

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History Number: 151-001**

**Interviewee: Herb Goodwin**

**Interviewer: Milo McLeod**

**Date of Interview: March 26, 1985**

**Project: First Special Service Force Oral History Collection**

Milo McLeod: This is an interview between Staff Sergeant Milo McLeod of the 103rd Public Affairs Detachment and Herb Goodwin, former veteran of the First Special Service Force and retired veteran of the Montana Army National Guard. Herb, you are aware that this taped interview may be used for research by other interested people of the Montana Army National Guard or people interested in the military history of Montana, is that correct?

Herb Goodwin: Yes, that's correct. I understand that.

MM: Well, thank you. Let's start off with a little bit about your experiences. You were born where?

HG: I was born and raised in a small town, Almira, Ontario, in Canada.

MM: Okay. What year were you born?

HG: I was born in...November 1, 1919.

MM: 1919, right after the First...the Great War.

HG: Yes, yes, immediately after. Within a year, anyway, after that war.

MM: Well, you're about as old as my parents. My father was 1917, and my mother was 1920.

HG: So that puts me in the same age group, right?

MM: Yes. Tell me, when did you join the Canadian Army?

HG: I entered the Canadian Army in September...actually in reserve capacity in July of 1940, and then went on active duty in September of 1940 in Kitchener, Ontario. I actually was a member of District Depot No. 1 which is in London, Ontario, and was posted to Kitchener as a...after going to an NCO [non-commissioned officer] school as an instructor at a basic training center.

MM: So you started out in the Canadian Army as an enlisted man.

HG: Yes, yes, as a private, and ended up in 1942 as a sergeant instructor at the Western Command Officers Training Centre at Gordon Head, British Columbia. From there went to the Eastern Command Officers Training Centre as a cadet in May of 1942. That's where I was at the

time that the First Special Service Force was being organized and volunteered from there. That was in Brockville, Ontario.

MM: Brockville, Ontario.

HG: Yes.

MM: What regiment were you in in the Canadian Army, initially?

HG: I was in the Scots Fusiliers of Canada. It was a Scottish regiment. Their home was Kitchener, Ontario. That's how come we were sent back there as instructors at the newly formed training center in...just outside of Kitchener.

MM: Okay, so the Scots Fusiliers, what was a rifle regiment.

HG: Yes.

MM: Infantry regiment.

HG: Infantry.

MM: Right. Tell me when did you first hear about the First Special Service Force?

HG: Well, I was going through the Officers Training Centre at Brockville. A group of officers on a tour of Canadian training centers. Brockville happened to be one of them, and they were, of course, looking for new young officers and not very much information given at that particular time and as the days went by the interviews became more intense, more personal until they had made their selections. Those who were accepted as volunteers for this new organization, as yet unnamed—all it was was particulars of the type of training that was expected of the individuals and that it was for a specific mission as yet not—the information not released.

Those of us that were selected and repeating that were graduated in one class. It made no difference whether you had just been in Brockville for a matter of a couple of weeks or whether you were a couple of weeks from graduation, which was in my particular case. I had assumed I would have graduated two weeks following our date of graduation. After being accepted, it was a very quick release from Brockville. If I'm remembering correctly, we had just a matter of a day or two to take care of any personal items and pack our gear and were sent to an assembly area at Ottawa, Ontario. That was the starting point of the troop training that ended up at Fort William Henry Harrison at Helena, Montana.

MM: You were telling me that you were selected for this mission or for membership in this force. Did many people apply?

HG: Yes.

MM: Do you have any idea? Did you not know how many people had applied to?

HG: I don't think we had any exact count. I do recall, however, that I was amazed at how many bodies there were assembled at this area in Ottawa. It constituted a troop train. We had additional people join the train in Calgary for the journey south into Montana. Incidentally, we were not informed even to where we were going until we were quite far west on that troop train. Then the information was given to us, and we passed it along to the other ranks or enlisted personnel.

MM: At that time when you first started after you had been selected, did you know you were going to be involved in a joint Canadian and American unit?

HG: (Speaking at same time) Yes, yes.

MM: That information was given.

HG: Yes.

MM: They did let you know it was going to be a...somewhat of a commando or ranger type unit?

HG: Yes.

MM: Parachute training.

HG: Yes.

MM: Special weapons and tactics.

HG: We knew that during the interviews early on at Brockville at the Officers Training Centre. We knew that that's the type of training we were volunteering for and it would be a special mission. Specifics were never mentioned at that time, not even the name of the organization.

MM: Early in the war, early in your military career, was it common for people to come around or ask for volunteers for missions like this? Or was this the first time you'd ever been approached?

HG: The Canadian Army was largely volunteer all the way through World War Two. There was no so-called conscription or selective service-type system in the Canadian forces until, oh 1942 or '43, something like that when they finally were drafting people. But so, volunteering, I had volunteered for whatever I did in the service up until that point, and so the Canadian portion of the First Special Service Force were all volunteers.

MM: No, but I guess my question was had you ever been asked to say join the British Commandos for instance, or—

HG: You mean a special unit.

MM: Yes, or the Airborne?

HG: (Speaking at same time) No, no.

MM: This was the first time you'd ever been asked to join or had the opportunity to join a unit like this?

