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Interviewee: Herb Goodwin

Interviewer: Milo McLeod

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Milo McLeod: This is an oral history interview conducted with Mr. Herb Goodwin and Staff-Sergeant Milo McLeod from the 103rd pad, the 28th of March 1985. This is the second interview with Herb on the First Special Service Force.

Herb, let's see, we left off we had discussed training and the days at Fort Harrison. Now where did you go after you left Fort Harrison?

Herb Goodwin: [Clears throat] Excuse me. The Force left Fort Harrison in April of 1943, destination as usual, unknown, until we were aboard troop trains, but we eventually ended up at Norfolk, Virginia, at Camp Bradford. We were scheduled for amphibious training at the Douglas Fairbanks amphibious school. It was certainly much different than any other training we had received prior too, just like we had people who had never seen snow before, skiing in Montana. We likewise had many non-swimmers that ended up learning how to swim or at least to float, even if they had to have some sort of water wings. In fact, part of the training was being able to stay afloat in your coveralls.

MM: Okay, you guys wore coveralls, didn't you, instead of a two part fatigues?

HG: We did in Virginia.

MM: How about here at Fort Harrison too?

HG: I think we wore a two-piece outfits in Fort Harrison. But the coverall there, I'm sure was for the specific purpose of learning how to use it as a floatation device. By capturing the air...by opening coveralls and capturing the air, it was just like having water wings.

I would say that about 99 point 8 percent of the people in training were not familiar with salt water. The training was conducted at the Fairbanks school. Rubber boats were used to a great extent, not only eight- to ten-man boats but big ones—big rubber rafts—that'd carry a whole platoon.

MM: Wow!

HG: We took some of the training in Chesapeake Bay and some of it in the Atlantic Ocean at Newport Beach. That was quite an experience riding one of those big rubber rafts in the surf.

MM: And that was kind of a—

HG: [Speaking at same time] Kind of a rolling action to it. You better be prepared if you happened to be on the tail end of that raft, that it was going to raise suddenly and many learned how to swim just by being thrown off. But it was...The amphibious school training was very impressive. It was short in duration.

MM: Now about how long were you there?

HG: We got there in April and left in the latter part of May. Because we were in...I can identify it, if no other way our next destination which wasn't too far away was Fort Ethan Allen in Vermont, just out of the city of Burlington. Since that's where my wife and I were married, I know that we had to be there before June because we were married on the 5th of June.

The training there was just pretty much physical conditioning. Now, this is the general make-up of the force. Physical conditioning—long marches. There is water in that area. Lake Champlain is there. We didn't use that, but the rivers we did—learn river crossings and this sort of thing. Those that needed additional airborne training, they did...Aircraft were available, and there was a limited amount of jump training taking place there. These were late fill-ins to the Force.

MM: Late arrivals to the Force?

HG: Right. Then, as time was moving on about the last, oh, week to ten days was just strictly a shake-down inspection. For equipment. At that time I'm sure that our headquarters, at least, had received orders to move to a combat theater. So our stay in Vermont was very short.

MM: Tell me, did you take the weasels [small troop transport developed for the First SSF] and all your TO and E (?) equipment to Vermont with you?

HG: Yes. Far as I know we did, as far as I can remember. When we moved, everything moved. For the simple reason, I'm not sure not being in...Not having been in force headquarters—I was at company level as a platoon officer—you don't know all the ramifications and all the instructions that are received at what you're going to do. So it's my assumption, rather than fact, that when we moved our equipment moved with us. At that particular time...I don't think, not to my knowledge, at any particular time really, that "x" number of weasels, as an example, would be signed...assigned to a squad or to a company. They were used just as a general type of training, and they were limited in number. So if the First regiment, as an example, or the First Battalion First Regiment was using, was scheduled for weasel training, then somebody else would follow that. So they were in pretty much constant usage.

MM: So it wasn't that each platoon in the Force had two weasels assigned to them?

HG: No, no, I think eventually had...we had that much use for them that that could've very well happened. That we'd had them as a permanent assignment, like a tank or something like that has today.

MM: But now the weasels were in the Force in a limited number as a specialized tool?

HG: Yes. And they were in the experimental stage.

MM: Still?

HG: Oh, at that time, sure, sure. The numbers kept growing as they'd come out with modifications. With the weather conditions that we had at Fort Harrison, with the weasel training, that was a good shakedown period. That was a test of Studebaker quality.

MM: Yes. Tell me, after you experienced the weasels, did you drive a Studebaker when you got out of the service?

HG: [laughs] I've driven one, but I have never owned one.

MM: Okay.

After Fort Ethan Allen, when did you hear that you were going to move out to the West Coast?

HG: Oh...I'm not just exactly sure. Certainly just a short time prior to our departure, undoubtedly, if it followed the norm there would be an officer's call and the announcement would be made. Since most of our moves and a lot of the things that we did were classified, so would that information be. It was more common just to get an alert order and a movement order with no destination until you got on a train.

