts in kayaks and electric surfboards marked the landing sites ahead of the main body. Shortly after midnight, the 1st Regiment landed 650 men on Port Cros, while the 2d and 3d Regiments (1,350 men) climbed ashore on Levant (see map 20).

Following the established Force pattern, the landing parties achieved complete surprise. Meeting no resistance, the men of the Force reached their assembly areas without trouble. On the Île du Levant, the Germans rapidly holed up in the port of Levant, where they fought hard against the 2d Regiment. By dawn, the Force had cleared a good beach, resupplied, and evacuated the wounded. By 2334 on 15 August, all resistance had ended. The coastal battery in the east turned out to be a dummy. At Port Cros, the German defenders held out for forty-eight hours. The last enemy strongpoint, sheltered in an old thick-walled fort, surrendered when twelve 15-inch shells from a supporting battleship passed from one side of the fort through the other. As in other Force operations, surprise, shock, tenacity, and leadership, were the key ingredients in the success.



Source: Adleman and Walton, *The Devil's Brigade*, 229.
 Map 20. Assault on Port Cros and Levant

Shoreward View of Ile de Port-Cros

The End of the Road

On completion of these missions, all three regiments of the Force were transferred to the French mainland, where they fell once again under General Frederick's command, the 1st Airborne Task Force (1st ABTF). After conducting a successful airborne assault during the invasion, the 1st ABTF was given the mission of advancing eastward along the Mediterranean coast to secure the rear and right flank of the main forces. The Canadian Army's report on its contingent in the FSSF succinctly describes this last phase of the Force's existence:

There now began for units of the Force a series of rapid advances along the Mediterranean Coast that was to take them in less than three weeks a distance of some 45 miles to the Franco-Italian frontier. In general, enemy resistance was light. It was not necessary for the Force to mount any large-scale operations. Engagements were on a regimental, or lower, level, as the enemy fought small typical delaying actions. Each day brought its quota of two or three towns occupied, a number of machinegun positions destroyed, a score or so of PWs taken, a mined road crater filled or a bridge replaced by the Engineers. Casualties . . . were slight. . . The greatest hardship on officers and men alike was the strain of being almost continually on the move, with no opportunity for rest or relaxation. . . It was not until November, when positions became stabilized on the frontier, that it was found possible to withdraw units into reserve.⁵¹

This entire advance was executed on foot without armor support. Two attached artillery battalions provided indirect fires.

The FSSF spent its last days sputtering into inactivity in defensive positions along the Italian border. The insignificance of its final operations contrasted starkly with the proud record it established in Italy, where it took the toughest tasks at the center of the action. But the Force was not completely forgotten. Since October, it had been the subject of message traffic and discussions between the U.S. War Department, the Canadian Department of National Defense, and the Mediterranean theater. The latter, had recommended the disbandment of the FSSF, a recommendation in which the Canadians concurred, primarily because of the difficulty which they were having in continuing to provide the Force high-grade infantry replacements. The Canadians now viewed the FSSF as an unproductive dispersion of scarce resources. Only the 6th Army Group lobbied for the retention of the FSSF because of its special capabilities in snow and mountain operations. Looking ahead to the advance into southern Germany, the army group envisioned the use of the FSSF in the Alps, then the French Vosges Mountains, and finally in the Black Mountains. The army group's concern was heightened by its recent rejection of the War Department's offer to it of the 10th Mountain Division (the army group rejected the offer because the 10th was not scheduled to arrive in theater until March 1945 due to a shortage of shipping space for pack animals). Lacking a proven mountain unit, the 6th Army Group wanted to hold on to the Force.⁵² But the War Department turned down the army group's request. When the 1st ABTF was withdrawn from the Italian frontier in late November, the FSSF moved back to a holding area. On 5 December 1944, the color guard sheathed the Force colors during a final parade and memorial service.

The members of the Force were reassigned to other units. The older Canadian members, those with airborne training, joined the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion in France. The larger remainder were shipped to Italy and fell into the general Canadian infantry replacement pool.⁵³ Edwin Walker, now a brigadier general, took some of the U.S. Force members with him when he assumed his new command, the 474th Infantry (Separate). At the war's end, the 474th shipped to Norway to oversee the repatriation of German soldiers who surrendered there.⁵⁴ The rest of the U.S. members of the Force finished their service in a variety of other units.