HG: A specialized unit, yes. I'm not just sure which...The first Canadian Para-battalion, I think, was formed just prior to the First Special Service Force, because we ended up being designated the Second Canadian Para-battalion for paper purposes. A designation of the Canadian Army, they had to call it something, you know, you'd have to be on paper somehow if for no other reason to get paid. So we, we were the Second Canadian Para-battalion on Canadian documents as well as being First Special Service Force.

MM: I'm going to get off the subject a little bit, you know, the initial chronology, but the First Special Service Force remained an airborne unit throughout its existence, did it not?

HG: Yes, it did.

MM: Even people who joined the force as late as '43 or '44 became airborne qualified.

HG: Yes. There was further jump training in Burlington, Vermont, when we were posted to Fort Ethan Allen. There was additional training there to qualify more individuals. Once the force was committed to combat, the originals remained on jump status, but the replacements were not airborne-qualified from either service.

MM: So assuming an individual joined the Force say early in '44 as a replacement, he would not be airborne or trained in parachuting.

HG: No. Not necessarily.

MM: Not necessarily, but the old originals still were jump-qualified and still drew jump pay?

HG: I'm not sure that I recall that as being a yes answer...Probably not. I'm sure that the purse strings would not allow continuation because we never were called upon to jump on any missions. The only personnel of the First Special Service Force who combat jumped were those individuals that General Frederick [Robert T. Frederick] took with him from the Force to form

the First Airborne Task Force for the invasion of Southern France. Those people jumped in without any further training.

MM: So the First Special Service Force never did make a combat jump?

HG: No, they did not.

MM: They never did use its airborne skills in combat.

HG: No.

MM: I was in a unit like that in Vietnam, the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Although they did make a combat jump in 1967, I wasn't there until 1969. I never saw a parachute my whole year there, but we did remain on jump status and we did draw jump pay. But we were the only unit, I think, besides Special Forces, in Vietnam that did draw jump pay during that conflict.

HG: From memory I cannot recall any point in time where we would not...where we did not get paid jump pay. I don't recall, in other words, having a lesser paycheck, and that generally is the indication that you've been separated from something in the way of pay. Not really being definite about this, I think we stayed on jump pay all the time we were First Special Service Force. When the Force was disbanded in Southern France in late 1944, that's when you no longer were on jump status.

MM: I see. Well, Herb, let's get back to some of these questions we were starting in earlier. What motivated you to join the First Special Service Force, if I can ask that?

HG: That's a tough one. Probably a couple of things—the challenge. Maybe the spirit of adventure. I graduated from OCS [Officer Candidate School] as an armored officer, maybe this just sounded better than being an armored officer.

MM: Did you request being an armored officer, or is that where you were assigned?

HG: I requested that. I went from infantry, to armor, back to infantry is about what happened in just a short period of time because at the time I was a sergeant instructor through the couple years in the Canadian Army—that was infantry. I guess if I remember correctly you had the opportunity when you entered OCS of requesting your branch. Had I stayed in the Canadian Army, in other words and graduated from OCS, I would have gone to the armored training center for advanced training, probably at Camp Borden, Ontario.

Other than that, you know, that's a lot to try to remember why you did such a thing. It probably was the adventure portion of it. Incidentally, it was quite a shock to arrive in Ottawa at the assembly area for this organization and find a lifetime friend also had volunteered.

MM: That's interesting because that was going to be my next question, if any of your...Let me interrupt you and then continue with this. When you first volunteered for this, did any of your friends volunteer also, from OCS? Were they going in too?

HG: Yes, yes. There were several who were in the same class as I was, also armor. One, incidentally, is a retired three-star general in the Canadian Army by the name of Stan Waters. Lives in Calgary. I know of, oh, at least three, right off-hand, by name who were in the same class I was that also volunteered for this venture. Two of us came through and the other fellow was killed at...on our move off the beachhead at Anzio. He and I incidentally were real good friends.

MM: So it wasn't like you were going into a unit, and you didn't know anybody.

HG: Nobody was awful close. (laughs) But that didn't last long. You soon knew many.

MM: I would assume that when you volunteered you knew you were joining an elite, special-type unit.

HG: Yes, they did give a little flower, a little bouquet, as to the type of unit that was being formed.

MM: More than being in just another typical rifle company or regiment?

HG: Yes, but they didn't... they didn't really give it too much glamour. In fact, I think it's being honest to say that it took almost 40 years before the force is finally getting some recognition. Now it's becoming more and more recognized as the years go by.

MM: Well, it was a very unique concept—an idea—for two countries and two militaries to come together and form a force of that caliber. It's amazing.

HG: It had its growing pains. One in particular that I can recall. At the time that the grouping was being made on the Canadian army, along with the type of training that we were going to be expected to participate in, we were also informed that we would be integrated. By that I mean, we would not have a Canadian Army company or battalion. We would have a mixed battalion. We would be dressed alike, we would train alike, we would be paid alike. That part never materialized.

At that particular time, the Canadian Army was paid less than the U.S. Army and that, that was a real difficult problem to overcome. Even as a young Second Lieutenant, very green as an officer, it was not easy to tell your Canadian members of your unit, in this case a platoon, that they were not going to be paid like they were promised when they volunteered. Another thing that was different, and this is tradition, no such thing as a Sergeants' Mess in the First Special

Service Force. There was a service club, you know where it is. It still sits at Fort Harrison in the same location, and an Officers Club. Period. This further caused a rift with some of the Canadian non-commissioned officers.

