

Chapter I

COMBINED OPERATIONS

Not until 1937 was any action taken to study and coordinate inter-service exercises and operations. A committee was set up by the War Office to examine the problems and a year later, the Inter-Services Training and Development Centre (later to become the Combined Operations Training Centre) was established near Portsmouth. As part of his determination '*to set Europe alight*' Winston Churchill initiated the establishment of a Combined Operations Headquarters. This was initially part of the Admiralty under Admiral Sir Roger Keyes as Director. In 1941, Vice-Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten became Chief of Combined Operations with a separate headquarters and a much bigger staff. He had a seat on the Chiefs of Staff Committee and responsibility for all aspects of Commando training and operations. His headquarters (COHQ) now became the mounting authority for all raiding against North-West Europe. (Combined Operations insignia are on pages 45 and 76.)

THE ARMY COMMANDO

In 1940, on the orders of the War Office, twelve Commando battalions and ten Independent Companies were to be raised. The Independent Companies were raised from the following divisions:-

- No 1 Company from 52nd Lowland Division.
- No 2 Company from 53rd Welsh Division.
- No 3 Company from 54th East Anglian Division.
- No 4 Company from 55th West Lancashire Division.
- No 5 Company from 56th (1st London) Division.
- No 6 Company from 9th Scottish Division.
- No 7 Company from 15th Scottish Division.
- No 8 Company from 18th Eastern Division.
- No 9 Company from 38th Welsh Division.
- No 10 Company from 66th East Lancashire Division.



It is known that only No 4 Company of the 55th West Lancashire Division wore its own patch, the 55th Division patch, consisting of a rose on which was superimposed the figure '4' in red stitching.

The Commandos were raised from the following commands:

No 2 Commando was raised as a parachute unit with volunteers from all commands. Numbers 3 and 4 Commandos from Southern Command. Numbers 5 and 6 Commandos from Western Command. No 7 Commando from Eastern Command. No 8 Commando from Eastern Command but actually raised from the London district and Household Division. Numbers 9 and 11 Commandos from Scottish Command. No 10 Commando was formed from Northern Command but they were unable to raise sufficient volunteers and it was disbanded in December 1940. It was reformed in 1942. No 12 Commando was raised from men stationed in Northern Ireland.

In October, 1940, the Independent Companies and Commando Battalion were formed into a Special Service (SS) Brigade. It was raised



from the following:

1st SS BN formed from 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9 Independent Companies.

2nd SS BN formed from Nos. 6 and 7 Independent Companies and Nos. 9 and 11 Commandos.

3rd SS BN formed from Nos. 4 and 7 Commandos.

4th SS BN formed from Nos. 3 and 8 Commandos.

5th SS BN formed from Nos. 5 and 6 Commandos.

No 2 Commando became 11 Special Air Service Battalion and eventually became 1st Parachute Battalion. No 12 Commando remained outside the Special Service Brigade and stayed in Northern Ireland. They wore no shoulder title but some of the Service Battalion wore shoulder patches.

The second SS Battalion wore crossed green claymores on a purple square.

HQ Company of the Brigade wore an oblong patch with two fighting knives in white with red S hilts. This also comes in bullion. HQ Signals wore an oblong patch with a knife facing upwards and a bolt of lightning running through and SS at each side. The knife and lightning were in white and the SS in red on a black background.

In March, 1941, the Special Service Brigade was disbanded and the battalion were to form the following:

No 1 Commando formed from 1 SS Battalion

No 2 " " " 1 SS "

No 3 " " " 4 SS "

No 4 " " " 3 SS "

No 5 " " " 5 SS "

No 6 " " " 5 SS "

No 7 " " " 3 SS "

No 8 " " " 4 SS "

