

# The Trojan Horse Badge:

Distinctive Identity for the 10th Special Forces Group

by Troy J. Sacquety







The Special Forces SSI was designed in 1955 by Captain John W. Frye, 77th Special Forces Group.

Captain Roger M. Pezzelle, a WWII veteran of the 473rd Infantry Regiment (Separate), designed the Trojan Horse Badge in 1955 while serving with the 10th Special Forces Group in Bad Toelz, Germany.



In early 1953, Roger M. Pezzelle and Herbert R. Brucker, two infantry Captains serving in the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG) at Bad Toelz, Germany met at the European Exchange Commission [today's Army and Air Force Exchange Service]. An excited Pezzelle showed Brucker a magazine on sale that had a 77th SFG soldier wearing a green beret on its cover.<sup>1</sup> Captain (CPT) Pezzelle had submitted a supply request for berets when the 10th SFG was still at Fort Bragg. The unit deployed before the berets arrived. They were well-received by the former 10th SFG men who stayed to serve as cadre for the 77th SFG. CPTs Pezzelle and Brucker were determined to get the headgear for the 10th SFG. In the meantime, in an effort at one-upmanship, Pezzelle decided a unique badge was also appropriate.

Insignia have long served to identify special military organizations. This has been especially true for Special Forces. From its beginning in 1952, Special Forces adopted distinctive uniform affectations and insignias to set itself apart. The most recognized today are the Green



The 10th Special Forces Group DUI



The 77th Special Forces Group DUI

Beret and the Special Forces Shoulder Sleeve Insignia (SSI) created by CPT John W. Frye, 77th SFG (approved 22 August 1955). A modified version of that SSI is now worn by all personnel assigned to the U.S. Army Special Forces Groups and subordinate units not authorized their own SSI.<sup>2</sup> This article will focus on the creation of the 10th SFG Trojan Horse beret badge, a well-known example of how Special Forces built its strong identity and traditions.

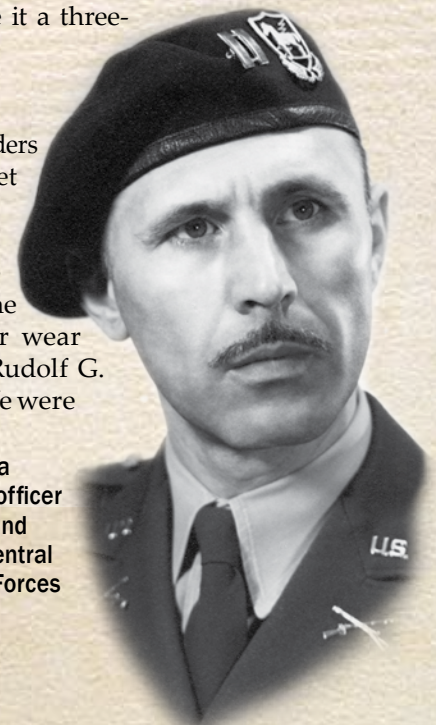
Unlike the Special Forces SSI designed by CPT Frye, this insignia was worn by 10th SFG personnel on the unofficial beret. The Green Beret, whose origins will be the subject of a future article in *Veritas*, was eventually approved by President John F. Kennedy in 1961. But, the 10th SFG's distinctive badge never received official approval.

Born to Italian-immigrants, Pezzelle was a WWII veteran. He served with the 473rd Infantry Regiment (Separate) in Northern Italy in 1945 [Commanded by Colonel (COL) William P. Yarborough].<sup>3</sup> Having separated from service after the war, Pezzelle rejoined the U.S. Army in 1948 and served in the 82nd Airborne Division before joining the 10th SFG in 1952. Like CPT Brucker, he deployed with the 10th SFG to Germany in December of that same year. In the 10th SFG he concurrently served as an assistant S-3 and as an "A" team commander.<sup>4</sup>

