

CONFIDENTIAL

IX AG NO. 57

HEADQUARTERS IX CORPS

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL
APO 809 c/o Postmaster
San Francisco California

1 May 1945

Colonel Thomas D. Drake,
War Department General Staff,
G-3 Section,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Tommy:

I just finished reading your report on the action of the 168th Infantry in the vicinity of Sidi Bou Eid. There is no comment that I can make in forwarding it on to the 34th Division. The report speaks for itself.

Knowing the conditions, I can only marvel at the gallantry of the 168th Infantry and yourself in the face of overwhelming odds. You, and you alone were fighting the entire German armored force of General Rommel and the delay you caused saved the Allied Forces in Southern Tunisia from disaster. Both of you wrote a page in American history for which you can be well proud. The blame for your defeat can only be layed on the shoulders of those who completely failed to come to your support as had been planned.

I am forwarding two (2) copies of your report with a copy of this letter to the 34th Division. I suggest that you send a copy to the Historical Section, War Department General Staff for the official records.

You have done an excellent job in writing the report. It is exactly what I wanted.

Best wishes,

CHAS. W. RYDER,
Major General, U. S. Army.

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WAR DEPARTMENT

WAR DEPARTMENT GENERAL STAFF

ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING DIVISION G-3

WASHINGTON



IX AG NO. 57

11 April 1945

Major General Charles W. Ryder
Headquarters IX Corps
Office of the Commanding General
APO #309
c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, California

Dear General Ryder:

I am inclosing a report in triplicate of the operations of the 168th Infantry between the dates of 24 December 1942 and 17 February 1943. I received a letter recently from the Chief of Staff of the 34th Division, Colonel John D. Forsythe, asking for the same thing and the additional information of what happened to the prisoners taken during the engagement.

I have added an extra paragraph describing what happened to them. It isn't very pleasant reading but it is the truth of how horribly the enemy treated them.

I have tried to be absolutely fair in the statements and have not put anything in the report not warranted.

It has been difficult to keep from mentioning what I did for the fact of it is that I did do most of the show. You know the problem-- good fighting men but inexperienced and partially trained.

Will you please make what comments you wish and forward two copies to the Commanding General, 34th Division? I am sending one copy for you personally.

With kindest regards I am,

Sincerely yours,

Thomas D. Drake
THOMAS D. DRAKE
Colonel, GSC

CONFIDENTIAL

2 April 1945

TO ; MAJOR GENERAL CHAS. W. RYDER, U. S. ARMY:
HEADQUARTERS, IX CORPS, APO 309, c/o POSTMASTER,
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

SUBJECT: Factual Account of Operations 168th Infantry, 34th
Division, from 24 December 1942 to 17 February 1943

During the period 24 December 1942 to 17 February 1943, the 168th Infantry Combat Team, operated directly under orders issued by Allied Force Headquarters, ALGIERS, AFRICA. Organizations of the regiment ranging from a company to the entire combat team were often separated and operated under various commanders ranging from advanced air fields on up through the II American Corps to direct control by First British Army.

1. 24 December 1942 - The regiment with attached units was in bivouac in vicinity of EL BIAR, ALGERIA, guarding the coast line and carrying out its function of garrisoning its assigned defense sector. Concentrated training, both day and night was being carried out. On this date orders were received for the Second Battalion, reinforced, to move to the vicinity of TELEPEATH for purpose of guarding advanced air fields located there.

2. 25 December 1942 - The Battalion moved out on its mission, with organic transportation and buses furnished by the French, through Allied Force Headquarters.

3. 2 January 1943 - The Antitank Company was ordered out by Allied Force Headquarters to BISKRA, Southern TUNISIA, to protect an air field at that place on the edge of the SAHARA DESERT.

4. 4 January 1943 - The First Battalion, reinforced, was turned over to disposition of First British Army for purpose of protecting air fields in vicinity of YOUS LE BAIN from the danger of enemy gliders and paratroops.

5. During this period and until it rejoined the Combat Team, 30 January 1943, the 175th Field Artillery Battalion was in action under the First British Army in vicinity of BEJA, TUNISIA.

6. Sometime during the first week in January 1943, Company G, 109th Medical Battalion and Company C, 109th Engineer Battalion, were both detached from the regiment and sent back to ORAN to re-join the 34th Division, then arriving in AFRICA.

7. The Third Battalion, 168th Infantry, was held in Force Reserve in vicinity of ALGIERS by Allied Force Headquarters.

8. 15 January 1943 - The Regimental Commander, Colonel Thomas D. Drake, started on a visit of inspection of the widely spread regiment, covering 1500 miles during the next ten days and finding conditions far from satisfactory. The units placed out on guard had been given such varied duties and orders by persons unfamiliar with Infantry training and tactics that they were unable to carry on any proper training.

9. 29 January 1943 - At 1830 hours Colonel Drake received a telephone message to report to Allied Force Headquarters. Upon arriving there he was directed to leave for CONSTANTINE and there report to Lieutenant General Anderson, Commanding First British Army. Upon inquiry as to the disposition of the Third Battalion, Service Company and remainder of Headquarters Company he was informed that the Third Battalion would remain in place, but nothing was known about the other two organizations. Alerting the two companies the Colonel put in a telephone call for Brigadier McHabb, the Chief of Staff, First British Army and received his permission to bring the two companies along with him.

10. 30 January 1943 - At 0430 hours Saturday after a night spent in preparation and securing permission for the movement of the convoy along the over-crowded roads, the columns passed the IP west of ALGIERS. Leaving the two companies under command of the Executive Officer for bivouacking, Colonel Drake proceeded on to British Army Headquarters at CONSTANTINE. All officers were out to dinner and he waited until 2130 hours at which time the staff returned. Orders were issued to him to proceed to the C.P. of the II American Corps located in a ravine just east of TRBESSA and there report to Major General L. R. Fredendall, U. S. Army, who would give him exact orders, but that in general his mission was to attack the Germans with the 168th Combat Team and secure some high ground overlooking the coastal plains of TUNISIA.

