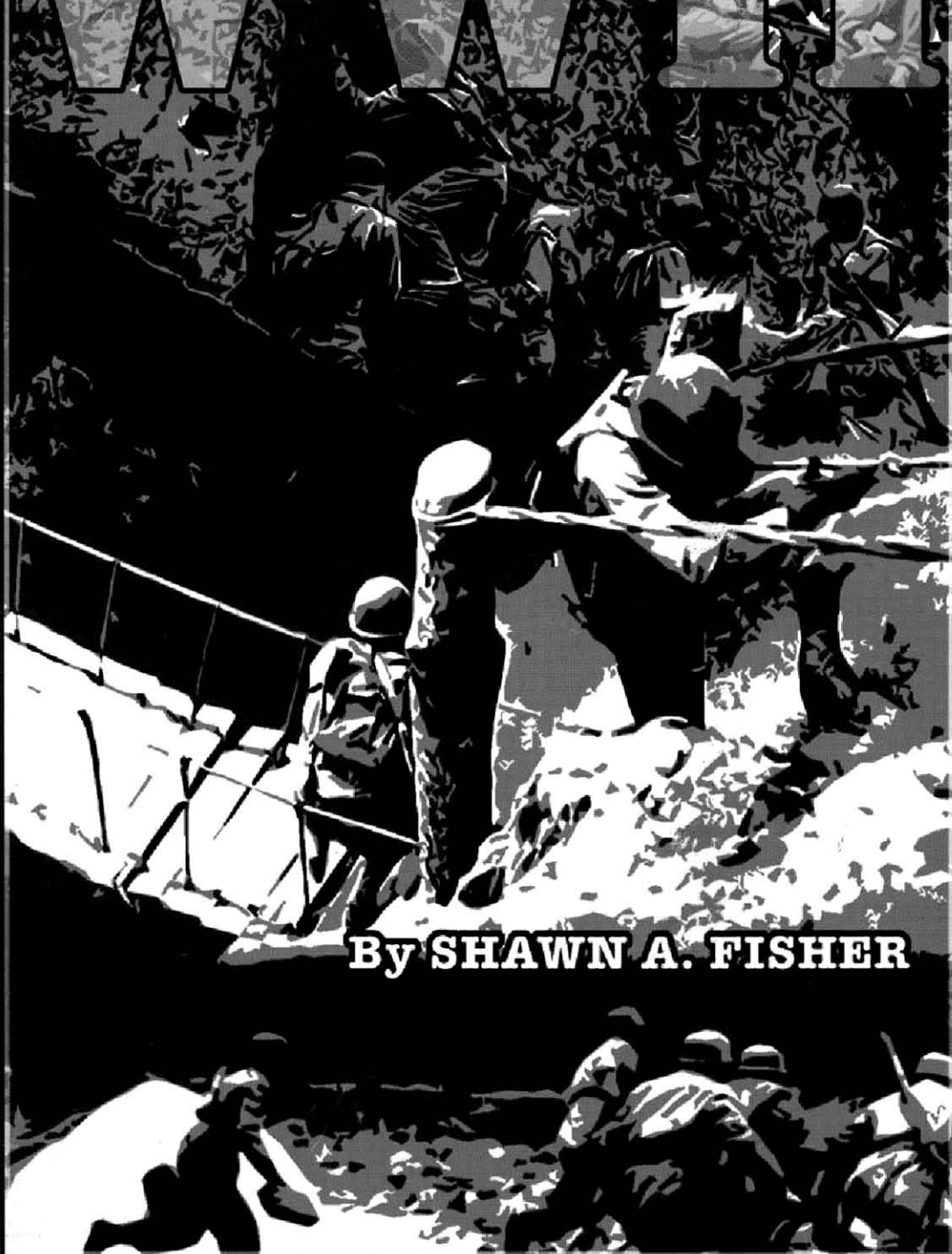


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WORLD WAR II[™]
HAND of STEEL[™]



By **SHAWN A. FISHER**

STEVE JACKSON GAMES



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GURPS

WWII HAND OF STEEL™

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Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition*. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the *GURPS Basic Set* – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition*. Page references that begin with BE refer to *GURPS Bestiary*, CI to *Compendium I*, CII to *Compendium II*, HT to *High-Tech*, VE to *Vehicles*, or W to the *WWII* corebook.

For a full list of *GURPS* abbreviations, see p. CI181 or the updated web list at www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html.

INTRODUCTION

Back when we were considering *GURPS WWII* as a stand-alone book, many of those reviewing the proposal suggested that it focus almost exclusively on commandos. They made an excellent point. The exploits of these handfuls of highly trained soldiers create superb gaming opportunities. Whether defying the odds in victory or going down in heroic defeat, commandos and their missions stand second to no other military operations for sheer drama and adventure.

As things evolved, *WWII* became the first in what is planned to be a long series of books. Given that shift from sourcebook to corebook, it transformed into something substantially different than originally planned, with a strong but nothing-like-exhaustive emphasis on commandos.

It stands to reason, then, that this first supplement in the *GURPS WWII* line should provide precisely the sort of content requested in that early feedback. While no book this size – or 100 times this size – could claim to tell the reader everything that there is to be known about these elite soldiers, this book does summarize the history, training, and methods of WWII commandos in a fashion that should prove most useful to WWII gaming. Its author, Shawn Fisher, has been running WWII- and special forces-based campaigns for a good, long time. I think he's passed on the best parts of his experience, here.

– Gene Seabolt

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shawn Fisher is a former history teacher currently pursuing a graduate degree in history and education. A frequent playtester and long-time *GURPS* player, Shawn has contributed to more than a dozen *GURPS* books. His previously published work has been featured in *GURPS Best of Pyramid Volume 1*.

Shawn currently serves as the training coordinator for the Harding University security department. An ex-Army infantryman, and seriously obsessed WWII buff, Shawn devotes his spare time to paintball, wargaming, and recreational shooting – when he's not reading books on WWII. He lives with his wife Jennifer in Searcy, Ark.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN WWII

Sixty years ago, the beaches, jungles, and deserts of far-flung places such as Tarawa, Jalo, Gran Sasso, and Cabanatuan served as the forge in which the modern concept of special operations was shaped and hardened. The nameless, blackened faces of today's Navy SEALs, Army Rangers, and Royal Marine Commandos are the progeny of those grim warriors of WWII. With spectacular successes, and sometimes dismal failures, the commandos of the Second World War fought and died in near-complete anonymity on missions so secret that even today some have not been opened to the public.

Yet WWII was not the first war to see special forces in action. From the dash and courage of cavalry actions since the time of Alexander, to the stealthy beach landings of Viking raiders, the core elements of special operations have always had a place in war. The Afrikaners of the Boer War, the trench raiders and storm troopers of WWI, the horsemen of Lawrence's Arabia – all these were "special forces," different in concept and mission from normal troops, and precursors of commandos.

If one thing prevented these units from being true commandos, it was technology. Never before had one man been capable of so much destruction. The submachine gun, light machine gun, and anti-tank launcher gave one man more firepower than a squad of riflemen. High explosives such as Composition-B and RDX invested a great deal of destructive potential in a tiny package. Years before, the same amount of power would have required mule loads of black powder. Strategic and tactical mobility also increased during WWII, with vehicles such as the jeep, submarines, rubber boats, and fast patrol boats. The advent of military parachuting and gliders provided yet another

“ . . . there comes out from the sea from time to time a hand of steel which plucks the German sentries from their posts with growing efficiency, amid the joy of the whole countryside.”

– Winston Churchill,
Oct. 12, 1942

method of commando insertion. This technology was readily available, and provided the firepower and mobility necessary to make mature special operations possible in the Second World War.

COMMANDOS

The summer of 1940 was a season of desperation for Winston Churchill. Defeated in France, the British Expeditionary Force had retreated back across the channel. The Luftwaffe was pounding southern England in preparation for a German invasion, and the RAF was struggling to stay in the air. With conventional forces too weak to attack the Nazis on the continent, Churchill turned to unconventional warfare, something he had witnessed firsthand as a journalist during the Boer War in South Africa.

Churchill ordered the creation of the SOE, the Special Operations Executive, and charged its director, Dr. Hugh Dalton, to “set Europe ablaze.”

At the same time, Lt. Col. Dudley Clarke devised a way to strike back at the Nazi regime: take a small force of highly trained and motivated men across the English Channel, attack a valuable target, and then return home before the Germans knew what hit them. Clarke himself was thinking of the Boers, the small, mobile bands of men that had tied up a much larger British force during the South African War. The term “commando” came from the term Afrikaners used to refer to their units, or *kommandos*, of militia. Clarke’s idea was eagerly accepted, as long as it required a tiny investment in men and materials.

Within a month of their unit’s creation, 30 men of the deceptively named No. 11 Commando (units 1-10 did not exist), with Lt. Col. Clarke along as an observer, hit the beach near Boulogne, France. Though little was accomplished militarily, the foray proved that the idea was practical.

COMMANDO FEVER

The British Commandos were not the first special forces created in WWII, though they were arguably the most successful. German Fallschirmjäger captured bridges and strongpoints with stunning efficiency during the German advance into the Low Countries. Companies of British light infantry had been raised to aid Norwegian guerrillas fighting the Germans in Norway.

Other special forces included Italian frogmen, Japanese parachutists, Greek raiders, U.S. Army Rangers, and many more. The U.S. Navy created their “demolitioneers,” and the U.S. Marines their Raider battalions and Para-Marines. The British Royal Marines raised their own commandos, and the Royal Navy a group of clandestine canoeists. Hardly a branch of any major military power did not possess at least one special unit by the end of the war.

A FINE LINE: THE OSS AND SOE

Britain’s Special Operations Executive and the American Office of Strategic Services, or OSS, created in the summer of 1942, worked together extensively in intelligence gathering, espionage, propaganda, and guerrilla warfare. The OSS even created its own force of uniformed commandos, called operational groups. OSS operational groups were landed in Normandy to disrupt German transportation and communications, and to engage in “counter-scorching” operations to prevent German destruction of key points such as railheads and bridges. The uniformed direct-action forces of the OSS and SOE

are the focus of this book. Espionage and partisan activities will be explored more deeply in following *GURPS WWII* volumes.

REAL MISSIONS

The special operations of WWII are some of the most exciting military operations ever conceived. The missions briefly described below serve as examples of what soldiers in a commando campaign in the Second World War might be asked to do.

Assault Force Granite: Attack on Eben Emael

The fortress complex of Eben Emael commanded the canal bridges of eastern Belgium and stood directly in the path of the German advance through the Low Countries into France. Its 15 gun emplacements were protected by up to 6” of armor, making it nearly impregnable to conventional assaults.

In November 1939, Assault Force Granite was assigned the mission of attacking Eben Emael. This force consisted of 85 parachute engineers and 11 gliders led by 23-year-old Lt. Rudolph Witzig. The unit trained for seven months using aerial photographs and sand-table mockups of the fort. Full-scale rehearsals and live-fire exercises assured that every soldier in the small force knew his objective.

On the morning of May 10, 1940, the operation was launched. It immediately hit a snag: The commander’s glider was torn from its tow rope and forced to turn back to Germany. (Witzig commandeered another tow plane and arrived two hours later.) A second glider was also forced to release early, leaving only nine of the 11 aircraft to complete the mission. The gliders arrived at the fort and began their descent under fire. Within seconds of landing, the para-engineers were placing heavy shaped-charge devices on the guns, and within 15 minutes all the primary guns (those that could fire on the bridges) were knocked out of action. The glider-borne troops continued to fight and hold the fort, with the help of Stuka dive-bombers, until the following morning. Unmolested by the fort’s guns, the German columns advanced into Belgium en route to France . . .

Operation Chariot: Raid on Saint-Nazaire

On the French coast, six miles up the Loire River, stood the port of Saint-Nazaire, the largest dry dock in the North Atlantic, and the only Axis dock capable of holding the German battleship

Tirpitz. The British high command worried that if the *Tirpitz* used the dry dock as a base of operations, the Atlantic convoys would be in peril, and wanted the dry dock destroyed. This would not be easy, however. Dozens of guns ringed the port, and analysts believed that aerial bombing alone would not destroy the dry dock.

In February 1942, Col. A.C. Newman, commander of No. 2 Commando, was given the assignment to attack the dry dock. Intelligence on the target was excellent. Aerial photography, blueprints of the dock, and even the original construction engineers were available. It was decided that 268 commandos would be landed at the facility on 18 watercraft crewed by 353 Royal Navy personnel. The commandos were formed into three teams. Demolition teams (armed only with pistols and explosives) would destroy critical targets at the dry dock and port facilities. Protection teams would provide fire support for the heavily burdened demolition teams. Finally, assault teams would knock out the guns around the port to protect the motor launches.

At 1:34 a.m. on March 28, 1942, the HMS *Campbeltown* crashed into the caisson of the dry dock at 18 knots. Inside her lay 24 depth charges encased in concrete inside a steel box. Overhead, RAF bombers dropped bombs and incendiaries on the town. Commandos from the *Campbeltown* scurried onto the dry dock and began placing their charges in the winding-house and pump-house. Motor launches tried to land other commandos on quays along the port, but were destroyed or driven off by heavy German fire. Within one hour, the surviving commandos regrouped near the dry dock to find no launches remaining. Col. Newman announced, "This is where we walk home."

The commandos began to fight their way through some 5,000 Germans to open ground beyond the town, and eventually, it was hoped, to Spain and back to England. Few of them made it. Half of the force was captured or killed.

The next morning some of the captured commandos were being interrogated when, at 10:35 a.m., the charges on HMS *Campbeltown* exploded. Her deck was crowded with German officers, soldiers, dock workers, and onlookers. Hundreds

were killed or wounded, and the dry dock was knocked out of action for the rest of the war.

Cabanatuan POW Rescue

When the Philippines fell to the Japanese in April 1942, over 72,000 American and Filipino servicemen surrendered and began the 65-mile trek known as the Bataan Death March. Fewer than 50,000 survived the ordeal, and by January 1945, only 512 POWs remained alive.