We had people go home, go back to the Canadian Army. We had one group that assembled secretly, but the word got out and they never quite made it to the border. Someone had the persuasive powers to convince them that that was not such a serious situation and since they had volunteered to begin with, they were expected to keep their promise of volunteering and with no feelings, no punishment, no nothing, just to get back to Fort Harrison and get on with the job. And they did. They came back.

MM: Maybe you could explain a little why the Sergeants' Mess is so important in the Canadian Army. In the American Army, we have the NCO Club, but that's usually open to ranks of E4 or in some cases E5 and above. The Sergeants' Mess, as I understand it, in the Canadian and the British Army is, I would say, more of an elite organization. Am I correct?

HG: Yes, yes it is. One thing that's noticeably different also, is that a warrant officer in the Canadian and in the British—you mentioned the British Army—is not an officer. He's a non-commissioned officer. He's a warrant officer, period, but he's not a commissioned officer. Whereas in the U.S. Army, a warrant officer is entitled to the privileges of an officer.

But the sergeants major in the Canadian Army, they are the top ranking people in the Sergeants' Mess, which is a recreation facility. What'd you, you eat there? This is where you go for you three meals a day, is to the Sergeants' Mess. This is your...your social activity is held at the Sergeants' mess.

MM: It's not only a place to drink like the Service Club.

HG: No way! No way, it's three meals a day.

MM: It's three meals a day. It's recreation.

HG: It has its own mess staff. It's run by a mess steward. I suppose that, it being a tradition, it probably goes back to being an incentive for promotion. You know, there's just one little extra goodie to being a sergeant. Over better than being a corporal.

MM: A little better quality of life, lifestyle.

HG: That's right.

MM: Rather than just being in the barracks.

HG: That's right.



MM: Or like in our army, the service club, that is open to almost all ranks.

HG: Yes, it's—

MM: That's a very interesting point, Herb, about the importance of the Sergeants' Mess to the Canadians.

HG: You bet! It was highly important. You know, you must realize that we had volunteers in the Canadian Army, I can only speak for the Canadian part of it. I can't speak for the U.S. part never having been one prior to that time. But we had quite a number of enlisted personnel, other ranks, who had already been overseas once. Not in a combat situation, but they were in England and for who knows what reason were returned to Canada and either assigned to a different unit or whatever, and had considerable time. They not only had been in...Let's see if you recall, the Canadian Army followed right in line with the British and were at war from September 1939 to the...to its conclusion. There were a number of people who came to the First Special Service Force who had even been Permanent Force prior to September 1939 and were—

MM: Excuse me, by permanent force do you...is that—

HG: That's your regular army. Just like your regular army.

MM: Okay, tell me did you have any veterans of Dunkirk or Dieppe?

HG: Yes.

MM: In the First Special Service Force?

HG: Yes, yes, we did have them. Now who they are and how many, I don't know but I do know that we did have them.

MM: Okay, so even before the First Special Service Force was deployed overseas, it had veterans who had already fought the Germans.

HG: Yes. Few in number, but they were there.

MM: Okay, that's very interesting.

HG: One other thing that I think is interesting, and again I can't state numbers, is that because Canada was at war several years prior to the United States being at war, the Canadian Army had quite a number of US citizens in their ranks, in the army. Every platoon that I recall training, or practically every platoon that I recall training, in the basic training center had U.S. citizens. They'd cross the border at Detroit-Windsor or Niagara Falls or Buffalo—

MM: (Speaking at same time) Vancouver.

HG: Maybe they did have them in the West too. I'm sure they did, but to being in southern Ontario it was those that were crossing in that area that would get in the battalions or regiments in the Canadian Army and would be sent to a basic training center for training prior to getting on with their unit. But we had a number of those also. Fact, I think, if I'm not mistaken, Lorin Waling, who lives here—a member of the force—was one of those.

MM: So he had moved up and joined the Canadian army and then came back and joined the First Special Service Force.

HG: Yes, he was a member of the Canadian army when he joined the First Special Service Force. I'm reasonably sure that Lorin is one in that category.

MM: That would be interesting. So he ended up on the short end of the pay. (laughs) (Unintelligible) in the American Army.

HG: (laughs) Yes, yes.

MM: That's interesting about Americans joining in '39. I know my father's mentioned to me that he was in...going to school at the University of Washington at that time, and several of his fraternity brothers joined the RCAF [Royal Canadian Air Force], early in '39.

HG: That was very common in the early years of World War Two. Very common, particularly Air Force. I'm sure that a number of those people got involved in the Battle of Britain.

MM: In fact, I think this one fraternity brother of his was killed in 1940 or '41. I don't know if I told you or not I used to live in Canada for a couple of years between 1961 and 1963—

HG: I don't recall that you did tell me.

MM: Oh? Well, I did. I went to a boarding school up there, a prep school, and was in the Canadian Sea Cadet program, so I'm somewhat familiar with the Canadian military system. It's one thing that really interests me, so I'm going to ask you a lot about your Canadian experiences.

HG: Okay.

MM: [pauses] Do you have anything else, Herb, before we change the subject?