11. 31 January 1943 - Upon arriving at II Corps Headquarters about 1530 hours, Colonel Drake was greeted by General Fredendall who told

him he was needed badly at the front. General Fredendall showed him the situation map and indicated an area covering the high ground east of GAFSA and commanding the coastal plain over which Rommel's Army must move northward to effect union with the mass of German troops that had been pouring into Africa daily for the past two months. The order in substance was as follows: "You will attack tomorrow morning and seize this high ground (indicating). After taking up an all around defensive position you will conduct raids into Rommel's Lines of Communications, doing all the damage you can and prevent his uninter-rupted movement north."

General Fredendall told Colonel Drake that his combat team was already up forward and for him to report to Major General Orlando Ward, First Armored Division for orders. Colonel Drake informed General Fredendall that neither the Anti-tank Company or the Third Battalion were with him. General Fredendall stated they were ordered to be present and that he had asked the First British Army for the entire Combat Team. General Fredendall then directed his Chief of Staff to get on the telephone and have the Third Battalion, Anti-tank Company, Engineer Company and Collecting Company released from their assignments and sent forward to join the Combat Team. General Fredendall then told Colonel Drake that one of his battalions (later found to be the First Battalion) had been pretty badly used that morning in an abortive assault upon the enemy positions when they were caught in their trucks by German dive bombers.

12. Going forward a few miles Colonel Drake reported in to the Rear Echelon C.P. of the First Armored Division. The officer (Lt Col) on duty said that the First Battalion, 168th Infantry, was at the front under the command of Colonel Maraist, Commanding Combat Command "D", and that General Ward who was up forward wanted to see Colonel Drake as soon as possible. He also stated that the Second Battalion, 168th Infantry, was down the road a couple of miles awaiting for darkness and the trucks that had been arranged to carry them forward; that the 175th Field Artillery Battalion was then moving in in that area. This officer then wanted to know if Colonel Drake would take charge and assume responsibility. Colonel Drake said, "No", most emphatically. He then explained that for him to take charge in the middle of their work would only tend to tie it up. That he, Colonel Drake, knew nothing about the arrangements that had been made, nor how many or where the trucks were to come from to haul the troops and nothing about road conditions or the enemy situation; that for the First Armored Division to carry-on until the troops were in their allotted assembly area was the only sensible thing to do.

13. Colonel Drake then visited both the 175th Field Artillery Battalion, commanded by Lt. Colonel Kelly, and the Second Battalion, 168th Infantry, commanded by Lt. Colonel Dewey H. Baer and assured himself that they had full loads of ammunition; told them that they would attack the next morning and that he would issue orders as soon as he found out the situation and received orders from the First Armored Division; further, that the First Armored Division would issue orders for their movement forward to an assembly area and upon reaching it, he wanted both of them to report to him at the advanced C.P. of the Combat Command. Shortly after midnight, about 0030 hours, the first of February, Colonel Drake reached GAFSA.

After identifying himself to the cross-roads military policeman, he learned what road led to General Ward's headquarters 20 miles southeast of GAFSA. Colonel Drake told the M.P. to watch for his column and the M.P. said a guide was right there to meet them. He then called Captain Frederick K. Hughes, 024471, First Armored Division, who came forward and told him that he had been sent there to meet the Infantry and Artillery to conduct them to their assembly area. When Colonel Drake questioned him Captain Hughes assured him he knew exactly where to place the troops and that they would be where Colonel Drake wanted them that morning. Also that the C.C. Headquarters had selected the places and as soon as they were in position he would report the fact to him at C. C. Headquarters. Colonel Drake told him he was going to stop and see General Ward first and then would go on to Colonel Maraist's C.P.

He appeared to know what he was talking about, so with a final word of caution to be careful about overrunning the Front Line, which Captain Hughes assured him couldn't happen, because he knew where to go and besides that the First Armored Division M.P.'s covered the road, Colonel Drake drove on.

Reaching General Ward's C.P. at 0230 hours, he explained the situation; said Colonel Maraist had everything left in the division under his command; that Maraist would be in command, but that Col Drake would command all of the Infantry; that his entire division, Combat Commands, A, B, and C were away on other Fronts and that he had nothing left but the General Staff to command. He explained that an attack had been started that day (Sunday); that the First Battalion, 168th Infantry, had been caught in trucks by Boche dive bombers and that they had suffered very heavily. He knew they were badly shaken, but hoped Colonel Drake would be able to pull them out of it.

After leaving him Colonel Drake drove on several miles and found Colonel Karaist's C.P. at about 0430 hours. The S-3 suggested he wait in their C.P. half-track until 0530 hours when Colonel Karaist would issue his battle orders. He further told Colonel Drake that all of his commanders had been, or would be, ordered to report at 0530 hours, so there wasn't anything he could do until then; that the units were closing in their bivouacs, having passed while he was with General Ward.

Lt. Colonel John Petty, Commander of First Battalion, came in shortly afterwards and explained to Colonel Drake that the First Battalion had been ordered sent forward in trucks to attack, along with tanks, and that they had been caught by dive bombers and badly shot up, but that they would be ready to fight again that day.