As American forces began to retake the islands, the 6th Ranger Battalion, under the command of Lt. Col. Henry Mucci, was ordered to rescue the prisoners at the Pangatian POW Camp in Cabanatuan, Philippines. Since the 6th Army's intelligence on the camp was very limited, two seven-man teams of Alamo Scouts (pp. 13-14) were assigned to reconnaissance. The Rangers, with a total of 128 men, were to be joined by 80

Filipino guerrillas. All knew that timing and surprise were important. Any leak of the operation might cause the Japanese to move the prisoners, or execute them.

The force intended to assault the following day, but a large number of Japanese moved into the area for the night. Postponing the operation, the Rangers and Scouts gathered intelligence from the locals, refined plans, and rested in a nearby guerrilla-controlled village until the following afternoon.

At dusk on Jan. 30, the troops began moving into position. Filipino guerrillas blocked the roads on the east and west sides of the camp. Directly across from the main gate lurked two platoons of Rangers, while another platoon waited at the rear gate. At 7:45 p.m., the Rangers opened fire, and within a few seconds all Japanese at the rear and eastern portions of the camp had been killed. At the same time, two platoons broke through the front gate and entered the western portion of the camp. Once all resistance was neutralized, the POWs were evacuated.

At 8:15 the signal to withdraw was given. One Ranger had been killed, and a medical officer fatally wounded. The guerrillas blocking the roads held off Japanese reinforcements until the Americans could escape, causing severe casualties to the Japanese. P-61s flew air support during the withdrawal and were credited with destroying 12 trucks and one tank.

The rag-tag force retreated all night (with the POWs riding in donated ox-carts), finally reaching American lines at noon the next day. All 512 prisoners from the Pangatian POW Camp had been rescued, and nearly 600 Japanese had been killed.



BEST OF THE BEST

Special forces of the Second World War looked for a certain kind of soldier – one who would not quit at the first hint of defeat, a type of man that wanted to be challenged, that was courageous, and committed to victory. They had to endure the worst that nature and the enemy could throw at them, and win. Physically tough, clever, and an expert in all matters of warfare, this trooper was literally the best of the best.

Recruiting and Screening

Most soldiers in commando units were volunteers from regular military units. A combat veteran with a good service record was the favorite choice of special-forces recruiters, but bad service, or even a prison record, did not mean immediate rejection. “Bad citizen, but good soldier” was a phrase often used to describe the hard-cases that sometimes volunteered for commando duty. Other issues were important, too. Did the prospect have a family? Could he speak a second language? What were his aptitude-test scores? Was he a Boy Scout (a useful background)? Was he a self-starter? Did he work well with others or was he a loner? Was he trusted by his comrades? Had he ever been out of the country? If so, how long? The questions, directed at both the recruit and his supervisors, were intended to save the unit from wasting time on unsuitable soldiers, and to safeguard the unit from infiltration by enemy spies. Individuals with mental problems (especially anti-social behaviors) or physical weaknesses (even allergies or color-blindness) were usually rejected. After initial interviews and screening, the recruit would be subjected to a thorough medical and psychological exam. As many as one-quarter of all applicants for British Commando training were rejected before training even started.

Any PCs wishing to enter a special-operations units with the disadvantages listed on p. W70 will be rejected. Any disadvantages that could be reasonably hidden from comrades and supervisors, *and* doctors and psychologists, may slip through the system, but probably will be

revealed in training. The GM should make the final decision as to whether a PC is suitable for service in special operations.

Training

Once the recruit was accepted, it was time for training. By all accounts, contemporary special-forces training is tough, but in WWII it was deadly. More than 40 recruits died at the Commando Depot in Achnacarry, Scotland. Real ammunition was fired at soldiers as much as possible “to acclimate them to the sound of fire.” Captured enemy weapons were used so that trainees would learn to recognize their sounds. Hikes in freezing rain or swims in frigid lakes were customary. Men that did not stay low to the ground in training were accidentally shot. Falls from cliffs or the sides of landing craft caused many injuries. Parachute training and demolition handling took lives. Bayonet, knife, and hand-to-hand courses with real weapons emphasized speed and brutality over safety. Attrition rates were high during this grueling process, with as few as 10% of recruits passing initial training.

Instructors tried in every way to prepare the troops for combat. One live-fire exercise required recruits to crawl through pig entrails shipped from a nearby slaughterhouse while machine-gun bullets zipped inches above their heads. Sleep was reduced to a few hours a day, and sometimes none at all for several days. Commandos were expected to be crack shots and much time was spent on the firing range. Firing was done at night, in the rain, or in the freezing cold after long, exhausting marches. Regardless of the conditions, the standards were always high and poor shots were quickly returned to their former units. Accidental discharge of a weapon during field exercises was grounds for immediate dismissal, or reduction in rank to private.

Physical training was extremely challenging. Commandos and Rangers were expected to cover 15 miles in full combat gear in 135 minutes. Swimming in full gear was practiced until men

could swim 300 yards or more with a rifle and rucksack. Obstacle courses rigged with explosive charges might end with a timed test of weapon disassembly and reassembly.

Any failure in training triggered a dreaded outcome: RTU, or return to unit. This meant the end of commando training and an embarrassing return to the soldier's original outfit.

WEAPONS AND TACTICS

Commandos seldom had the advantage of superior numbers or firepower. They frequently fought without artillery or air support, and often without any means of immediate extraction. To win, commandos were forced to rely on their few advantages: surprise, speed, and determination. Surprise can throw an enemy off balance, sow confusion, and prevent a rapid response. Surprise and speed multiply firepower and create a "violence of action" that will paralyze the enemy or damage his will to fight. Finally, determination is perhaps the most important asset of an elite force, and often the final arbiter of success or failure.

For simplification, assume that any soldier caught in the kill zone of an ambush is under *grazing fire* (per the machine-gun indirect-fire rules on p. W202) until he escapes the kill zone. To ensure that an ambush is executed properly, roll against the ambush leader's Tactics skill and the average of the unit's Soldier skill. Aimed fire from marksmen and heavy weapons (grenades, bazookas, anti-tank rifles, etc.) should be played out normally.

Firing was done in sequence so that no two commandos would be reloading at the same time. Certain soldiers would be designated to throw grenades; others would be assigned to quickly search the bodies once the ambush was over. Every commando would practice his role in the ambush until it became reflex. After the ambush, the whole unit would quickly leave the area, sometimes to set up a secondary ambush nearby.

In contrast to regular military training, commando training emphasized killing, not "shooting" the enemy. Rapid, accurate fire in any position and any condition was drilled into troops



Small Arms

Statistically speaking, small-arms fire is not very dangerous. In WWII, more men died from the shrapnel from artillery fire, grenades, and rockets than machine-gun or rifle bullets; however, often a commando unit's *only* firepower was small arms and they had to be employed effectively. This usually meant an ambush.

An ambush catches the unsuspecting enemy in a confined area that modern special forces have termed the *kill zone*. This kill zone is completely dominated by concentrated friendly fire, and makes the limited firepower of a small commando unit much more devastating. Various types of ambushes were developed (L-shaped ambushes along roads or paths, X-shaped ambushes at road junctures, z-shaped ambushes that provided for four different kill zones, etc.), but all were designed with two goals: total surprise and maximum violence.

during training and honed to a fine level once the new soldier was assigned a permanent unit.

The rifle was the most common weapon among regular infantry units, and it was the same for WWII special forces. Perhaps one-third or more of all commandos were given standard-issue rifles.

Other units used submachine guns in great numbers. This gave commandos a firepower advantage against riflemen, though only at short range, and helped make them more aggressive.

Snipers usually were issued specially selected rifles (treat as Fine quality; see p. CII39) and telescopic sights in the 2-6x range (p. W88).

Pistols were issued as backup weapons, though UDT (p. 13) and SBS (p. 12) operators and some other special forces carried only pistols.

Organizations generally assigned light machine guns at the squad level, often with two or more to the squad.

Riflemen were usually ammo bearers for the squad's LMG, and all were trained to take over in case the machine gunner was hit. In fact, depending on the mission, ammunition for every weapon in the unit might have to be assigned to all members. Soldiers might carry a belt of machine-gun ammunition and a bazooka or mortar round in their backpack, to be later redistributed to the right person before the attack.

Heavy Weapons

In addition to small arms, some units had access to heavier firepower. Rangers used anti-tank rifles, flamethrowers, bazookas, and 60mm mortars to augment their small arms. British Commandos were much the same, though they sometimes used 3" mortars in specially trained teams. This was typically the upper limit of a special unit's firepower. These weapons were usually assigned to one squad or platoon. This "heavy weapons" unit could then back up the regular units, either en masse or parceled out among them. Some heavier weapons, such as light artillery, and even anti-tank guns, were used by larger commando units. "Pack" howitzers designed to be broken down and carried by mules were common among American and British units in Italy and Burma, for instance.

Sentry Removal

Killing sentries was a vital part of surprise raids, and the most important purpose of hand-to-hand training. As the war progressed, sentries were taught to carry their rifle guarding their neck in such a way as to prevent a quiet kill; commandos should roll vs. Soldier (Guerrilla) to realize their prey is doing this. This technique required commandos to use a two-man attack on the sentry, with one commando pulling the rifle aside while the other dealt the mortal blow. A Contest of Hearing vs. the lowest Stealth skill of the two approaching troops should be rolled.

Silenced weapons such as the DeLisle Carbine and the Welrod (p. 20) were developed in part to reduce the risk of sentry removal.

Once the sentry was killed, the commando had to decide whether the body needed to be moved to prevent discovery, searched for intelligence, or even booby-trapped.

DEMOLITION

WWII special forces were avid users of explosives. From blowing bridges behind enemy lines to clearing beach obstacles and laying traps for pursuing enemies, high explosives were a commando's best friend.

Booby Traps

Land mines and booby traps provided commando units with a great amount of destructive ability for very little trouble. A 10- to 20-lb. mine could destroy or disable a tank (p. W98). A few well-placed antipersonnel mines could serve as an alarm system, initiate an ambush, or protect a unit's withdrawal. With little effort, a land mine or demolition charge could be command-detonated, or rigged to blow up by some unconventional manner, such as when a door was opened, or when a train passed over a certain rail. German special forces sometimes left behind booby-trapped Luger pistols (a GI's favorite souvenir) filled with explosives and set to go off when the action was worked. The creative use of HE booby-traps saved many commandos from capture, and caused countless hours of terror and confusion for the enemy.

Breaching

Royal Navy Beach Commandos, and U.S. Navy frogmen and "demolitioneers," were trained to destroy obstacles at the waterline. Whether iron or timber, these obstacles were designed to damage or disable watercraft, or at the least prevent enemy landing craft from hitting the beach efficiently. Some were simple poles with land mines attached. Others were iron frames, concrete tetrahedrons, or complicated structures of barbed wire, ironwork, and land mines. Other obstacles, such as sandbars and coral reefs, were natural. Once the beach was surveyed and mapped by reconnaissance troops (see *Scouting and Beach Surveying*, pp. 10-11), engineers and demolitioneers were assigned obstacles to destroy. On the day of the landing, the demolition experts would hit the beach in the first wave and begin to clear the way.

Destruction

Commandos often used demolition to accomplish the primary objective of the mission. This might mean blowing up a rail bridge or an airstrip full of aircraft. The charge itself was carefully calculated (see pp. HT26-27), and usually extra explosives were taken along to provide for any error or mishap.

GETTING IN AND OUT

Efficient insertion and extraction were crucial to commando operations. Whether hiking through festering swamps and jungles, paddling away from a submarine in the dark of night, or leaping through the doorway of a plane miles behind enemy lines,



special forces relied heavily on surprise to make their missions successful. This required reaching and leaving the scene quickly or quietly.

Land

Overland movements were a common means of penetrating enemy territory, but this was seldom done quickly. Slow, carefully planned movements through jungle, mountains, or arctic terrain required patience and endurance. The Special Air Service, OSS operational groups, and Alamo Scouts were able to move long distances undetected. Sometimes this was done by stalking and crawling through enemy positions, and other times it was done while disguised as locals, or with the help of local guides. Regardless, a land insertion had its risks. Nature played havoc with the commandos. Disease and parasites, extreme temperatures, and lack of food and water could be as deadly as the enemy. A Long Range Desert Group patrol could expect agonizing death in the Sahara's dunes if their vehicles broke down. British and Norwegian commandos trekked across ravines and mountains in freezing temperatures to attack power and aluminum plants. Frostbite, snow blindness, and starvation were constant threats. Overland jungle operations faced malaria, exotic jungle diseases, and leeches (p. BE19).

Stealth and Hiking (or Skiing and Snowshoeing) skills are important for most overland insertions. Since the Stealth skill is at -1 penalty for each level of Encumbrance, and a -5 to skill for any movement over 1 yard per second, commandos were encouraged to take only the most essential items, and to cache equipment before the actual objective was reached.

Air

Airborne assaults in WWII came in various forms. The most common was by parachute. In comparison to modern airfoil parachutes, these primitive chutes could not be controlled very effectively, often leaving the parachutist at the mercy of the wind. This limited the usefulness of the parachute by forcing planners to use very large drop zones, which in turn made it easy for the enemy to guess where a large parachute force might land.

Another means of aerial assault was by glider. The assault on Eben Emael (p. 4) was the most famous use of glider-borne special forces, but it was not the only one. German gliders also carried Otto Skorzeny's commandos to Albergo Rifugio, the hotel atop Gran Sasso mountain, in the mission that freed Mussolini. American and British airborne troops used gliders as well. British glider-borne troops attacked Pegasus Bridge over the Caen Canal during the Normandy invasion. Gliders also supplied the American 101st and 82nd Airborne with reinforcements, jeeps, and anti-tank guns.

Glider were also used to carry troops *out* of harm's way. American gliders were sometimes used to take wounded off the battlefield. A glider would be loaded with wounded men, then attached to a tow rope with a large loop suspended between two poles. A low-flying C-47 would swoop in and snag the loop, dragging the glider into the air.

