

Government honours Mann for Devil's Brigade role

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By Barb McKay

It was recognition that was long overdue,

but on Jan. 27, the Canadian government honoured the members of the elite Second World

War military unit known as the Devil's Brigade.

Charles Mann, of Kincardine, was one of

just a few remaining veterans of the First Special Service Force (FSSF) who travelled to

Ottawa last month to accept an award for his service with the joint Canadian-American unit. Thirteen surviving members from both Canada and the United States were on hand to receive awards.

Paloma Aguilar, press secretary for Minister of National Defence Peter MacKay, told *The Independent* in an email that during the awards presentation, MacKay recognized the service and sacrifice of the FSSF members. The award was presented jointly by MacKay and Veteran's Affairs Minister Steven Blaney. Aguilar noted that the awards were established because "the example of co-operation and excellence established by the First Special Service Force has been particularly inspirational to the Special Operations Forces of both the United States and Canada."

Mann, an original member of the FSSF, received an Award for Operational Excellence that read, "In recognition for extraordinary accomplishments and dedication to operations during the Second World War, their significant contribution to the Allied victory in Europe and in their role for establishing the foundation for Special Operational Forces in Canada and the United States."

Mann said he was pleased when he learned that the Devil's Brigade was to be recognized by the Canadian government.

"It was quite a pleasant surprise," he said. "I'm very honoured that my regiment and representatives were honoured. There are not too many of us left from the Canadian side."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper came out of caucus to greet the veterans. Mann said that Harper took the time to speak with the group and a few of the former Black Devils had their photos taken with the Prime Minister, MacKay and Blaney.

The Devil's Brigade, a name coined by German forces, were also known as the Black Devils; an elite, secretive commando force established in 1942. The force, a combination of the First Canadian Special Service Battalion (800 members) and U.S. Army volunteers (1,000 members) underwent rigorous unconventional training, including martial arts and ski training, to prepare them for fighting behind enemy lines in winter conditions.

The original goal of the joint force was to land in occupied Norway to capture and destroy a heavy water plant to prevent the Germans from successfully developing an atomic bomb. The mission was aborted after the Norwegian government expressed concern that there would be civilian casualties. Instead, the FSSF received additional training and in 1943 was sent to the Aleutian Islands off the coast to Alaska to liberate them from the Japanese. Unfortunately, Japanese troops evacuated the islands just days before the Devil's Brigade landed.

From there, the elite regiment made the long trek to Italy to disable the Germans' position on Mount LaDifensa. The mission was an important one because taking the mountain would allow Allied troops to progress through Italy. (continued on page 2)



Charles Mann, second from right, and fellow members of the elite Devil's Brigade chat with Prime Minister Stephen Harper, left, and Defence Minister Peter MacKay, centre, after receiving awards from the Canadian government in Ottawa on Jan. 27. (PMO photo by Jason Ransom)

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Storm aftermath

Kincardine public works trucks were on site at this property on Broadway Street Friday morning after a severe storm with freezing rain and high winds swept through the area. Few Kincardine residents were left without power, but some residents in Tiverton and Ripley were still without hydro Monday. (Barb McKay photo)