It still lacked some time before Colonel Karaist would appear to deliver his order of battle, so Colonel Drake started out to the bivouac of the Second Battalion. The sandy desert on the left of the trail where they should have been was completely barren except for a few tanks and half-tracks. As Colonel Drake's fears began to take more definite shape, violent firing of all calibers suddenly sounded from the east, well within the German lines. He knew the worst! In the darkness, the guide, Captain Hughes, had led this battalion well inside the enemy lines! The firing lasted about 30 minutes and then subsided. There seemed to be no alternative to their fate. The M.P. farthest to the front told Colonel Drake that about 0300 or 0330 hours, a long line of trucks carrying troops had passed him headed for the enemy lines. He was asked why he had not stopped them and he replied that he had had no orders to do so. Colonel Drake returned to the C.P. and inquired of Lt Colonel Petty how the truck column could have gotten through the front line and then sent him to get the outpost, which Petty said, he had placed on the road. Petty came back accompanied by two frightened privates who admitted to having been the farthest advanced road outpost. They both stated that they had halted the column, but that the officer leading it had gotten out of his machine and told them that he knew where he was going and that everything would be alright. (Nine months later I met Captain Hughes in a prison camp in Poland. He then stated to me that he had seen no such outpost and furthermore that he had never seen that terrain but one time and that during day light.) Colonel Drake's C.P. and Service Company had likewise failed to show up, but he was thankful for the appearance of Lt. Colonel Kelly, who assured him that the 175th Field Artillery would be right with him in everything he wanted.

Colonel Maraist now came to the group and issued in substance the following order: "The Infantry under Colonel Drake will attack, supported by tanks and artillery, and capture SENED. It will then push on and seize and fortify the high ground about eight kilometers east of SENED. No artillery preparation will be made. The tanks will advance on the left of the Infantry next to the mountain and will be available on call to Colonel Drake. Time of attack: 0730 hours". At this juncture about 50 German dive bombers suddenly appeared and started raining bombs down on the troops. No anti-aircraft artillery was available! Only the 30 and 50 caliber machine guns mounted on half-tracks and tanks, all of which went into action, as well as many of the rifles of the Infantry. The desert was soon littered with burning tanks and half-tracks. Several planes plummeted to earth in flames and many white parachutes dotted the sky as some were able to jump before going down. After dropping their bomb loads, the Germans withdrew.

The conference reassembled and Colonel Drake told Colonel Maraist that he couldn't possibly attack at 0730 hours as he had not had time to see the ground or his troops. He was asked what was the earliest time he could attack and he replied "0930 hours is the very earliest". Colonel Maraist then said, "Alright, time of attack 0930 hours".

14. At 0930 hours, Monday 1 February 1943, the attack started. As the Infantry moved forward it drew both enemy artillery and small fire. Lt. Colonel Kelly was forward with Colonel Drake at all times and was also in communication with the Armored Artillery. Prompt artillery fire was brought to bear on all targets located. Hard fighting resulted on the open plain. The tanks soon ran into emplaced 88's well dug-in in the cactus patches where they were completely concealed. Progress was very slow. About two kilometers advance had been made by 01200 hours with the town of SENED now in sight. To the north of the railroad, which ran east and west, were many blazing and smoking vehicles of the Second Battalion which were fired by the enemy. As the advance continued Colonel Drake saw what appeared to be hundreds of men break out of the cactus at the foot of the ridge on their left and start dashing toward them. It was the remainder of the Second Battalion. Colonel Drake arranged for a renewal of the attack with Combat Command D. at 1430 hours. At the attack started out it was met by enemy fire of all descriptions, which soon stopped its advance and pinned it to the ground. Men were dying everywhere. The sand was being kicked up in the clouds and the air was filled with buzzing and whining

bullets. This appeared to be the end of the battle, because they had put everything into it time and again and still could not get forward. At this juncture Colonel Drake walked out in front of the First Battalion and started casually walking toward the enemy lines. At his urging they all got to their feet and charged forward. Enemy tanks were waiting in a row under the olive trees bringing direct fire upon them. They concentrated their small arms fire on these vehicles causing them to button up and continued their advance. Suddenly the enemy tanks, apparently not understanding this spectacle of riflemen attacking them, turned and streaked through the town. They had now gained the edge of the town when Colonel Drake sent Captain Bird, Commanding Company B, to envelope the town from the right. This he did and soon sent him a message that he had successfully reached the crossroad on the other side of the town. Colonel Drake went back to where he had last seen battalion headquarters and there found Lt. Colonel Petty had received a mortal wound through the stomach and that the battalion Executive Officer had been wounded. In addition to the capture of the town, including a railroad roundhouse and 12 engines, over 260 prisoners, about 100 Italians and a large amount of equipment, including new motorcycles in crates, were passed on to Combat Command D Headquarters. The Second Battalion was being reorganized under Major Moore, the Battalion Executive Officer, Lt. Colonel Bear having been wounded that day. The First Battalion now organized for all around defense, morale having been restored - everything looked better.

15. Tuesday, 2 February 1943, orders were issued at 0200 hours by Colonel Karaist for continuing of the attack at 0500 hours and to seize the high ground overlooking the open plains extending toward SPAX. The Tanks would precede Colonel Drake's Infantry; he would have the Cannon Company, 39th Infantry, attached to him for the battle. Colonel Drake issued orders for the attack in column of battalions; Second Battalion to follow First Battalion at 1000 yards; 175th Field Artillery displacing by bounds ready for instant support on call; Cannon Company follow right flank of First Battalion; Service Company remain where it was; C.P. follow First Battalion; Colonel Drake would be forward with the First Battalion. Promptly at 0500 hours the attack moved forwards. As Colonel Drake passed a large barn just before clearing the town, one of his inquisitive soldiers threw open the barn doors and about twenty Italians, who had huddled in there throughout the night, came pouring out with their hands raised over their heads. Within a few minutes the German Air Force appeared overhead and again they experienced the nerve racking scream of the dive bomber, accompanied by the heavy 'Crunch'

of the exploding bomb. But this was going to be different - no more than three of the Germans had gone into their dive when what appeared to be black arrows came from over the range of hills to their left. It was the first appearance of the American Air Force. These fast 'Lightnings' could fly rings around the Stukas and German planes soon began falling everywhere.

Long range fire came against them, but nothing could stop the advance. Soon the first high ground was taken, then the next, and by 1400 hours the objective was reached.