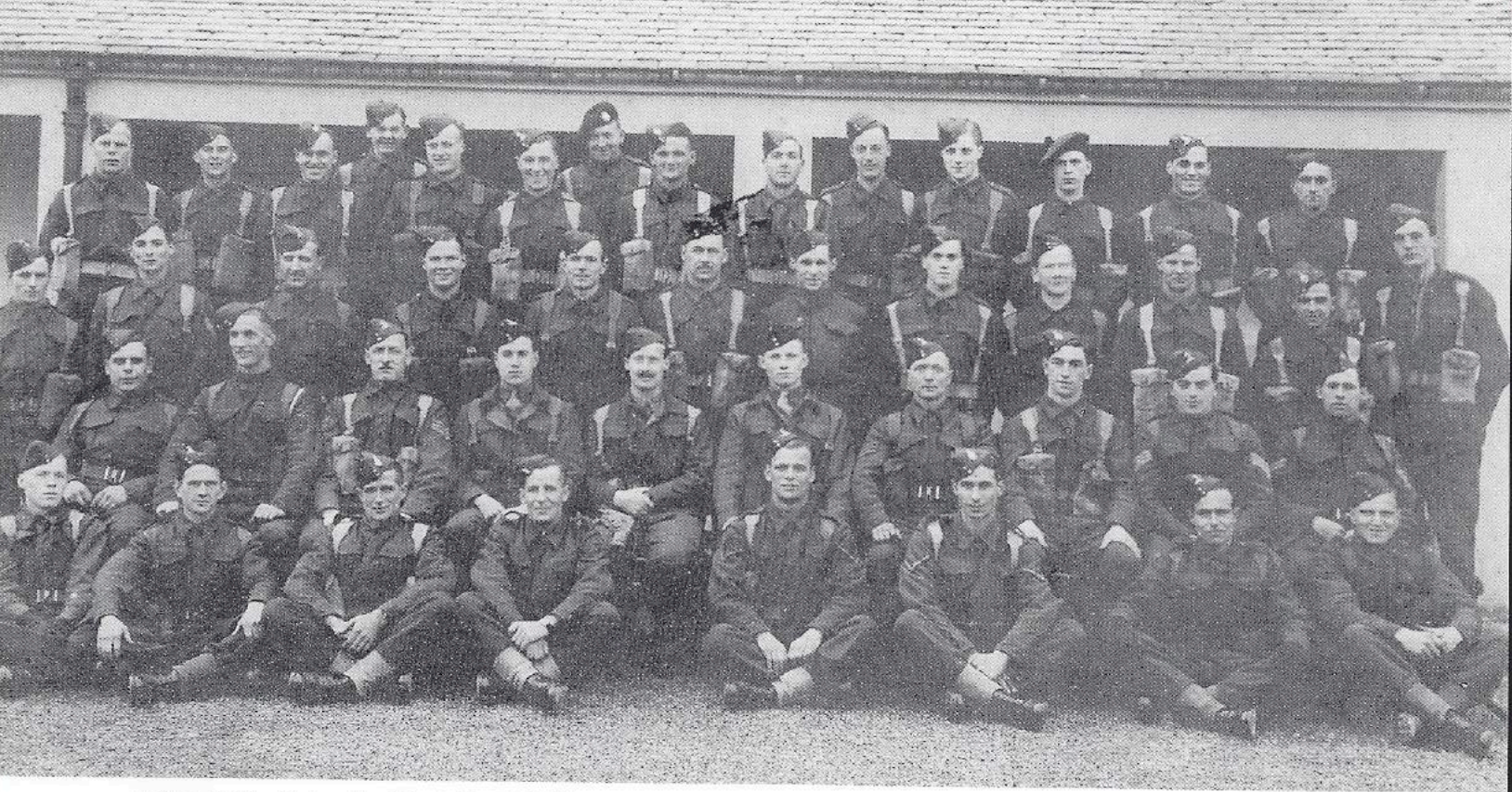
No 9 " " " 2 SS "

No 11 " " " 2 SS "

No 12 Commando

All twelve Commando Battalions were disbanded by 1945.





Lofoten Raiding Party – No.4 Troop. March, 1941

No 1 Commando

Created from A Company 1st SS Battalion in March, 1941. The first shoulder title was 1 over COMMANDO in green on khaki and this changed early in 1943 to No 1 COMMANDO in red on dark blue. This title is found in woven or printed variations. 1 COMMANDO wore a green salamander in a red and yellow flame on a khaki background below the shoulder title. 1941- 1943 only. From 1943 it changed to the Combined Operations patch, red on dark blue.



