



First Special Service Force 1942-44 (Elite)

Bret Werner

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Osprey's examination of the First Special Service Force of the second half of World War II (1939-1945). This famous unit was formed with three battalions in July 1942, for special operations in occupied Norway, from handpicked US and Canadian volunteers who were trained in parachute, amphibious, ski, mountain and demolition operations and other 'Special Forces' skills. Their training base was Fort Harrison, Montana. In the event the Force first saw combat in Italy. There they distinguished themselves, at heavy cost, in the battles of La Difensa (Dec 1943), Mte Majo (Jan 1944), on the Anzio beachhead (Feb - May 1944) and in the race to Rome, which they actually liberated. Their uniforms, clothing and weaponry had many unique features reflecting their bi-national composition and specialist skills.

The FSSF fought with a ferocious skill which earned them a fearsome reputation. At Anzio, although at only half strength, they successfully held at least a quarter of the entire beachhead and were the spearhead of the final breakout towards Rome. Famed for their night-time fighting ability, the Germans named them "Die Schwartze Teuflen" the Black Devils (they blacked their faces with boot polish). However, after taking part in the South of France campaign in Aug - Nov 1944 the Force was disbanded, survivors passing to other units. 1,800 men at full strength, they had accounted for 12,000 enemy casualties, taken 7,000 prisoners and experienced a 600% attrition rate.

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