After seeing the magazine cover photograph, CPT Brucker and his wife tackled the beret problem while Pezzelle got to work on the badge. The Bruckers found MutzeMuller, a German haberdasher, to custom-make their berets.<sup>5</sup> Pezzelle, a talented amateur artist, was inspired by the French parachutist beret badge with its winged knife.<sup>6</sup> Instead of adapting the French insignia, Pezzelle chose the Trojan Horse as the badge centerpiece. On 5 November 1955 he briefed his badge design and showed Muller's prototype beret at a 10th SFG staff meeting. Commanding Officer COL William E. Ekman recommended that the badge be modified to give it a three-dimensional appearance.<sup>7</sup>

On 17 November, a memorandum was sent to the A Detachment commanders that announced that the beret was being adopted by the 10th SFG. They were told to poll their soldiers to see if they wanted to adopt the Trojan Horse insignia for wear on the beret.<sup>8</sup> Sergeant Rudolf G. Horvath remembered: "We were

Captain Herbert R. Brucker was a WWII OSS veteran and an early officer assigned to Special Forces. He and Captain Roger M. Pezzelle are central to the story of the 10th Special Forces Group's unique insignia.

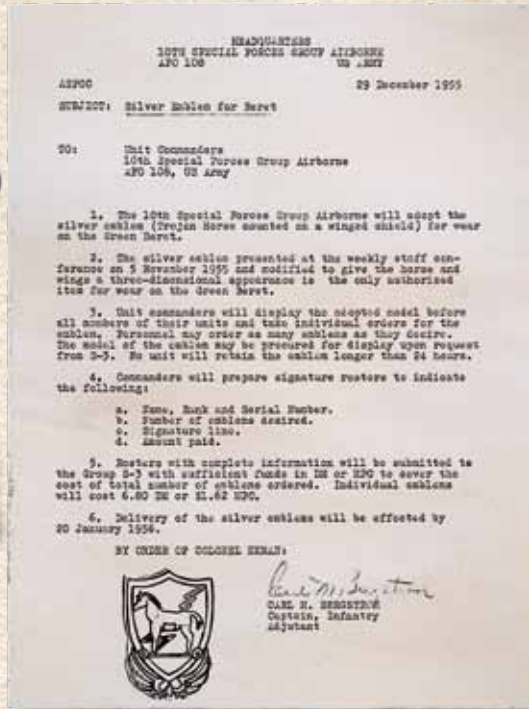




At the time of the badge's design, the commander of the 10th Special Forces Group was Colonel William E. Ekman.



The orders describing the Trojan Horse Badge's adoption, cost, and prescribed wear.



Unit commanders were instructed to take orders from their men for "as many emblems as they desire."<sup>12</sup> The cost was to be 6.8 DM (Deutsche Marks) or \$1.62. The badges would be delivered by 20 January 1956.<sup>13</sup> Like the winged knife insignia on the French paratrooper berets, the 10<sup>th</sup> SFG Trojan Horse was mounted on the beret above the wearer's left temple. Officers were permitted to affix their rank devices on the beret alongside the badge.

The emblem was made by Eichmann, a local jeweler who cast the insignia out of .900 grade "coin silver." There were actually two different versions made. The first was heavier gauge with sharp corners and a flat pin. When worn it crimped the beret.<sup>14</sup> Staff Sergeant Thomas R. Tomlin recalled additional problems with the initial badge; "It pulled the top of the beret over. It did not stand up straight like we expected it to . . . they flopped over." There were also casting problems with the first badge. "It tended to crack [at the top]. I know mine did," remembered Tomlin.