Tactical Style

The mountain tactics of the FSSF are outlined in detail in a Force report dated 14 April 1944 and titled "Lessons From the Italian Campaign." This report strongly emphasized that terrain had an overwhelming influence on the tactics employed by the Force.⁵⁵ "The most important lesson learned from the terrain was that without exception high ground must be taken and held."⁵⁶ To implement this principle, the FSSF insisted that movement to seize peaks take place as high up on the connecting ridges as possible without creating silhouettes on the skyline. Crests might be occupied temporarily in the defense, but over the long term, the reverse slopes were considered safer from enemy fires and observation. Hidden observation posts on the forward slope would then provide early warning to the reverse-slope defenders. In the attack, and even after a specific objective was taken, the Force found that it often received hostile fire from adjacent peaks and ridges. As a result, the Force carefully

selected its routes of march and moved in the dark (including supply and evacuation) to avoid observation. Moreover, since mines were often laid in obvious tracks (particularly in draws and along ridgelines), mine detectors had to be employed forward, and well-worn trails went unused until cleared.

The tactical formations employed by the FSSF changed with the ground. The most common formation used was the wedge or arrowhead. This formation provided a heavy volume of fire to the front and the flanks, and it permitted quick transition into a skirmish line. Even veteran troops, however, showed a tendency to bunch up.

The platoon and section tactics practiced by the FSSF relied strictly on closing with the enemy as rapidly as possible. Using both fire and maneuver and fire and movement, Force units sought the flanks and rear of the enemy positions:

Hit him hard and move in where our hand grenades are effective. He dislikes them.

Aggressiveness and fast maneuvering to the flanks and, if possible, the rear we find the best policy for taking out machine gun nests. . . . Don't be pinned down by fire. . . . Quick thinking, maneuver fast is our policy.⁵⁷

The men of the Force used a lot of hand grenades, particularly to reach into sheltered positions protected from direct fires. Personal accounts of tactical actions frequently praised the effectiveness of hand grenades in assaults.

Force units preferred to attack at night and repeatedly achieved surprise. During attacks, they discovered that the enemy usually did not aim his automatic weapons; the Germans fired along specific lines to cover areas of ground. Once they had determined these lines of fire, it was not difficult for the Force to move against the enemy flanks.

Control of movement and fire at night posed problems. The Force overcame these problems through five techniques: good training that simulated anticipated conditions; the use of SOPs; strict discipline; simple plans understood by all; and constant supervision. Local guides sometimes got lost, so leaders learned to rely on their own night navigation through prior map study, daylight reconnaissance, and frequent reference to maps and compasses during movement. Once contact was made at night, actions became automatic.

When attacking in daylight without surprise, the Force valued the support of armor, engineers, and artillery to reduce or suppress enemy strongpoints while they assaulted. They recognized, however, that the infantry played the decisive role:

We have learned from experience, sometimes slightly bitter, a lesson of the utmost importance to infantry units and of particular importance to a force such as ours—the lesson of “self-reliance” by the employment of our own supporting weapons.

It is very easy for subordinate commanders charged with the responsibility of the attack to overlook at certain phases of the attack the full employment of their own supporting weapons. Calls for artillery support are sometimes made where the task is one for the unit's mortars or heavy machine guns, if such are available. The rocket launcher and rifle grenade are not always fully exploited.⁵⁸

When the FSSF engaged in active operations, it constantly sent out patrols. In the defense, as at Anzio, vigorous patrolling kept the enemy from laying mines and ambushes to his immediate front and prevented mortars from being set up too close. Force officers insisted that patrols have either the purpose of reconnaissance or raiding. Particularly at night, it was important to have a single objective for each patrol, one on which all patrol members had been fully briefed and rehearsed, if possible.

The Force believed reconnaissance patrols should be small, six to twelve men, armed with at least one light machine gun and several submachine guns. The FSSF learned in France that, in a fast-moving situation, early, aggressive reconnaissance yielded results not obtainable later. Such reconnaissance well forward of the advance of the main body often caught the enemy by surprise, before he had fully camouflaged his positions and hidden his troops.⁵⁹ Several Force company commanders recommended that each company specially train a number of small groups of soldiers for reconnaissance. The overall Force objective, however, was that *all* members of the Force be so trained. Reconnaissance by commanders was deemed to be especially important to the outcome of combat actions.