HG: No, I would like to recall one thing because it was rather important to me. I mentioned, and we had got off onto another tangent, about being really surprised to arrive in Ottawa and find a lifetime friend of mine also had volunteered and was a member of the First Special Service

Force. Was one of the killed-in-action persons. He was an only child, but we were...he was about six months younger than me so we went to school together, played together, did a lot of things together. He didn't see fit—probably because of being an only child—did not volunteer to go in the army until the law was changed and there was about to be a draft, and then he volunteered. He incidentally also was best man when my wife and I were married. In fact, my wife was the only civilian. Her bridesmaid was my sister who was in the Canadian Navy. Then Schmitt (?) was the best man, so Doris was the only civilian in the wedding party. But unfortunately he didn't make it through. He was killed in Southern France and—

MM: Toward the end of the war then?

HG: Yes, yes, just before. Just before the...Just before we were—

MM: Disbanded?

HG: —disbanded as the First Special Service Force, but not too long before that. It was on the move across the Riviera, Southern France at Ville Nouvelle Bay (?) by...I don't know if it was artillery shell or mortar shell but—

MM: Shrapnel?

HG: Yes.

MM: Well, let's get back to the early hist—

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

MM: Let's get back to some of the early days at Fort Harrison. When did you first arrive at Fort Harrison, or do you remember?

HG: Sixth of August, 1942.

MM: Okay, and you travelled by train from—

HG: Yes.

MM: —Calgary, is that correct?

HG: From Ottawa.

MM: From Ottawa?

HG: Yes. At Calgary we picked up the troops who were assembled at Calgary, and that was the Western Command. Canada at that time, and I think still is, split on the Winnipeg...Not Winnipeg...Manitoba-Ontario Border, and you have east and west. So you had two assembly points, and all troops in the east came to Ottawa, all troops in the west came to Calgary. When the troop train came through, they just tied those additional train cars on and came south.

MM: I see, right here to Fort Harrison.

HG: Right on the siding, down there. The thing that I recall the most of all, this was August. We had to put on a good appearance so it was spit and polish, I'll tell you. We were in Canadian Army summer gear, which was shorts, short-sleeve shirts and black boots and—

MM: (Speaking at same time) Puttees?

HG: —those wrap-around puttees. We stepped off that troop train in dust that deep. Fell in in formation and marched from the siding to probably in this area someplace because force headquarters, the buildings are no longer there, but it was on the west side of the street, this next street up.

MM: Okay. West of the NCO Club then...the Service Club.

HG: Yes, across the street. Those buildings were parallel—

MM: (Speaking at same time.) Across the street on the north side?

HG: No, on the west side of the street.

MM: On the west side.

HG: This is north. On the west side of the street, and they were parallel to the street. The front of the headquarters faced east.

MM: Were they brick or frame?

HG: Frame. Long gone. They've been gone a long time. That has never, never gone from my mind is—

MM: (Speaking at same time) All that dust.

HG: —to be really shined up and step off that train into dust that was over your boots.

MM: Yes. You know, in the movie, *The Devil's Brigade*, they showed the arrival of the Canadians and—

HG: Don't forget it was a movie. (laughs)

MM: I know. I want to get your comments on that. In the movie, they showed the Canadians as being very spit and polish, a very crack unit, and they showed the Americans as being the rag-tag bunch of ruffians and people just let out of the guardhouse. My earlier comment—I think know the answer—but that was for a dramatization.

HG: Yes, yes, it certainly was. Giving credit where credit is due, I do think that by its very organization of the regimental system, there has been more esprit de corps and more of the snap, shall we say, in the Canadian army than there was at that time in the U.S. Army. Just kind of pride themselves on being able to march well, drill well, and do it in a very military fashion.

MM: That's one thing I remember about Canadian drill, compared to when I went into the regular American army. The Canadians were very sharp, very crisp, where the Americans...not quite as much. There are sharp American units, definitely, but the average Canadian unit really snaps to.

HG: Well, two examples that I can think of in today's military in the U.S. forces that couldn't...can't possibly compare are the Special Forces, if they're on parade, and certainly the Marines. But I wouldn't say that was true in the Army or the Air Force or the Navy or the Coast Guard or those they... that isn't what they're—

MM: There's not an emphasis on it.

HG: —there for. Right.

MM: Even in basic training there's not an emphasis on it.

HG: *The Devil's Brigade*, however, as we say it was a movie and it was done for a dramatization and I'm not saying that we didn't have any of the not-so-good type of troops. We certainly weren't, and I don't think anyone would deny there were some...Maybe they were misfits someplace else, but they were not misfits as far as we were concerned. They trained well and they sure as hell fought well. And they may have had records. We did have such things as bodyguards to controversial figures and this sort of thing. Yes, we did. But nevertheless they turned out to be excellent fighting men, and that's what we were designed to be.

MM: If you got here the sixth of August, you were one of the first contingents to arrive, is that correct?

HG: The U.S. portion of the force started assembling in July. There were a number of U.S. Army people on post when we arrived. This was particularly true as far as instructors were concerned. Because training started immediately. This was not basic training. Everyone was trained when they got here from whichever army or from whichever branch of the army. They were all already trained soldiers. So the training schedules started almost immediately. The advanced detachment, let's say, of the U.S. Forces were here, had the training schedules—the original ones—prepared and training began immediately. Whether we had a place...a roof over your head was immaterial. We slept on the ground.

MM: Okay, that was my next question. What was the Post like when you got here? Were any of these small, white, frame buildings here, or was it mostly the old, red brick?

HG: Well, the red brick buildings in existence now are the red buildings that were in existence then. Since this organization was thrown together on such short notice, the troops were here long before Fort Harrison was here, as a resident post.