The second version was a lighter gauge badge with a slightly convex frontal surface that made them easier to wear on the beret. Tomlin said that the lighter version was "definitely liked" by everyone.<sup>15</sup>

"They were pretty popular and the [10<sup>th</sup> SFG soldiers] were proud of them . . . you'd hear pissing and moaning and grumbling about it but when it got down to it the guy was glad to wear it and signified that [he belonged to a] different unit and different type of organization," Tomlin remembered.<sup>16</sup> CPT Carl M. Bergstrom recalled that the troops "loved it. It was a great morale builder and made everybody stand out that much more."<sup>17</sup> Those not on hand to receive the first version, like 1LT Charles W. Norton, bought theirs from the group adjutant or directly from Eichmann's Jewelers.<sup>18</sup>

The badge was worn on the beret until 1962.<sup>19</sup> It was then replaced by the SF Distinctive Unit Insignia when the

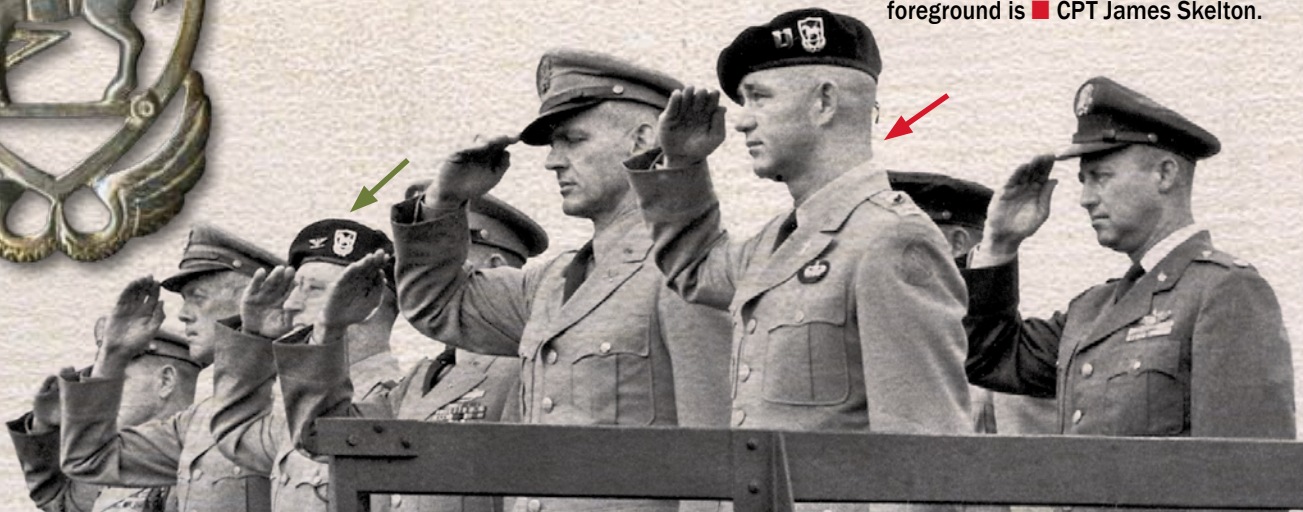
asked what we thought about it. We were at liberty to suggest other forms of insignia."<sup>9</sup> Like the majority, Horvath approved of the insignia. Second Lieutenant Timothy G. Gannon said that the men of the 10<sup>th</sup> SFG "saw a similarity between the techniques used in the Trojan Horse in the old days and in what we saw as our mission in the new time frame; surreptitious entry, undercover placement for awhile, and then coming out and doing your thing."<sup>10</sup>

Having been widely accepted, the Trojan horse-in-shield emblem was approved on 29 December 1955 as the "only authorized item for wear on the Green Beret."<sup>11</sup>



The 10th Special Forces Group Trojan Horse Badge.

Officers wore the Trojan Horse Badge on the beret along with their rank insignia. Enlisted men wore just the Badge. Left (middle front) is ■ COL William E. Ekman. In front foreground is ■ CPT James Skelton.





Soldiers assigned to the 10th Special Forces Group wear the unit's Trojan Horse Badge just outside of the gates at Bad Toelz, Germany soon after the unit adopted the badge. From left to right are MSG Ernest E. Emmons, SFC Kenneth W. Gibson, SFC William F. Whitehead, and SFC Bertsy M. Goodson.



