Their story will go on, told by descendants and others who have rejuvenated their 65-year old association and renewed their proud record

The brave soldiers of the Canada-USA First Special Service Force to be honoured with Congressional Gold Medal

The Congress of the United States has authorized issuing a Congressional Gold Medal to commemorate the Canada-USA First Special Service Force that was raised as an airborne unit in 1942 and served with distinction in Italy and France.

The Congressional Gold Medal is on the same level of honour as the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest award for valour or meritorious achievement that can be given to an individual by the United States government.

It should be understood that the medal being struck for the First Special Service Force is not one that will be issued and worn by the veterans or their descendants.

Every medal is specially designed to reflect the recipient or recipient group and usually only one is ever cast. It is cast in gold in the form of a coin.
In the case of individuals, it is presented to the honoured person.

In the case of associations, the medal is presented to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, which is charged with perpetuating the history of the members of the association or unit.

The House and Senate Bills call for two to be struck, with the second one being presented to the First Special Service Force Association, which is headquartered in Helena, Montana, near the post where the Force underwent its first training.

Bronze replicas of the medal are available for purchase by members of the unit and family members, friends and supporters. The cost is low, only to offset development and minting of the gold coin (which has a budget cap of $30,000). The funds are collected by the Secretary of the Treasury’s office for deposit in the enterprise fund of the U.S. Mint.

Units that have received this award include the Tuskegee Airmen (America’s first black airmen), the 100th Battalion 442nd Regimental Combat Team (Japanese Americans), the Navajo Code Talkers, Women Air Force Service Pilots, the Montford Point Marines (first black marines) and others.

Individuals who have been awarded the Congressional Gold Medal include George Washington, Jesse Owens, Sir Winston Churchill, President Harry S. Truman, General Colin Powell, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandella, Pope John Paul II, Ruth and Billy Graham and other luminaries. Less than 200 medals, including those for military units, have ever been struck in two centuries.

Several of Canada’s Korean War veterans had served in this unique unit that was made up of Canadian and American servicemen.

The First Special Service Force should not be confused with the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion – but often is.

It is no wonder. Both were formed in 1942, with the 1st Canadian Paras organized in June and the FSSF later that year, under the fictitious designation of 2nd Canadian Parachute Battalion.
The FSSF was organized as a unit with the secret mission of striking behind enemy lines in occupied Norway and in other locations where strategic damage could be done to generating systems, oil refineries and other targets.

However, their role changed greatly. They were first deployed to the Aleutian Islands, landing at Kiska, but the Japanese forces had already withdrawn.

In 1943 they were sent to Morroco and from there on to Italy where they fought in many major battles in the mountains. In February 1944 they were diverted to the Anzio beachhead, following the invasion.

After Italy they were deployed in the South of France and fought until being disbanded in December, 1944. At that time the Canadian and American soldiers were taken on strength by units of their own nations.

The 1st Canadian Paras were different and served as a unit of the 3rd Parachute Brigade in the British 6th Airborne Division. They jumped into France on D-Day and in the fighting then and in the months more than half of their entire force were casualties.

After regrouping in England, they were rushed into service in Belgium and fought in the Ardennes in the Battle of the Bulge.

They then fought in Holland and crossed the Rhine into Germany.

One of their medics, Corporal Frederick Topham, of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery in an action near Wesel, Germany in March, 1945.

Their unit was disbanded after the end of the war in Europe in 1945.

Today, in the little town of Tanner Hill, Nova Scotia, veteran Sergeant Roy Rushton, now 93, still holds forth as the national president of the Normandy Veterans Association of Canada.

Roy jumped into France six hours before the Normandy Beach landings and was twice wounded serving with the 1st Canadian Para.

When the Canadian Special Force was accepting its first volunteers in August, 1950, for service in the Korean War, Roy enlisted at once. He served in Korea as a platoon sergeant with 10 Platoon, D Company, 2nd Battalion Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry.

Roy could not participate along with comrades in the April, 2011 ceremonies in Korea that marked the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Kapyong. His health is such that his doctor will not let him travel outside of a 20-mile radius of his home.
Sergeant Roy Rushton and some of his comrades in Korea in 1951 in a trench they recently chased enemy soldiers out of.