MM: That way there's no chance—

HG: By this time, even though early on in the Force it was desirable that we be single. Time marches on, and many, many, many of the Force people were married. So, this in itself is a temptation. I'm sure this is why...It with being a secret type of classification, with our moves and with our doings, you were...you certainly were not to discuss it with your wife or family or anything else. That was theory. That wasn't always true. We found out as we went along that lot of times the wives knew where we were going before we did. Once such incident, however, with a little humor to it, there were several officers' wives who ended up in Florida when we moved to Virginia because that was the word they had. So they just took off driving knowing that we would be traveling by troop train, and they ended up at a destination in Florida. So you see, word does get out of various natures though. But I'm reasonably sure that since this happened a number of times, why, our destination usually was released while we were moving.

That particular move from Fort Ethan Allen to the West Coast, we arrived at San Francisco on troop trains. I think there were five all together, and no two trains took the same route. They were not on the same railroad, and we did not travel the same route. If there was a part of the routing that was compatible to two different trains, it was not for very long—highly secretive type moves. We were not allowed off the train at any time, or very little. When we arrived in San Francisco, we were at dockside, unloaded, and transported to Angel Island, and we were confined to Angel Island. The only person that I know of that was allowed off the island was the Force commander. He, of course, had business to conduct. He may have taken his aide with him or one of his other headquarters' officers, but the troops, all you could do was sit there and look at the lights at night. There again we took advantage of any time that could be taken for further training. Orientation on the Japanese, their weaponry, their composition, things of that nature.

MM: Probably because you were sent to San Francisco you had a pretty good idea you were going against Japan, didn't you?

HG: Oh yes, oh yes. I'm sure that if not before...I don't recall that we knew before we got to Angel Island that we were going to the Aleutians, but we did know it then at briefings on Angel Island, why, we were going to the Aleutians. I am repeating, but they did keep us training. You know, there wasn't very much let down or much leisure time. Angel Island isn't very big for that many people, so there was no long, extended route marches or anything of that nature. When the designated day came to leave, why, they loaded us back up on the ferries or landing craft and back across to San Francisco and loaded us on Liberty ships—two Liberty ships—that took the force and its equipment to the Aleutians.

MM: You were talking about training. One thing unique about this Force compared to the training in other units at that time is you trained with foreign weapons, didn't you? Or had training in foreign weapons—enemy weapons.

HG: Identification-wise. I don't recall at any time actually using enemy weapons as a training course. You know, say, German—

MM: (Speaking at same time) German rifles or machine guns or—

HG: —rifles or anything of that...For identification purposes, yes, but that was it. Just like you learn enemy aircraft and all this sort of thing in training some place along the way. But you don't actually see the airplane, it's just a—

MM: Silhouette?

HG: Yes.

MM: In most cases.

HG: The ride to the Aleutians was very interesting. I can only speak for the ship that I was on, I can't, to this day, tell you its name. But seasickness started about the time the ship got under the Golden Gate Bridge. There again you're subject to the rolling surf, and the farther out we went, the sicker the individuals got. I feel very fortunate. I never was.

MM: Oh, really?

HG: No.

MM: I know, myself, I get sick. You know, I get in those swells off the coast.

HG: Oh, and they're terrible there.

MM: Twenty-minutes, and I'm over the side.

HG: [laughs] Well, there were a lot of them hanging over the side, and there isn't much you can do about it, just sweat it out.

MM: Did they stay sick until Alaska?

HG: Some of them.

MM: Oh, I bet they [unintelligible].

HG: I can recall one battalion commander that I don't think got out of bed. He was sick from the word go and just stayed sick. But it was a long ride. These Liberty ships were, even when we were boarding them, there were workmen on board still working on the inside of the ship.

MM: So they were brand new then.

HG: They were brand-new, or they had been undergoing some remodeling changes to the interior structure or something of that nature. A lot of the cargo, was not—

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

HG: —which in this case were drums—55 gallon drums with paint. They just stowed them on the top deck and attempted to tie them down. We hit some rough sea, and the barrels tore loose. Some over the side, and some down the galley ways. Barrels split open, and paint all over everything.

MM: Tell me, Herb, were you and Joe on the same ship? Did you know Joe Glass at that time?

HG: I knew Joe Glass before the Force. I met him on a train, prior to either one of us getting into the Force, but I don't think so. First and Third Regiments were on one ship, and Second Regiment Service Battalion and force headquarters on the other one.

MM: Okay. Because he mentioned the same thing on going up there that they had cargo strapped to their deck, and they lost everything that was strapped on the decks in that storm.

HG: Yes. The seas were very rough, and that didn't help as far as sea-sickness was concerned. You could go below decks where your troops were, and the cots were stacked four or five high right from floor to ceiling. Between the people who were sick, heaving, and their helmets couldn't carry any more and the ship floating like a cork, losing its cargo that was lashed on top, sea splashing up over the sides and down the companion ways and...it was a hell of a mess.