Organization for defense was made while their tanks pushed on out as a protecting screen on the open desert beyond and there gave battle to German Panzers that were counter-attacking.

16. The First Battalion held the main part of the front; the Second Battalion, the left rear, the 175th Field Artillery, a position in center rear; the Armored Artillery, over which Colonel Drake had no control, farther back and the Tanks toward the right rear flank, while the remainder was used in front covering the organization of the ground. The 39th Infantry Cannon Company was placed behind the first ridge in the First Battalion sector where it could protect the front and left against enemy armored attack. The Antitank Company had not arrived. Engineers now came forward and were given the herculean task of planting mines to cover the valley to the left of the position.

Several dive bombing attacks and strafings, following the dropping of their bombs, occurred throughout the day. During the days' attack a long column of German trucks and tanks had been 'bottled up' in a narrow rocky defile along the right flank by placing guns and mines at both ends of it. The road being so narrow the enemy could not turn their vehicles around, Colonel Drake asked for bombers to destroy them, but headquarters sent word that they would be captured. This seriously depleted his strength to maintain two fighting forces at the ends of the pass. Neither could a sufficient force be detailed to fight and capture them without deviating from the main mission. This enemy force was a source of worry in that it might break out and over-run the rear area.

17. About 1700 hours Colonel Drake observed a movement near the eastern exit of this pass which was about two miles away. Through his field glasses he saw what appeared to be guns moving into position. At first it was believed the enemy had debouched and were preparing to go into action. The 175th Field Artillery was alerted and swung its guns to cover this position while he went forward to find out who they were,

It was found that it was the Armored Artillery moving forward into position.

Some desultory firing was going on at the front when from his position Colonel Drake saw the road suddenly choke with fleeing vehicles dashing madly to the rear. He started off cross-country to intercept them, but several vehicles had already passed when he reached the road. The men in the overcrowded vehicles were wild eyed, as they roared along at full speed. The column was made up of half-ton weapon carriers, jeeps, half-tracks and tanks - anything that would roll. Colonel Drake stopped this rearward rush and placing a guard across the road, ordered all back to their position. By personal direction and use of all available officers the troops were returned to their former positions. Only part of one battalion, plus some rear units had been effected. Investigations showed that the screening tanks had been withdrawn without notification and that a German patrol of one platoon of tanks investigating the withdrawal had moved forward into the American position, being identified as friendly tanks. Upon arriving there they opened sudden fire at point blank range. This sudden development on the overwrought nerves of troops led the men in the immediate vicinity to believe that the German Panzers were among them in force. This near panic was averted without any real loss to the defensive position.

18. 3 February 1943³ Wednesday - The day was passed in consolidating position, making range charts and of being dive-bombed by the ever present enemy air at frequent intervals. A serious loss was sustained shortly before daylight when one of our half-tracks laden with engineer personnel ran into a Dump of fuzed mines, setting off the entire Dump. At 0930 hours the Antitank Company arrived, completing their long journey from BISKRA and were placed in position. In the late afternoon Brigadier General Ray Porter, who had been placed in command of the entire sector, came forward and after inspection expressed his pleasure over the defensive set-up.

19. 4 February 1943 - Thursday - The entire day was quiet with the exception of bombing attacks and continued strengthening of the position. Heavy fighting was in progress north of them near MAKHASSAY, where another combat command tried to break through to the south to join forces. The enemy, however, was too strong for them, so there they sat - two badly mauled battalions - 25 miles out in the heart of the German Army. Considerable activity was observed out in front

where the enemy could be seen re-fueling tanks in a large olive grove about eight miles forward. Air bombardment was called for and was promised for 1400 hours, however, the attack did not materialize. At 1515 hours a flight of fifteen flying fortresses, accompanied by Spit Fires, came from the direction of the enemy line, flying low over the American position and dropped their full load of bombs on the rear area. Fortunately little damage was done.

20. At 1700 hours Colonel Drake received orders to withdraw that night under cover of darkness and to secrete his command in the vicinity of GAFSA by daylight. All roads would be at his disposal from 2200 hours on and that he would destroy everything that might be of use to the enemy. Hastily preparations were made and at 1800 hours all commanders were assembled and the order of march was given. The order: "The Engineers to prepare all installations in SERED, including the roundhouse with the twelve locomotives they had captured for demolition and to blow them at 2400 hours. They were then to mine the road behind the Covering Shell which would pass at that hour. The units in rear areas to march from their area at 2000 hours sharp; Artillery the same. One Tank Company would follow the First Battalion which would be in the rear of the Second Battalion, who in turn, followed the artillery by fifteen minutes. Company B, Captain Bird commanding, with two platoons of ~~heavy platoons of~~ heavy machine guns from Company D to cover the front and withdraw on order. Trucks to be spotted back of the first hill at 2200 hours. Special units with the C.P., less the Commanding Officer, to follow artillery. Executive Officer to command the column. Colonel Drake to remain with the shell". Everything depended on timing and secrecy and the movement went like clock work. All installations were destroyed immediately after the troops moved out. At daylight the last of the Combat Team closed in at its area in the vicinity of GAFSA.

21. 5 February 1943 - Friday - About 0800 hours Colonel Drake went into GAFSA and talked with General Porter. There he received orders to proceed to FERRIANA that night, leaving the 175th Field Artillery behind. Some of the units of the Combat Team had been sent on to FERRIANA during the withdrawal the previous night by orders of higher headquarters. At 1500 hours a Colonel from Second American Corps Headquarters came to Colonel Drake and issued orders for movement to continue on to SBEITLA that night. The movement started promptly at 1900 hours with proper guides left along the road to intercept and direct the troops.

