



# Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF  
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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February Extra # 1 2021



## A Canadian in the Devil's Brigade - Part 2

By Roy Akins

Laurence Arthur (Larry) Story was born 26 June 1922 in Holden, Alberta. He joined the 19<sup>th</sup> Alberta Dragoons on 23 July 1940, less than a month after he reached the age of 18. Only 30 days later he volunteered for active service and enlisted with the Edmonton Fusiliers. Story was serving as a Sergeant with the Intelligence Section in New Westminster, BC when he learned that a new force was looking for volunteers,

*“I waltzed into the Brigadier and I said I would like to join this outfit. Okay he said, go ahead, go get your head shot off but don’t come crying back to me.”*

On 16 August 1942 Story was officially transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion and proceeded immediately to Fort William Henry Harrison in Helena Montana.

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Father of the Canadian Armoured Corp. **Major-General Frederic Worthington**, MC, MM, CD



The black beret of the Canadian Armoured Corp. dates back to WW1, when British tank crews began searching for an alternative to the khaki forage cap (known as a Service Dress Cap). The stiff, high-crowned, peaked cap was impractical for use in the confines of a tank, and the serge material was easily stained. Major General Sir Hugh Elles, the units first commander realized this style of headdress (beret) would be practical option for his tank crews who worked in the confines of a tank. The black beret would help keep sweat at bay and would not show oil stains picked up inside the interior of the vehicle.

**In General Sir Hugh Elles own words**  
–[Page 6 War Stories](#)



Major-General B.M. Hoffmeister *commander of the Canadian 5th Armoured Division, Italy*



*FSSF Enlistment Photo.  
Eric Queen*

On 26 August 1942 he became parachute-qualified after only one week of training and 2 jumps from a C-47 Dakota. In addition to parachuting, the extremely challenging training regimen included mountain-climbing, small arms, demolitions, hand-to-hand combat and intense physical training. He recalls marches of almost 100 kilometres with heavy packs,

*“It was kinda tough going because there was blood running out of the toes of your shoes...Some of the guys passed out and the stronger guys just picked them up”.*<sup>4</sup>

On October 9 1942, Story was promoted to Staff Sergeant.



*4<sup>th</sup> Section, 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, 5<sup>th</sup> Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, Fort William Henry Harrison, October 1942.*

*Author’s collection Standing: Pte. M.O. Ritchie, S/Sgt. L.A. Story, S/Sgt. James L. Wines, L/Cpl. Spoule, Pte. R.J. Schmuck, PFC Delmar P. McMilan, Sgt. Jack H. Beauchamp*

*Kneeling: Sgt. Wilbur Slaughter (KIA), L/Cpl. W.H. McVeigh, PFC Casimir Yakevistski*

S/Sgt. Story participated in the Force's landing at Kiska Island on 15 August 1943. On 27 October 1943 he embarked overseas the Italian Front, arriving in Naples on 13 November.

Between 3 December and 9 December 1943, he saw action during the famed battle for Monte La Difensa,

*“Mr. Story's role in the la Difensa mission was to resupply the assault force, carrying impossible loads of ammunition and 50-pound water tanks up the steep slope – and wounded soldiers down. Casualties were high and it took six to eight men to carry a single stretcher over the rough terrain, according to fellow veteran Charlie Mann.”<sup>1</sup>*

In January 1944, S/Sgt. Story's 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment would play a crucial role in the assault on Monte Majo.

At the end of January, S/Sgt. Story and the Force were ordered to the Anzio beachhead. It was here that the “Devil's Brigade” earned its nickname after instilling fear in the Germans by silent, harassing night raids with blackened faces,

*“A German diary that was captured and he said ‘these black devils are all around us. We never see them or hear them’”*

Story and the Force led the US advance to Rome and on 4 June became the first unit to enter the city. He was promoted to Lieutenant on 26 July 1944 and on 14 August landed at Îles d'Hyères to spearhead the invasion of Southern France, Operation Dragoon. Nine days later he was wounded in the hip by a grenade and spent the next few months undergoing rehabilitation.