This required 300' of cleared, level ground and at least 30 minutes to prepare the equipment. The No-Landing Extraction skill is rolled against to make sure preparations are done properly (use the highest skill among those setting things up on the ground). The pilot of the tow plane must make a roll at Piloting -4 to properly snag the tow line. Failure could result in another Piloting attempt, broken equipment, or some type of damage to either of the two aircraft, and possibly to the cargo or the ground personnel. A critical failure could be disastrous to all involved! No-Landing Extraction was an experimental, and dangerous, technique and was not commonly known. GMs should restrict this skill to those commandos trained by the SOE, OSS, or U.S. glider schools.

Aircraft were sometimes used to directly carry troops on missions. In the Pacific, flying boats (such as the Catalina on p. W116) were the perfect transport for Marine Raiders and Alamo Scouts. These small teams of commandos were air-landed at night near the shore of an island. Using rubber boats, they paddled ashore, performed their mission, then paddled back out to meet the plane. A small aircraft landed on a tiny, rocky field to carry Benito Mussolini back to Germany after the Gran Sasso rescue.

Sea

Commandos might be put ashore in a variety of fashions. Submarines served as mobile bases for the SBS and COPP (both on p. 12). With sonar navigation equipment, a submarine could approach a hostile shore with accuracy and stealth. Once the mission was complete, a hand-cranked device held underwater was used to signal the sonar operator for pickup. Smaller midget submarines were used with some success in placing saboteurs and reconnaissance specialists onto enemy beaches.

Surface vessels provided a more conventional approach. Landing craft could carry 30 or more men, but their range was limited to a few hundred miles. PT boats were used with great success to support Marine Raiders. Their speed, and especially their armament, was greatly appreciated by the teams that worked with them. These boats could land themselves, or they could cast off the commandos in small rubber boats. Rubber boats themselves could be utilized in two different ways. Paddling was considered the best means of insertion for a reconnaissance party, but assaulting troops preferred to use the faster (10-15 mph) outboard motors to reduce their vulnerability to enemy fire when approaching the shoreline.

Frogmen were often dropped a half-mile or more from the beach and simply swam the rest of the way. They sometimes carried infrared flashlights to signal for a rendezvous. Underwater breathing gear was not generally issued – scuba was still in its infancy – but some units, such as the OSS operational groups in the Pacific, did experiment with it. Submarine escape devices using primitive chemical scrubbers could give swimmers an hour or more underwater, but these gadgets were cranky and cumbersome. Pure oxygen also was used, but the swimmers risked oxygen poisoning (see p. CII173) below 30’.

SPECIAL SKILLS

The following expands upon existing skills in *GURPS*; *Compendium I* or *Martial Arts* will be required to use the martial-arts style.

Fairbairn Close Combat Training 10 points

Commando training stressed killing as the objective, not subduing or “gentlemanly conduct.” The most widely used Allied system of self-defense was taught by Capt. William Ewart Fairbairn, a former Royal Marine and Shanghai constable. Fairbairn’s instruction formed the basis for the Close Combat course for the Commando

Training Center, the SOE, and the OSS. He admonished his students to forget about rules or “foul methods,” and to focus on “killing the poor bastard and accomplishing the mission.” The training included throws, locks, and strikes aimed at the target’s weak points. Knife fighting and use of the garrote were also taught.

Primary Skills: Karate, Judo, Knife, Stealth.

Secondary Skills: Shortsword, Garrote.

Optional Skills: Holdout.

Maneuvers: Close Combat (Knife) [1 point], Choke Hold, Disarming, Head Butt, Hit Location (Knife), Knee Strike, Neck Snap.

Scouting and Beach Surveying

All military commanders needed better intelligence in WWII. With electronic warfare and aerial photography in its infancy, there were only a few ways to find out what the enemy was doing. Many military commands formed their own reconnaissance teams. U.S. Army divisions often had their own “reconnaissance squads,” made up of hand-picked veterans. The Alamo Scouts, for instance, were formed to fulfill the 6th Army’s intelligence needs.

Military scouting required nerves of steel. Small groups of practically unarmed men crept to within spitting distance of the enemy. They lurked just outside the enemy’s camp, counting men, and mapping and sketching out gun emplacements, buildings, and other defensive works. Stealth was their only defense. To reduce noise and reflections, scouts often wore no helmets or jewelry, and carried minimal weapons and equipment. Some scouts were walked *over* while watching the enemy. One American scout in the Pacific was bayoneted when a group of Japanese soldiers became suspicious and stabbed the bushes he was hiding in. He did not move or make a noise (despite injury), much to the relief of his teammates, and the Japanese moved on. Another scout was lying alongside a path when a Japanese soldier stopped and urinated on his leg. Once the scouts gained the intelligence they needed, they had to escape, undetected if possible, back to friendly lines and deliver their reports.

Of all operations, amphibious invasions required the largest amount of intelligence data. Under certain conditions, a plane could photograph the bottom of a shallow beach and determine its gradient. This helped determine the suitability of the beach for certain landing craft. In order to learn more about a prospective landing site, military planners sent scouts to survey and map beaches. If the beach was well-defended, this

was an extremely dangerous mission. The U.S. Navy Scouts and Raiders, and the British Combined Operations Assault Pilotage Parties (COPPs) performed beach reconnaissance. Primitive tools (lead line and sinker, hand augers) were used to determine depth and gradient, and to bring up samples of the ocean bottom. Sand composition was studied carefully to determine whether vehicles could easily become mired. Sandbars and coral reefs were mapped. If the operation was to be an opposed landing, the commandos also would map the enemy's trenches, bunkers, and other defensive works. This was all

very time-consuming and exhausting work. A 200-yard-long beach could take up to three or four hours for a two-man team to survey and map, all the while risking discovery, capture, or death. Any detection of the commandos could alert the enemy and cause severe casualties on the day of the landing.

The GM should roll secretly against Surveying (which will usually be modified by an optional specialization in Beach) to see whether the commandos gather the information correctly. Failure of this task could spell disaster for an invasion force.

SPECIAL FORCES OF WWII

The following provides more detail on the special units described in *GURPS WWII*, and illustrates some additional forces.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Having taken an early lead in developing special operations, the British expanded their commitment to these units throughout the war.

Commandos

These elite units, described on p. W41, formed the backbone of British special forces. By the end of the war, more than 25,000 men would pass through the Commando Depot at Achnacarry, Scotland.

Each unit, called a Commando, was led by a colonel or lieutenant-colonel with a staff of about 90 men, including a communications platoon of 20. Each of the six companies, or troops, was led by a captain, and five of them were further subdivided into 25- to 30-man sections (designed so that one section could fit on one landing craft). The section, led by a senior sergeant, would be further subdivided into two subsections of 10-15 men, each led by a sergeant. Each of the five regular companies in a Commando was specialized: boating, climbing, demolition, and parachuting were the most common specialties. The sixth company was a 39-man "heavy weapons" unit with nine Vickers K-guns (p. 21) and nine 3" mortars (see 81mm mortar, p. W93).

Most Commandos used standard-issue Lee-Enfield rifles, with one or two Bren machine guns and two or three Thompson (later Sten) SMGs per 10-15-man subsection. They occasionally wore helmets, but usually wore a dark green beret or a black stalking cap. A Colt M-1911A1 or Browning HP 35 and the coveted Sykes-Fairbairn commando knife (p. 18) was issued to each man.

Special Air Service

The survivors of the special British unit Layforce and No. 8 Commando – both mauled in previous actions – formed the core of the Special Air Service (see p. W41) when then-Capt. David Stirling created it in Cairo in July 1941. Originally called "L Detachment," this 64-man unit intended to parachute into enemy territory, with disastrous consequences: The high winds of the deserts made parachuting nearly impossible. Eventually, the SAS adopted the tactics of the LRDG (p. 12) and used heavily armed jeeps in stealthy hit-and-run raids. Attacking German and Italian supply depots, fuel dumps, and airfields, the SAS destroyed hundreds of aircraft and trucks in North Africa, causing Stirling to acquire the nickname "The Phantom Colonel."

Stirling was captured in February 1943, and spent the rest of the war attempting to escape from several German prison camps.

By June 1944, the SAS had become the 1st Special Air Service Brigade (commanded by a brigadier general), including four SAS regiments, two of which were French and Belgian, totaling nearly 2,500 men. The SAS regiments were split into four squadrons each, with 100 men per squadron, led by a lieutenant colonel. The squadrons would usually break up into smaller units, depending on the mission. SAS troops used their jeeps in North Africa, Italy, and Northwest Europe, with as many as 16 jeeps in one operation.

SAS troops relied primarily on their jeeps for firepower. Formal organization was very lax, though a group of three or four jeeps was common. They often carried whatever they wanted or could "acquire" from nearby units. Much of their resupply was airdropped. One SAS unit requested an anti-tank gun, received it via airdrop, and then used it to knock out a German armored car.

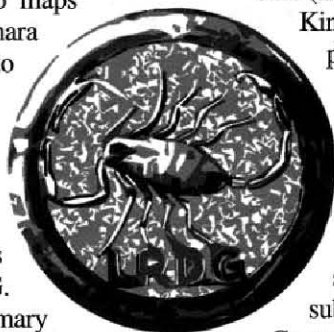


The SAS unofficially adopted the khaki or tan beret, and winged dagger patch, as part of their uniform, though they wore the airborne maroon beret from 1944 to the end of the war.

Long Range Desert Group

These desert scouts, also known as the Kiwi Scorpions, are described on p. W41. They harassed the Germans in the African campaign. Since no maps existed for the interior of the Sahara desert, the LRDG was forced to improvise. They cannibalized aircraft compasses for their trucks, and used the sun compass to navigate by day and celestial charts at night. They also surveyed the desert when possible. Many modern maps of the area were made by the LRDG.

Reconnaissance being their primary mission, the squadrons set up road watches to track enemy movement along coastal roads. Occasional raids against poorly defended road houses would yield prisoners. The LRDG provided transport for early SAS raids, and even acted as a primitive search-and-rescue team for Allied airmen lost in the desert. Their biggest danger was always mechanical breakdown or enemy aircraft. They prepared for each by bringing along spare parts and camouflage nets.



The basic LRDG squadron was composed of 6-10 trucks, with three or four men per truck. These squadrons could travel more than 600 miles per day, their only real limitations being fuel and water. The head of the LRDG was a lieutenant colonel or major, and each squadron was led by a captain. Small arms for the LRDG were similar to those of the standard British infantry, though SMGs and Bren guns were more common.

SBS/COPP/SRU

The Special Boat Service (created in 1941), the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties (formed in 1942), and the Sea Reconnaissance Unit (also formed in 1942) were all United Kingdom special forces organized to provide amphibious-landing reconnaissance and support, and to act as a small maritime raiding force. The SRU and SBS used paddle boards, kayaks, and folbots (p. 23) to attack shipping in harbors and scout invasion sites. The COPP was similar, but sometimes used midget subs to scout beaches crawling with Germans. These units often helped landing craft navigate to their assigned landing area, and even cleared the beaches of mines and obstacles.

All three of these units were small, with perhaps 200 men in each. All were organized around independent 10- to 20-man sections, which were scattered throughout the various theaters. Armament was minimal – pistols and SMGs, though silenced weapons were sometimes used, particularly the silenced Sten submachine gun. At least one SBS kayak was armed with a Bren gun.

THE LRDG RATION

Divisional commanders approved an improved ration for LRDG troops, one of the few perks that the Kiwi Scorpions received. The daily ration included, in ounces: 2.5 bacon, 16 bread, 12 biscuit, 1.5 cheese, 2 chocolate, 4 tinned fruit, 3 potatoes, 4 tinned vegetables, 1 rum, 0.01 pepper, 0.75 salt, 6 preserved meat, 1 pickles, 1 tinned salmon, and other niceties such as 2 ounces of tobacco or cigarettes and 2 boxes of matches a week. Total daily weight was 5 lbs., and it was usually issued weekly or biweekly.

The variety and generosity was appealing to the line troops that lived off tins of bully beef and meat and vegetable rations for weeks at a time. Many units tried to be put on the LRDG rations, including the SAS.

THE UNITED STATES

The U.S. military made up for its late start in special operations with its enthusiasm for founding and training new units.

OSS Operational Groups

The Office of Strategic Services created its operational groups in May 1943 to act as uniformed soldiers working in conjunction with guerrillas and partisans behind enemy lines. These units cut railroads, attacked fuel depots, ambushed truck convoys, and prevented retreating Germans from destroying important infrastructure in “counter-scorching” missions. In August 1944, the OGs were known as the 2,671st Special Reconnaissance Battalion, Separate (Provisional). The groups were mostly assigned to Europe to support the Normandy invasion and

breakout, but some were sent to the Balkans, Burma, and the Pacific. Fewer than 2,000 men were active in the OSS operational groups.

The standard organization of an operational group was 34 men commanded by a captain or major, with a first lieutenant as executive officer. A second lieutenant was in charge of each 16-man section, further divided into two eight-man squads. Some OSS groups were much smaller, with the three-man Jedburgh liaison teams (p. W168) being the smallest.

Rank meant little in the OSS; men were often promoted just for volunteering for the work. Leadership was often assigned to the most competent and experienced man in the group. Leadership styles varied, but a simple democratic vote often decided sticky issues.

The groups chose their own weapons. Some used the silenced M-3 Grease Gun (p. 20), while others carried BARs, M-1 carbines, and Marlin UD42 (p. 20) or Thompson SMGs. Bazookas and demolitions were issued liberally, and even anti-tank guns were parachuted to teams on occasion.



UDTs and Scouts and Raiders

The Scouts and Raiders were originally a joint Army-Navy beach-reconnaissance unit created in August 1942. Formed at Camp Perry, Va., the Scouts and Raiders became an all-Navy unit in December 1943, though Army forces (such as the Rangers) continued to train at the new Scout and Raider school in Ft. Pierce, Fla.

Another U.S. underwater unit was the Naval Combat Demolition Unit, which began training in June 1943 at Ft. Pierce. With an emphasis in ship salvage, ordnance disposal, and obstacle and assault breaching, the NCDU was joined by the Underwater Demolition Teams in December 1943. The UDTs were tasked with clearing obstacles during landings, including sea mines, sandbars, and coral reefs.