So in answer to your question, this area was just a mass of construction activity. From road graders and dirt haulers, to carpenters and steam fitters and plumbers and electricians and you name it in the construction game. It just seethed with people.

MM: Training went on in conjunction with the construction.

HG: You bet, you bet. Now the original housing were a wooden sideboard, pyramidal tent that housed three to four people. It was just a series of those beginning down on the east end of the reservation and slipped by the roads, but it just proceeded westward toward the far end of the fort. They were similar-type hutments south of here over the draw that runs from the west end of the fort down past the main gate and continues on into the farm down there. They were the same type of huts. They were fine for summertime living because it was hot. It was real hot that particular August, and the summer weather continued on into September and typical Montana

falls, even into November before there was any real drastic change. But they just barely got the hutment area completed, you might say, and it was time to think about winter.

So, the way it was done—and I don't recall just where the starting point was, it's immaterial—it was a matter of leaving the officers huts like they were. Where the Officer's Club is now there was a building—a frame building on that location—that if I remember correctly, was a laundry pickup point and kind of an administrative building. Not an officers' club, the Officers' Club was over, just west of the present service club. Where they tore the kitchen down? In that area. That and another building that sat behind the headquarters' building at one time, was an officers' club. They moved it several times.

The winterization was a matter of completing the siding, the wood part of it all the way to the eaves, and it just made them enclosed and then the...This portion of it of the Fort Harrison over here where the main body was all the enlisted personnel, they just moved three of those huts together and tore down the walls that were in between and made the long buildings. Just built them up around the sides, and there was the old pot-bellied Sibley stoves—there was one to each officers' hut.

MM: Wood-fired or coal?

HG: Both, both. The wood, however, was just kindling, just to get it started. Coal was the main—

MM: (Speaking at same time) The main fuel.

HG: —was the main fuel. But that's how they winterized Fort Harrison. After they got the things all put together, then the ski racks were put on the ends and this sort of thing.

MM: All that was done by civilian contractors?

HG: Yes, yes.

MM: The First Special Service Force trained, trained very hard during the construction.

HG: Exactly. Exactly. We were just barely into, oh, quite a diversified training schedule which involved a lot of physical conditioning. That was one thing I was really grateful for in my particular instance.

MM: All of the physical training?

HG: As an instructor and then as a cadet at an officers' training center, both of them, you had a lot of physical conditioning to contend with. It was easy to fall in with the rigid training, physical conditioning that was expected of you at Fort Harrison. Again if memory serves me correctly it,

when I talk about intense training, within a week after we arrived here...Certainly the instructors at that time had to have been in similar physical condition as I was because I can recall taking off out the front gate and cross-country to the Scratchgravel Hills and never stop. It was double-time.

MM: Done in full...double-time?

HG: Yes.

MM: And that's full field gear?

HG: No, not at that time. That came along as the other training progressed, but our parachute training began immediately. We got, as I say the Canadian training...Incidentally we also had Canadian troops coming in in smaller groups out of Fort Benning because this is where the First Canadian Para-battalion was in training, was at Fort Benning getting their jump training. They called for volunteers from there, and people came from there to here as part of the First Special Service Force. We had people from Fort Benning—Canadian people that were coming out of Fort Benning—several months after the Force was actually organized. So they came already jump qualified, you see.

The parachute training began immediately, and in force history, one date that stands out above all others is the 15th of August. Between the 6th and 15th of August we had our ground training, our parachute training. We never had any tower training, as such like you do at a regular airborne school. It was strictly a series of mockups out on the north side of the reservation...or of the cantonment area, the housing area, the other side of the latrine row over there. You know where the remains are of the one remaining parachute building. So over west and a little north... north and a little west of there they had these mockups, and we took that training and got our wings on the 15th of August. So it was a short course.

MM: It certainly sounds like. It's a lot shorter than the course that I took at Fort Benning in 1968.

HG: (Laughs) Yes.

MM: We spent one week of ground training, and then one week of tower training, and then of one week of actual jump training. It was five jumps to become qualified.

HG: Because of the short period of training and the type training that they had...Incidentally we did use the strip out there. The C-47s land and take-off from right out on that strip and jumped out there as well. It was the feeling of the command that if you could make two jumps after that short a training period, you were qualified. So that's all it took to qualify was two jumps.



MM: Tell me, by this time, by the 15th of August, had you met or seen Colonel Fredrick yet? Or heard anything about Operation Plough? Or was the Force still kind of in the dark?

HG: No, no I don't think so. I think by that time...That's a two part question. Yes, we had seen Colonel Fredrick on more than one occasion, even though he was on- and off-post frequently. He spent a lot of time on an airplane between here and Washington, D.C. He wouldn't stay for long periods of time, and it was for the purpose of ironing out some of the wrinkles and following up on equipment and clothing and you name it. He did this...Sure he had help, but he did a lot of the follow up himself to be sure that it was moving and got here as expected. I really can't tell you just when we were informed, but it was early. Early in our training we were informed, and this is also at the time when the intense secrecy was imposed. You were not supposed to discuss anything off the reservation.