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Landing exercises in Scotland. This was on the occasion of King George VI's visit to the Commando training area.

Commandos crossing the Seine at Duclair, September, 1944.



Combined Operations patches. (also see page 76)



No 2 Commando

Created from B Company 1st SS Battalion in March 1941, this unit was unique in that it was the only Commando unit to wear its own badge. The badge was a commando dagger with SS on the hilt in silver bullion on a black background or hand-made from canteen cutlery and was worn on a black patch. Officers wore the bullion version only.

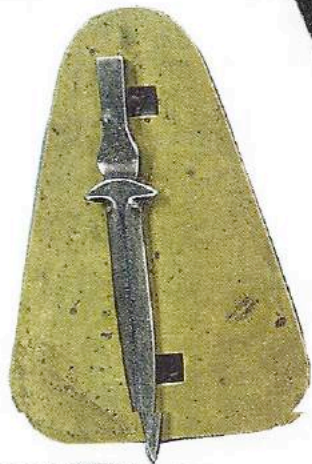
The other ranks' badge was just the Commando dagger with no SS on the hilt. The first few were made by the men from canteen cutlery and then commercially made later on. Then, in late 1944 or early 1945 there appeared a cast brass version of the badge but nobody knows why this version was made. All the badges were worn on a black patch on their headgear. The first shoulder title was 2 COMMANDO white on black and in early 1943 changed to No 2 COMMANDO red on black this variation is found in printed or woven examples.

The shoulder patch was a Commando dagger with SS on the hilt and was the same as the officer's cap badge. This was worn by all ranks. The patch was worn in pairs and appears in silver bullion wire and woven silk thread on a black oblong patch. The silver bullion was worn on the service dress uniform and the silk thread was worn on the battle dress. This patch disappeared in late 1943.

Lieutenant Colonel Todd.

Officers of No 2 Commando wearing the metal cap badge.





No 3 Commando

3 Commando was the first Commando unit to be formed in 1940. Up to 1941 they had no shoulder titles but wore individual troop patches. D Troop wore a white full-face death's head in a blue D on a dark green background. In mid-1941 the troops changed from letters to numbers which were 1 to 6 and HQ.

D troop became no 3 Troop but still wore the same patch and other troops wore patches as well. No 4 Troop wore a white death's head on a black disc and No 5 wore just a black disc. It is not known if other troops wore patches.

At the same time the new shoulder title 3 COMMANDO, white on black, appeared with the troop numbers underneath. HQ wore just 3 COMMANDO. In early 1943 a new title No 3 COMMANDO was introduced. This had no numbers beneath and was red on black and appeared in printed or woven form.





D Troop



No.3 Troop



No 4 Commando

No. 4 Commando was formed in mid-1940. The first shoulder title to be worn by them was SPECIAL IV SERVICE in white letters and salmon-pink Roman numerals on black. In 1941 this was changed to 4 COMMANDO with red number and light blue letters on black. In late 1942 they changed again to No 4 COMMANDO, red on black, printed or woven, also red on khaki. In 1940 when the unit was formed, only officers wore a silver cracked skull badge. It is not known why this badge was worn or how many were made.

In August 1942 three troops of French marines were added to the unit. The marines wore their own special badge and title. The first badges to be worn was a cap band in black with F N F L in gold letters. This was worn on the naval bonnet. On the sleeves was FRANCE in large or small letters in white on khaki or white on navy blue. This was worn above the FF COMMANDO in red on black at first and then 4 COMMANDO in red on black. At the same time below the shoulder title they wore the F N F L patch which was a red cross of Lorraine in a white diamond on a blue shield with a yellow or white border see page 60. In late 1942 when the troops got the beret, the sleeve patch was sewn on as a cap badge and in early 1944 a new metal badge was introduced. This was made at first by a local blacksmith in light-coloured bronze and numbered on the back, later by J. R. Gaunt in die-struck bronze. The badge was a shield with a cross of Lorraine in the top corner and a commando dagger going through a sailing ship. Beneath the shield was a scroll with 1st Bn FM COMMANDO.



