

The Daring Dozen: Special Forces Legends of World War II

Mortimer, Gavin. *The Daring Dozen: Special Forces Legends of World War II*.
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We in Special Operations Forces (SOF) have a quite appropriate interest in the history of those special operators who have served before us. Those in whose



footsteps we follow. One of my favorite SOF books is Admiral William H. McRaven's "*Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*," which covers covert missions done by famous operators. Journalist Gavin Mortimer brings out a near sequel in format to this in his book of 12 legendary Special Forces commanders from

World War II. Before World War II, the concept of "special forces" was largely unknown. We did have Major T.E. Laurence and General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck in World War I, but little else and nothing in the "big" theaters. World War II brought us visionary SOF leaders like Colonel David Stirling (of the Special Air Service) and Colonel Charles Hunter (of Merrill's Marauders). These men altered the very concepts of how wars can be fought and won.

This book covers 12 extraordinary men who not only reshaped military policy, but also led from the front and accompanied troops into the heat of battle. All theaters of war are covered, from the sands of North Africa to jumping in on D-Day to infiltrating behind enemy lines into the jungle. The author offers a skilful analysis of the twelve's qualities as military commanders and the

true impact that their own personal actions, as well as those of their specialized SOF units, had on the eventual outcome of the war.

When you first look at the list, some names may be quite familiar, like Colonel David Stirling (SAS) and Major General Robert T Frederick (1st Special Service Force), but some of the others included are less well known. Colonel Charles N Hunter commanded the Marauders after Merrill. Colonel Edson Raff (82nd ABN-D Day Task Force Raff) ultimately commanded the 77th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Brigadier Ralph A. Bag-nold (the Long Range Desert Group) after the war was a researcher on the physics of blown sand, which was studied by NASA Mars researchers. Two of my favorites, both little known and little remembered (Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich Baron von der Heydte, a Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves-winning paratrooper who later served as a Bundeswehr brigadier general, and Captain Adrian von Fölkersam, a Brandenburger) also made the list. Neither of them has been as widely written on as they should have been.

I highly recommend this book, which I bought used from Amazon® for less than \$10.00. It gives exposure of some of the lesser-known World War II SOF operators from both sides. There are Italians (SEAL precursors) and Danes included also. Where the book "*Spec Ops*" is mission oriented, this book is personality oriented and covers each man's entire career. It is a well-done effort.