That secrecy, incidentally, began for me at Brockville in the OCS. That was one thing...After the briefings, and we had, I told you, we had several briefings before you were actually accepted as a volunteer. You couldn't even discuss it with the guys who were being interviewed with you. You were not to discuss what you had in the briefing room. So it began that early in the organization. As in any organization, you know and I know that everybody doesn't keep their mouth shut, even though it's expected of them. But I think in all honesty to myself at least, that I did. My wife will vouch for that, because she got hell a couple of times because something would come back through her to me that I felt should not be known and didn't know where it originated, but it just wasn't the sort of thing you discussed.

As far as the troops are concerned, I'm sure that by the time we had jump qualified that we knew what the training was all about and what was going to be expected of us.

MM: I see. The Force at that time had almost number one priority on acquisition of equipment and training needs and things like that, didn't they?

HG: To the best of my knowledge, yes.

MM: As I was reading in Berhans' book, *The First Special Service Force— [The First Special Service Force: A Canadian/American Wartime Alliance: The Devil's Brigade*. Burhans, Robert D. (1947)]

HG: (Speaking at same time) Which is the official history, incidentally, of the force.

MM: —a very good section in there about the development of “the Weasel” [small troop transport developed for the First SSF] and the priority for a cross-country snow machine that would work in Norway on both frozen snow and powder snow, and the ability to access at least

a 30-percent grade, travel 20 miles an hour. Apparently at the beginning of the force, the development of this type of a vehicle was number one priority.

Another thing I learned from the book was the acquisition of equipment, and coming up with a totally different organization from the Canadian army or the American army in terms of squads, platoons, and the regimental concept of...What was it? First Battalion, Second Battalion?

HG: We had three combat regiments and a service battalion.

MM: (Speaking at the same time) Three combat regiments.

HG: Each regiment was composed of two battalions of three companies each, and each company was composed of two platoons.

MM: Only two platoons. That's different—

HG: Two platoons.

MM: —from a standard rifle company, which has as many as four or sometimes five platoons.

HG: Yes. We operated with two platoons. Wait a minute, wait a minute, excuse me. Three platoons. Three platoons per company.

MM: Okay. What were they? Were they all rifle platoons or did you have a weapons platoon or were heavy weapons integrated into each platoon?

HG: They were integrated into each platoon. We had a tremendous amount of firepower.

MM: But basically, what were the organization of the platoons in terms of equipment? Types of armament? Small arms?

HG: Each individual was equipped with a rifle or carbine and a .45 caliber pistol and a combat knife. Then the platoons were broken into firepower sections, I think, is what you'd have to describe it. That was light machine gun and 60mm mortars and flamethrower and the anti-tank weapon—

MM: Which was at that time? The bazooka?

HG: Yes, yes, the bazooka. I guess that's about what we had. (laughs)

MM: That's a tremendous amount of firepower. Now each man carried a rifle and a pistol?

HG: Yes.

MM: And a knife?

HG: And a knife.

MM: Was there anything special about the type of knife? Was—

HG: They were manufactured by J.I. Case. Right off hand the name of it skips me. It does have a designation however. Ask Colonel Reed. I'm sure he could tell you what it is. It's probably in the book too, the type of knife, but it was a particular type of combat knife. It was quite a thin, two-edged blade, very sharp pointed.

MM: Okay, I just noticed that there. [shows photo] Is that like it?

HG: That's it. And the handle had a, oh, a pointed end that was also part of the weapon. If you got to the point where you were hand-to-hand combat that was a very effective knife.

MM: So that knife was issued in terms to be used as a weapon, in hand-to-hand combat?

HG: You bet. Not for opening C-ration cans. (laughs)

MM: When I was in Vietnam, everyone carried a big knife and primarily for opening C-ration cans, building hooches—utilitarian chores in the field. I've heard of a couple instances during the Vietnam War of hand-to-hand combat with a knife, but most people—and I was in an airborne rifle company—the knife wasn't carried for that purpose. It was more as a tool.

HG: No. These were definitely combat weapons. They were combat knives.

MM: In your training did you receive training in knife, using the knife as a weapon and hand-to-hand combat too?

HG: Yes. Also, we had a bayonet course. You were taught how to use a rifle for that purpose. Hand-to-hand combat was quite extensive as far as training was concerned. I'm sure you've seen demonstrations of the Special Forces today and their's. We threw ourselves around that much too. We were just as mean and tough as they are today. But when you're in as good physical condition as we were, and as the Special Forces today, you don't notice it quite that much. You can take a lot of hard treatment without—

MM: Without being injured.

HG: Yes.

MM: That's part of the concept of jump school and the rigorous training and the physical punishment, is to get people in shape so if they do have a problem they don't break themselves up.

HG: One thing I think that probably should be thrown in at this point, while I'm thinking of it, is that from the very beginning of our training we were being taught the buddy system. Which proved its worth in the combat theatre. That didn't make any difference...Your rank didn't make any difference to the buddy system.

MM: Could you explain a little how the buddy system would work, Herb?

HG: The way it actually did work, you did very little of anything alone. You worked with another individual.

MM: Would it be the same individual all the time?

HG: Not necessarily, because they didn't live all the time, you see. It was a constant change, but I recall quite emphatically and quite vividly an individual that was in my company who—he was a sergeant—he and I shared a hell of a lot of foxholes together until he was wounded and then I found somebody else. But you very seldom operated alone.

MM: But the buddy would be...You would identify your buddy and you would work and live and train with him until he was wounded or disabled.

HG: Right.

MM: It would be the same buddy on a day after day after day?