Combat patrols needed to be larger than reconnaissance patrols—up to platoon strength and with more automatic weapons. These patrols sometimes were split into two groups. One group accomplished the mission; the other group followed at some distance to prevent ambushes, to maneuver, if necessary, and to provide flexibility. To enhance control, the men of the Force preferred bright nights for raids and dark nights for reconnaissance.

As members of a light infantry force facing an enemy with substantial artillery and mortars, men of the Force learned that they had to dig in on the defense. Every time that the Germans lost a position to the Force, they immediately counterattacked with infantry, artillery, and mortars—compelling the Force to go to ground. One NCO in the 2d Regiment said, “When we are not shooting we are digging. When we are not digging we are shooting. When we take up a position, we dig and dig deep. It pays.”⁶⁰

The value of houses to the Force as outposts or defensive positions drew mixed opinions. While they afforded protection from fire, they could not be occupied carelessly; other local positions had to protect them. Men of the Force often viewed them as traps, objects to be blown up into rubble, not occupied.

In the rugged mountain fighting, choice of weapons and munitions often influenced the outcome of actions. Force leaders had to balance their desire to have heavy volumes of fire on a moment's notice with the burden of carrying heavy weapons and loads of ammunition by hand over mountain tracks. Still, they were loath to leave anything behind. Light machine guns and submachine guns were indispensable to the shock of a surprise assault by night. The Force often needed bazookas in each section to take out houses, bunkers, or an occasional light tank. Everyone used hand grenades. Unit mortars were often used to break up enemy counterattacks. The flamethrower, it appears, was the one weapon used infrequently. Heavier machine guns, .30 and .50 caliber, were used primarily in the defense at Anzio. All Force soldiers were expected to know how to operate all the available weapons.



Sergeant Cyril Krotzer of the 2d Regiment surveying the beachhead for the last time before preparing for the drive on Rome

Leadership

The FSSF's tactical style was unusual and distinctive, and its execution required exceptional leadership. Mountain warfare often demanded that junior leaders exercise their own judgment in the absence of detailed orders. The nature of the terrain broke up regimental and battalion attacks into connected series of section and platoon attacks. Under these decentralized conditions, aggressiveness and initiative—qualities possessed in abundance by Force leaders—were invaluable.

To ensure control, the Force wrestled with the problem of where commanders should be during attacks. Generally, the Force called for officers to lead from the front. However, if they were too far forward, commanders might

be unable (or slow) to employ their reserves and control their support. The Force recognized that commanders' positions might vary with the situation, but it concluded that "in rugged mountainous country where maneuverability was limited, approaches long and time consuming, and communications sometimes unreliable, it was generally advisable [for commanders] to be with the forward troops."⁶¹

Another leadership problem recognized by the Force concerned the transmission of verbal orders. Force commanders insisted, as a rule, that all soldiers be briefed on tactical plans and expected enemy actions. Commanders attributed much of their tactical success to the fact that their soldiers knew the purposes of coming actions and how they fit into them. Mountain combat, however, often required changes in plans that needed to be disseminated rapidly by voice. Constant care was required to make sure that such orders (passed down by runner or relay) reached their proper destination.

During actual attacks, voice communication assumed great significance. A visible leader who calmly directed actions on the battlefield settled the men and spurred them on. A section leader in the 2d Regiment wrote: "Don't be afraid to talk loud if it's in the daytime, because your voice is a real tonic at this time, both to yourself and the men with you. Don't worry too much about how your men will conduct themselves when they get under fire, just keep yourself cool and your men will be right there acting like they had been under that stuff lots of times before."⁶²

Elite soldiers, like the men of the Force, required that their leaders earn their respect. The concept of leading by virtue of rank was not recognized in the Force. The privilege of leadership fell only to those who had earned it through performance, first in training, then in combat. In practical terms, this meant that the men recognized the superior abilities of their leaders. Conversely, it meant that the Force leaders had to be as hardy, as fit, and as proficient in infantry skills as their men. Frederick's performance in this regard set a high standard for all his subordinates to emulate.

Logistics

Keeping support moving forward in the rugged Italian mountains was far from easy. Frederick frequently had to divert combat troops to act as porters. At Difensa, Frederick employed 1,200 men in this role, about 50 percent of his total manpower. The soldiers understood the necessity of such work; they jokingly nicknamed themselves "Freddy's Freighters." The demands of this labor, however, created many casualties—from exhaustion, enemy indirect fires, snipers, and exposure.

