

Brief History of the Green Berets

Adapted from "Special Forces of the United States Army"

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It's a myth that the Americans naturally and historically exhibit a proclivity for unconventional warfare.

Subversion, sabotage, and guerrilla warfare are the weapons of the politically and materially weak. They have been considered by the Americans, who have not had many requirements to use them, as wholly unworthy methods.

The use of "Guerrilla Tactics" by Robert Rogers' rangers in their attack on the St. Francis Indians in 1759 adopted only the military dimensions to gain tactical advantage.

The operations of Lieutenant Colonel Francis Marion, nicknamed "The Swamp Fox", and others in South Carolina during the Revolutionary War were more integrated with, and directed toward a broader political goal.

The tactics were quite unconventional, and not only the British, but the inhabitants of the area, whether opponents or uncommitted, became legitimate targets of Marion's armed bands.

The American Indian employed the mobile and elusive tactics of the guerrilla, in the extended territorial conflict with the white man, and suffered near annihilation as a reward.

In the mountains of East Tennessee and the border country of Missouri and Kansas, the strife was decidedly irregular during the War-between-the-States but was condemned as outright banditry by the conventional commanders of the time.

Even men like Brigadier General John Hunt Moorage, and Colonel John Singleton Mosby, two of the most successful Confederate raiders, were not held in high esteem by their contemporaries, because of their unconventional tactics.

In the main, their approach was devoid of the bitter seditious qualities, so prevalent in unconventional warfare of the twentieth century, but was an anathema to the conventional soldiers.

The American military leadership, reflecting the attitudes of Americans in general, expects to directly confront an adversary and overwhelm him with unlimited power.

Obviously, there is little need for sedition, sabotage, or guerrilla warfare in such a scenario. Only when unable to directly attack an enemy, will the conventional system consider the employment of unconventional tactics.

The apparent effectiveness of the German "Fifth Column" raised many hackles in Washington, and as early as October, 1941, then Colonel William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan, established a "Special Activities" section, in his office of Coordinator of information (COI), to become involved in, espionage, subversion, sabotage, and guerrilla warfare.

His observation led him to conclude the process of undermining a modern state by secret infiltration and "softening up" the target for the conventional armed forces, with resistance groups, guerrillas, or commandos, had an almost magical inevitability of success.

The outbreak of war, 7 December 1941, hastened the preparations for subversive activities and guerrilla warfare. There had been a very "close hold" affair up to then, because these activities could serve a distinctly political, as well as military purpose.

Once war was declared, unconventional warfare activities could properly be placed in support of military operations, and begin the insidious process of weakening the enemy states.

The end of 1941 was the beginning of the COI and OSS operational teams.

Special Operations training began with a three-week course, designed to provide basic physical conditioning, land navigation, field craft, weapons, demolition's, communications, sabotage, and operational instruction with considerable field training. The atmosphere was decidedly military, but placed heavy emphasis upon the practical considerations of clandestine operations.

The United States Special Forces came off the drawing board with the activation of the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) on Smoke Bomb Hill at Fort Bragg, North Carolina on 20 June 1952.

The creation of US Army Special Forces was influenced to a great degree by Colonel Aaron Bank, who had been deeply imbedded in the organizations of OSS.

Other officers, who had the practical experience of developing guerrilla forces with the remnant of the Philippine military organization; brought a different perspective to the process. Still others, who had been involved with essentially conventional military units with somewhat unconventional tactics, provided another point of view. All ultimately agreed on not only the basic mission, but also the organization of Special Forces.

The atmosphere in the original 10th SF Group was a blend of the OSS Special Operations clandestine approach, and the Operational Command aggressiveness.

It is obvious that Special Operations Branch and the Operational Group Command, OSS are directly related functionally to the modern Special Forces.

Officially, however, US Army Special Forces derives its lineage honors from the 1st Special Service Force, 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th Ranger Infantry Battalions, and the 2nd Infantry Battalion. This arrangement under the Combat Arms Regimental System (CARS) was necessary; it has been explained by some authorities, because of the "civilian" nature of the OSS and to perpetuate these elite units within the system. The modern ranger units, the 75th Infantry (Merrill's Marauders), claim lineage and honors from the 5307th Composite Units (Provisional), and it would appear logical that the 2671st Special Reconnaissance Battalions, Separate (Provisional), would be a valid antecedent of modern Army Special Forces.

NOTE: 11/26/2013; ANOTHER IMPORTANT MILESTONE IN THE SPECIAL FORCES HISTORY.

*Received information today, from Sandy (Ekman) Goshorn regarding the early years of the 10th SF Group. Her Father, Col. William E. Ekman, (BG, US Army, Ret.) was the Commander who approved, designed and made the original **Green Berets**. The original insignia, a sterling silver Trojan Horse, with a lightning bolt, was designed by an NCO and*

was used until sometime in the 1960's? In 1954 the entire Command of the 10th SF Group voted to wear the Green Beret's.



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