One who served with Roy in Korea and who was a veteran of the Canada-USA First Special Service Force was Sergeant Thomas Prince.

In World War Two, he was awarded both Canada’s Military Medal for bravery in the field in Italy and the U.S. Silver Star medal for bravery in an action in Southern France. He also was awarded the U.S. Combat Infantry Badge (CIB). Had he lived, he would also have received the U.S. Bronze Star. It was awarded in 2007 on a “conversion” basis to all veterans of the FSSF who wore the CIB, which requires a certain number of days of service under fire.
Sergeant Tommy Prince, from Winnipeg and Lieutenant Colonel John F. “Jack” Akehurst, from Kirkland Lake, Ontario, at Buckingham Palace in 1945. Sergeant Prince had been awarded a Military Medal and Lieutenant Colonel Akehurst had been awarded a Distinguished Service Order by His Majesty, King George VI. In the investiture the Sovereign never pinned those honoured but handed each of them their medal in a box. Sergeant Prince had formerly served in the Royal Canadian Engineers and Lieutenant Colonel Akehurst was commanding officer of the Special Service Force’s 1st Regiment. He had been awarded a Mentioned in Dispatches while serving earlier with the Algonquin Regiment.

Tommy Prince had been serving with the Royal Canadian Engineers when word went out that volunteers were needed for a special unit. The notices said preference would be given to those with outdoors logging, skiing, mountain climbing, other such experience.

He recalled without embarrassment that in his jump training in Montana, one time he was scared to go out the door. The plane had to circle after everyone else had jumped to let him follow them down after he got his nerve up.

Tommy Prince served twice in Korea, once with the 2nd Patricias and then again as the sniper section sergeant with the 3rd Patricias.

He was colourful and there were legends about him, both pro and con.
In Korea in November, 1952, a couple of hours after members of C Company, 3rd Patricias had helped counterattack the enemy on the Hook position and had replaced the Black Watch soldiers who had high casualties, he came up to the most forward position.

Sniper fire was frequent from the nearby Ronson feature where the enemy were secreted in trenches and blown out bunkers. It was only one hundred yards distant.

Prince put his elbows on the rampart in a section of the trench that had survived the night’s massive shelling. Fully exposed he started sweeping the enemy slope with binoculars.

One soldier near him said incredulously that he would get his head shot off.

“They know what I’m here for,” he answered. He was right. All of their shooters went to ground.

He was wounded in the knee a couple of nights later on a long range reconnaissance patrol. Legend says he picked the shrapnel out with his bayonet, but that is stupid for the bayonets used had thick spike blades, similar to a sailor’s Marlin spike.

Tommy used his pocket knife, and he did it by candlelight in the “Warsaw tunnel” on the Hook. There was only one witness, but many tell the more colourful story about the bayonet.

What is significant to Canada’s Korean War Veterans, especially those who are members of the Korea Veterans Association of Canada, is a parallel in situations between the veteran members of KVA Canada and those of the First Special Service Force Association.

Virtually all of the surviving veterans of the FSSFA are in their 90’s. Just six years ago, they were planning to disband because attrition had taken its toll and seemed it would eventually wipe them out. Some thought it best to wrap it up their association, which had first been formed in 1947.

However, some new and aggressive members came on board, invited by new and aggressive leaders. Association membership was opened to relatives of the veterans and even beyond that to those who wished to support the history of the unit and of those who served in it.

So the Association grew, and it developed such a sophisticated and energetic voice that it convinced influential U.S. Senators and U.S. Congressmen to pass a bill that would award the Congressional Gold Medal to their historic unit.

That is no small feat.

A bill recommending the award of the Congressional Gold Medal must pass through both the House of Representatives and the United States Senate with two thirds of the members of both houses voting in favour.

So this shows what can be done when a flagging association suddenly perks up and brings in new members who energetically pursue the objective of making sure that the primary members are honoured and never forgotten.
They also see to it that the FSSF veterans receive not only honour but proper care and treatment by their governments and their fellow citizens.

None left uncared for!
None in need that is not seen to!