22. 6 February 1943 - Saturday - After a hazardous all night march the regiment, less one battalion, passed SBEITLA and bivouacked in the open desert, depending on dispersion for protection from enemy bombers. Men and vehicles were dug-in. At 1500 hours the Corps Chief of Staff, visited the command with orders for the First Battalion to move to SIDI BOU ZID at dark to relieve a French Battalion. Protest was made to a particular unit being designated, whereupon the order was changed to 'send a battalion'. The First Battalion had suffered very heavily in casualties during the battle of SENED with approximately 20% casualties inflicted on them. Request was also made again at this time for the 175th Field Artillery Battalion, but instead orders were issued that the Seventeenth Battalion of Corps, medium artillery would be sent forward to join the regiment, because they had to have artillery at GAFSA and the exchange would save moving the two units. However, promise was made that the 175th Field Artillery would be sent forward within a few days to rejoin its Combat Team.

23. 7 February 1943 - Sunday - Orders were received attaching the Regiment to the First Armored Division and for Colonel Drake to report to Major General Orlando Ward for orders. General Ward issued orders for the command to move to SIDI BOU ZID that night and there report to Brigadier General McQuillin, Combat Command A; that the Third Battalion, 168th Infantry from ALGIERS would join the Regiment on the move forward and that upon reaching there the 17th Field Artillery would revert to General McQuillin; that the First Battalion, 168th Infantry would move that night back to FERRIANA in Corp Reserve. After issuing the necessary orders for the movement Colonel Drake went forward to SIDI BOU ZID and reported to Brigadier General McQuillin. General McQuillin ordered him to complete his movement that night and to relieve Colonel Alexander N. Stark, commanding 26th Infantry, First Infantry Division, the next day. That night the remainder of the Combat Team, less the First Battalion, and with the Seventeenth Field Corp Artillery moved forward and came under long range of enemy artillery fire as they neared SIDI BOU ZID. However, the movement was completed into position without confusion.

24. 8 February 1943 - Monday - In early morning Colonel Drake went on reconnaissance of position with General McQuillin, who selected positions into which the units would move. Arriving back at the C.P., 26th Infantry, at 1000 hours orders were issued for the relief of the 26th Infantry by Colonel Drake and movement into position for the other

units. Daylight relief was made necessary by orders that the 26th Infantry must be relieved by 1700 hours, that day, as it was reverting to the Corp Reserve. By dispersion and taking advantage of vegetation and folds in the ground, the movement forward was made and the relief completed by 1900 hours.

25. For the next five days, the ninth to the thirteenth, inclusive, the time was spent in consolidating the positions, putting up wire entanglements, laying the mines and shifting of units. On the eleventh of February a typewritten order was received by General McQuillin, signed by the Corp Commander, Major General Fredendall, directing the exact location and disposition of each organization. General Ward had written on the margin of this order in pencil, "Show this to Drake." The order follows:

C
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S E C R E T

HEADQUARTERS II CORPS
APO #302

11 February 1943

SUBJECT: Defense of FAID Position

TO : Commanding General, 1st Armored Division.

1. You will take immediate steps to see that the following points concerning defense of the FAID Position are put into effect:

a. Scheme of Defense: DJ. KSAIRA on the South and DJ LESSOUDA on the North are the key terrain features in the defense of FAID. These two features must be strongly held, with a mobile reserve in the vicinity of SIDI BOU ZID which can rapidly launch a counter attack. Plans for all possible uses of this reserve should be prepared ahead of time. A battalion of infantry should be employed for the defense of DJ. KSAIRA, and the bulk of a battalion of infantry together with a battery of artillery and company of tanks for the defense of DJ. LESSOUDA. Remainder of artillery is at present satisfactorily located. It should, however, furnish its own local protection, and be prepared to shift rapidly.

b. Additional Reserves: The 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry, now under your control, should immediately send a liaison officer to Hq. CG A.

Inasmuch as this Battalion will likely be employed by McQuillin should an attack in the FAID area develop, the Battalion Commander in collaboration with McQuillin should prepare plans for the use of his Battalion. These plans should insure rapid movement and employment of this Battalion once it has been ordered.

g. Reconnaissance: It is extremely important that reconnaissance and counter reconnaissance be conducted by you from HADJEB EL AIOUM on the North to the pass between DJ. MAIZTLA AND DJ. GOULES on the South. In this area strong listening posts should be established 24 hours a day from which raids, when appropriate, can be conducted. It is essential that this reconnaissance and counter reconnaissance link up with that now being conducted by the 1st British Derby Yeomanry. The force now at McQuillin's disposal is not sufficient for the area for which he is responsible. The bulk of your 81st Reconnaissance Battalion should be used in the area HADJEB EL AIOUM - MAIZTLA - GOULEB PASS.

d. Patrols: It is vital that strong infantry foot patrols be sent forward at night from DJ LESSOUDA and DJ KSAIRA. These patrols must be offensive. They must keep track of the enemy's strength and organization. They should be especially watchful for any attempt of the enemy to debarah from the passes at night. They must take prisoners. It is also important that these patrols locate the presence of minefields, if any, in areas like the gap between DJ REEHAIB and DJ BOU DZEL. The latter would, of course, be of great importance in the event we decide to capture FAID.

g. Use of Wire, AT Mines, Trip Wire, etc.: I desire that you make maximum use of all available means to strengthen the positions outlined above. The necessary materiel is available and should be used immediately.

f. Photography: I have instructed my G-2 to furnish you as soon as possible a photographic strip covering the area: Pass at T8358 - FAID PASS - REBOU - MATLEG PASS. I have asked that every effort be made to secure good pictures of the Pass at T8358, FAID PASS, and MATLEG Pass.

2. I desire that a copy of this directive, together with your own comments, be sent to McQuillin.

3. You will inform me when the instruction enumerated in this

directive have been complied with.

L. R. FREDENDALL,
Major General, U.S.A.,
Commanding.

In other words I want a very strong active defense and not just a passive one. The enemy must be harrassed at every opportunity.

Reconnaissance must never be relaxed - especially at night. Positions indicated must be wired and mined now.