SPECIAL IV SERVICE

A. COMMANDO

NO 4 COMMANDO

NO 4 COMMANDO

FRANCE

F.F. COMMANDO

No 5 Commando

Formed in the mid 1940s as A Company, 5th Special Service Battalion, the 5th wore no title but wore a golden coloured hackle in the beret. Because it was so fragile and easily got lost, it was discontinued by 1942.

The first shoulder title appeared when it separated from the Special Service Battalion in 1941 to become 5 Commando. This was V COMMANDO, gold on dark green. Sometime in mid 1942 the title 5 COMMANDO appeared. This was yellow gold on dark green. In early 1943 the title changed to No. 5 COMMANDO, red on black in printed or woven variations. By the end of the war a brass shoulder title was being worn in the Far East – 5 over COMMANDO. Before 1943, 5 Commando wore a shoulder patch which was a V between two crossed daggers, all in yellow with black details on a green rectangular patch woven in silk.



V. COMMANDO

5 COMMANDO

Nº5 COMMANDO



5
COMMANDO

No 6 Commando

This was formed in mid-1940 and then became B Company Special Service Battalion and in March 1941 reverted to its original title. The first shoulder title was VI. COMMANDO, white on black and was changed in late 1942 to a white VI and COMMANDO in red and then in 1943 to No. 6 COMMANDO, red on dark blue, in printed and woven variations. On the side cap they wore VI over COMMANDO, white on a black rectangle. They also wore just the VI in metal which was cut out of aluminium cans and stitched on to a black rectangle and a woven variation which was hand-made with white silk thread on a black oblong patch.

Within 6 COMMANDO, was a seaborne troop which used canoes or folding boats. This troop was called 101 Troop and had its own special patch worn in facing pairs below the shoulder title. This was a blue rectangle with a red 101 with a white swordfish emerging through the O, and came in printed and woven variations. 101 Troop were disbanded in early 1943 but the men helped to form the Special Boat Squadron.

*Military Medal winner of 101 Troop, 1942.
Note VI over COMMANDO on shoulder.*

*Note VI over COMMANDO on side cap and
arm. He is in US army uniform, May, 1943.*





No 7 Commando

This was formed in July 1940 and then became 2nd Special Service Company of the 3rd Special Service Battalion. On the disbandment of the Special Service Brigade in 1941 it was re-designated A Battalion of LAYFORCE. It is not known why the shoulder title No. 7 COMMANDO, red on dark blue, was made in early 1943, but never worn.

No 8 Commando

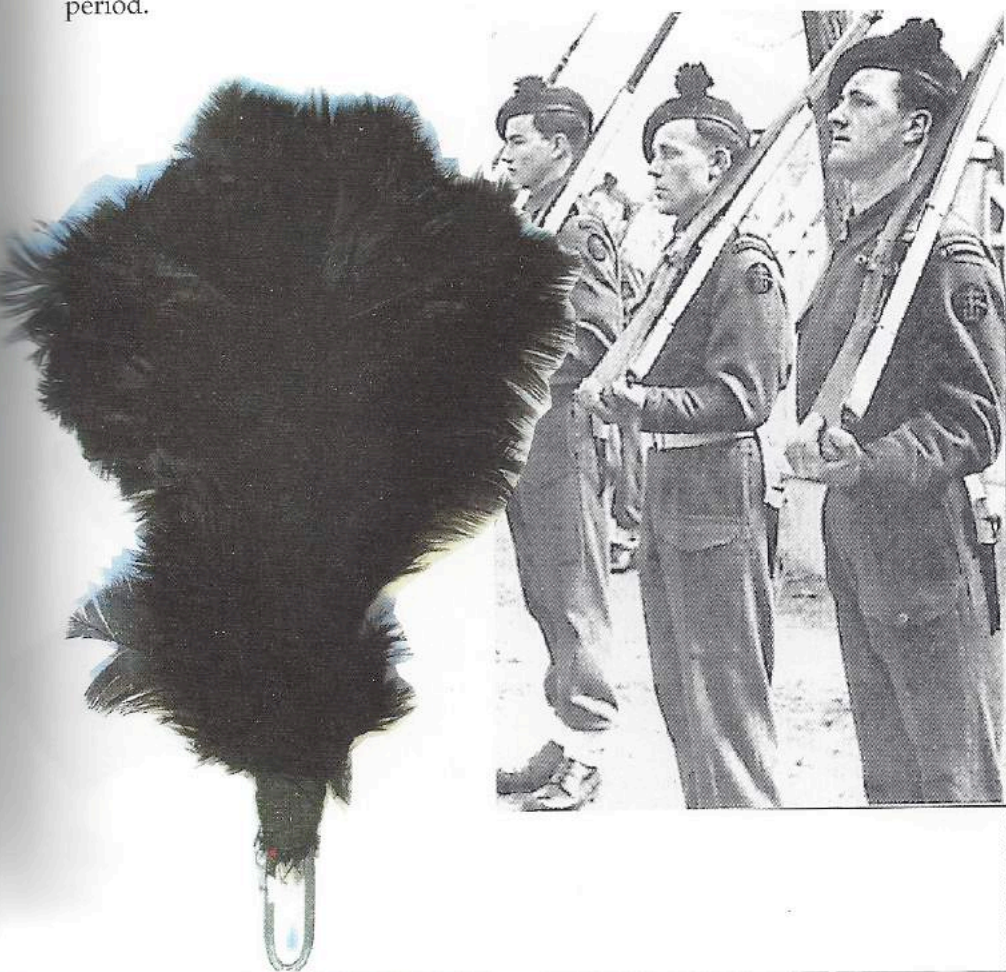
This was formed in mid-1940 and then became B Company, 4th Special Service Battalion but suffered the same fate as 7 Commando by becoming B Battalion of LAYFORCE. It is not known why the shoulder title No 8. COMMANDO, red on dark blue was made in early 1943, but never worn.