The command attempted to use aerial resupply in the mountains, but air-drops worked poorly. There was too much fog, and it was too easy to miss a drop site perched on some ridge or peak. Pack trains, on the other hand, helped enormously. The Force enjoyed such support in the Majo operations and from Anzio to Rome. The pack trains came from the Italian Army or from other U.S. divisions. The FSSF never received its own dedicated pack train.

The Force also never received its TOE authorization of vehicles. Consequently, when operating in more open terrain, men of the Force borrowed, scrounged, and stole vehicles whenever they could and used them for tactical transport and supply. At the rest area in Lake Albano, according to one source, the men stole so many vehicles for recreation that each soldier had his own personal vehicle.⁶³

Frederick had an unusual attitude about rations in combat. At the front, he subsisted on instant coffee and cigarettes. Eating no food himself, he figured that his infantrymen could survive on two-thirds of a K ration per day. As a result, the FSSF carried few rations.⁶⁴

Medical support to the Force appears to have been excellent. Aid stations routinely were established quite far forward, with evacuation being accomplished almost wholly by litter. Companies not in contact provided the manpower. Frederick, himself, pulled litter duty, demonstrating his own estimate of its importance. Force policy directed the immediate evacuation of casualties; holding casualties on the line tended to demoralize the men.⁶⁵

During the course of its active operations, the Force established a reputation for lax supply discipline. On several occasions, they apparently discarded materials that they felt they no longer needed and did not want to continue to carry.⁶⁶ It appears that the Force tended to stock materials for the worst-possible eventualities. When actual situations required much less expenditure, the stocks were simply abandoned. The richness of the American supply system permitted such waste. When the supply system failed to come through, the Force improvised to correct any of its perceived deficiencies. Raiding German larders at Anzio, commandeering half-tracks en route to Rome, and filching vehicles at Lake Albano are three typical examples of their improvisations.

Finally, as an experiment in the division of manpower between combat and service-support functions, the Service Battalion proved to be a success. Aside from occasionally assigning it help from the combat echelon when necessary, Frederick apparently never meddled with its organization. No documented criticism of the unit exists.

Conclusions

Few units in World War II equaled the glowing reputation established by the FSSF. It never met defeat in battle. It accomplished the most difficult missions with an elan and a proficiency that astonished all outside observers, including the Germans. In size the equal of an infantry regiment, the Force consistently accepted tasks appropriate to a regular infantry division. Moreover, the unit remained effective even after it had sustained casualties that would have incapacitated another force. Yet viewing the entirety of its short history, not just its glories, one cannot ignore a number of problems internal and external to the Force. Both the reasons for the success of the Force and its problems deserve attention for the insights that they provide on current light infantry operations.

Certainly, the FSSF can be categorized as a light infantry force. It had no organic supporting arms. Its tactical mobility derived from its marching power and its ability to dominate the terrain. However, one must understand

that the FSSF was more than a light infantry force. For a number of reasons, care should be taken in relating the employment and characteristics of the Force to other light infantry.

Because of the rigorous selection practiced by Frederick and his staff, the soldiers and officers accepted for training in the Force were of above-average quality. The intensity and mercilessness of the training further guaranteed that only the best of the initial cohorts would measure up. Together, rigorous selection and hellishly intensive training produced an extraordinary body of men who were closely knit, full of esprit, and confident. More highly trained than the U.S. Rangers, the Force was a true elite, a characterization that cannot be applied to all light infantry units.

The Force also differed from ordinary light infantry in that it spent almost a full year in training as a coherent organization before it was ever committed to battle. Probably the only other unit in the U.S. Army to enjoy such a prolonged, unified preparation was the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment. The skills acquired by the Force in this training endowed it with an unmatched versatility. Exceptionally fit, the men of the Force possessed the abilities to ski, snowshoe, climb mountains, assault by parachute, destroy facilities with explosives, and conduct amphibious raids—all during the black of night. The average light infantry unit is proficient in some of these skills (and has cadres with experience in others), but they do not routinely train in them all.