But we eventually road out the storm and got to the Aleutians. The closest we ever got to A deck was sitting in the harbor waiting for instructions. It happened to be a pretty, nice day—clear—and it was daytime. We left there and went to Amchitka which was our staging base island for an invasion of Kiska. Again training, starting with digging in, because we had...again had pyramidal tents—sizable ones. But because of the winds in the Aleutians, they had to be dug in, and you're talking about an island that is composed, a lot of it, of muskeg. Fortunately we were in good physical condition so the digging wasn't quite so difficult. But you just had to set up...and we set up our own. It wasn't done for us. Maybe some of the headquarters type of tents and that sort of thing might have been, but there was not very much on Amchitka besides the First Special Service Force.

After that was done, then you go back to the training aspect, and it was done by regiment. I recall our regiment going on a so-called... It ended up being just like a forced march. Something got fouled up in the signals. We took off, and in this particular case we were travelling with full packs, weapons—the whole bit. The only thing we did not have was a full load of ammunition, but we did have all the weapons. We took off for a supposed pre-arranged destination out on the shoreline, where we were supposed to...we were supposed to meet landing craft and perform some amphibious operations. This is where the foul up came. The landing craft never arrived. So we just turned around and went back. This is in darkness. We started out in daylight, marched all night, got back to camp the next day. We had been on the move almost 24 hours in very, very wet conditions. It rained, you're in darkness, muskeg country like that.

MM: (Speaking at same time) And I bet the wind was blowing too, wasn't it?

HG: They usually have...It was. Maybe not constantly, but yes we'd run into some wind conditions. It was really a true test of a man's durability—his physical conditions—and just how much he can actually take. This was another indication of the buddy system, because you had to kind of look after one another. I do recall, in my particular instance, where in addition to the equipment that I had and weapons...Most officers were armed with carbines at that particular time—the carbine pistol and so on—and I have no idea how long I carried a machine gun. Because the machine gun crew just couldn't, couldn't keep up with it—with the load— so we just had to kind of share the agony, so to speak. But one thing that was different in country of that nature—terrain of that nature—is that it's interlaced with little streams and it...Muskeg is a spongy ground condition—grass—and you don't see these little streams, until you step in it and down you go. You just learned throw out your arms because you don't know how deep it's going to be either, and they're always full of water. I don't think I ever fell into one that wasn't, so you're soaking wet all the time.

MM: Now, did you have pretty good equipment for the Aleutians?

HG: Yes.

MM: Rubber boots and—

HG: Mukluks.

MM: Mukluks?

HG: Yes. This was in August...we made the...Well, we left Angel Island in, oh, it was either late June or early July. We were on that bouncing ship for the better part of, well, it had to be ten days to two weeks to get up there. Our invasion of Kiska was the 15th of August, that memorable day on the calendar. So we had a good opportunity to use the equipment we had, and even though it was July or August, it is not hot in the Aleutian Islands. That's far north. It's at best cool and cold at nights. But we had good clothing for those days. I mean, as good as could be had, we had it.

MM: But I would think rubber boots or mukluks would really be mandatory in muskeg and that type of terrain. I guess without them, I think... well, I'd suspect you'd have trench-foot and things like that in just regular leather boots.

HG: You would have. Yes, you would have. It's bad enough as it is because under the conditions just described, even though they're supposedly waterproof the tops are not waterproof and so you're walking in wet socks anyway. Much of the time.

MM: Yes. But the Japanese had moved out of Kiska by the time you'd gotten there, isn't that right?

HG: Yes, yes, there was no resistance.

MM: But I had read somewhere that they had just moved out. I'd heard stories that some of the food was still warm and fires were still burning in some of the stoves. Is that, in your opinion, overreaction, or is that true?

HG: I would have to say that I did not, or my platoon did not, encounter such conditions. I don't say that it isn't true, but from memory the intelligence reports and the Air Force and their coverage—photographic coverage of the island—showed activity on Kiska up to a very, very short time before we actually made a landing. Our regiment was the first to go on shore, followed the next day by the Third Regiment. These are rubber boat landings. To a point, I think, that was approximately 1,000 yards off-shore on a naval destroyers and then into rubber boats and paddled to shore. The weather forecast was supposed to have overcast skies and generally not too favorable, or comfortable I guess I should say, weather conditions. Mother Nature fouled up that report, because we got about halfway to shore and it was almost a full moon. Just bright as day out on the water.

One thing that I can recall on that particular landing, someplace along the line people forgot what happens when the tides change and water is going around an island. Instead of taking you inshore, it takes you around the island. So what should have been a reasonably short 1,000 yards ended up taking hours to get ashore because you were constantly fighting to keep that front end pointed toward the island. With everybody rowing, if the guy with the rudder oar in the back relaxed even a little bit, it'd just turn with the current. In fact, we had one boat—not one of ours—but one boat on that particular landing that they just couldn't control it. They finally had to go pick them up with a destroyer. But we eventually got on shore and had to...First thing you do is let nature take its course, and then you assemble your troops and head for your destination which in this particular case was the high ground on that particular part of the island.