No 9 Commando

Formed in mid 1940, it became A Company of the 2nd Special Service Battalion. As A Company they wore no titles but wore a black feather hackle in a khaki Balmoral hat; no cap badge was worn. In March 1941 they reverted to 9 COMMANDO but carried on wearing the khaki Balmoral and black hackle. In 1942 when they got their green beret, they transferred the black hackle to it. The first known shoulder title was 9 COMMANDO, white on black. This was changed to No 9 COMMANDO, white on black, in late 1942.

Between late 1942 and early 1943 the shoulder title went through a number of changes. The first was No 9 COMMANDO, green on black, and then No 9 COMMANDO, red on black. This appears in woven and printed examples. Finally they went back to 9 COMMANDO, white on black. It is not known why they changed the title so often in this period.



9 COMMANDO

Nº9 COMMANDO

Nº9 COMMANDO

Nº9 COMMANDO

9 COMMANDO

ARMY PHYSICAL TRAINING
CORPS

No 10 Commando

This was formed in 1940 but could not raise enough volunteers and was disbanded in December 1940. Reformed in January, 1942, as No 10 (Interallied) Commando, it was made up of men from occupied territories.

NO 10 Commando was organised as follows:

Headquarters British

No1 Troop French

No2 Troop Dutch

No3 Troop Miscellaneous (made up from Jews from occupied Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Greece and a strong contingent from Germany.)

The Belgian Troop Headquarters

No4 Troop Belgian

No5 Troop Norwegian

No6 Troop Polish

No7 Troop Yugoslav

No8 Troop French

No9 Troop Belgian

No10 Troop Belgian

Belgian Commandos in Italy, 1944.



CZECHOSLOVAKIA

BELGIUM

BELGIUM

FRANCE

POLAND

NO 10 COMMANDO

The shoulder title was No 10 COMMANDO, red on dark blue, in two sizes, large and small.

The French wore the same FRANCE shoulder title and cap badges as men in 4 Commando.

The Dutch wore No 10 COMMANDO shoulder title which they wore above their patch of the Lion of Orange over NEDERLAND, yellow on khaki. On the beret they wore the Lion of Orange in brass or BZ for officers.

The Belgian troops wore a large lettered shoulder title BELGIUM, red on dark blue; also red on khaki below No.10 COMMANDO shoulder title. On their beret they wore a rampant lion on a black backing.

The Norwegian troops wore the title NORGE, white on khaki, and a small Norwegian national flag in blue, red and white on khaki patch below the title No 10 COMMANDO. On the beret they wore 7 superimposed on H within a crowned wreath.