The basic operational unit, or “team,” was composed of 50-100 men led by a lieutenant commander, with a lieutenant as executive officer. All of these units operated as small teams of five to seven men. This allowed each team to operate from one rubber raft. Each boat was led by an ensign, and was further split into “buddy” teams of two men.

Weapons for the teams were similar to those of other American infantry units. Special items, such as swim fins and masks, and primitive underwater breathing devices, began seeing limited use in the fall of 1944.



Army Rangers

These special battalions, described on p. W44, began their storied service in WWII with the 1st Ranger Battalion, formed in June 1942. From 2,000 volunteers, a force of 500 men was selected to train and fight in the style of British Commandos. A small team of 50 Rangers participated in the Dieppe raid.

In the beginning, Commandos and Rangers were both trained at the Commando Depot in the Scottish Highlands, but later Ranger battalions were trained in the states.

A colonel or lieutenant colonel led each battalion, with a headquarters company of 80-100 men, which included support personnel, medics, and radio operators. A captain led each of the six line companies with a second lieutenant in charge of each platoon. The platoons had two 11-man squads and a five-man 60mm or

81mm mortar section (each led by a sergeant).

Rangers used standard U.S. infantry equipment, with flamethrowers, anti-tank rifles, and even anti-tank guns used in assaults. A Ranger Cannon Company was formed to support assaults. It contained a battery of five 75mm howitzers mounted on half-tracks.

The Alamo Scouts

Created in November 1943, the Alamo Scouts were a small unit of U.S. Army raiders and reconnaissance specialists. Gen. Walter Krueger, commander of the U.S. 6th Army in the Southwest Pacific, named the Scouts after the landmark of his hometown, San Antonio, Texas. Though the Scouts existed for only two years, they completed more than 106 missions in New Guinea and the Philippines (Leyte and Luzon, specifically), without losing a single man to the enemy.

Although specialists in strategic reconnaissance, the Scouts frequently engaged in raids against Japanese outposts as well. They were disbanded in November 1945. Fewer than 150 men served in the Scouts, though more than 300 completed the grueling training at the Alamo Scouts Training Center at Ferguson Island, New Guinea.

The Alamo Scouts worked in six- or seven-man teams led by a first or second lieutenant. A Filipino scout often worked with each team, providing much needed knowledge of the local population and language. Alamo Scouts were lightly armed, carrying rifles, carbines, SMGs, and even the occasional shotgun.

U.S.M.C. Raiders

The U.S. Marines formed the 1st Raider Battalion just six weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, in February 1942. The Marine Raiders (see p. W44) were the first U.S. commando force, and the first to see combat.

The Raiders were created along the same lines as the British Commandos, with raiding and guerrilla warfare as their primary mission.

The Raiders proved an extremely successful unit, operating from submarines, destroyers, and seaplanes. The Raiders enjoyed some high-level support as well, since Pres. Franklin Roosevelt's son, Capt. James Roosevelt, served as executive officer in the 2nd Raider Battalion. Eventually, four separate Raider battalions were formed, with a force of nearly 4,000 men.

Led by a colonel or lieutenant colonel, the 900-man Raider battalion was made up of a HQ company, four rifle companies, and a weapons company. Each rifle company, commanded by a captain, contained a HQ section with radio operators, snipers, and medics; three 30-man rifle platoons; and a 30-man weapons platoon (with two 60mm mortars, two anti-tank rifles, and two machine guns). Each of these platoons was led by a lieutenant.

The rifle platoons consisted of three nine-man squads, each led by a sergeant, which contained three three-man fire-teams. The weapons company (commanded by a captain), contained a 30-man HQ section, an 80-man demolition platoon, a 35-man mortar platoon (with three 60mm mortars), and two 33-man machine-gun platoons (with four medium machine guns each).

A similar unit, the U.S. Para-Marines, was formed to raid and harass Japanese-held islands, but was disbanded before it saw combat. Many of these troops were recruited by the Raiders.

GERMANY

The Wehrmacht's special forces carried out some of the most daring missions of the war.

Brandenburger

Created in October 1939 as a company-sized unit of soldiers working for the German intelligence branch, the *Abwehr*, the Brandenburger (see p. W50) eventually grew to battalion then division strength. The Special Duty Training and Construction Company No. 800, or more commonly,

the Brandenburger (named for the region where the unit was trained), consisted mostly of ethnic Germans that had lived in foreign countries. Skilled in foreign languages, sabotage, assault techniques, and reconnaissance, the Brandenburger were masters at infiltrating into enemy-held areas and holding them until front-line troops arrived.

The Brandenburger were not formed with the typical Nazi concerns about race and ethnic background. In fact, their success depended on their men looking like the enemy – they often used enemy uniforms and equipment to wreak havoc in enemy rear areas. Severely limited by Prussian narrow-mindedness and political infighting, the Brandenburger were often used as nothing more than elite infantry.

At regimental strength, the Brandenburger were commanded by a colonel, and a small HQ company. Each of the three battalions in the regiment was led by a major or captain. Each battalion contained four to five companies of perhaps 75-100 men, each led by a lieutenant or a senior NCO. A motorcycle reconnaissance platoon, paratrooper platoon, and signal platoon supported each battalion. Their weaponry was typical German fare, but with a high ratio of automatic weapons (MG42s, StG44s, MP40s, etc.). Captured enemy weapons were also used, including the British Sten gun and the U.S. M-1 carbine.

SS-Jagdverbände

Created and led by Maj. Otto Skorzeny, the daring German commando, the first Waffen-SS commando units were formed in early 1942, but did not officially exist until August 1943. Volunteers from the SD (see p. W50), former Brandenburger, and foreign-language specialists formed these "hunter battalions," after training by *Abwehr* and SD technicians in commando and espionage skills, including hand-to-hand, demolition,



tracking, and anti-partisan warfare. Parachute and glider training was also provided. Named Mitte (center), Ost (east), Südwest (southwest), and Nordwest (northwest), each battalion operated in its designated area. Some performed in anti-partisan campaigns, such as SS-Jagdverband Ost, while others, such as SS-Jagdverband Mitte, were used in a more traditional special-forces role. Elements of Mitte, for instance, spearheaded the Battle of the Bulge (see p. W33) dressed as U.S. troops in the infamous Panzer Brigade 150.

The SS-Jagdverbände typically contained three standard rifle companies and as many as three legionnaire companies (made up of foreign nationals, often ethnic Germans). Each of the battalions was commanded by an officer ranging from captain to lieutenant colonel. Each company of 100-200 men was led by a lieutenant or senior NCO. Small-scale organization of these units is virtually unknown, but it's likely they operated in assault groups of 20-30 men, led by an NCO. Armament was most likely top-notch, as Skorzeny received *carte blanche* from Hitler in the creation and supply of the units.

SS-Fallschirmjäger

In October 1943, the Waffen-SS created its own paratroop unit. Strangely, the unit was composed of both decorated combat veterans and soldiers from military prisons. The latter were given their previous rank and invited to redeem their honor by serving in the unit.

The parachutists served in several anti-partisan operations in Eastern Europe, including the failed attempt to capture or kill the communist guerrilla leader Tito. Elements of the parabattalions also served with Otto Skorzeny's Panzer Brigade 150 in the Ardennes Offensive, and in desperate fighting on the Eastern Front.

The SS parabattalions, commanded by a major or lieutenant colonel, consisted of three parachute infantry companies, a heavy-weapons company, and a HQ company. Each company was led by a lieutenant. The HQ company included a signal platoon, reconnaissance squad, and maintenance and support elements. Each of the parachute infantry companies had three platoons (each led by a senior NCO), made up of three 12-man rifle squads (with a large proportion of automatic weapons), a communications team, and a light mortar squad. The weapons company consisted of a machine-gun platoon (with five

MG42s), a flamethrower platoon (three flamethrowers), a 120mm mortar platoon, and an anti-tank platoon (with four anti-tank guns).

Marine Einsatz Abteilung

The Kriegsmarine Naval Assault Detachment, formed in late 1943, was the first official German naval special-warfare unit.

Unlike the frogmen of the U.S. Navy, the men of the Kriegsmarine's Naval Assault Detachment (K-men for short) were skilled in many different fields, not just swimming and combat demolition. The K-men were formed in the image of British commandos, and trained by veterans of the Eastern Front in guerrilla warfare, demolition, and small arms. In addition, the K-men were trained in combat-swimming techniques, naval engineering, and the use of submarine escape devices. Using midget submarines, manned torpedoes, and explosive-filled motor boats, the K-men became proficient in all manner of exotic naval weaponry.



The K-men were organized into three kommandos, each led by a lieutenant. The kommandos, with 20-30 men in each, were further subdivided into smaller teams, depending upon the exact mission. Their weaponry ranged from captured silenced Stens to regular German arms.

OTHER NATIONS

Several other nations had effective special forces. Finnish rangers harried and attacked Russian forces. Italian frogmen destroyed British warships at port and pioneered the use of underwater breathing devices. Russian special forces included naval commandos and special airborne-deployed reconnaissance units. To create characters from these units, or to create fictional special forces, start with a similar unit and template, then modify from there.

CHARACTERS



Players creating commandos should begin with the information in *GURPS WWII*, then further modify their commando with the information below. The many changes in training and organization that WWII special forces underwent cannot be fully detailed here, but the information presented below will help create more realistic characters.

Soldiers who are part of special teams (sniper, anti-tank, mortar, machine gun, etc.) should spend additional points in those areas of specialization. These points should not only be spent in the actual weapon skill, but also in supporting areas. A machine-gun team could benefit from skills such as Speed-Load, Fast-Draw (Magazine), and Armoury (Small Arms), which would keep the weapon firing. Snipers and scouts need high levels of Camouflage, Stealth, Orienteering, and Tactics, and advantages such as Night Vision, Alertness, and Acute Vision; Guns (Rifle) is not the only pertinent skill for a military scout/sniper.

Commandos trained with a wide variety of weapons and vehicles, including those of allied forces and those of the enemy. Commandos with Combat/Weapon and Vehicle operation skills will have about twice as many familiarities as normal (see sidebar, p. B43), should the familiarities rules be in use.

Most special forces had a fiercely competitive selection and training process. In many units, training focused on preparing each man to take over the leadership role of the unit and continue the mission. GMs may permit commando PCs to take the Tactics and Operations skills for their specialty area, even though they may not have the rank to officially use them. This represents the general tactical and operational prowess that these small units exhibited, and illustrates why so many special-forces veterans were able to rise so rapidly in post-war years.

COMMANDO TEMPLATE

The following notes provide additional detail for customizing the Commando template on p. W80, broken down not just by nation but by particular units.

U.K. Customization

The quality of British special forces will vary from seasoned – representing commandos fresh from training – to elite – for SAS or LRDG troops with a good deal of combat experience.

All British special-ops soldiers should take the Fairbairn Close-Combat Training style (p. 10). Each Commando should pick a specialty (see the Commando unit description, p. 11) and spend additional points in one of the following skills: Climbing, Skiing, Boating, Parachuting, or both Demolition and Explosive Ordnance Disposal.

Hiking was a primary part of Commando training; extra points should be put into the Hiking skill, or into increasing the Fit advantage to Very Fit. The Forward Observation skill should be available only to officers or senior NCOs. Survival (Woodlands or Mountains) would be common for those trained at the Commando Training Center in Scotland.

Troops in the LRDG should spend their extra points in Area Knowledge (North Africa), Driving (Automobile), Electronics Operation (Communications), Mechanic (Gasoline Engine), Survival (Desert), Surveying, Telegraphy, and most importantly, Navigation. LRDG trucks were usually armed with machine guns, but some were mounted with mortars and light cannons, requiring skills in Gunner (Mortar) and (Cannon).

The combat kayakers of the SBS should spend points in Boating, Navigation, Stealth, Surveying (usually with the optional specialization of Beach), and Swimming, as well as Demolition, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, and Underwater Demolition. COPPists would add Mechanic (Ocean-going Vessel), Meteorology, Navigation, Powerboat, Seamanship, and Shiphandling (with familiarity with midget submarines and/or old-fashioned steamers).

The SAS, depending on the particular unit or mission, could have any or all of the skills listed above. Skills similar to those of the LRDG would fit SAS jeep-patrol missions, for instance. Other SAS troops worked behind the lines coordinating partisans. These troops would spend their remaining points in various Combat/Weapon skills, Area Knowledge (target country), Diplomacy, Electronics Operation (Communications), Intelligence Analysis, Leadership, Parachuting, Stealth, Tactics (Guerrilla), Telegraphy, and languages (French or German, among others). Some SAS units performed maritime duties, and would use the SBS skill recommendations.

U.S. Customization

U.S. special forces will be of seasoned or veteran quality, with only the Alamo Scouts, and perhaps the Marine Raider and Ranger units late in the war, being of elite quality.

American forces were well-trained in hand-to-hand combat (often by British SOE and Commando instructors), so the Fairbairn Close-Combat Training style usually should be taken.

U.S. troops had access to the most mechanized army in the world. Many of them would have Driving (Automobile), and more than a few would have Driving (Halftrack) or (Tank). Varying backgrounds made U.S. special forces particularly notable for flexibility. One unit of Rangers was raised from a field artillery unit, and would have had several skill points from the Artilleryman template, p. W74.



Ranger and Marine Raider characters should put extra points in Guns (Flamethrower), Guns (LAW), Gunner (Mortar), and Gunner (Machine Gun). Additional points can be put in Climbing, Boating, Engineer (Combat), Stealth, and Demolition. The Forward Observer skill would be limited to officers or senior NCOs. Survival (Jungle or Island/Beach) is a key skill for Marine Raiders and Alamo Scouts. At least two points should be spent on the Hiking skill for all of these troops. Alamo Scouts would spend extra points in Boating, Camouflage, Intelligence Analysis, Stealth, Surveying, and Tracking.

Maritime units like the UDTs and Scouts and Raiders will spend their points on Swimming (this skill level should be 15+), Boating, Demolition, Engineer (Combat), Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Intelligence Analysis, Powerboat, Stealth, Surveying (Beach), Survival (Island/Beach), and Underwater Demolition.