MM: You did expect resistance—

HG: Yes.

MM: —as soon as you hit the beach?

HG: You bet. We expected resistance before we got to the beach really, particularly with that moon shining up there. We keep wondering when the machine guns and mortars would start, and this was our first experience too.

HG: But fortunately we didn't lose anyone on that venture at all. That's not true of all troops on the island that within that next 24 hour period. We secured our destinations or our objectives and were instructed to dig in and that we did. This was, by that time, almost daylight—six o'clock in the morning. But patrols and everything else we didn't encounter anybody, and then the main landing came in—on that particular landing area—came in by landing craft at whatever the hour was.

MM: Okay, so the First Special Service Force was the first troops on the beach at Kiska?

HG: Yes.

MM: So you spearheaded the invasion?

HG: Yes.

MM: And it was all a rubber boat landing, no airborne?

HG: No, the Second Regiment was going to be used in case of reinforcements being required in the landing. The aircraft were already on Amchitka, and on the runways. The Second Regiment was suited up to make a jump, which never happened. There was no requirement. We went in one morning. Third Regiment went in the following morning on a different end of the island. Again, no resistance. We were only on Kiska a matter of, oh, within a week after the invasion we were back on-board ship coming back to the United States. There it was a much bigger...it not a Liberty ship. It was a regular troop ship. Regular is not the word to be used, but it was a troop ship. Again, the name skips me. We were all on it. The Force—the whole Force was on it.

MM: The whole Force? Were living conditions a little better than going up?

HG: Oh yes, much. Much better. It was a much bigger ship, and it didn't...I think we made the return trip in six, seven days.

MM: Back to San Francisco?

HG: Yes.

MM: They had better food, better accommodations.

HG: By being a bigger ship and properly loaded and this sort of thing, why, it didn't bounce all over like a cork. It just moved faster. We didn't encounter stormy weather like we did going up, so conditions were much better.

MM: Where did you go after returning to San Francisco?

HG: They put us on barges of some type—I don't know how else to describe them—and the Force was moved to Camp Stoneman which is upriver from San Francisco. Oh, how far I couldn't tell you, but it was an hour or more ride. This was an Army post, had barracks for us. We were there just a matter of a couple of days. Even though we had no physical contact with the enemy, nevertheless, it was an experience so it was felt by command that we were entitled to some leave. So they gave 50 percent of the total complement, or approximately 50 percent, leave from there, and the other 50 percent, by troop-train, went back to Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont.

I happened to be on that first category and flew from there to Helena and met my new bride of a few weeks after several months away, and we arrived at Fort Ethan Allen by automobile. After the leave time was over, I and another...We and another couple...Another Force officer who had similarly married a girl in Helena. She was originally from Butte, but she was living in Helena at that time. Just a real short training time again, regrouping. There was some change of commands made, another equipment check, et cetera while we were waiting for the next orders. Didn't take very long for them to come.

The next stop was Patrick Henry in Virginia—back in Virginia—and again a very short time and it was aboard a troop ship to Casablanca, by Forty and Eight across to North Africa. North Africa had already fallen. The fighting was going on in Italy at that time. Sicily had already fallen, but we crossed in the Forty and Eight on a train to Iran, which was a staging area for us to go to Europe to get onto the European continent. We shipped out of Iran to Naples and went to our...what was to be our bivouac area during most of our campaign in Italy. That was just out of Caserta in Italy.

MM: Up until this time the Force really hadn't been in combat?

HG: No, no.

MM: But it wasn't too long after this when you did go into combat?

HG: Very short time, I can't...I don't recall just how long, but we left Virginia in October. So it was probably in the middle of November when we arrived in Naples. They trucked us out from the harbor area there to the bivouac area. Some more training. It didn't take very long. I don't recall just exactly how long, but it wasn't very long before we had orders and that was our first combat mission was Monte Difensa, La Difensa [Battle for Monte la Difensa].

[pause]

MM: Okay, Herb, now after you got to Naples, how long was it before the Force had their first baptism of fire?

HG: I really don't recollect how many days or weeks it was, but it wasn't very long. The reason we had been sent to Italy was because the advance of the U.S. Forces, in fact, all of the Allied forces had been stopped at the so-called winter line—

MM: Okay, Herb, could you explain winter line a little bit?

HG: It was just the terrain features, the natural terrain features that the Germans had been able to fortify very heavily. They had the advantage of observation. They had all the high ground. This is a very mountainous part of Italy. You must recall that we're talking late November, early December. It's winter. If not snow, rain, mud very common for the next several months in the Italian campaign. This so called winter line not only was facing the U.S. Fifth Army, but also the, I think it was, the British Eighth that was on the east side of the boot and they were having as much problem in that sector as we in the U.S. area had on our sector.