The Polish troops wore the title POLAND in large letters, red on dark blue above the No 10 COMMANDO title. On the beret they wore a metal badge of the Polish national eagle. No 7 and 3 Troops were made up of men from Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Germany and some of the men wore titles, i.e. CZECHOSLOVAKIA, red on dark blue. Some wore their own beret badges. SOE used these troops on secret missions.







Free Czechoslovakian, troops cap badge.



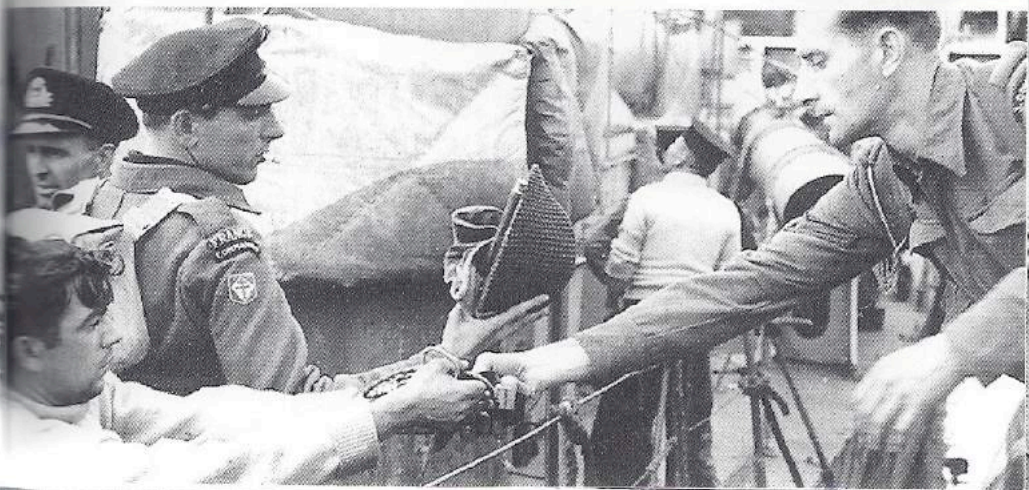
Belgian troops cap badge.



Free Czechoslovakian, pocket badge.



Free Dutch cap badge.



No 11 Commando

Formed in 1940 from men of the Scottish Commando, it then became B Company, 2nd Special Service Battalion on the disbandment of the Special Service Brigade. In 1941 it became 11 Commando and later became C Troop, Layforce. It is not known why the shoulder title No. 11 COMMANDO, red on dark blue, was made in early 1943 but never worn.

On the Balmoral or Tam-o-shanter a black hackle was worn.



No 12 Commando

This was formed in Northern Ireland in August 1940 from Irish and Welsh regiments. The first shoulder title was TWELVE, yellow letters on blue. Then it changed in 1942 to TWELVE COMMANDO, yellow on black, and again in late 1942 to No. 12 COMMANDO yellow on green, either printed or woven. This last change, in early 1943 was to No 12 COMMANDO, red on dark blue, woven or printed.

No 14 Commando

This was formed in late 1942 for operations in the Arctic Circle against German bases supporting their troops on the Finnish Border and Luftwaffe bases bombing Russian Convoys. It was disbanded in late 1943. The only shoulder title was COMMANDO white on black.

Commando Signals

Formed from Special Service Brigade Signals in 1942 and served with Commando Headquarters. There were two Signalmen per Commando troop. This title was not in use long because men preferred to wear the normal Commando title. The shoulder title was COMMANDO SIGNALS, white on black, and then, in late 1942, red on black.

Commando Depot

This was formed in early 1942 when all Commando training was centralized at Achnacarry, in Scotland. It became the Commando Basic Training Centre by the end of 1942. They wore two shoulder titles. The first was COMMANDO over D. COMMANDO was woven in light blue and the D was in red on black. The second title was COMMANDO then D red on black.



Medical Commando

1st Medical Commando was formed on 26 June, 1945, from 1 Light Field AMG and was named 1 Medical Commando RAMC (light). This unit never saw active service and was disbanded in October, 1945. The shoulder title was 1 MEDICAL COMMANDO, red on dark blue.