In early 1945, the Scuba skill could be taken, but it would represent the use of various experimental devices (see p. 23), and not the fully mature scuba gear developed by Jacques Cousteau in 1946.

The OSS operational groups should draw their skills from SAS recommendations. They received a good bit of espionage-style training as well, so Area Knowledge (target country), Electronics Operation (Communications), Intelligence Analysis, Interrogation, Lockpicking, Pickpocket, Telegraphy, and Traps would be appropriate. No-Landing Extraction was taught to certain OSS units, and though it was dangerous, it was used on occasion. A maritime OSS group, such as the one operating in the Pacific theater, would select skills from the UDT and SBS recommendations, as well.

German Customization

German special-operations units had many backgrounds, but the most common one was as combat engineers. These men tended to be brave, smart, and fit, and they already had a foundation in certain special skills of the commando (such as Demolition). Those creating German special forces should use the Commando template, but should take their secondary and/or optional skills from the Combat Engineer template on p. W78. Most troops would have Parachuting training of some sort. Among early-war troops, almost all knew at least one foreign language and had Area Knowledge for a foreign locale.

Many of the Brandenburger missions required enemy uniforms and enemy equipment, so Acting, Area Knowledge, and Holdout skills – as well as native fluency in the language of the targeted country or city – would be useful. Anti-partisan fighters needed skills in Animal Handling, Area Knowledge (the operations area), the local language, Orienteering, Riding, Stealth, and Traps. (Many of these operations were in remote areas of eastern Europe, where horses proved to be more useful, and plentiful, than motorized transports.) Intelligence Analysis, Interrogation, and Intimidation may also be useful.

A few troops might have acquired Piloting, since some cross-training was necessary in case the pilot was wounded on airborne or glider missions. Guns (LAW) and Guns (Flamethrower) were unusually common skills among German special forces. Troops might receive training in Driving (Tank or Half-track) if the mission required it.

German frogmen would have skills similar to SBS or U.S. maritime units. They had access to primitive underwater-breathing equipment, so the Scuba and Underwater Demolition skills would be available to a few of them. The Parachuting skill could also be increased; some were trained to jump into the water near the coastline.

GIZMOS AND GADGETS

Technology played a big part in the formation and success of special forces. Rapid-firing weapons, potent and stable explosives, and long-range radios all gave small desperate knots of men unprecedented advantages.

For commandos themselves, however, the interest in techno-toys only went so far. They

knew that no matter how many gizmos they carried, their goal of killing the enemy would require a grim warrior resolve for which no whizbang device would substitute.

This chapter details some of the special vehicles and equipment that made commando operations possible.

SPECIAL WEAPONS



During WWII, dozens of organizations around the world worked to create weapons that would win the war. In the United States, the Office of Scientific Research and Development and the Office of Strategic Services' own research and analysis branch produced hundreds of gizmos and gadgets. The Special Operations Executive had its Welwyn Experimental Laboratory, famous for the collapsible motorbike (Welbike) and the silenced pistol (Welrod).

KNIVES AND MELEE WEAPONS

Marines and paratroopers were famous for their knives, and so, too, was the commando. Knives have many advantages that appealed to special warriors: They seldom malfunctioned, they required no ammo, and they could open food tins and C-ration containers when chow time rolled around.

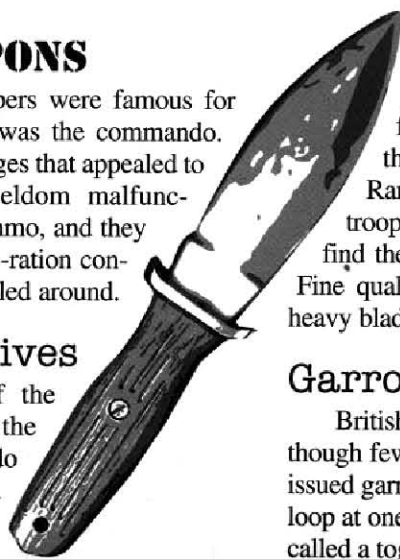
Commando Knives

The most famous of the special-forces knives is the Sykes-Fairbairn Commando dagger. A double-edged steel blade, darkened and equipped with a slender grip, the Commando dagger was a deadly weapon in the hands of a trained user. It could penetrate deep into vital organs, and its razor-sharp double-edged blade could quickly drop a sentry with a thrust to the throat. The U.S.M.C. Raiders carried

a nearly identical blade. Rangers carried the M-3 Fighting Knife, which had a double-edged point and strong back for utility purposes. Marine Raiders and Para-Marines used the Ka-Bar Marine Fighting Knife, with its distinctive blood groove. All of these blades should be treated as large knives of Fine quality.

The Smatchet

OSS operatives were issued a leaf-bladed chopping knife (see illustration) that was intended to serve as an all-purpose field tool and combat weapon. The Smatchet, as it came to be called, proved to be a popular choice for many Allied special forces and espionage agents (contrary to the usual reaction to OSS gizmos). Rangers, Marine Raiders, and even SAS troops used Smatchets as often as they could find them. A Smatchet should be treated as a Fine quality long bayonet (p. W193); it has a heavy blade and lanyard hole.

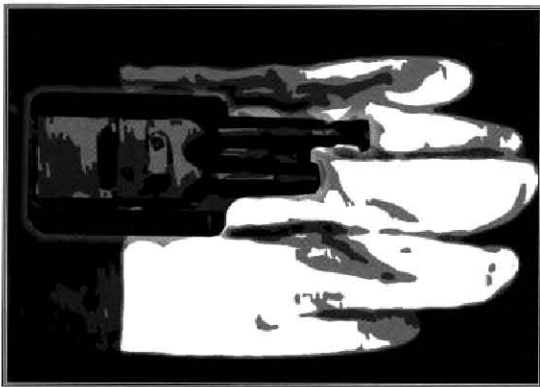


Garrote

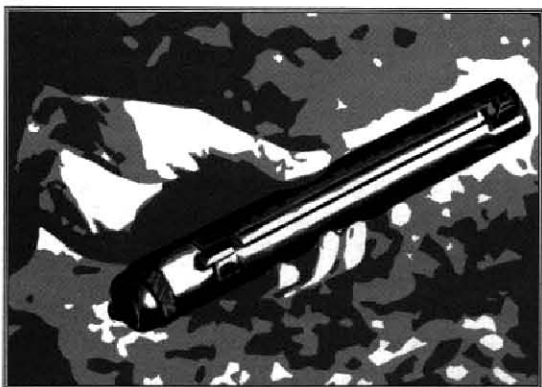
British Commandos trained with garrotes, though few ever used them. The most commonly issued garrote consisted of a length of rope with a loop at one end and a wooden handle at the other, called a toggle rope. By inserting wooden toggles into the loops of other toggle ropes, a Commando force could fashion a rope ladder out of a unit's combined toggle ropes. Thus, the toggle ropes served as a climbing aid and – in extreme circumstances – a nasty weapon. A toggle rope is 3' long, weighs 1 lb., and costs \$2.

SPECIAL WEAPONS

Glove Pistol (1944): A rather silly weapon developed by U.S. Naval Intelligence, the Glove Pistol was issued to OSS and special ops for assassinations and sentry removal. It consisted of a heavy leather glove with a metal plate riveted to the back of the hand. This mounted a very short barrel loaded with a single round and a striker assembly, which protruded when the hand was balled into a fist. The user was to strike the target with his fist in hand-to-hand combat, firing the bullet point-blank into the target. (Use Brawling skill – the shot automatically hits the same body part as a successful punch. The shot doesn't go off if the punch is dodged. If the punch is parried, the *shot* may still hit the parrying arm or weapon; the attacker should roll again at Brawling-4 to see if the shot hits.) The weapon could be fired manually using both hands, at -4 to Guns (Pistol) skill.



Sleeve Pistol Mk I (1944): The British SOE's answer to the Glove Pistol, this was a 9" metal cylinder less than 2" in diameter that fired a single .32 ACP round. The integral suppressor gave a -3 to the usual +18 (for a net +15) to hear a .32, or -4 if pressed tight to the victim. The device weighed 1.7 lbs., allowing use as a sap or blackjack (use Blackjack skill) by swinging it from the wrist lanyard.



SILENCED WEAPONS

To improve their stealthiness, commandos often wielded firearms equipped with silencers. (Serious users of firearms, such as military personnel, usually refer to these devices by the more technically accurate name of "suppressors.")

To hear any gunshot, roll vs. IQ and add any hearing bonuses or penalties (Acute Hearing, Alertness, Hard of Hearing, etc.). Firearms provide a bonus to hear them from +16 for a .22 LR rifle to +30 or more for artillery. Suppressors reduce this bonus to hear the weapon; all of the suppressed weapons in this book have the normal acoustic signature, suppressor effect, and net modifier described for them.

The range penalties from p. W201 are applied to Hearing rolls. Background noise also inflicts a penalty, from -5 for a quiet conversation to -30 for trying to hear a pistol shot amidst a battery of firing 105mm cannons!

Apply a +2 if both the weapon and listener are in the same building or other structure. Subtract -3 if the shot is not fired in the direction of the listener.

SMALL ARMS

See *GURPS WWII* for general firearms information and the meaning of the statistics on the following weapons table.

Pistols

Colt-Browning M-1903 (1903): The U.S. military issued this pocket pistol to generals, OSS agents, and a few other government agencies.

High Standard HDMS (1944): This is a modified High Standard .22 pistol with an integral sound suppressor used by the OSS. The integral sound suppressor gave a -3 to the usual +16 to hear a .22 round for a net +13.

Steyr M.12/P16 (1916): This machine pistol was a variant of the Austrian service pistol M.12. It featured a fixed, extended 16-round magazine loaded with 8-round stripper clips. A shoulder stock was sometimes attached giving Acc 6, Rcl -2, using Guns (Light Auto) skill. In 1939, a number of guns were rebarreled to fire the 9mm Parabellum round and issued to German commandos. A suppressor could be fitted (+1 lb., -4 to the usual +20 to hear for a net +16).

Czeska Zbrojovka vz.27 (1927): This small pistol was issued to the German police and *Waffen-SS* as the P27(t). From 1943, small numbers were made with screw-on sound suppressors, and used by German Abwehr agents, Brandenburg, and SS assassins; when fitted, Dam 2d-2-, 1/2D 50, 2.8 lbs., -4 to the usual +18 to hear for a net +14.

Welrod Pistol Mk I (1943): Developed at the SOE's Welwyn Herts Laboratories, this special-purpose handgun had an integral suppressor (-2 to the usual +18 to hear it for a net +16) lasting for only a dozen shots. It was issued to the British Commandos, SOE, and OSS agents. Despite an internal magazine, it had to be recocked manually after each shot, by turning a dial at the rear of the weapon.

Rifles

Johnson M-1941 (1941): This self-loading rifle had been developed in the late 1930s in an unsuccessful bid to replace Garand's M-1. An internal 10-round magazine was loaded with five-round clips. In 1942, Marine Raiders and Par-Marines used them in the Pacific theater. They were also found in the hands of Rangers and French partisans.

Remington M-1903A4 (1943): A sniper version of the Springfield M-1903A3 service rifle (see p. W95), this featured a 2.5× scope and specially selected action. Each Ranger platoon had one sniper with this rifle. The M-1942, adopted by the U.S. Marines, was similar, but featured a 8× scope (+3 Acc).

Springfield M-1C Garand (1944): This was the sniper variant of the standard M-1 rifle (see p. W95), fitted with a 2.5× scope and a leather cheek-piece.

Winchester M-1A1 Carbine (1942): The paratrooper's version of the M-1 carbine (p. W95), with a folding wire stock. It was popular with Rangers and OSS agents. Captured weapons were used by German special ops.

Winchester M-3 Carbine (1945): A specially modified version of the

M-2 carbine (p. W95) with an experimental infrared sight, this was used in the Pacific theater in the closing days of the war. See *Infrared Sights*, p. 24, for more information. The listed statistics include the sight, but not the battery pack.

Haenel Sturmgewehr 44 with Vampir (1944): In December 1944, the German military received 310 prototypes of the top-secret Leitz ZG1229 *Vampir* active IR-sighting system, fitted to the StG 44 assault rifle (p. W95). See *Infrared Sights*, p. 24. Note that the listed statistics include the sight, but not the battery pack.

DeLisle Commando Carbine Mk I (1943): Designed to take out sentries from a distance, the DeLisle was made up from old SMLE rifles and Thompson SMG barrels. An integral sound suppressor (-5 to Hearing) was fitted, as was a Colt M-1911A1 pistol magazine. Two types of ammunition were issued: standard rounds or special, extra-powerful rounds for longer range. Standard rounds (+18 to hear) reduced firing noise to that of an air rifle (a net +13), extra-powerful (+20 to hear) to that of a .22 rifle (Dam 2d+1+, 1/2D 200, Max 1,900, a net +15 to hear the shot).

Submachine Guns

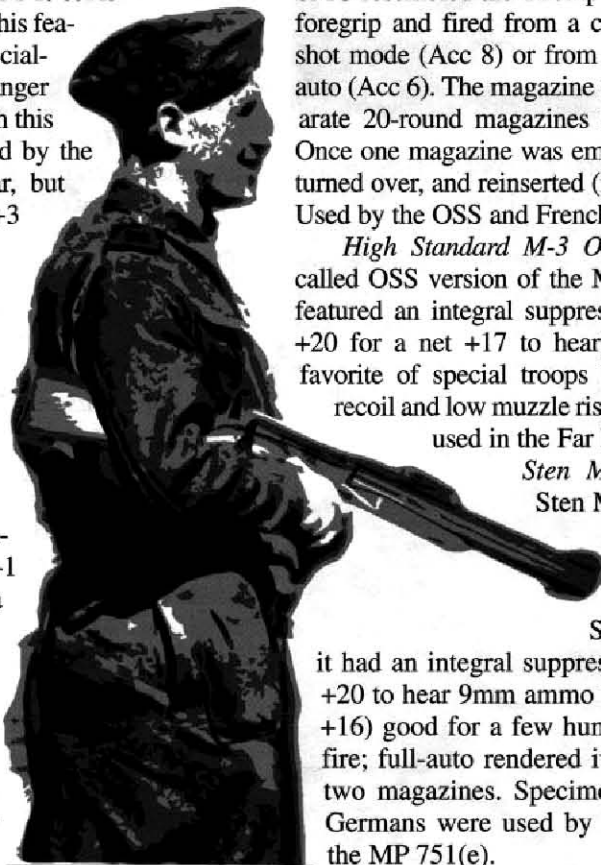
Marlin UD42 (1942): Made by the United Defense Supply Corporation for the OSS, this SMG resembled the Thompson. It had a wooden foregrip and fired from a closed bolt in single-shot mode (Acc 8) or from an open bolt on full auto (Acc 6). The magazine consisted of two separate 20-round magazines mated back-to-back. Once one magazine was empty, it was removed, turned over, and reinserted (requiring 2 seconds). Used by the OSS and French Resistance.