The First Special Service Force was disbanded on 5 December 1944. Story recalls,

*“It was a very very sad day because we had no idea it was coming. They just formed us up as a unit and asked the Canadians to step forward. So we just stepped forward, formed ranks and marched off.”<sup>1</sup>*

Lieut. Story returned to the UK on 6 January 1945. He completed the Junior Leaders Tactical course at 3 Wing CTS and then served as a parachute instructor with 8 CTR.

He returned to Canada in December 1945 and on 23 January 1946 he married his girlfriend Jessica Jean Scott whom he'd met in New Westminster during his posting there with the Edmonton Fusiliers. He went on to earn a B.Sc. in Chemistry at UBC and worked for Walker Bros. and Glidden Paints until 1980. He then acquired a partnership in Sykoloid Co. of Canada and finally retired in 1995.

Sadly, he passed away 6 October 2009 at New Westminster BC, leaving behind his loving wife of 63 years and two daughters, Jude and Terry.

***Laurence Arthur Story, 1922-2009. Kearney Funeral Services***





*U.S. Garrison Cap worn by Lieut. Larry Story*



*The wing is a UK-made Type 5*



*Beret and Battle Dress worn by Lieut. Larry Story*



*The SSI is a theatre-made (Italy) Type 6*



*Lieut. Story's 1944-dated Kangol beret*



*U.S.-made FSSF collar insignia - worn as a cap badge by Canadian Officers post-disbandment*

Larry Story Interview, KCTS-Seattle 2007

Ibid

Edwards, Frank B., The Accidental Devil, The Globe and Mail, 2009

Larry Story Interview, KCTS-Seattle 2007

Mr. Story removed the ribbon bar as well as the cap badge which he wore on his reunion beret. They have been replaced with original examples.

**Thank You to Member Roy Akins for this story and pictures**

### War Stories - Origin of the Black Beret

A good deal of mythical information circulates in the Royal Armoured Corps (RAG) about the origin of the beret. Most members of the Corps know that it was the distinctive head-dress of the Royal Tank Regiment, but in many cases their knowledge ends there. It is thought therefore that the following account by **General Sir Hugh Elles** may be of interest and may help to dispel the improbable legends which are current. "Some time at the end of 1917, at a dinner one night at Bemécourt, France, we discussed two well worn subjects:

- a. Would the war ever come to an end, and when?
- b. If it did, what would happen to the Tank Corps in peacetime?

We agreed that it (the Tank Corps) ought to go on, and proceeded to talk about its equipment.

Someone, I think it must have been Fuller, pointed out that after every war, the British Army had made a habit of adopting some head-dress belonging to its enemies: the bearskin of the Guards had come from Napoleon's Imperial Guards; the Lancers hat came from the Germans; the slouch hat came from the Boers, and so forth.

It happened there lay at Bemécourt just then, *en repos*, a regiment of *Tirailleurs Alpains*, and the bright idea occurred,

I think to myself, that we might make an exception at the end of this war, and adopt a head-dress from our Allies. The choice lay between the beret Breton, which the *Tirailleurs Alpains* wore, and the beret Basque (Borotra - though nobody had ever heard of Borotra then) which were worn by our comrades of the *Chars d'Assaut*, (*French Tank Corp*) Neither of these met with favour; the Breton was considered sloppy and the Basque skimpy.

So we fell back upon the version which was then very popular among girl's schools in England. We circularized a large number of girl's schools and received a number of berets of different colours. And eventually, after a stern contest with the War Office, "**our black beret was, surprisingly, authorized.**"



Tirailleurs Alpains

Note; "*Origin of the Beret*" - Extract from DRAG Monthly Liaison Letter No. 25, by General Sir Hugh Elles, 1926



Lieutenant General Sir Hugh Jamieson Elles KCB KCMG KCVO DSO was a British officer and the first commander of the newly formed Tank Corps during the First World War.



French Tank Crew



#### Modern Canadian Version

Anthony Swards  
Former SQMS  
Lord Strathcona's Horse  
(Royal Canadians)

"Monty" in WW2



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The SOCIETY

is a non-profit registered society which fosters the study of the military and the police, and the heritage of Canada, the British Empire, and the world as well as the preservation of military artifacts and records. The CMHS meets once every calendar month at:

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