2nd Medical Commando was formed from the remains of 1st Medical Commando but was never employed in active operations, and was disbanded in late 1945. The shoulder title was 2 MEDICAL COMMANDO light blue on black.

'On June 26th, 1945, orders were issued for the conversion of 1 LT FD AMG recently returned to the UK from Italy, into 1 Medical Commando RAMC (Light) with the effect from July 1st. On August 9th the unit was warned for service overseas in a tropical climate. It did not sail and in October was disbanded. 2 Medical Commando was formed out of its remains. This unit was not employed in active operations and with the ending of the war was disbanded in its turn.'

The Army Medical Services



Special Service Squadrons

In June, 1941, three tank squadrons were formed to support amphibious landings. These were entitled A, B and C Squadrons and wore a black shoulder title with Special "A", "B" and "C" Service (as appropriate) in white. Only B Squadron went into action – in the Madagascar landings of May, 1942. A Squadron was disbanded in the middle of that year and in July, B and C Squadrons formed the 1st Airborne Light Tank Squadron.

The Middle East Commandos 50, 51 and 52

50 Middle East Commando was formed in July, 1940, from men already serving out there. 51 Middle East Commando was formed in October of the same year from Jewish and Palestinian soldiers of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps. Early in 1941, these two units amalgamated to become D Battalion of LAYFORCE and were otherwise known as the Combined (Middle East) Commando. 52 Middle East Commando was formed in November, 1940, and was sent to Crete where it suffered heavy casualties. On its return from there in the following summer it was disbanded.

Men of 50 Commando. Note the knuckle-duster knife badge.



INSIGNIA

The unique feature of 50 Commando was their special knuckle-duster knife which they carried instead of the normal FS pattern knife. The cap badge was a small version of the knuckle-duster knife and and, according to veterans, it was issued for the Crete operation. This comes in two sizes – the large flat type worn on the bush hat and the small type which was worn on side cap and field service cap. It was also common practice for men in the Middle East Commando to wear their own regimental cap badge and in some cases wear the knuckle-duster badge above it. They also wore a shoulder title M. E. COMMANDO, yellow on black. The Jewish and Palestine Arabs wore a metal shoulder title PALESTINE and a shoulder patch, a yellow Star of David on a purple, white, purple background.



No 62 Commando

Formed in mid-1941 under the command of Lieutenant David Stirling of the Scots Guards. For a short period the unit was designated number 1 Small Scale Raiding Force but in February, 1943, became the Special Air Service.

Insignia: none known.

THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVAL BEACH COMMANDO

This was formed in 1943 but did not see action until Normandy in 1944 and in South East Asia in 1945. The insignia worn was CANADA over COMMANDO red on blue. Melton head-dress was worn. This was a naval rating's cap with the cap tally H M C S; officers wore the RCN peaked cap.

THE ROYAL NAVY COMMANDO

This was formed in 1941 for beach parties and changed its name to R N Commando in late 1941. In spring of 1942 the RN Beach Head Commando began to be formed. In order not to confuse them with the other Commando units, the RN Commandos were given letter designations using the phonetic alphabet of the time. Each unit was made up of two officers and twenty-two men. One officer was the Beach Master who wore a title BEACHMASTER instead of RN Commando. By 1943 there were twenty-two RN Commando units which served in every theatre of war. The first shoulder title was ROYAL NAVY, white on black, and in the spring of 1942 was changed to R.N. COMMANDO white on black in woven and printed examples.



No 30 Commando

This unit was formed on 30 September, 1942, under the code name Special Engineering Unit and became 30th Assault Unit in 1943. It comprised three troops, 33 Troop (Royal Marine), 34 Troop (Army Commando), 36 Troop (Royal Navy or technical). The unit's job was to collect information, i.e. paperwork, maps, etc, from enemy headquarters. This unit wore no shoulder title but wore a shoulder patch, a red 30 on a khaki background.



THE ROYAL MARINE COMMANDOS

The Royal Marine Commandos were formed in 1943 from men of the RM Division. The commandos were formed as follows:



40 (RM) Commando

Raised in February, 1942, as RM A Commando it became 40 (RM) Commando later that year. It absorbed 43 RM Commando in 1945, and disbanded in 1946. The shoulder title was 40 over ROYAL MARINE over COMMANDO, red on black, woven or printed.