They brought the force to Italy to see whether we could do something about taking some of the key hilltops—some of the key points along this so called winter line. Our first mission was a mountain called La Difensa. It was the highest point at that particular time. To our left, the British unit was assigned the task of taking another hill that was to the west of us—to the left flank so to speak. This was a test of our mountain climbing ability to say the least.

The senior officers in the Force decided that along with the assault regiment commander and his staff, which would be the least likely expected point of attack. So we put our mountain climbing experience into being, and the regiment was virtually on top of the mountain without detection before the Germans were aware that there was any resistance anywhere close. They had been used to tank attacks and infantry attacks, and they would take the so-called easiest way to get there.

That part of the operation was a success. The regiment that I was a part of was given the task of a diversionary force. Unfortunately, we found ourselves in a position where the Germans had complete visibility of the area in which we were moving, and it proved to be a drastic night to say the least. Shortly after dark, or about dusk, they started shelling us, and being inexperienced troops as we were we ended up the night losing a lot of people digging in in that particular area and, to say the least, quite confused. We did have to wait until the next morning to withdraw from that area. The visibility the Germans had on this particular area was such that they let us out. We could take our wounded, but we could take no equipment. If anyone tried to move some of our equipment, then the shelling started again.

MM: What type of equipment, Herb?

HG: Crew served weapons.

MM: Okay, like machine guns, mortars?

HG: Yes, yes.

MM: Tell me, did you have the weasels over there?

HG: No, no. We never used the weasels ourselves. The only time that I can recall the weasels were used by our Force people was the, I think it was the Rapido River crossing, and some of our people were the operators—were the weasel drivers. Since it wasn't part of our regiment, I really don't know how many or for sure in what capacity they were being used as cargo carriers or personnel carriers or weapons carriers or what, but I don't...At no time, at least in our regiment at no time, did we use weasels for any purpose in a combat situation.

We stayed on Difensa after we had pulled out of this chaos in the morning. We were regrouped, resupplied, and were moved to the—by our own strength—moved to the top of Monte Difensa in a holding position along with the Second Regiment who had taken the hill and this was to be sure that the mountain was retained in case of counter attack. There were counter attacks, but they were all beat off. This was the breaking of the winter line.

Incidentally, just as a matter of logistics, that mountain was so steep it took at least eight litter bearers to bring down one casualty.

MM: Eight litter bearers.

HG: Our Third Regiment was used logistically, rather than in a fighting capacity, and they carried the rations and ammunition up and brought the casualties down. Because, you know, the fighting didn't stop just because we took the hill, because they wanted it back. It being one of the highest points in the area. There were other high points which we found and took, because that was the next assignment, was to go on up the boot taking hill after hill until we got as far north as...We weren't involved with the Cassino operation, but we were far enough along the mountain mass that we could see the abbey. You could see the abbey—

MM: Of Monte Cassino?

HG: Yes, Cassino. With glasses, you sure could. But that first battle was an educational one, and I think it's safe to say that in all our combat experience...In fact, I saw that in writing today in some material I received from a friend in the Force, that one thing that we had in our favor is that we never retreated. We always moved forward. We found really most times that was the salvation. If you came under shell fire or machine gun fire, shell fire of any kind—artillery, mortars, whatever—your salvation was in moving and dispersion.

MM: Right. By and large, the troops in that first encounter performed very well.

HG: Yes, yes.

MM: Much—

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

MM: –terrain of Italy.

HG: For a relatively short period of time, I would say until for, oh, January of '44 into February. We weren't there that much longer than that. That's because we were pulled out entirely, and sent to the beachhead at Anzio in February of 1944. So we didn't use them a long period of time, but they certainly were used in the mountain terrain.

MM: Did many people in the Force gain experience in packing mules in that short of time?

HG: I would say no, that they did not. We used the Italian mule skimmers. If I recall, they were part of the Italian military. They were in uniform. Italy had capitulated at that time, and so the Italian resistance was part of the Allied forces. So this was part of the Italian Army, I'm sure. They were the mule skimmers. We may have had a few, but very, very few people who had any experience with mules at all. This is how rations and ammunition, water, got to the high ground, and the dead were evacuated.

MM: I remember in our last conversation, Herb, we were talking about the extremely heavy loads that men in the Force would carry. One hundred, 125 pounds on pack boards or rucksacks, and I can see where mules would certainly be useful.

HG: Yes, they were. They were. That helped relieve some of the load, particularly in the case of ammunition.

MM: Yes. One can go through an awful lot of ammunition in combat.