High Standard M-3 OSS (1944): The so-called OSS version of the M-3 submachine gun featured an integral suppressor (-3 to the usual +20 for a net +17 to hear). This SMG was a favorite of special troops because of its tame recoil and low muzzle rise. Most of them were used in the Far East and the Pacific.

Sten Mk IIS (1942): The

Sten Mk IIS was the most common silenced weapon of WWII.

A variant of the Sten Mk II (p. W96), it had an integral suppressor (-4 to the usual +20 to hear 9mm ammo being fired for a net +16) good for a few hundred shots in single fire; full-auto rendered it useless after about two magazines. Specimens captured by the Germans were used by their own troops as the MP 751(e).



Machine Guns

Colt-Browning M-1922 (1922): This M-1918 BAR variant (p. W97) was made for the U.S. cavalry and consequently supplied to OSS agents and Rangers, who cherished its compactness and light weight.

A similar weapon was the Colt R80 Monitor (1933), a commercial variant intended for sale to U.S. police departments and the FBI; it featured a shortened barrel, muzzle compensator, and forward pistol grip much like that of the Thompson submachine gun. It also saw service with special units; same stats except weight 17.9 lbs.

Johnson M-1941 (1941): A light machine gun that fed from a side-mounted magazine, this served with USMC Raiders and Para-Marines, and later with the joint American-Canadian First Special Service Force (p. 31) in Italy.

Vickers G.O. Mk I (1937): This weapon fed from a large platter drum magazine on top of the receiver. British raiding and reconnaissance units called them K-guns and slapped them on anything with wheels. A typical jeep of the SAS was fitted with twin guns on a pintle mount at the co-driver's seat, and another pair behind the driver's seat, covering the rear.

WEAPONS TABLE

Entries in these tables use the format and abbreviations on p. W91.

Special Weapons – Use Guns (Particular Special Weapon)

Name	Malf	Dam	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	AWt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Glove Pistol, .38 S&W	16	2d-1	DX	0	50	500	0.5	0.03	1/6	1	8	-1	+3	n/a
Normally used with Brawling skill; see p. 19.														
Sleeve Pistol Mk I, .32 ACP	Crit.	2d-1-	8	0	50	500	2.15	0.01	1/10	1	8	-2	+1	n/a

Pistols – Use Guns (Pistol)

Name	Malf	Dam	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	AWt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Colt-Browning M-1903, .32 ACP	Crit.	2d-1-	10	2	100	1,300	1.8	0.25	3~	8+1	8	-1	+1	\$50
High Standard HDMS, .22 LR	Crit.	1d-	10	3	50	600	2.5	0.4	3~	10+1	7	-1	-2	\$75
Steyr M.12/P16, 9mm Steyr	Crit.	2d+2	10	3	150	1,850	2.8	0.4	13*	16	10	-4	-2	\$50
With the stock attached, use Guns (Rifle) for single shots or Guns (Light Auto) for automatic fire.														
CZ vz.27, .32 ACP	Crit.	2d-1-	10	2	100	1,300	1.8	0.25	3~	8+1	8	-1	+1	\$50
Welrod Pistol Mk I, .32 ACP	Crit.	1d+2-	11	1	50	700	2.1	0.1	1/2	5+1	8	-1	-1	n/a

Rifles – Use Guns (Rifle) or Guns (Light Auto)

Name	Malf	Dam	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	AWt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Cranston M-1941 Johnson, .30-06	Crit.	7d+1	14	10	1,000	4,600	10.2	0.6	3~	10	12	-3	-6	\$80
Remington M-1903A4, .30-06	Crit.	7d+1	15	12+1	1,000	4,600	9.7	0.3	1/2	5+1	12	-3	-6	\$120
Springfield M-1C Garand, .30-06	Crit.	7d+1	15	12+1	1,000	4,600	11.7	0.5	3~	8	12	-3	-6	\$120
Winchester M-1A1, .30 Carbine	Crit.	3d+2-	12	8	300	2,100	5.7	0.5	3~	15+1	9	-1	-4	\$55
Winchester M-3, .30 Carbine	Crit.	3d+2-	14	8	300	2,100	10.5	0.5	12*	15+1	9	-1	-5	\$250
Haenel StG 44 Vampir, 7.92mm K	Crit.	5d+1	14	8	500	3,100	18.4	2	8*	30	11	-2	-7	n/a
De Lisle Commando Mk I, .45 ACP	Crit.	2d-1+	12	8	150	1,600	8.75	0.5		17+1	10	-1	-5	n/a

Submachine Guns – Use Guns (Light Auto) or Guns (Rifle)

Name	Malf	Dam	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	AWt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Marlin UD42, 9mm Parabellum	Crit.	3d-1	10	6	160	1,900	11.1	2	11*	2x20	10	-1	-5	\$200
High Standard M-3 OSS, .45 ACP	Crit.	2d-1+	10	6	110	900	11.3	2.2	7	30	10	-1	-5	\$70
Sten Mk IIS, 9mm Parabellum	Crit.	2d	10	6	100	1,000	9	1.4	7*	32	10	-1	-5	\$50

Light Machine Guns – Use Guns (Light Auto) or Guns (Rifle)

Name	Malf	Dam	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	AWt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Colt-Browning M-1922, .30-06	Crit.	7d	14	9	800	4,200	20.8	1.6	9*	20	13B	-2	-6	\$250
Cranston M-1941 Johnson, .30-06	Crit.	7d+1	15	10	1,000	4,600	14.6	1.6	7*	20	12B	-3	-7	\$250

Medium Machine Guns – Use Gunner (Machine Gun)

Name	Malf	Dam	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt.	AWt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Vickers G.O. Mk I, .303 British	Crit.	6d+2	18	8	1,000	3,800	25	4	20	96	13B	-1	-7	\$300

DEMOLITION



The demolition equipment on p. W89 can be used in addition to the equipment below.

EXPLOSIVES AND INCENDIARY DEVICES

Primacord is a very fast-burning explosive used to initiate other explosive devices. It looks a good deal like clothesline. It does 6d×2 explosive damage per pound, or 1d-1 explosive damage in each hex that it passes through. A 1,000' spool is \$50, 23 lbs.

Plastic Explosives: Often called PE or plastique, this is a stable, waterproof explosive. Most American and British units had access to PE, but GMs should feel free to require Scrounging or Administration rolls to find it. Axis units should suffer a penalty on this roll. Does 6d×3 damage per pound and costs \$9.

Pocket Incendiary: A cigarette-pack-sized block of thermite in a tin box, this burns at over 5,000°, doing 1d of burning damage every second for 40 seconds to anything in contact. It can ignite any flammable object within a two-yard radius. In addition, for every 10 points of damage, it permanently reduces DR at that location by 1. It uses a "time pencil" delay device, described below. It was issued to saboteurs and commandos, and often used to destroy aircraft parked on airfields at night. \$1, 0.25 lbs.

Thermite Bomb: A larger version of the pocket incendiary, the thermite bomb does 2d burning damage per second, as above, but for 40 seconds. It could ruin heavy machinery or tank engines, and even cut bridge supports or train rails. \$8, 2.5 lbs.

Limpet Mines: These devices contained a shaped charge designed to cut through the hull of a merchant ship. Held in place by magnets and detonated by time pencils or a time clock, limpet mines were used by several special forces to sink freighters and support craft. Each limpet mine does 6d×9 (10) damage. \$35, 4 lbs.

Time Pencils: These pencil-shaped devices consisted of a long glass tube, inside of which

was a thin wire and an ampule of acid. If the ampule was crushed, the acid would eat through the wire and snap the exploding cap, setting off the explosive device. The chemical-delay devices were available in 10-minute, 30-minute, 2-hour, 5-hour, 12-hour, or 24-hour versions.

Temperature variations caused the devices to fluctuate on exact time to detonation, so a Demolition roll is required to determine which time pencil is needed for a given situation. (Temperatures above 60° F reduces time by 20-50%; roll against Demolition to determine the actual time to detonation.)

A six-pack (one of each type) costs \$10 and weighs 0.25 lbs.

Time Clock: A precision timepiece used to set off explosives. A detonator cap (p. W89) is wired to the clock, and then the clock is wound and set. Time delay can vary from 15 minutes to 12 hours. It is waterproof to 20' and can be stopped and reset, or tripped manually. \$25, 1 lb.

Tire Busters: These small metal spheres used a pistol primer to detonate a small amount of PE. One does 2d+2 explosive damage if compressed by more than 150 lbs. They were commonly camouflaged in mud or animal droppings and scattered in the path of pursuing vehicles. \$2, 0.25 lbs.



Beano: These OSS-designed impact grenades are approximately the same size and weight as a baseball. They arm after being thrown eight yards, and then explode on the next firm contact. Simply pull the safety pin and throw. Snow and mud might prevent detonation, however. Damage is 2d concussion and 1d+1 fragmentation. \$20, 0.75 lbs.

UNIFORMS AND GEAR



The following specialized gear will add flavor and realism to a commando campaign.

CLOTHING AND ARMOR

Special forces usually adopted some sort of identifying article of uniform. This could be a hat, such as the green beret of the Commandos or the tan beret of the SAS, or just a uniform patch, like the blue diamond worn by Rangers. Articles of dress, and even footwear, became badges of station for special forces. American airborne troops stuck their uniform trouser legs inside their boots, giving them a baggy "bloused" appearance, and wore heavy jump boots with reinforced toes.

Armor was seldom used by most special forces. It was usually too heavy and noisy to be of any real benefit, but there were some exceptions. Japanese Special Naval Landing Force soldiers sometimes wore protective vests (p. W87) and Italian commandos were issued heavy shields (DR 20, 25 lbs.) with firing slits. Soft caps, bush hats, or stocking caps were much more common than helmets (at least until Commandos and Rangers were thrown into the front lines).

Fictional WWII special units should have their own signature articles of uniform.

FIELD GEAR

Although the focus of fiction and history alike is often on the combat of the war, it was frequently the non-combat dangers that killed troops. Catching a cold, or malaria, or dengue fever was just as dangerous as catching a bullet.

GMs may require detailed lists of gear, and penalize Soldier rolls based on the lack of basic field gear.

Camouflage Clothing

At the beginning of the war, German researchers estimated that casualties could be reduced by 15% by using camouflaged clothing. German special units were the first to issue such clothing. American Marines in the jungles of the Pacific were also issued camouflaged uniform items, though often the only piece retained was the helmet cover.

GMs may permit troops from German or American special forces to use camouflage clothing, which grants a -1 to -2 to Vision rolls when someone is attempting to spot them, if appropriate. Specialist snipers often wore elaborate outfits called ghillie suits, which give a +1 to +8 to the

Camouflage skill. These weigh 15-20 pounds and increase the wearer's effective temperature by 15° or more (see p. W205).

The equipment list in *GURPS WWII* is sufficient for most special forces. Unlike today, the commandos of WWII usually had very little special equipment to choose from. Specialty areas, such as combat swimmer gear, are covered in more depth below.

Combat Swimmer Gear

Auger – 2' tube to sample sand composition. Samples are kept in condoms. \$1, 0.5 lbs.

Bong Stick – Hand-cranked device to signal a waiting sub's sonar, +4 to Sonar detection roll. \$15, 5 lbs.

Breathing Apparatus – 1.5-hour supply of air (refills are \$20, 4 lbs.), uses Scuba skill -2. At depths below 30' the diver suffers the bends (see p. CII132). \$200, 30 lbs.

Depth Gauge – Large belt model. \$15, 1 lb.

Dive Gear – Mask, swim fins, and snorkel. \$3, 6 lbs.

Dive Mask – Allowed divers to see underwater much easier. Fitting was done by carving the soft rubber with a knife and then sanding it smooth. \$1, 1 lb.

Dye Marker – Used on water, takes 3d seconds to make a green glowing 30' circle that lasts an hour. \$5, 1 lb.

Fly Reel – A 200' reel of fishing line marked at precise distances for depth survey work. \$2, 1 lb.