41 (RM) Commando

Raised in October, 1942, as RM B Commando from 8th Battalion RM Division and 41 RM Commando in late October, 1942. Disbanded by 1946. The Shoulder title was 41 over ROYAL MARINE over COMMANDO, red on black, woven or printed.

A Marine of 45 (RM) Commando receives a decoration.

42 (RM) Commando

Formed in 1943 from 1st Battalion RM Division. Served in Burma in 1944-45. The shoulder title was 42 over ROYAL MARINES over COMMANDO, red on black, woven or printed examples.

43 (RM) Commando

Formed from 2nd Battalion RM Division in mid 1943. The shoulder title was 43 over ROYAL MARINES over COMMANDO, red on black, woven or printed.

44 (RM) Commando

Formed from 3rd Battalion RM Division in mid-1943. Served in the Far East. There are two shoulder titles. The official title was 44 over ROYAL MARINE over COMMANDO, red on black, woven or printed. An unofficial title was No 44 COMMANDO, red on black. This was locally made. Woven examples only.



ROYAL MARINES



42
ROYAL MARINES
COMMANDO



N° 44 COMMANDO

45(RM) Commando

Formed from 5th Battalion RM Division in mid-1943. The shoulder title was No. 45 over ROYAL MARINES over COMMANDO red on black.

46 (RM) Commando

Formed from 9th Battalion RM Division in mid 1943. The shoulder title was 46 over ROYAL MARINES over COMMANDO, red on black, printed or woven.

47 (RM) Commando

Formed from 10th Battalion RM Division mid-1943. The shoulder title was 47 over ROYAL MARINES over COMMANDO, red on black. Printed or woven.

48 (RM) Commando

Formed from 7th Battalion RM Division early in 1944. The shoulder title was 48 over ROYAL MARINES over COMMANDO, red on black, printed or woven.

By the end of the war Cash nametape examples were being used. All shoulder titles were worn in 1, 2 or 3-part constructions.

RM Commandos who were para-trained, wore a wing like the Army but the wings and canopy were red on a black backing. For a short period some men wore a straight Airborne title, red on black.







A group of A Troop, 45 Royal Marine Commando, at Southampton before setting off for France. Seated right is Lance Corporal Henry Harden, RAMC, who would win a Victoria Cross in Holland, January 1945, and lose his life.

THE SPECIAL BOAT SECTIONS (ARMY COMMANDO)

In late 1940 or early 1941 the Army Commando formed two Special Boat Sections. No 1 Special Boat Section was formed as Folboat Section No 8 Commando, in November, 1940. Sent to the Middle East in March 1941, it was renamed Middle East Folboat Section, then in 1942 became D Squadron Special Air Service and eventually became the nucleus of the Special Boat Squadron in late 1942. No 2 Special Boat Squadron which was formed in April 1942 was part of the 1st Special Service Brigade and was amalgamated with the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties under the command of Lieutenant Commander Clogstoun-Willmott, for training and other duties.

INSIGNIA

The beret badge, which came in two variations, one in metal, the other in cloth badge was a shield within a shield with a hand brandishing Excalibur and rising out of the water, with the letters SS at either side and a B below the waterline. The shoulder title was red lettering on black ground which read COMMANDO S.B.S. and was worn with the Combined Operations badge as shown at the bottom of this page.





Worn in 1944/45 Headquarters only.

COMBINED OPERATIONS

INSIGNIA

Designed by Lieutenant. D. A. Grant RNVR in 1942, the badge, as described by Lord Mountbatten, consisted of a 'Tommy' gun, an eagle and a stockless anchor, representing the Army, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. The first badge was designed so that the manufacturers would be able to produce the required number of badges within a reasonable time; the embroidered badge came later. At this time it was made in three colours - red on dark blue, blue on white (Royal Navy only), and yellow on light blue, which was for US personnel. This badge was changed slightly; instead of an eagle it had an American eagle. The US Amphibious Forces badge was exactly the same as the new American eagle badge but on a red background. There is also a gold bullion on black variation for No. 1 dress.