L.R.F.

S E C R E T

The Second Battalion, less Company E, with two platoons of Company H attached, was placed at DJ. LESSOUDA, eight miles north of the city of SIDI BOU ZID and by General McQuillin's orders directly under the command of Lt. Colonel John K. Waters, First Armored Division; Company E, with two platoons of Company H, were placed with the Armored Artillery as local protection. He further directed that the Third Battalion would garrison DJ. KSAIRA and would be under the direct orders of General McQuillin; that Colonel Drake would command the Service Company and Headquarters Company; that the 17th Field Artillery would be attached to his Artillery and he would issue orders to it. Orders were also issued that the ground must be defended to the last man.

Each night patrols were made into the German lines on call from higher headquarters and prisoners captured and sent back. Some casualties were suffered during these patrols. On the twelfth General Ward sent forward instructions that Colonel Drake would command the Infantry. Upon delivering these orders to Colonel Drake, General McQuillin stated that the Second Battalion would remain under Lt. Colonel Waters at DJ. LESSOUDA and that any orders Colonel Drake saw fit to issue to the Third Battalion would be submitted to him for approval.

26. On Friday night the 12th of February replacements were received at the front. A total of 450 having been sent forward to the regiment, 250 of whom had been dropped off at the First Battalion in FEBRIANA and the remainder coming on forward to SIDI BOU ZID. These replacements arrived, part of them without arms of any kind and all carrying two heavy barracks bags of clothing. The roster that accompanied them did not have all of their names on it, but it did contain names of men who were not present. Upon questioning these men it was found that a great many had never fired a rifle in their life. That none of them had entrenching tools, nor bayonets and some were without rifles. Many of them were medical corp men, artillery men, tank destroyer men and everything except infantrymen. These men were sent to the different companies throughout the day and had joined their companies for the attack which came Sunday morning.

That night six truck loads of "bazookas" and their accompanying ammunition was received. Distribution of these guns and rockets were made Saturday, but due to lack of them for instruction they were useless. Every effort had been made to get just one "bazooka" in the regiment for instructional purposes, but without success. They had been systematically forwarded to front line outfits where they were just as religiously thrown away.

27. 13 February 1943 - Saturday - During the afternoon an observer in the outpost on DJ. KSIARA spotted hostile vehicles moving south on the road east of DJ. KETCHEM. The size of the movement indicated a large force in motion toward MACKENASSY. During the night listening posts on DJ. KSIARA reported noise of large tank formations in our front to the east.

Later that afternoon Colonel Drake issued orders to the Service Company that all heavy trucks of the 168th Infantry would be moved to SBEITLA at dark that night to go into bivouac there, and that a Quartering party would be sent out by infiltration that afternoon to prepare for their reception. Heavy enemy activities was observed in front of the position throughout the day and it appeared as though an attack was imminent. Orders were issued for breakfast at 0400 hours and to "Stand To" at 0500 hours the next morning. At 2350 hours a telephone call came through to the Regimental C.P. for Colonel Drake to report to the C.C.A.C.P. There he met General Eisenhower, the Allied Commander-in-Chief, who presented to him the Silver Star Medal for the action at SENEED.

28. 14 February 1943 - Sunday - The enemy attacked at 0630 hours with two divisions of Panzers, the 10th and 21st. The German Group Commander of the Panzer Divisions was General Schmidt. The enemy first hit DJ. LESSOUDA with two battalions of tanks, one from the north and one from the east. The heavy north westerly wind had been blowing all night, during which the tanks moved up in the face of the wind without their noise being detected. Patrols had been ordered out every night by higher authority, in spite of the fact that there was but a restricted sector to patrol in the front. It was obvious to anyone that the enemy could locate the patrols and grab them at any time that they might wish to do so. One patrol stationed near FAID PASS on Saturday night was never heard of afterwards. Outside of one or two patrols to capture prisoners, it appeared that the patrols were unnecessary. Quite often most of them were killed, as the Germans would lie in wait for the patrols after the first couple of nights. Coming from the north and the east the two forces of German tanks closed on DJ. LESSOUDA. Through his field glasses Colonel Drake counted eighty-three German tanks in front of DJ. LESSOUDA. At daylight there were flashes of gun fire from the two German forces direct on the position. This almost instant action destroyed all seven of the American tanks with Lt. Colonel Waters. There were a few pieces of armored artillery which were knocked out at the same time. One company of infantry out on the desert dug-in in front of DJ. LESSOUDA was immediately overrun. What became of the infantry in those holes was never known, though two or three men from that company said that the men could be seen lying in the fox holes and the enemy tanks would put a track in the fox hole, turn around on them and crush the soldier into the ground. The remainder of the battalion was back in the hills just outside of DJ. LESSOUDA and later, under Major Moore, about half of them got through to the American lines.

29. Combat Command Headquarters was in SIDI BOU ZID, while the 168th Infantry CP was a mile and half farther east in a small olive grove. The Third Battalion of the 168th Infantry and the 17th Field Artillery were at DJ. KSAIRA, about four and one-half miles farther east. The remainder of the artillery of the armored command was out on the plains between the 168th Infantry CP and DJ. KSAIRA. One company of tanks under Lt. Colonel Hightower was in SIDI BOU ZID with the armored CP. While the battle of DJ. LESSOUDA was going on there was a large troop movement, including tanks, coming toward SIDI BOU ZID from the southeast. Air bombardment was called for, but did not

materialize. The armored artillery followed by the 17th Field Artillery, left their positions and withdrew to the rear. The withdrawal soon became a rout in some cases. At this juncture Colonel Drake reported by telephone to General McQuillin that the troops appeared to be panicky. The general directed him, "You are on the spot, take command and stop it." Colonel Drake asked, "You mean for me to take command of all troops in the area?" General McQuillin's reply was "Yes." Steps were taken which effectively stopped the withdrawal. Troops infiltrating to the rear were stopped and held in a state of readiness. About thirty minutes after this conversation the Executive Officer, 168th Infantry, Lt. Colonel Gerald Line came to where Colonel Drake was watching the battle of DJ. LESSOUDA through his field glasses and said, "General McQuillin is on the telephone and said he is pulling out and for you to stay here." Colonel Drake's instructions previously had been that he would hold his position to the last man. Colonel Drake went to the telephone but it was dead. The Communications Officer, First Lt. Edgar P. Moschel, 168th Infantry, reported that he had sent out two men to check the line. These men soon reported in and stated that they found that the telephone on the other end of the line was gone,