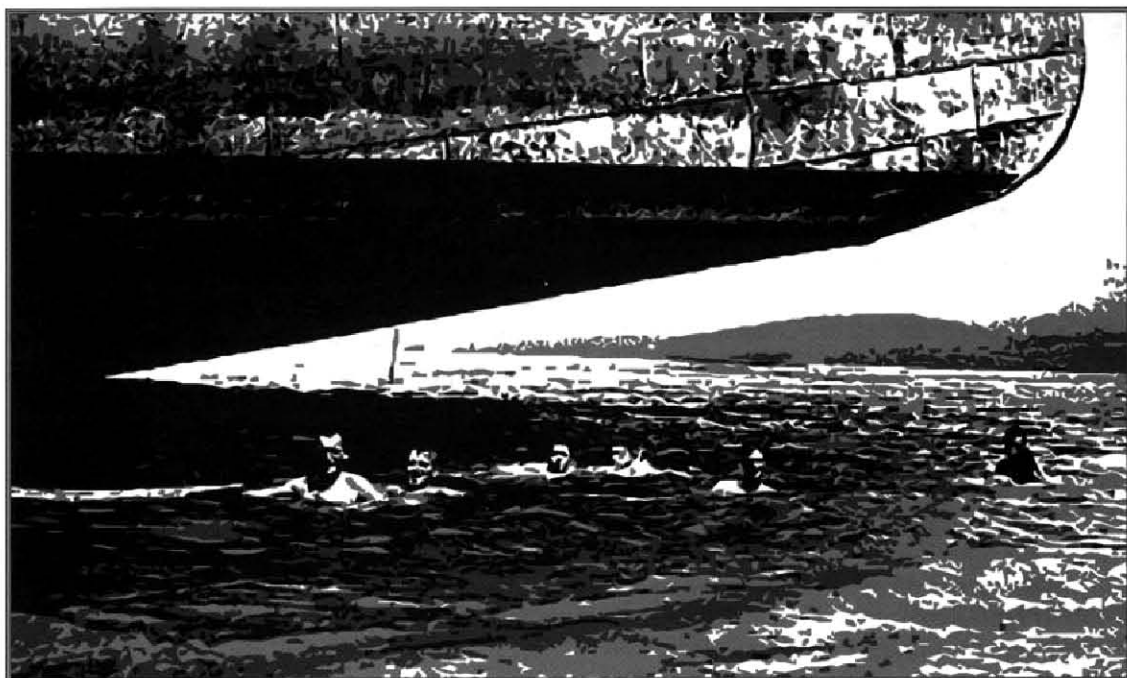
Folbot – A "folding boat" two-man kayak used by the SBS. Folds down to a 5'x1'x1' package to fit through sub hatches. Has a maximum load of 500 lbs. and a top speed of 4 knots. DR 3, HP 25. \$35, 50 lbs.

Invasion Belt – A heavy web belt with rubber bladders inside. A pull-ring activates the CO² cartridges and inflates the belt. Often used by combat swimmers. \$1, 2 lbs.

Infrared Signal Device – Infrared viewer and light for covert signaling of ships and subs (use Telegraphy skill); uses four large flashlight batteries per hour. Often cranky and prone to malfunction. Needs line of sight. \$300, 3 lbs.

Lead Line – A 30' line or cord with a lead weight used to make soundings in survey work. \$1, 1 lb.

Paddle Board – A one-man surfboard with a compass on the front. Used by the SBS and OSS groups during maritime saboteur operations. \$20, 30 lbs.



Plexiglas Plate – A 10"×10" plate used with a grease pencil to record survey data. \$2, 0.5 lbs.

Silver Grease Paint – Applying this to one's body gives a -2 to Vision rolls to detect the wearer in the water. \$0.75, negligible weight.

Snorkel – Allows a swimmer to breathe with his face in the water, and gives anyone searching for him a -2 to Vision rolls to spot him. \$1, 1 lb.

Swim Fins – +1 to Move in water, maximum Move 1 on land. \$1, 4 lbs.

Waterproof Suit – A rubberized "dry suit" for infiltrating spies, with watertight fittings at face and hands. Usually issued to parachutists jumping near a large body of water. \$50, 6 lbs.

Communications and Electronics

Homing Beacon – This is the Eureka system used by Allied bombers and aircraft to deliver ordnance, cargo, or men on target at night. The 10-mile transmitter guides specially equipped aircraft to the beacon. (Assume the aircraft needs a special Radio Direction Finder receiver capable of picking up the signal – see p.W143 – and treat the beacon as using Morse code, doubling its range.) With a successful Electronics Operations (Communications) roll at +4, the beacon gives the pilot a +3 to skill when determining whether he lines up on the DZ correctly or not. Airborne pathfinders and SAS troops were taught to use it during the Normandy invasion. It needs a power source and uses 360 kW's per hour. \$300, 15 lbs.

Infrared Sights – As the war was closing, American and German forces fielded experimen-

tal infrared sights for small arms. The Germans mounted theirs to the StG44 assault rifle, while the Americans mounted theirs on a modified M-2 carbine. It's doubtful that the German system was ever used in combat, but sources claim that the American "Sniperscope" system saw use in the Pacific theater in the closing weeks of the war.

Both systems would have similar game stats: Range is 100 yards and all darkness penalties are halved. Malfunction for small arms infrared systems (see p. CII6) is at -5. Each infrared sight requires a motorcycle battery for each hour of operation. Either system would add about 5 lbs. to weapon weight (adding 2 to SS) and require a separate 15-lb. battery pack. Extra batteries can be added to increase operation. Cost is at least \$250, plus the cost of the batteries.

Marker Panels – These brightly colored panels were used to mark LZs and DZs for aircraft. They give a +2 to Vision rolls to spot them, and if spotted, they give the pilot a +3 to skill when determining whether or not he lines up on the DZ correctly. \$5, 2 lbs.

Drop Zone Lights – These lights were mounted on tripods and positioned on a DZ so that aircraft could identify the area at night. Airborne pathfinders landed ahead of the massive follow-on waves and operated the lights, which were used in various combinations of red and green. With a successful Vision roll at +4, the lights give the pilot a +3 to skill when determining whether or not he lines up on the DZ correctly. Each light, with power source, weighs 5 lbs. and runs for 2 hours. Cost is \$25 each.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS VEHICLES

The following expands the use of vehicles in commando operations.

PARACHUTES AND AERIAL RESUPPLY

Parachute and glider operations require two rolls. The first roll is against the Operations (Air-Land) skill (p. W22) of the officer planning the mission. This determines the overall success and feasibility of the jump plan. Any failure here is applied as a penalty to the Piloting roll, and to Tactics (Infantry or Guerrilla) rolls for the first hour on the ground.

As the plane nears the drop zone, the pilot must navigate and pilot the aircraft in the right direction, over the right spot, and at the right speed. Rolls against Piloting and Navigation are required. If the Piloting roll is failed, apply the margin of failure to each jumping trooper's Parachuting roll.

A failed Navigation roll simply puts the paratroops in the wrong place. Look up the margin of failure +10 on the *Speed/Range and Size Table* on p. W201. The result is the number of yards from the DZ that the paratroops actually land. A critical failure results in the paratroopers being dropped a full 1d×1% of the distance traveled from the beginning of the flight to the target DZ; for instance, a 500-mile flight would put the troops 5-30 miles from the intended DZ.

Parachuting requires two rolls: one to exit the aircraft and ensure the chute opens correctly, and another to land safely. The first roll is only modified by poor Piloting, which can cause the parachutist to exit the aircraft too fast or too low. A normal failure on this roll means that the jumper loses equipment or suffers injury (at 1d per 3 full points of failure, roll randomly for location of the injury) due to opening shock, loose straps and equipment, or an impact against the aircraft. Critical failure means the chute doesn't open, and another skill roll must be made to open the reserve, or redeploy the main chute. A failure on this roll means almost certain death as the troop "augers in," though a very few men have survived a failed chute opening.

Once the chute has been successfully deployed, the jumper must guide himself to a safe landing. Winds and Vision (p. W154) can effect this roll, as can terrain. This is the only roll on which German paratroops take the -4 penalty described on p. W88. Utility lines, trees, and

rocky ground can create penalties ranging from -1 to -5. Assess damage as above, and allow a second roll on critical failures.

Once the paratroops have landed, they must assemble at predetermined points and begin the operation. This may take some time, especially if the drop is far from familiar landmarks. GMs should roll 1d×10 to determine how many minutes that the assembly will take in ideal conditions. Rugged terrain, a misplaced drop, or ground fog may make this 1d×60. On the other hand, a landing in daylight on a large open field may be reduced to 1d minutes. Rolls against Tactics, Orienteering, and Soldier skill could reduce (or extend) the assembly time. For more on Parachuting, see p. W190.

Gliders

Gliders usually suffer few of the problems associated with parachuting, but add some unique to themselves. With calm weather and a clear view, gliders usually can land directly on target. Failed Piloting rolls (by the glider or the tug) might mean a premature launch, leaving the glider pilot many miles from the target LZ and rapidly losing altitude. A particular danger during landing was obstacles on the ground, which could force gliders to dodge helter-skelter about the LZ, and sometimes even collide with other gliders. GMs may penalize Piloting rolls for particularly tricky landings, due to obstacles or winds and weather.

Aerial Resupply

Once on the ground, special units often needed resupply from friendly forces. Collection of heavy equipment caused tremendous problems for parachuting commandos. Machine guns and mortars were usually carried underneath the airplane in "parapacks," a metal or canvas container attached to a parachute and mounted on hard-points. The last man out would flip a switch and jettison the cargo containers. Hopefully, the equipment would land close to the men that needed it.

Some parachutists jumped with their weapons and equipment; some did not. British and American troops generally carried their weapons on their person, but German paratroopers usually jumped with only a pistol. British Special Boat Service teams sometimes parachuted with their kayaks suspended beneath them. Special Air Service troops used specially modified bombers to air-drop men and jeeps!

Gliders could be used to supply heavy loads, but often the supplies, and even reinforcements, were dropped to the troops from cargo craft. Sometimes the cargo was dropped *without* parachutes, especially ammo crates, food, and grain. Fragile equipment, such as radios and small arms, was dropped in parapacks.

The standard American A-1 parachute container held 120 lbs. of cargo in a canvas-and-cardboard pannier. Other containers were about 5' long and about 1' across. These were made of metal (DR 5) and weighed about 100 lbs. Each

could hold up to 200 lbs. of cargo. A C-47 cargo plane could hold four to six such containers.

Delivering the cargo to the right spot is handled much like *bombing* (p. W155). This roll is made by the "kicker" or jumpmaster in the cargo plane (or the pilot if dropping parapacks). Each time the plane passes over the DZ, the kicker rolls against his Freight Handling skill (modified by the pilot's skill rolls) as he kicks out the cargo over the DZ. The size of the DZ and the speed of the aircraft determine the number of passes needed to drop the cargo load.

SPECIAL OPS VEHICLES

Various commandos make frequent use of the following vehicles.

DFS-230 ASSAULT GLIDER

The DFS-230 was the glider of choice for several German operations during the war. The Eben Emael raid was performed in 230s, as were the rescue of Mussolini and the raid on Tito's HQ.

Impatient to see what they were facing, passengers not near a window sometimes would cut slits in the glider's canvas skin to peek outside during flight. Troops often used their weapons during landing to maximize shock value; this would require doing serious damage to the fuselage and windows.

DFS-230 B-1

Subassemblies: Light Fighter-Bomber chassis with no streamlining +3; Light Fighter-Bomber STOL wings +3; skid +1.

Occ: 2 CS, 8 PS Cargo: 8.6 Wings

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	1/2C	1/2C	1/2C	1/2C	1/2C
Wings:	1/2C	1/2C	1/2C	1/2C	1/2C
Skid:	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3

The "C" denotes cloth armor.

Equipment

Body: Vehicular parachute.

Statistics

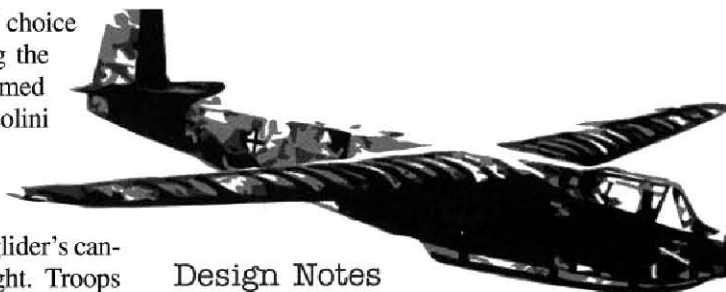
Size: 68'x37'x9' Payload: 1 ton Lwt: 2.3 tons
Volume: 312 Maint: 75 hours Cost: \$7,000

HT: 12. HPs: 165 Body, 160 each Wing, 45 Skid.

gSpeed: 0 gAccel: 0 gDecel: 15 gMR: 0.25 gSR: 3
Ground Pressure Low. 1/2 Off-Road Speed.

aSpeed: 130 aAccel: 0 aDecel: 25 aMR: 6.25 aSR: 2
Stall Speed 36. Landing Run is 39 yards.

Piloting rolls to extend the glide are at no penalty.



Design Notes

The design reduces each crew and passenger space to 4.2 VSPs, per the option under *Crew Station* on p. W141. This essentially leaves a very narrow aisle for passengers to move about only with great difficulty.

While the wings certainly have space available for equipment, the trim characteristics of gliders usually didn't favor actually placing any there. Enterprising PCs might try mounting weapons in this craft, but severe handling penalties would not be unjustified . . .

The glider does not come equipped with a radio; it communicated with the tow plane via an intercom wire in the tow rope. Fictional gliders might be equipped with radios and even radar or infrared searchlights for night operations; these will require reducing passenger space.

Variants

The B-1 was the most common variant.

The A-1 had no parachute; this increased the landing run to 86 yards.

The C-1 replaced the parachute with three rockets mounted in the nose. These could shorten landing runs to 30 yards. Increase weight by 0.2 tons and cost by \$48.

The F-1 was an enlarged model – basically a new design on the Medium Fighter-Bomber chassis – that seated up to 15 occupants.

MINI SUBMARINE

The British used a variety of small submersibles perfectly suited to small parties of special forces wishing to sneak ashore for daring missions. This is the largest historical version.

Two 1.8-ton demolition charges, up to a ton of cargo in watertight containers, or a four-man rubber raft could be fitted outside the sub. Two men could operate the boat, but three was better, so controls are fitted for one of the up to three passengers to help out. Usually, the passengers were COPP (p. 12) swimmers.

The engine burns 1.3 gallons of fuel oil per hour. A full fuel load cost \$40.

XE Boat

Subassemblies: Light Cutter chassis with submarine option +5.

Powertrain: 31-kW marine diesel with 31-kW screw propeller and 330-gallon standard tanks; 288,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: 3 CS **Cargo:** 135.5* Body

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5

Equipment

Body: Airlock, bilge pump, two bunks, three man-days of life support, navigation instruments, 20' periscope (two modules), medium radio receiver and transmitter.

Statistics

Size: 52'x6'x6' **Payload:** 1.5 tons **Lwt:** 25.2 tons
Volume: 390 **Maint:** 72 hours **Cost:** \$7,700

HT: 12. **HPs:** 3,000 **Body.**

wSpd: 8 **wAcc:** 0.2 **wDec:** 0.3 (0.4) **wMR:** 0.05 **wSR:** 3
Draft is 3'3". **Flotation Rating** is 28.8 tons.

wSpd: 6 **wAcc:** 0.16 **wDec:** 0.3 (0.4) **wMR:** 0.05 **wSR:** 3
Submerged draft is 6'. **Crush Depth** is 108'.