As an elite Canadian-American outfit, the FSSF also had special access to resources not routinely available to regular infantry units. Highly placed persons kept tabs on where the Force was and what it needed. Frederick seemed to be able to obtain whatever materials and equipment that he wanted, changing his unit's TOE as he saw fit. The Force's abundance of light machine guns, submachine guns, bazookas, and mortars demonstrated its privileged access to resources. Frederick was also able to pick and choose the U.S. replacements for his casualties.

Any analysis of how and why the Force achieved so much success should be accompanied by a recognition of these features that distinguished it from ordinary light infantry. The Force's record should be viewed as a sort of upper limit to what light infantry can be expected to accomplish. The more common aspects of the Force training program—fitness training, marksmanship, night operations, and basic demolitions—and virtually all of the features of their tactical style, with its emphasis on speed, shock, surprise, aggressiveness, and terrain domination, can and should be accepted as legitimate models for light infantry units today. Moreover, the use of the Force as a flank-covering force in restricted terrain and their economy-of-force role in Anzio against relatively light enemy forces are appropriate examples demonstrating how light and heavy forces can be combined synergistically. (The use of the FSSF for these missions, however, wasted to a certain degree its one-of-a-kind offensive capabilities for deep raids.) Many of the special tasks accomplished by the Force could not have been performed by the average light infantry unit without specialized training (for example, its two nighttime amphibious raids and its assault against Difensa). The specialized training of the FSSF enabled it to be used as an operational-level, spearhead force in the invasions of Kiska and southern France.

The most significant problem experienced by the Force was its misuse by corps and army commanders. In this regard, the Force spent most of its existence performing missions that could have been accomplished as well by units with far less specialized training. The case can be made that only the Difensa assault and the amphibious strikes against Kiska and the Hyères Islands fully employed the special capabilities of the Force. The Majo operations might be added to the list. Nonetheless, the employment of the FSSF at Anzio, in the drive to Rome, and on the mainland of southern France failed to maximize its capabilities. Moreover, these operations embodied close to 90 percent of the time spent by the Force in contact with the enemy and accounted for the majority of its casualties.

The misuse of the Force conforms to a frequently observed historical pattern. Once a unit arrives in theater—its special capabilities notwithstanding—its availability irresistibly tempts commanders to employ it. Stilwell's poor use of the Chindits, the massacre of the Rangers at Cisterna, the frequent employment in Italy and France of airborne units as regular foot infantry, and Germany's use of its mountain divisions on the Russian steppes are other examples of this historical tendency.

The misuse of the Force may also have resulted because there were no legitimate special missions for it to accomplish. General Clark might not have been able to identify deep-raiding and reconnaissance missions appropriate for the Force. If so, though it seems unlikely, Clark understandably employed the FSSF rather than allow it to sit idly in the rear. Nevertheless, the Force never conducted a deep raid, performed deep reconnaissance, or used its over-snow and airborne capabilities. The time and resources it spent training for these capabilities was largely wasted.

Because of the relative scarcity of legitimate missions for specialized forces, the formation of such units should be limited. Most of the combat operations in a conventional war are of an ordinary sort and can be accomplished by normal units. When specialized operations are necessary, they can be undertaken by conventional units provided with special training prior to the operations.

To allow the proliferation of specialized forces in an army robs an army of its needed manpower and flexibility. To withhold such forces because the specific conditions appropriate to their employment have not appeared can be quite inefficient in the long run. A number of senior World War II commanders complained about the waste and futility of having so many specialized forces on hand.⁶⁷ Clearly, a correct balance must be struck between special and conventional forces.

Another problem connected with specialized forces and specifically with the FSSF was the question of replacements. To replace members of the Force with ordinary infantry was inappropriate. Thus, Canadians took care through their stateside FSSF establishment to send groups of replacements to the FSSF that had been specifically trained in typical Force skills. These replacement cadres and soldiers seldom fell short of Force expectations. However, this process was demanding and expensive. Eventually the Canadians tired of it and sought the disbandment of the Force.

No such pipeline for trained personnel existed for the Americans. Frederick maintained a relatively high standard of replacements by insisting on and receiving only the best men, but even so, it was impossible to get men as well trained as his original unit.⁶⁸ The FSSF was fortunate to receive the remnants of the Ranger units destroyed at Cisterna, since these men were much like the soldiers of the Force in terms of skills and attitudes. Inevitably, over a period of time, the overall quality of the Force deteriorated, although it retained its elite character to the end. The same deterioration occurred in airborne, mountain, and commando units on both sides during the war.