30. The outpost now reported an enemy column coming from the south. The enemy was flanking the position on three sides. Some of the enemy tanks had gone around DJ. LESSOUDA in a movement which cut a road junction seven miles west of DJ. LESSOUDA. All traffic leaving SIDI BOU ZID by road was now blocked. The morale of most of the men was low. Colonel Drake was repeatedly importuned if the troops should not pull out as the others had done. His reply was to the effect that he intended to attack; that it was his belief that an attack was his best defense, and that he was going to capture the high ground at GARET HADID, about a mile to the front. The enemy was coming up from both east and west and closing in. The Band, 168th Infantry, under Second Lt. Seymour R. Bolton, was immediately started forward as scouts along each side of the road leading toward GARET HADID. At this time Company A, 16th Engineers First Armored Division, reported to Colonel Drake. The Company Commander, Captain William R. A. Kleystauber, 16th Engineers, said that he had been told by General McQuillin to report to Colonel Drake and there to render any assistance possible. Colonel Drake immediately sent forward this Engineer Company and Company E, of the 168th Infantry, Headquarters Company, less Dets. 168th Infantry, under Captain Bernard U. Bolton,

along with several hundred men that had been picked up from units outside the regiment, in an attack to seize GARET HADID. Company E, 168th Infantry, under Captain Donald L. Wilkinson had been on duty protecting the artillery and was now available to its regimental commander after the evacuation of the artillery. Outposts were left on the road to take care of anything that came through. On the way forward to GARET HADID Colonel Drake found a platoon of light tanks returning. The Lieutenant in command stated that he had been out as right flank outpost. He reported that the enemy was attacking in force with heavy tanks immediately behind him and that his instructions had been in such an event to withdraw. Colonel Drake explained to the Lieutenant that he was now in command of all troops in the area and that the tanks would now be under his, Colonel Drake's orders. The platoon of light tanks was immediately launched into the attack, and the improvised force, due to its speed of advance, was successful in reaching and seizing GARET HADID before the enemy could bring sufficient force to prevent them. The remnants of Company A, 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, under Captain Otto C. Amerell, were also placed in position, as they come back. The Cannon Company, 39th Infantry, Captain "Buck" Walters commanding, and the seven 37MM Towed guns that were with Company A, 16th Engineers. The First Platoon, Company C, 109th Engineers, under First Lt. Royal I. Lee, was given the task of mining the road leading northeast around GARET HADID, while Company A of the 16th Engineers, covered the mine field at the eastern end of it. All troops made hurried preparations for a last minute defense of GARET HADID. As the troops deployed for the defense of GARET HADID, the enemy came within gun range. There was a small exchange of fire whereupon the enemy deployed and then cautiously attacked. Had they gone on through the Americans would have been defeated. They did not attack in force at this time, but instead started a deliberate siege. The enemy besieged GARET HADID from all sides. By this time a check made by the Adjutant, Major Merle A. Meacham showed that about 950 men were employed in the defense of GARET HADID. About 300 of them were not armed, and these included men from tanks, reconnaissance units, tank destroyers and artillery units. Some of the men had procured side arms and guns that they had found in shot-up half-tracks. A hurried effort was made to secure arms from those found abandoned in an effort to arm everyone. This, of course, could not be done. The enemy made several attacks during the 14th, 15th and 16th of February.

31. On the 15th they began to drive in heavily and on three

different occasions penetrated as far as the CP. Several snipers worked throughout the position causing casualties and constant effort to wipe them out was exerted at all times. Due to the rough ground and the several pieces of artillery picked up in the move to GARET HADID, the enemy tanks could not get into the American forces to overrun them. All of the artillery was knocked out by the 16th of February by direct fire. Casualties were heavy and finally the enemy pushed in the right flank. A counter attack with two platoons was made and drove the enemy back to his original position. A tall inverted cone of rock controlled the whole rear position. Only six men could be spared to garrison this cone. The enemy succeeded in scaling the side and killed three of these men. The other three men came back and reported that they had been driven off. Colonel Drake sent one officer, Second Lt. Seymour A. Bolten, with six men of the Regimental Band to retake this position. They did retake it and their efforts saved the entire position from being penetrated. On the 15th the situation became very desperate as there had been no food nor water since supper on the 13th; casualties were heavy, no medical assistance other than first aid could be given to the wounded. The fighting did not let up day or night and finally on the 16th the enemy was able to get through. The entire rear and right flank were driven in. Losses began to mount. During this time Colonel Drake kept in contact with the armored forces to the rear by radio, using a code which had been arranged with the division Communications Officer before they went into action. The radio, however, would function only in the daytime. As soon as the sun went down the radio would fade out and there were no further communications with the outside world until the sun came up the next morning.

32. All guns of the 39th Cannon Company and all 37s were knocked out by noon 16th February. Reinforcements had been promised by the First Armored Division Headquarters, but each of the two attempts made were attacked in force by the enemy and failed to get through. Supplies were asked for by air. Ammunition was asked for but none came. Air bombardment on the numerous enemy artillery batteries in plain view was asked for but none materialized. On the 16th of February the enemy first attacked the Third Battalion, 163th Infantry, on DJ. KSAIRA. The Third Battalion was able to withstand the attack, although their position had become somewhat confused by the 17th Field Artillery which had moved back and forth and finally after leaving caused a collapse on their left. When the artillery moved out the Third Battalion was left in a scattered position. At 1400 hours on the

16th it became increasingly clear that the force could not hold out for more than one day longer.