(See some of their photographs below the newspaper clippings)

The Korean War Veteran publication wishes to thank the First Special Force Association for use of the following photographs that were borrowed from its outstanding website. The website was developed and is maintained by Eric Goodwin, grandson of the late Lieutenant Colonel M. Herbert Goodwin, from Elmira, Ontario who served in the FSSF as a lieutenant and captain. The website [www.firstspecialserviceforce.net/](http://www.firstspecialserviceforce.net/) is highly recommended.
Helena Man
Selected
Force Chief

Mark Radcliffe Named
President of
FSSF Association

Mark Radcliffe of Helena, who
has served as appointive presi-
dent of the First Special Service
Force association and was chair-
man of the group’s first reunion
which ended here last night, has
been elected association president
for the ensuing year.

Veterans of the force, at their
meeting following the dedication
of the memorial to their war
dead, voted to meet next year
in Canada, with the reunion city
to be chosen later.

M. H. (Sliver) Lee of Montreal,
Canada, and Heath Underhill of
Ithaca, N. Y., were elected vice
presidents of the association, for
which a charter, constitution and
They’re the real thing, but they look like movie stars right out of a Hollywood deluxe production. The photos shown are of a few of the brave young men from Canada who served as volunteers in the First Special Service Force.

Lieutenant Colonel John F. “Jack” Akehurst, from Kirkland Lake, Ontario, commanding officer, 1st Regiment, awarded Distinguished Service Order and Mentioned in Dispatches.

Corporal Gordon H. Baker
British Columbia
Sergeant Carl William “Tiny” Beacon, Osoyoos, British Columbia, was awarded a Mention in Dispatches for his service in France in 1944. He died in 2007.

Sergeant John Barnett of Montreal was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Valor Clasp in France in 1944.
Lieutenant Colonel John Gilbert Bourne, commanding officer of 2nd Battalion, 3rd Regiment came from Montreal. He was awarded a Mention in Dispatches in Italy in 1944.

Sergeant Camille Gagnon of Montreal was awarded a Silver Star for bravery in operations in Italy in 1944.

Sergeant Jack Frederick Glenn of Brockville, Ontario, was killed in action on Christmas Day, December 25, 1943 serving under fire in Italy. Sergeant Glenn was awarded a Silver Star medal for bravery. He is buried in the Cassino War Memorial Cemetery in Italy.
Captain Glen H. “Herb” Goodwin from Elmira, Ontario, served with the Scots Fusiliers in Canada before joining the First Special Service Force. He met the lady he was to marry, Doris Porten, in Helena, Montana during unit training.


Private Lawrence “Junior” E. Durant,

Lieutenant R. A. MacDonald from North
from Prince Edward Island, served in 4 Company of the 2nd Regiment. He received the Bronze Star Medal in 2007 that was awarded to survivors who had been awarded the Combat Infantry Badge.

Private Victor A. Innanen of Toronto served as Victor A. Coja. He first enlisted in his own name at age 15 but the deception was discovered and he was discharged. Still at age 15, he signed up again under his mother’s maiden name, Kojo. Somehow it wound up as Coja on his records. The brave young soldier was killed in action at age 17 on November 1, 1944.

He was a qualified parachutist and had earned the Combat Infantry Badge.
Sergeant George W. Wright of Picton, Ontario was awarded the Silver Star for bravery. He joined the FSSF after first serving in the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment.

Sergeant Thomas George Prince of Winnipeg was awarded the Military Medal in Italy and the United States Silver Star while serving in southern France.
Captain D. I. McWilliams, Toronto

Sergeant Andrew Olson, Glaswyn, Saskatchewan, was wounded in action in September, 1944.

Lieutenant Colonel Donald Dobie Williamson, commanding officer 2nd Regiment, from Brantford, Ontario.

Major Gerald W. McFadden, Brockville, Ontario.
Lieutenant Alan Wesley “Spud” Wright of Grand Prairie, Alberta was awarded the United States Distinguished Service Cross and the Canadian Military Medal for bravery when he served as a staff sergeant. The Distinguished Service Cross is America’s second highest medal for bravery, just under the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Sergeant George Rainville of Bonfield, Ontario, was awarded the Silver Star.

You get the picture… Brave and good men all… and they are being remembered by comrades, historians, friends of their service and by their descendants who are so very proud of them.

That is how an association of veterans serves its members, both the survivors and the departed.