The Trojan Horse Badge is still used at 10th Special Forces Group reunions to identify service in the early days.

beret flash was introduced. Afterwards, the Trojan Horse badge was used by the 10<sup>th</sup> SFG to recognize soldierly excellence. The “Best Soldier of the Year” could wear the badge on his shirt pocket for one year.<sup>20</sup> Although it never received official U.S. Army approval, the badge remains an honored insignia of the 10<sup>th</sup> SFG. A few years after the 10<sup>th</sup> SFG adopted the badge, Special Forces received permission from President Kennedy to wear its most distinctive identifying symbol— the Green Beret. ♣

*Thank you: I wish to thank all who helped with this article: Roger Pezzelle, Jr., MAJ (ret) Herbert R. Brucker, COL (ret) John H. “Scotty” Crerar, CSM (ret) Thomas R. Tomlin, COL (ret) Charles W. Norton, Rudolf G. Horvath, MAJ (ret) Caesar J. Civitella, COL (ret) Clarence “Bud” Skoien, COL (ret) Timothy G. Gannon, COL (ret) Carl M. Bergstrom, Steve Smith, Assistant Historian Army and Air Force Exchange Service, and Alejandro Lujan, Chief Archivist of the Historical Resource Section, USASOC History Office, Fort Bragg, NC.*

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*Troy J. Sacquety earned an MA from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and his PhD in Military History from Texas A&M University. Prior to joining the USASOC History Office staff he worked several years for the Central Intelligence Agency. Current research interests include Army and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) special operations during World War II, and Special Operations units in Vietnam.*

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## Endnotes

- 1 Herbert R. Brucker recalled that the periodical was a men's pulp magazine. However, COL William V. Koch relates in “More on the Beret,” *Veritas*, January 1971, that it was a *New York Times* exposé on Special Forces.
- 2 “U.S. Army Special Forces Group (Airborne),” [http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/SF/Special Forces Group.htm](http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/SF/Special%20Forces%20Group.htm), accessed 28 May 2009. Troy J. Sacquety, *The Special Forces Patch: History and Origins* in *Veritas* 3: 2007.
- 3 Roger Pezzelle, Jr, email to Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, Subject: Brief Bio Pezzelle, 25 April 2007.
- 4 **The Special Forces A Teams were actually called FA Teams at the time.**
- 5 SP5 Robert Banta, “The Fight for the Green Beret,” *Veritas*, October 1970, 16.
- 6 COL (ret) John H. Crerar, email to Troy J. Sacquety, 18 October 2007, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 7 CPT Carl M. Bergstrom, “Silver Emblem for the Beret,” 29 December 1955, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 Letter from CSM Donald P. Brosnan in “More on the Beret,” *Veritas*, November 1970, 20, Colonel Ekman to Unit Commanders, 10<sup>th</sup> SFG, “the Green Beret,” 17 November 1955, USASOC History Office classified files, Fort Bragg, NC. **The 10<sup>th</sup> SFG beret was constructed differently than that worn by the 77<sup>th</sup> SFG. It was multipiece-wool as opposed to the one piece felt beret purchased from Canada.**
- 9 Rudolf G. Horvath, telephone interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 24 June 2009, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 10 COL (ret) Timothy G. Gannon, telephone interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 6 July 2006, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 11 Bergstrom, “Silver Emblem for the Beret.”
- 12 Bergstrom, “Silver Emblem for the Beret.”
- 13 Bergstrom, “Silver Emblem for the Beret.”
- 14 Roger Pezzelle, Jr, email to Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, Subject: Herb Brucker, 19 March 2007.
- 15 CSM (ret) Thomas R. Tomlin, telephone interview with Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 24 June 2009, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 16 Tomlin interview.
- 17 COL (ret) Carl M. Bergstrom, telephone interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, digital recording, 7 July 2009, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 18 COL (ret) Charles W. Norton, telephone interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 24 June 2009, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 19 COL Jesse L. Johnson, “Trojan Horse Organizational Insignia,” 9 August 1993, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 20 COL (ret) John H. Crerar, email to Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, Subject: Minutiae on Trojan Horse Insignia, 3 June 2009.