Design Notes

The wSpeed has been reduced to the historical 8 mph from a calculated 10mph. Calculated submerged draft is 13' but is capped at actual height of boat. Vehicle weight had to be reduced to 83% of the calculated weight to fit it within its flotation rating when loaded with the demolition charges.

* Almost all this space would be access and bilge space. **GURPS WWII Iron Cross** will introduce enhanced volume rules for naval vessels.



LRDG TRUCK

The LRDG and the SAS pioneered mobile desert warfare. They usually used stripped-down, Canadian-built Chevy 1½-ton trucks, fitted with aircraft and sun compasses, oversized tires, extra fuel tanks, underbody skid plates, and radiator condensers to conserve water. Both units performed the same conversions on any Jeep (p. W106) that they could beg, borrow, or steal.

Chevrolet 30cwt 4x2

Subassemblies: Medium Wheeled chassis +4; four off-road wheels +3.

Powertrain: 60-kW standard gas engine with 60-kW wheeled transmission and two 30-gallon standard fuel tanks; 4,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: 1 XCS, 1 XPS **Cargo:** 114.3 Body

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	3/10	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/10
Wheels:	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5

Equipment

Body: 40 exposed cargo, navigation instruments.

Statistics

Size: 20'x7'x5' **Payload:** 1.5 tons **Lwt:** 4.8 tons
Volume: 150 **Maint:** 252 hours **Cost:** \$630

HT: 12. **HPs:** 330 **Body,** 55 each wheel.

gSpeed: 54 **gAccel:** 3 **gDecel:** 10 **gMR:** 0.5 **gSR:** 4
Ground Pressure High. 1/6 Off-Road Speed.

Design Notes

Payload can exceed the 30cwt rating. At loaded weight 5.2-6 tons, HT becomes 11. At 6.1-7.4 tons, HT is 10. At 7.5-9.5 tons, HT 9.

The truck is not designed to efficiently use its volume. It may carry up to 40 exposed VSPs of cargo safely, or up to 114.3 if stacked precariously.

A Vickers Mk I (p. W93), or even a 37mm Medium Tank Gun or 20mm Long Ground Autocannon (p. W134), often were mounted in the bed.

MISSION PLANNING

Some special operations required hundreds of hours of planning, and months of rehearsals and critiques. Others were planned and executed in minutes.

While some players may not enjoy planning a mission, GMs should consider including the planning process in the game, rather than starting the gaming session as the troops leap from the landing craft. The political wrangling, wheedling, and trading that goes into a mission can be just as exciting to some participants as bullets and bodies, and should not be overlooked as a source of conflict and drama.

CONCEPT

The first task for a mission commander is to determine the objective of the operation. What is the unit trying to accomplish? Missions may have specific objectives, such as blowing up a bridge or capturing a specific person, but not all operations need to be so precise. The SAS and LRDG were notorious for their lengthy missions into enemy territory with no other goal but to "cause trouble." In a long-running campaign, a mix of the two can prove most entertaining.

RAID

A raid is a hit-and-run operation, usually against the enemy targets (supplies and materiel, communication stations, bridges, troop camps, outposts, etc.). U.S. Marine Raiders attacked Makin Island in 1942, and though it accomplished little militarily, it greatly bolstered American morale after the Pearl Harbor attack. SAS and LRDG raids in North Africa slowed the

movement of supplies to the front by raiding vehicle laagers and airfields hundreds of miles from the front lines.

ASSAULT

Assault operations attempt to reduce or capture enemy strongpoints. Army Rangers assaulted the 100' cliffs of Pointe Du Hoc to neutralize German guns overlooking the Normandy beaches.

In addition to the Eben Emael assault, German special forces assaulted Tito's mountain fortress in an attempt to capture the guerrilla leader.

RECON

Reconnaissance missions are attempt to secure tactical or strategic intelligence through covert means.

The Alamo Scouts were masters at securing strategic recon for the 6th Army in the Pacific. They scoured enemy-held islands and potential landing sites, including operations in New Guinea, and in

Leyte and Luzon in the Philippine Islands.

SPECIAL MISSION

Commando units were formed in large part to handle the unusual or the bizarre, including rescues, kidnappings, and assassinations. The attempted assassination of Gen. Erwin Rommel by British commandos during the North African campaigns was one such mission. Commandos also raided the coastal village of Bruneval, in northern France, for a radar set. The set was



disassembled and taken back to England to be studied. Skorzeny's special forces kidnapped the son of the Hungarian regent, forcing him to resign, thus ensuring Hungarian support of the Nazis. Commandos might be asked to field any of an infinite variety of one-of-a-kind missions.

THE PLAN

Once the commander has determined the actual objective of the mission, the details must be filled in. How will the team get there? What do they need to perform the mission? How will they get home? How will the commanders back behind the lines communicate with them? The questions are legion, but answers are necessary if the mission is to succeed.

INTELLIGENCE

Mission planners need information. GMs may consider staging full-scale reconnaissance operations in-game, with secondary characters, which will net the information that the commanding PCs need. If players want more information, they'll have to figure out a way to find it, and fret over ways to do it without compromising the mission.

Prepared props and handouts add a lot of value and color at this stage. Here, a good printer and scanner can be used to produce high-quality documents, all printed in various typewriter fonts, and placed in a manila folder. Intelligence and weather reports, recon photographs, and other handouts can all be used to create the proper atmosphere. Real maps and atlases from the period can be found at library sales and online book stores for almost nothing. Military grid maps, available from various Internet sources, can be used as game aids. Satellite photos, downloaded from the Internet for free, work great as high-altitude photos used for analyzing enemy targets. Just use photo-editing software to convert the file to grayscale, then add any specific details the scenario requires. Screenshots can be captured from WWII flight simulators and used as-is. Be creative. Old yearbooks are a perfect source for dossier photos, for example.

SUPPORT

Issues of fire-support, transportation, and reinforcements must be addressed. The answers may be simple ("You are on your own this time, captain"), but could range from a battleship just offshore, to a squadron of fighter-bombers that



could scramble in 15 minutes. Can the special forces call for a platoon of tanks, or a company of cavalry, or is the nearest supporting unit 1,000 miles away? Is there a secondary commando force available (and possibly, secondary characters!) just in case the primary force is annihilated or captured?

SUPPLY

Commandos cannot accomplish their mission without a healthy supply of beans and bullets. Long overland marches are limited by how much one man can carry. Airdrops can extend that range, but may draw unwanted attention. Pre-arranged caches of supplies can be arranged through guerrillas and partisans.

A comprehensive list of supplies for each man is one way to ensure that players don't try to carry too much. Consumables usually provided the bulk of a commando's supplies, be that food and water or ammunition and explosives. Field gear, such as tents and sleeping bags, was lower on the list. Foot powder and good boots were a must.

SIGNALS

Military radios in World War II were a mixed blessing. Rough handling, bad environmental conditions, and the fickle nature of vacuum-tube electronics often ruined the devices.

For better or worse, commandos were stuck with cranky, heavy, and sometimes useless radios. These were supplemented by pyrotechnics (flares and smoke grenades), cloth marking panels, and various types of signal lights. U.S. Army Rangers at Pointe Du Hoc, for instance, managed to direct the fire of a nearby destroyer with nothing more than a signal light and Morse code.

EXECUTION

“No plan survives contact with the enemy” is a tried and true military maxim. One of the easiest ways to add excitement and tension to a commando operation is to throw a wrench in it. Military intelligence was notoriously bad at estimating enemy numbers, and injuries and loss of equipment during parachute drops and amphibious operations was a common occurrence. The GM should seek to keep the mission challenging, yet possible.

THE END

Whether the mission is a success or failure, the commandos need a way to get home, and for some missions this is the most dangerous part. Sneaking *into* a sleepy enemy base may be easy compared to escaping once it's been fully alerted! Extraction could be an elaborate midnight rendezvous between a flying boat and a submarine in gale-force winds, or a simple hike over the next ridge to reach friendly lines.

After the commandos make it back to a safe area, they have to be debriefed, refitted, and retrained. Then they'll be ready for the next daring mission.

DEBRIEFING

The debriefing usually begins with a written report by the commander or senior survivor of the operation. GMs may even request that the player actually write the report (usually between game sessions). This report may include sketches of enemy facilities, new enemy equipment and vehicles encountered, and recommendations for medals and promotions.

After the report is written, the unit may be ushered into a dark room, alone or as a group, to be grilled for more information or chewed out for any failings. Some may be given medals; others could be sent to the brig.

Standard operating procedures, equipment, and even strategic plans may be changed because of the information provided during the debriefing. After the debriefing, the soldiers will get a chance to voice their concerns in a brief-back. Here, the commandos themselves get to critique the support and supply portions of the plan, and undoubtedly the intelligence blunders.

REPLACEMENTS

If the commandos were wiped out, the players may bring in new characters at this time. Old hands that survive may be promoted, demoted, or sent off to another unit. Reputations and Allies can be earned in the rough-and-tumble barracks life, just as on the battlefield.

A certain amount of socializing, and sometimes fighting, goes on to determine the pecking order, and then the unit settles back down to its old routine: training.

TRAINING

Commandos should get 1-3 character points per month of training time between missions. (Alternatively, the GM may want to award these points based on the quick learning and intensive training rules on pp. CI114-117.)

These points should be spent on the skills being learned, or on new Advantages that could be acquired (increasing Fit to Very Fit, gaining Extra Fatigue or Less Sleep, etc.).

Training is more than just time at the range. Training scenarios, called field problems, test all of the soldier's skills in a real-life setting. Complete with all the dangers of a real mission, thanks to live ammunition, these full-dress rehearsals test mental and physical limits in preparation for the real thing.

This is also a good time for new skills, specializations, or familiarities to be picked up. Soldiers may be shipped off to training schools for weeks at a time, and players may want to have backup characters in case the unit gets an assignment while their usual soldier is at radio school.

THE NEXT MISSION

The briefing room darkens and the reel-to-reel hums into action as the colonel steps forward with his pointer. A blurred and grainy image of a

foreboding castle zips by for a few brief seconds. It is the target. Folders packed with intelligence reports, recon photos, dossiers, and equipment manifests are handed out. Outside, the cough of

aircraft engines warming up can be heard, and the screeching brakes of a truck announce the arrival of supplies and equipment.

It's time to move out.

FORMING FICTIONAL UNITS

Placing the PC group in a real-life commando unit can present special problems, as briefly described on p. W160. Players who are particularly well-educated on that unit's history may object whenever the mission calls for them to be somewhere other than where the real-life unit was historically.

Also, history books tend to describe a particular unit as carrying a specific rifle, using a specific table of organization, and in additional precise but not entirely real terms. In practice, veterans in many units acquired a more personalized set of gear depending on the vagaries of what might be found on the battlefield or unclaimed in the quartermaster's hut. Casualties and other personnel shortfalls meant that commanders could hardly avoid battlefield changes to their unit's organization. In short, real life was sufficiently "fuzzy" to support a customized PC group, but many players with an interest in WWII will interpret the history books in a fundamentalist fashion, and thus object to deviations in equipment, organization, and so forth.

The simplest way to circumvent this dissatisfaction might be to create an entirely fictional unit for the PCs. This could be a group so secret that its exploits were classified, as well, but that doesn't mean its missions have to be unimportant. For instance, the GM could set up history in his campaign such that the Operation Overlord landings on D-Day (p. W30) most assuredly would fail unless Team Xfiltrate kidnaps the one mid-level German officer with authority to mobilize the proper reserves, *and* plants evidence that he's taken an unwise leave in Paris so as to sidestep any German suspicions. This sort of mission structure doesn't significantly rewrite history; it simply weaves an intriguing backstory behind it.

Alternatively, the GM can establish a mildly alternate history in which the fictional unit is just as high-profile as the Rangers or Fallschirmjäger, and competes with units of that caliber for prestige and resources. Some players may have a lot of fun using the SAS's real track record as

a benchmark by which to measure their own exploits, or competing with OSS agents for the honor of taking on a particularly important mission. The GM also may want to include a barracks brawl between the PCs' unit and the real commando groups, to spice things up.

Obscure Units: First Special Service Force

If the GM or players don't like the idea of a fictionalized unit, then another alternative is to place the PCs in a real unit that was and remains relatively obscure. This makes it unlikely that players will know enough about the unit to object when their adventuring strays from the historical track record, while grounding the exploits in a certain measure of verisimilitude.

The First Special Service Force may be just the unit to fill this role. A joint American-Canadian commando outfit formed in 1942, the FSSF trained for nine months to perform special operations in German-held Norway, but the mission was canceled. Instead, the FSSF was sent to spearhead operations in the Aleutians, Italy, and France.

Trained to parachute, ski, and climb, the FSSF were proper commandos, trained to match the capabilities and prowess of the best Commando and Ranger units. In Italy, the commandos of the FSSF proved especially skilled at night reconnaissance and raids, and were known as "The Devil's Brigade."

A unique feature of the FSSF was the full integration of American and Canadian troops, who were evenly distributed among all levels of the unit; American sergeants took orders from Canadian officers, for instance.

Unit organization was nearly identical to that of the Rangers (see p. 13), though the heavy weapons of each platoon were incorporated into each squad, rather than being assigned to a separate section. With a bazooka, a 60mm mortar, a flamethrower, and two LMGs rationed out among its 12 men, the FSSF squad was bristling with firepower.

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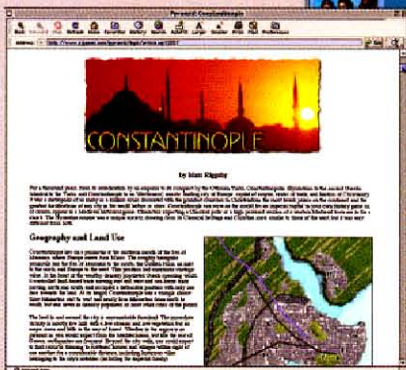
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