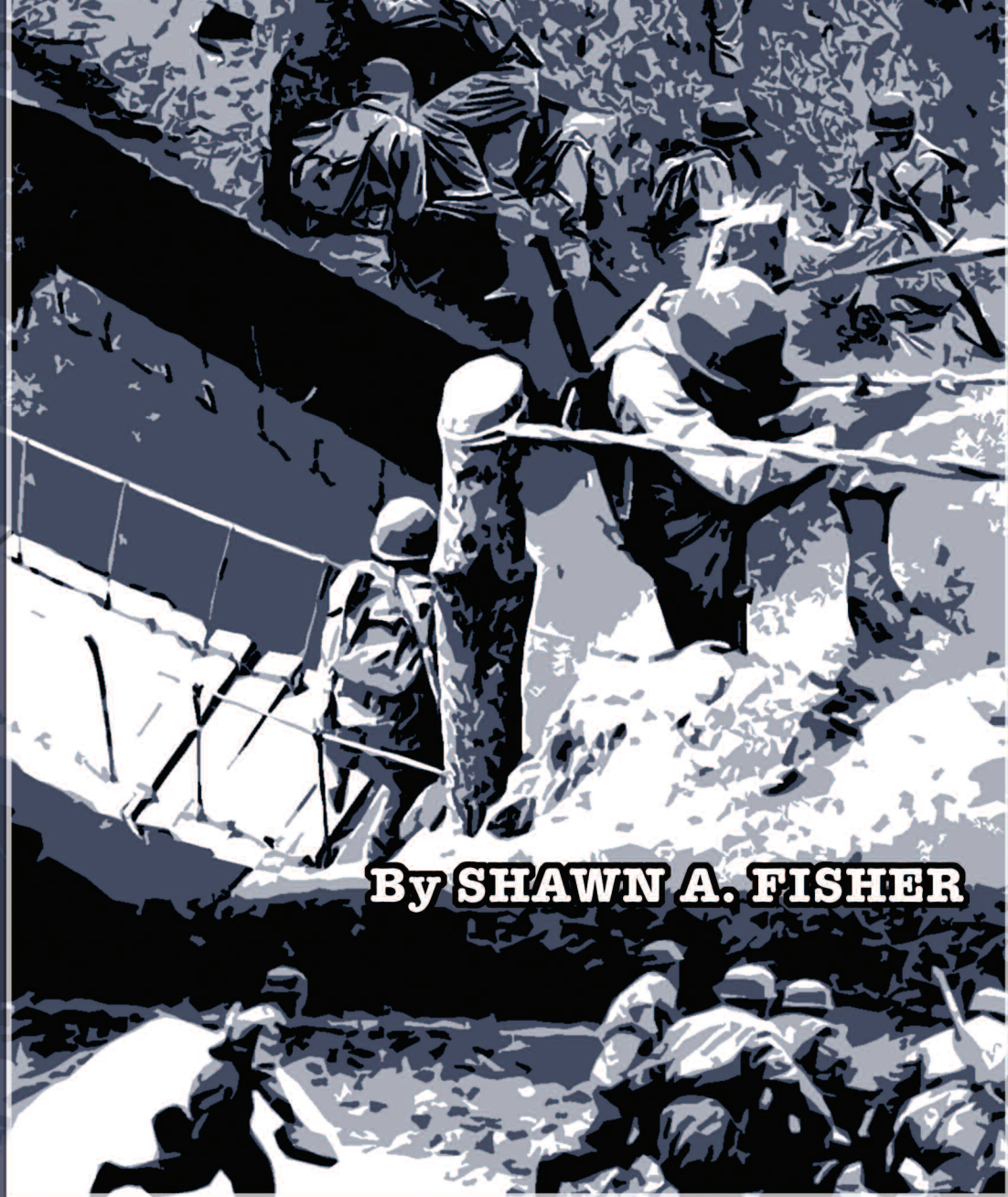


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By **SHAWN A. FISHER**

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G U R P S

# 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](http://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.”

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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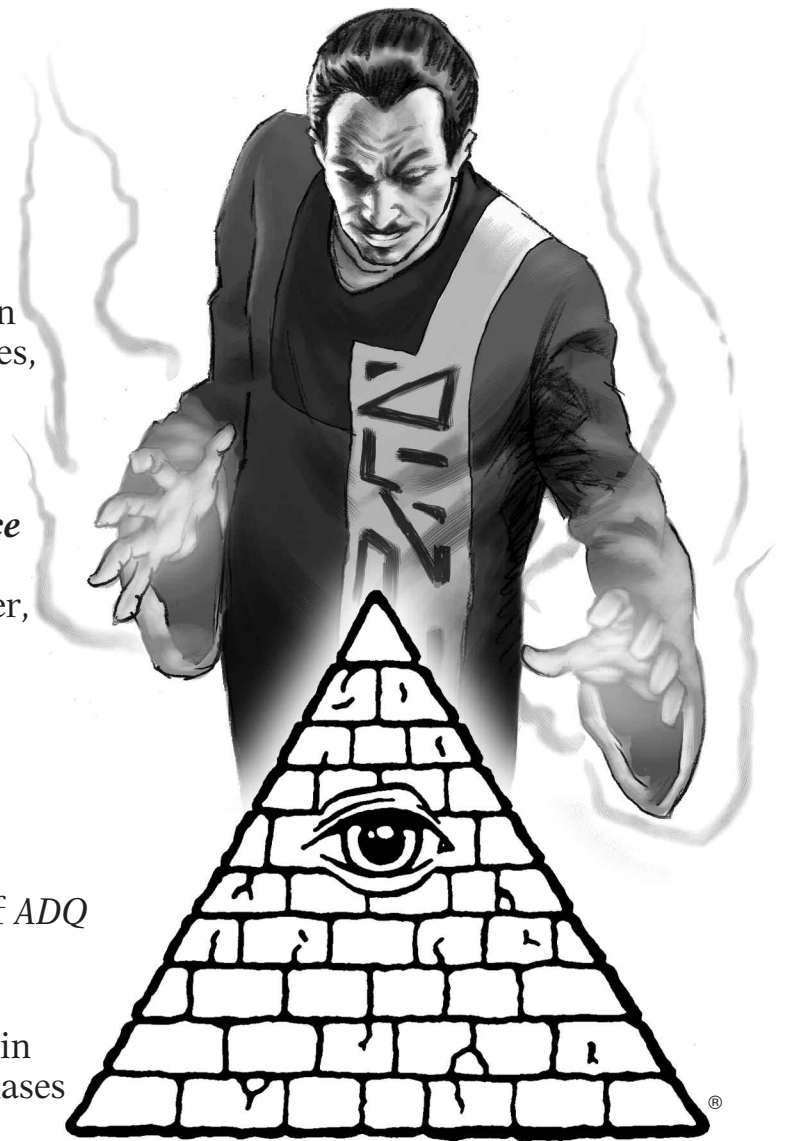


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