HG: True. As far as rations are concerned, you were issued more than 24-hour rations many times, so it was up to you to carry your rations, except for water. A canteen doesn't hold a hell of a lot of water. And yes, you had atabrine at that time, and you could get water out of a creek. But it was usually at that time of year, and with the rains and the mud conditions, rivers are swollen, and they're just as muddy as can be. So you're not going to drink that kind of water. So water was a problem. We had no reason to be looking for gasoline, because it was the old shank's mare. We didn't move very many times by motor vehicle. We walked a hell of a lot more than we did on wheels, so.

MM: The force didn't have many vehicles assigned to it, did it? Jeeps, trucks?

HG: Jeeps, yes. And there had to be a few trucks, because we did have a quartermaster.

MM: Oh, sure.

HG: The supply situation. But when it came to movement of any kind, we had to call on quartermaster truck companies to move us from our bivouac area to a point of departure to attack and this sort of thing. This was done by regular truck companies. So ours was a strictly organic for the unit supply sort of thing. But we had very...we didn't have very many vehicles. But your thoughts on the mules is an interesting one. I would have forgotten that entirely. What I recall, in a hilarious sort of way, is the problem we would have with the skimmers to bring the bodies out of the hills. They didn't want to touch them.

MM: Why?

HG: I don't know whether they're superstitious or what. But it would be sometimes a knock-down drag-out to get them to put the bodies on the mules. You'd carry two at a time and lash them on and get them down the hill to whatever point was designated as a burial...the disposal point.

MM: Is that American dead or German or both?

HG: Well, could be both. But usually, it'd be American.

MM: Okay. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about your experience, and experiences of the Force, in actual combat. How did most people in the Force feel about the Germans? Or about the enemy? Did they respect them? Did they fear them? Did they hate them? Or—

HG: Oh, I'm not sure that I'm in a position to answer that. Certainly, there was animosity. There could have been some hate. I think I can recall one individual, hate and fear at the same time. One individual in my command who happened to be a German Jew, who came out of the eastern United States, and he certainly had no respect for them because his family had suffered under German domination. So he certainly disliked, if hate's not the word. He certainly had a certain amount of fear, the fear being captured, in his particular instance. He really was concerned about that, what would happen to him in case if he was captured. Because it was pretty obvious what the Germans were doing in those years.

Overall, I think the feeling that I would express is that there's a war on—a very stubborn enemy—and we were there to win. It's another reason that we never withdrew. But as far as feelings about the enemy, you certainly learned to respect him. I'll go back to the defensive, where they—and we ran into this situation more than once in our combat career—where they knew tactics. Having the high ground was essential. The disaster, almost, that could exist if you couldn't take the high ground. This, really, is why the Anzio beachhead operation was so disastrous. Because it is just a flat terrain, at one time very swampy, until they put in the Mussolini Canal and drained the swamps and made it a productive area. But it's surrounded by quite high ground, and that's what the Germans held. We didn't have any high ground, so they definitely had an advantage until such time as the situation was right, and we moved off the beachhead.

MM: When I was talking with Joe earlier today, he said there was several different types of enemy that the Italians that he encountered were...oh, I don't mean to say poor soldiers, but lot less than motivated. Their country had almost capitulated. They surrendered fairly easily. There were, further on in the war, the Germans began surrendering and not being quite as intensive fighters, with the exception of some of the hardcore Nazis. Is that true?

HG: Did he designate any particular point in time or a theater?

MM: I believe it was, well, he was wounded at Anzio, wasn't he?

HG: I don't know.

MM: Okay, in southern France.

HG: To kind of, to shed a little light on that particular subject, I cannot voice an opinion at all about the Italians. Because to the best of my knowledge, our only contact with them was with the mules. I don't ever recall us being opposed by organized Italian military.

MM: Okay.

HG: But the comment about some of the German forces having enough combat. Yes. We certainly did run into situations like that in southern France. Example, our regiment's objective going into southern France was the Island of Port Cros. We took two islands. Port Cros was First Regiment objective, Levant was the Second and Third Regiment objective. The sentry on the outpost in the area where my unit landed, again by rubber boat incidentally, it was a night landing.

MM: Another amphibious operation.

HG: Yes, another light land, 15th of August.

MM: Oh, really?

HG: Yes. Fifteenth of August 1944. Fifteen August '43 was Kiska.

MM: Fifteen August '42 was when you graduated from jump school.

HG: That's right. That individual who was on sentry duty on an outpost where he had perfect vision, he watched us paddle in, climb up the cliff, the shoreline at that particular point, and never fired a shot. Gave in. Just as soon as we get up there, he was all through fighting. On the other hand, there happened to be a fort—a medieval type fort on that island—and a German lieutenant commanding and he was the Nazi type. It took us a lot of manpower, a lot of deaths,

and days to take that fort. It finally was by naval gunfire or aircraft that that lieutenant was wounded, and they finally...It was the old type with a moat. There was no water in it. But nevertheless, that moat was there and a drawbridge. Hell, you just couldn't do anything about it. So it had to be that type of fire. But later on, as we were crossing eastward—going eastward along the shore along through southern France—we came across some points that the resistance was not up to the usual standard. There were a time or two where prisoners came through in a short interrogation. By that time, we're talking now August, September, into October 1944, so the war had moved along a long ways.