HG: It was done for a lot of reasons. The mental strain, that you...particularly in a combat situation that a soldier goes through. You had somebody to share it with, somebody to talk to, somebody to keep warm with, somebody to share your rations with. There's a lot of things with it. That training was started early. It came in handy many, many, many times. Being trained or being taught the buddy system didn't always mean that you had to do something with the same individual. As an example, during our skiing when we went up to Blossburg. There's a siding up there, and they had railroad cars—the section crew type of cars—up there and it was very, very cold. I'm sure that I'm right in saying that one week when our regiment was up there—and we did this by regiment, that's about all the accommodations those cars had—we just lived up there for a week, skied every day, used the weasels, and you just had to constantly check the person behind and ahead of you for frostbite.

MM: I noticed in the book there's a photograph where it's 50 below, and skiing, the chill factor, I would imagine frostbite could come very easily.

HG: Very quickly.

MM: I would imagine most Canadians would be experienced with cold weather but—

HG: Not for long cold like that though, where you're exposed to it. Because you'd be gone...We'd be out skiing for the whole day. You'd take off in the morning and you'd cover many, many miles, maybe some of it was the same miles, but you carried your lunch with you or they'd bring you lunch with weasels. The snow was real deep. During that one week we were up there, the warmest that it got was 29 below. You're talking about beautiful clear skies and sunlight and the whole nine-yards, you know, and just beautiful, but you can freeze very quickly.

Those very dangerous cold snaps that we do get.

HG: Occasionally you'd get a little breeze with it and that's the chill factor, and you can't have your entire face covered and do what you're supposed to do, so it was just simply an occasion of stopping frequently and check the person ahead and behind. To this day, I can't take extreme cold weather, hands in particular. I froze my fingers, and cheeks, nose, chin, forehead.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

HG: I wouldn't suggest that everyone be interviewed. Are we on or off?

MM: We're on.

HG: Okay.

MM: Who were those names, the two others that should be interviewed?

HG: Got four now. Roy Hudson.

MM: Is he at Helena?

HG: Yes, they both live here.

MM: Okay, Roy Hudson lives in Helena?

HG: Yes.

MM: And who else?

HG: And Lorin Waling.

MM: Lorin.

HG: L-o-r-i-n. Waling—W-A-L-I-N-G.

MM: And he's also Helena? You said some—

HG: He's the one that I mentioned earlier who, I think, was in the category of being a U.S. citizen in the Canadian Army.

MM: Right, exactly.

HG: Also, like Joe Glass and I married a girl from East Helena.

MM: Earlier, you were talking about the fellow that froze his hands up at Blossburg and they turned black and they were going to amputate, and he asked that they not be amputated and he said he would bring them back and apparently he did. You said ran into him in Southern France, is that right?

HG: I'm reasonably sure it was Southern France that I saw him again. He still had, referring specifically to his hands, he went through a terrific amount of intense pain in bringing those hands back, a lot of peeling, but eventually he got the color back. But he never had his natural...his same natural hands again, they were still affected. The time that I saw him, was

very much surprised to see him and I'm sure it was in Southern France, he had transferred into the Air Force and was part of...He was one of the crewmembers in a resupply, airborne resupply group. This is why I'm reasonably sure that it was in Southern France, probably in Nice or some other town along the way and they had been part of...they supplied the First Airborne Task Force after they had jumped into Southern France. So he was really, really glad to see the Force people again.

He didn't let it get him down and it was, I think, a remarkable situation that a man could be that badly frozen and by sheer guts and determination be able to stay useful and that's what he did!

[Telephone rings]

MM: (Speaking at same time) Oh, by all means!

HG: He put all his other training together, and he may not have been a First Special Service Force combat veteran, but he sure as hell was a veteran.

MM: Yes, and that happened up at Blossburg, is that right?

HG: I'm sure it is because that's when we were subjected to most intense weather, was at Blossburg.

MM: Did many people quit the Force because of the rigorous training or the physical demands, once they'd signed up? Did people quit because they were, oh, were afraid to jump or the runs were too long or the winters were too cold or—

HG: When you're talking about the jump situation, I'm sure there were some who left the Force because they did not jump and that was their last day in the Force. During that period of time, if you refused to jump, you were moved quickly to the front gate and on to a train and you were gone, or a bus or whatever. That was just the routine at that time. You refused to do nothing, really.

MM: But they didn't have a holding company and make the dropouts pull K.P. or—

HG: No. (laughs) No, they sure didn't. Like I described it, if you refused to jump you were on your way out of the Force. We lost a lot of people because of injuries, because you had the same situation, you can't break a leg and catch up on the training. I don't recall at any time...The only instances...I shouldn't put it quite that definite, because there were—I can't pinpoint any—but there were instances where individuals stayed with the Force but they became members of the service battalion, which was not airborne qualified. Did not partake of all the other intense training that the combat regiments got involved in. That map that you and I looked at a little earlier this afternoon, if you get an opportunity, I would suggest you get one

and study it, and that in itself will raise many questions that I'm sure, because we skipped over pretty rapidly, but it certainly gives you some idea of the magnitude of the training—

MM: (Speaking at same time) Of the training area.

HG: Yes, and of the training schedule, in which we were involved. Same thing as airborne today. You know there's no such thing as walking. It's always double-time, with or without a pack.

MM: The airborne shuffle.