Several other unusual problems arose because of the unique composition of the Force. Because of its binational makeup, the Force was bounced around as a political football. Both the United States and Canada had to agree on where it was to be employed, and Winston Churchill was not above adding his influence to the equation, even though England had provided no men or materiel to the unit. The binationality of the Force created a number of problems to be reconciled: differences in pay, uniforms, decorations, promotions, punishments, and other administrative actions.

Another problem besetting the Force was its devil-may-care attitude, which, though it was encouraged in its training, led it into occasional overaggressiveness. The Force's tendency toward impatience and excessive bravado induced its leaders to expose themselves to excessive fire, for the men to advance ahead of flank units (as in the breakout at Anzio), and for units to attack fortifications rashly (as on Levant, without waiting for commanders to make up their minds about surrendering).

The Force also was troubled by a substantial number of prima-donna-type personalities. Highly individualistic and lacking the garrison discipline of a regular unit, the wilder element in the Force seemed always to be up to mischief when not involved in combat. These shenanigans included transporting prostitutes from Naples to Anzio, practicing hand-to-hand combat on unwary MPs, stealing jeeps, and using explosives for pranks. The leadership of the Force seemed to tolerate such antics as long as no one was seriously hurt, perhaps accepting the disorderly behavior as the price they had to pay for similarly bold performance in combat.

As a whole, the FSSF was a unique unit with exceptional capabilities quite beyond those of general-purpose light infantry organizations. While the FSSF should not be considered a prototype for the design or employment of subsequent light infantry units, nevertheless, a careful and judicious analysis of its training, leadership—and especially its tactical style—yields a number of important lessons applicable to light infantry. The misuse suffered by the Force also provides a warning to current light infantry units: there are no guarantees that senior commanders in the future will properly employ light infantry or exclude it from combat situations for which it is ill suited.

NOTES

Chapter 4

1. The exiled Norwegian government objected to the destruction of its hydroelectric stations. In addition, studies showed that the stations could be destroyed by strategic bombing; a ground raid was not required.
2. Canada, Department of National Defense, General Staff, Historical Section, "The 1st Canadian Special Service Battalion," Report no. 5 (N.p., n.d., mimeographed), 15, hereafter cited as Report no. 5. At various times, planners considered using the Force in the Caucasus, Balkans, North Africa, and Europe.
3. Robert D. Burhans, *The First Special Service Force: A War History of the North Americans, 1942—1944* (1947; reprint, Nashville, TN: Battery Press, 1981), 14, hereafter cited as Burhans, *FSSF*.
4. Report no. 5, 3.
5. General Paul D. Adams, Interview no. 1 with Colonel Irving Monclova and Lieutenant Colonel Marvin C. Lang, 5 May 1975, 64, photocopied transcript on file at the U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, and at the Combined Arms Research Library, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS.
6. Burhans, *FSSF*, 61.
7. Martin Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, United States Army in World War II (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army, 1969), 255.
8. Major General Robert T. Frederick, interview at the Pentagon, 7 January 1969, 6, photocopied transcript on file at the U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, and at the Combined Arms Research Library, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS. Also see Burhans, *FSSF*, 43.
9. Burhans, *FSSF*, 49. Ninety-nine percent of the men of the Force attained Norwegian Army standards in skiing within two weeks. See also Robert H. Adleman and George Walton, *The Devil's Brigade* (Philadelphia, PA: Chilton Books, 1966), 84. The culmination of the ski training was a thirty-mile cross-country ski trip with full pack and rifle.
10. Adams interview, 62; and Adleman and Walton, *Devil's Brigade*, 84.
11. Report no. 5, 12.
12. Burhans, *FSSF*, 23.
13. *Ibid.*, 24.
14. Adams interview, 60; and Adleman and Walton, *Devil's Brigade*, 69, 78—79.
15. *Ibid.*, 58.
16. Burhans, *FSSF*, 44.
17. Adams interview, 60.
18. Adleman and Walton, *Devil's Brigade*, 93; and Burhans, *FSSF*, 56.
19. Burhans, *FSSF*, 58.
20. *Ibid.*, 83; and Report no. 5, 29—30.
21. Chester D. Starr, ed., *From Salerno to the Alps: A History of the Fifth Army, 1943—1945* (Washington, DC: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), 52—53. See also Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*.

22. Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 265. See also U.S. Military Academy, West Point, Department of Military Art and Engineering, *Operations in Sicily and Italy, July 1943 to December 1944* (West Point, NY, 1950), 53–54; and Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, *Neither Fear Nor Hope* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1964), 184. Senger und Etterlin states that the German positions were vulnerable because they lacked the manpower to man the entire line.
23. U.S. Army, Special Staff, Historical Division, “Critical Evaluation of Italian Campaign Based upon German Operational and Tactical Viewpoints, 3 September 1943–2 May 1945,” (N.d.), 44, hereafter cited as “Critical Evaluation”; and Senger und Etterlin, *Neither Fear Nor Hope*, 184.
24. Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 265.
25. “Critical Evaluation.” 44; and Senger und Etterlin, *Neither Fear Nor Hope*, 187.
26. Adleman and Walton, *Devil’s Brigade*, 126–27.
27. *Ibid.*, 137; and Burhans, *FSSF*, 111–12.
28. Burhans, *FSSF*, 124.
29. *Ibid.*, 120.
30. Adleman and Walton, *Devil’s Brigade*, 133.
31. “General Frederick and His North Americans,” *Reader’s Digest*, 45 (November 1944):101.
32. Burhans, *FSSF*, 145.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Adleman and Walton, *Devil’s Brigade*, 160.
35. *Ibid.*, 157.
36. U.S. War Department, General Staff, *Fifth Army at the Winter Line, (15 November 1943–15 January 1944)*, American Forces in Action Series (Washington, DC: Military Intelligence Division, U.S. War Department, 1945), 98, hereafter cited as WD, GS, *Winter Line*.
37. *Ibid.*, 99; and Burhans, *FSSF*, 154.
38. Report no. 5, 38.
39. First Special Service Force, “Lessons from the Italian Campaign” (14 April 1944), 2, hereafter cited as 1st SSF, “Lessons.”
40. Burhans, *FSSF*, 170.
41. *Ibid.*, 179.
42. *Ibid.*, 185.
43. Adleman and Walton, *Devil’s Brigade*, 177.
44. Burhans, *FSSF*, 209; and Report no. 5, 42.
45. Frederick interview, 2.
46. *Ibid.*, 15.
47. U.S. Army, 7th Army, *History of the Seventh Army, Phase 1* (N.p., 1945), 60.
48. *Ibid.*, 121–22; and Report no. 5, 46.
49. *Ibid.*, 122.
50. *Ibid.*, 32. The FSSF and its supporting units were called the Sitka Force for this operation.
51. Report no. 5, 48.
52. U.S. Army, 6th Army Group, *History of Sixth Army Group, July–October 1944*, vol. 1 (N.p., 22 June 1945), 185.
53. Report no. 5, 52.
54. Adleman and Walton, *Devil’s Brigade*, 244.

55. 1st SSF, "Lessons." In addition, the following reports include some lessons learned by the FSSF and the 1st Airborne Task Force during the campaign in southern France: U.S. Army Ground Forces Board, Mediterranean Theater of Operations, "Report on Airborne Operations in DRAGOON," by Colonel Paul N. Starlings, Report no. A-200, 4 November 1944; and U.S. Army Ground Forces Board, Mediterranean Theater of Operations, Report no. A-228, 1944?, hereafter cited as AGFB, MTO, Rept. no. A-228.
 56. 1st SSF, "Lessons," 1.
 57. Ibid., 4—5.
 58. Ibid., 5.
 59. AGFB, MTO, Rept. no. A-228, "Lessons Learned in Operations from 15 August 1944 to 1 November 1944," 5, submitted by Colonel H. T. Brotherton as enclosure 3.
 60. 1st SSF, "Lessons," 5.
 61. Ibid., 2.
 62. Ibid., 8.
 63. Adleman and Walton, *Devil's Brigade*, 219—20.
 64. Frederick interview, 16.
 65. 1st SSF, "Lessons," 15.
 66. Report no. 5, 28—29, 48.
 67. Roger A. Beaumont, *Military Elites* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1974), 8. At the end of the war, the U.S. Forces European Theater Headquarters convened a board of general officers to record important combat lessons. One of the recommendations of this board was that no specialized divisions be retained in the force structure except airborne divisions.
 68. Frederick interview, 4.
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