MM: D-Day had taken place.

HG: Oh yes, oh yes. That was in June '44 when we went into Rome. So they were old and very young and a number of White Russians—

MM: Oh, really?

HG: —who had been drafted into the German army when Russia, or when the Germans had been moving east through all the countries and into Russia. They took Russians with them and put them in their army, and we ran into that situation on some of the prisoners that were taken. There again, why should they resist when it was easy to give up? You know, why should they fight for the German cause?

MM: They really didn't want to be in the German army in the first place.

HG: No way. So, with those two comments, I agree with what Joe's comments were.

MM: That's very interesting, the intensity of the enemy, how it changes over time and perceptions and what it's made up of—White Russians, for instance. Joe had mentioned to me that they'd captured several Poles who had been drafted into the German army when Poland fell.

HG: I recall [unintelligible] too. And those, when they had the opportunity, they'd give in real easily. They'd had enough.

MM: Keep the tape going. But he was saying that in Italy his unit had suffered some heavy casualties, and they'd gotten some replacements. And one of them was black, and they were very happy to see this fellow. He said he was a very good-looking man in very good physical condition. He was with him for two or three days, and then all of a sudden he was gone. He looked into it and found out he was transferred, that the Force wouldn't allow a black man to be in it. I asked if that was because of U.S. Army policy at that time, where they did have segregated military units, or if he felt it was the attitude of some of the officers. He thought it was the attitude of some of the Southern officers from the U.S. Army that really, that were very prejudiced toward blacks. Do you have any comments on that?

HG: Well, I'm not aware of the incident at all. That's news to me, and if Joe had talked about it, I don't recall it being discussed. But I would have to agree that it probably was on the...because of the thoughts of some of the...not just officers, but personnel from the U.S. South, because we never at any time had a Negro in the force. We had several individuals in the organizational stage of the force—members of the Canadian Army—who were from the southern islands.

MM: Barbados or Jamaica—

HG: Bermuda, Jamaica, those places. And they're brown skins. They're not Negroes. They're brown-skinned people. They couldn't stay.

MM: Oh, really?

HG: No way. Good NCOs. They'd been members of the Canadian Army for years, and they couldn't stay, because there were no Negroes allowed in the First Special Service Force. That was just it. It was one of those morale situations, I guess is what you'd have to attribute it to. If they'll tolerate it, they'd probably had a lot of Southerners ask for transfers—get out—because they wouldn't work with them. I don't think that was attributable just to officers. I think it was Southern U.S. people.

MM: Okay. I certainly don't think Joe was saying that it was the officers who necessarily were racist. He said some Southern officers, they had had...But were there are a lot of Southerners in the force?

HG: Yes.

MM: I've noticed that in the Airborne, that maybe it's even today, the Airborne was made up about 70 percent Southerners. I don't know if it's because Fort Benning is in Georgia and Fort Bragg, and Fort Campbell, and the Airborne is located down there, or if the military tradition fosters that.

HG: Well, I wasn't aware of that, but now that you make it a point, I guess I would have to agree. Understand and agree with what you're saying in the instance that I have had contacts with Special Forces people, Airborne people, that yes, there sure are a lot of Southern people in the active military. In fact, when you speak Special Forces, there again, a lot of the units are from the South. Units that have come here over the last few years for training have been from the South. But I never gave...I never thought of it that way of the preponderance of Southern types in Special Forces, or in Airborne of any kind.

MM: I don't know if that has to do with the social attitudes of that part of the country that has a strong military tradition—conservative political history, et cetera. Or, if just because of the placement of the forts down there—Benning, Bragg Fort Stewart, Georgia, Campbell, Knox—

that you just get a lot of people familiar with the Airborne down there and go into it. I mean, in Washington, Idaho, Montana, not many people go off and become paratroopers.

HG: No, no, that's true.

MM: They join the Navy or the Air Force. But they don't go off and become Airborne.

HG: In fact, Navy, very popular in the Northwest states. I think probably just as, almost equal to Air Force-type recruitment.

MM: And Army and Marine Corps are very popular in the South.

HG: Yes.

MM: One other question I wanted to ask you, Herb, was what were the feelings of most of the...Well, first of all, did you know...were you present when the Force was disbanded?

HG: Yes.

MM: What were the feelings of the officers and the men—members of the Force?

HG: It was a very sad day. This is when the true closeness, I think, of the unit came to the top. You don't very often see grown men cry, but they did that day when the order came down for the Canadians to fall out in designated area and we marched past each other and that sort of thing. Most of the Canadians went back to Italy. A few had volunteered for the First Canadian Parachute Battalion, and they were flown to England to become part of it—for some refresher jump training—and become part of the First Canadian Airborne, who were operating in the western part of Europe.