HG: Take off, go up to Scratchgravel [Hills] or up to the top of Mount Helena or you look and sees the farthest skyline in the West and you just double-time. You just didn't stop. Kept going.

MM: When you did that, when you'd go these double-time runs, would you sing Airborne chants, or was that a part of it? Did that come later on in the Airborne?

HG: I don't recall doing it. Here again if you interview more of our people, they probably did something different than we did in that respect.

MM: In 1942, the Airborne was still a very new service branch and a lot of the traditions hadn't been established, but today on any airborne post—Fort Bragg, Fort Benning—when they go for their runs, they always sing these Airborne chants to keep in step, agility calls.

HG: No, I don't think that...I don't recall us doing anything like that. We may have, but I can't recall any particular song. When you mentioned singing, the one thing that stands out in my mind is that we had a number of very harmonious officers from the Canadian Army, and they had some songs that they could sing but not tying in with any run of any kind.

MM: This more purely for recreation.

HG: Yes.

MM: Like in the Officer's Club.

HG: In the Officer's Club.

MM: Or the Montana Club.

HG: Yes, yes.

[Break in audio]

HG: —situation that the armament is no good unless you have something to put through it. We also carried all our ammunition.



MM: Okay. What was the basic load of ammunition? Do you have any idea?

HG: No, I really don't. Your pack board was so heavy that there was many times you couldn't just stand up directly, you'd have to roll over on your knees and push yourself up. Once you got in an upright position, why, most were able to carry it. Run into a situation on occasion when I'm sure that many of us did, if not all, particularly when we worked in the mountains in Italy where you'd stumble and trip or fall off the trail. When you'd finally stop rolling, why then you'd have to get yourself back up onto the trail again and keep moving. We did carry some tremendously heavy loads.

Here again is where the buddy system came into effect. You needed all that armament at some point in time, and it wasn't always possible for the individual or individuals who were the crew on a crew-served weapon to carry the weapon. So there was a buddy there to help out, and help carry the load for a while.

MM: Speaking about loads, I know in terms of say like, I'm an elk-hunter and packing out an elk quarter that weighs between 100 and 125 pounds, I've done that on occasion. I've weighed them. But I know what you mean as far as having to get up on your knees and have somebody help you up. I'm good at carrying those on a level plain for a quarter of a mile or maybe even half a mile without taking a break. The smokejumpers, who are in excellent physical condition, carry pack-out loads of approximately 125 pounds which sound like the loads you're talking about.

HG: Very comparable. Oh, you could take a break, but you can't just stop forever. You can only break for a short period of time, and if you're on a forward move, you can't be strung out for long distances either because if by chance you encounter the enemy, which is what you were after—was contact with the enemy forces—you needed all the manpower and all the firepower that you could get on a real short notice. You usually got it. But I really don't recall what our basic load was of ammunition, when you think of all the things that I mentioned earlier, about the only thing we didn't use to any great extent was a flamethrower. But certainly did everything else.

MM: The bazookas, the machine guns, the pistols.

HG: Right. Oh, yes. All of that stuff. The only thing (unintelligible) is that I don't recall that we used to any great extent, I don't recall my company ever using, was a flamethrower. We had nothing heavier in the way of armament than light machine guns, that could be a BAR—

MM: .30 caliber Browning.

HG: Yes. We were one of the only units with a Johnson automatic rifle.

MM: Could you explain a little about the Johnson automatic rifle, Herb?

HG: In what way?

MM: Okay, most people I think are familiar with the TO and E (?) of the Browning light machine gun, or the BAR. They were standard inventory for the American Army for a long time, but what about the Johnson?

HG: It was the same caliber as the other two.

MM: It was a .30 caliber, fully automatic rifle like the BAR?

HG: It was both.

MM: Fully-automatic and semi-automatic.

HG: Right, right, so you could fire single shots. It was much lighter than a BAR. The one characteristic that I recall was it had a high foresight. It had a carrying handle.

MM: (Speaking at same time) Kind of like a Bren gun?

HG: It was a magazine-fed, not a belt-fed, weapon. It was a magazine-fed weapon.

MM: Magazine coming in on the side?

HG: No, I think on the bottom.

MM: On the bottom, okay.

HG: The one feature it had, if I'm remembering correctly also, is it had a quick-change barrel. The shortcoming with the Johnson in comparing it with say the BAR, the BAR was just and old, good slugger. It could damn near operate laying in the mud. That was not true of the Johnson.

MM: (Speaking at same time) Very low rate of fire too, as I recall.

HG: Yes, yes.

MM: About 350 rounds a minute.

HG: (Makes machine gun noise with mouth) Poom, poom, poom. But the Johnson, that was one of the shortcomings of the Johnson, stoppages could occur very easily.

MM: Okay, did it have a higher rate of fire?

HG: Yes.

MM: So it was more like, say, the Browning machine gun—600, 700 rounds a minute.

HG: I think that sounds about like the rate of fire. There are a few of them around...Colonel Reed knows of the whereabouts of one. Course as you also know, he's honchoing this historical preservation thing and so he's got big ears and eagle eyes about a lot of pieces of equipment that he'd like to save.

MM: Tremendous amount of enthusiasm too.

HG: Yes, yes.

MM: Well-directed enthusiasm and support from the Special Forces Association. Colonel Reed is very supportive and a very good resource.

HG: (Laughs) That he is!

MM: Well—

[End of Interview]