MM: Did they end up in Arno (?)?

HG: I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I know a number of who were among the 10 or 12, and these were officers. In the case I'm referring to, these were all officers. The balance of us were sent back to Italy, where again, it was split out. Those who came to the Force's Canadian Army replacements, and not part of the original Force, were left in Italy, again, as replacements to the Canadian Army. The balance of us who were originals with the Force were sent to England, and split up to training centers as instructors in the various capacities. Some additional joined up with the First Canada Air Battalion—the Airborne Battalion.

The U.S. portion of the force, some of the officer personnel had gone with General Frederick [Robert Tyron Frederick] back in Italy when the First Airborne Task Force was formed for the invasion of Southern France. I think some additional people may have gone there, but the First Airborne Task Force was for a designated operation—invasion of Southern France. It was

disbanded early on, and General Frederick took command of the 45th Infantry Division. These people just went with him. Where he went, they went. The balance of the U.S. portion of the force, some went to the 82nd Airborne, some went to the 101st Airborne, and then we get down to what's left. They were formed into a separate infantry regiment. I could be mistaken, but I think they were then boiled down to two battalions of First Special Service Force people, as U.S., and then there was a separate battalion—Norwegian-American battalion—that was the third battalion in the regiment. They proceeded through Germany and ended up being occupation troops in Norway.

MM: Was that the 474th Infantry Regiment?

HG: Yes. That was the 474th Separate Infantry Regiment. Incidentally, we do have in Helena several people who were part of that. Mark Radcliffe (?) and Bob Durkey (?), I'm sure were both...I know Mark was, because Mark was a commander. I don't know whether he had a company or just what he was, but he was in the command position in Norway. But if you talk to those people, you can get much more on that.

MM: Okay, that sounds like another story in itself.

HG: Yes, it is. Speaking of that being another story, just recently received material from our association headquarters on another European trip this fall to go to Norway.

MM: Oh, really?

HG: Yes. It's in [unintelligible] so that'll be 40 years, also, since they were there—another anniversary type thing. I think it's in September or October.

MM: Oh, that'd be a nice time to go to Norway.

HG: Yes, yes.

MM: I know my aunt goes over, oh, about every four or five years. I have shirrtail relatives who live in Trondheim and Oslo.

HG: Oslo is one of the stops. There and Bergen. That's on both the west and the east part, those two cities. But it's about a two-week, I think, a two-week tour of Norway, and it highlights the towns that they were stationed in.

MM: The 474th stayed in?

HG: Yes. Their headquarters was in Drammen, which is just out of Oslo on the east part of the country.

MM: It was a very sad day when they disbanded the Force.

HG: Oh, it sure was.

MM: Did that come as a surprise to Force members?

HG: No.

MM: Or had there been rumors around?

HG: Yes, yes, the latrine rumors were flying long before that actually happened, and it was just...There was no longer a requirement for specialized units, and they were too difficult to find replacements and—

MM: Expensive to train.

HG: You bet, you bet. By the time this came about, we were not very much, had very much in the way of specialized equipment anymore either. I mean, it was just a straight old infantry-type of weaponry. But a lot of it—

MM: Most of the Johnson machine guns were gone?

HG: Yes. Back to BARs and light machine guns. We never got away from 60 millimeter mortars, I don't think.

MM: One thing that came out in the movie, *The Devil's Brigade*, was when the operation plan was given up—was decided not to go through with. There was an attempt to disband the Force, or it was portrayed in the movie. Was that a reality?

HG: I don't know.

MM: Okay, early on in the Force, when you were still at Fort Harrison, were there rumors of disbanding it? Do you remember?

HG: I really can't remember any such...I'll reword that. That gets a little bit of wheel turning that I didn't expect. I do recall that Colonel Frederick made many, many frequent trips about that time to Washington, D.C. And yes, there was comment—not official. It would be rumor type of comment there, that an effort was made to find another mission, and we would continue our training as originally portrayed. It would be extended, because of the original mission no longer being in existence. That sort of thing, yes, yes. But I don't recall that it ever was to the point of disbanding the Force, at that particular time.

MM: Okay, a change in—

HG: It was a sell job on Frederick and whoever he could get to go along with him, to find another mission for a specialized unit. After all the effort and training and expense that had been gone to this far, it would have been a shame to do otherwise and to give us another specialized type of mission, or missions. Really, that's about what it boiled down to. We were just given a succession of objectives or of missions.

MM: Of specialized missions?

HG: Yes.

MM: You weren't—

HG: When the going was tough and things were bogging down, why, they kind of called on us.

MM: Yes, kind of like frontline firefighters or the smokejumpers.

HG: Yes.

MM: So you weren't just used as elite infantry? You had specialized missions?

HG: I would say that, yes.

MM: That were beyond the capabilities of most regular—

[End of Interview]