33. At this hour the situation was thus: The rear of the position was driven in; the right flank was in process of being driven in; ammunition was running low; the center had been penetrated three times by tanks and the lack of water was becoming increasingly grave. The men having not eaten or had a drink of water for three days, along with the hot weather and nervous exertion, reduced many to a pitiful state.

At 1430 hours on the 16th of February 1943, Colonel Drake received a radio message from General Ward to this effect, "We can do no more for you. The decision is yours. I will try to have supplies dropped to you." The supplies were never dropped. This message which came in the clear was not understood because it presented problems which had not been in question! The orders were to hold this position. Was it intended that the decision was up to Colonel Drake, 'either to surrender, continue the defense or to withdraw'? No one was told of the contents of this message except the Communications Officer, Lt. Moschel, who received it, the radio operator, the Executive Officer, Lt. Colonel Line, the Chaplain, Stephen W. Kane, and the Commanding Officer, Colonel Drake. At 1500 hours on this date Colonel Drake received another message from General Ward, "Look for dropped message at 1700 hours." Colonel Drake assumed that they were going to order him to withdraw. He made all preparations for withdrawal that night and after a careful estimate of the situation, before which Chaplain Kane, standing in full view of enemy snipers with his hands raised in Benediction, asked the Blessing of God upon the decision, selected the route west along foot of GARET HADID, thence Southwest following the foothills until clear; thence Northwest across country to EL HAMIR. He sent a code message to Lt. Colonel John H. Van Vliet, Jr., of the Third Battalion to prepare to withdraw on order that night and then completed arrangements for the withdrawing of his own men from GARET HADID. He called a conference of his unit commanders for 1900 hours that night.

34. At about 1700 hours, three American fighter planes came over, flew directly over GARET HADID, and dropped a message on DJ. KSAIRA four and one-half miles to the north of his position, and at the point where the fighting was going on between the Third Battalion and the Germans. Fortunately the message dropped on the American Side. It

was about 2000 hours before Colonel Drake got the information it contained. It was not understood how the airplanes missed GABET RADID for this location was well known and identification panels were out. The message was long and the Commanding Officer of the Third Battalion had to decode and encode it. (See Incl. No. 1 for gist of the message contained in second paragraph.) It was then forwarded to Colonel Drake. Fortunately the message did not change any of the plans previously made. Colonel Drake was ordered to withdraw that night under cover of darkness. The route was left to his discretion. He was further ordered that all men would go to SBEITLA and that he was to be certain that each man understood that. The message added that an air umbrella would be provided and all support possible would be rendered for the withdrawal. These instructions were passed on to the unit commanders, the wounded were assembled; the most seriously wounded were placed in ambulances and the rest of the wounded were covered with canvas in the area and left under suitable medical personnel with supplies. At 2200 hours the withdrawal started. First the troops from GABET RADID leaving outposts in position, followed by the Third Battalion in column. The tires of all vehicles were slashed, magnetos and radio parts buried, all machine gun bolts were hidden and everything done to make the abandoned equipment unserviceable without creating noise which would give the withdrawal away.

35. The Third Battalion started their march from their position thirty minutes before those from GABET RADID, so as to close the distance between the units. As the Third Battalion was attempting to cross the open desert between DJ. KSAIRA, a German scout car challenged them. One of our soldiers tossed a grenade into the scout car which set it on fire and burned it up. This did not excite the Germans as there was a great deal of confusion in the area, shooting, etc. The movement was not discovered. Colonel Drake lead the column through a German tank park and bivouac area without being apprehended. They marched all night covering between 22 and 26 miles with only one rest of a few minutes at midnight. Efforts had been made to get through by radio to General Ward to find out where the rendezvous point was located. It was perfectly obvious that he could not march to SBEITLA before dawn, so he set EL HAMIR, the only high ground between SBEITLA and his position, as the rendezvous point, and hoped that help would be there to meet him at that point. At dayling EL HAMIR could be seen in front of the column about a mile away. (Many months later it was learned that the 6th Armored Infantry Garrison had been withdrawn

from there the night before after the orders for the withdrawal had been given).

36. The column had become somewhat disorganized in marching and at this point proper approach formation was taken up. When the returning men attempted to cross the road into the foot hills of EL HAERA a machine gun opened up on the right column from the hills as a German motorized column came up the road. The enemy stopped and started leaping from their trucks, while enemy tanks immediately began encircling the American column. One U. S. plane flew over at this point and opened fire on the column. Our men, with surging morale, thought it was the promised air support, but it apparently was a lone night fighter a little late getting back from its mission. One German truck was hit and set on fire. Colonel Drake immediately deployed his mixed command and opened fire with the weapons that they had. By this time there were about 400 men in the command and not more than half of them were armed. Colonel Drake asked for volunteers of an officer and men; the officer to lead the group of men to a knoll in their rear as the German Infantry was running to circle them. First Lieutenant William Rogers, Artillery Liaison Officer of the 91st Armored Artillery, volunteered to lead the twelve men and urged them to follow him. They gained the desired ground, a little knoll in the desert, and there they were able to hold the enemy off for about an hour. At the termination of the hour Lt. Rogers and all of his men had been killed.

The Germans brought up several tanks, all of them with yellow tigers painted on their sides and opened fire. They also set up machine-gun positions and supplemented that with rifle fire. While they were doing this their infantry completely encircled the small American force. After three and one-half hours of fighting the American fire power diminished and then practically ceased as the men were out of ammunition or had become casualties. Finally a German armored car bearing a white flag came dashing into the American circle. Colonel Drake ordered his men to wave the car away. When the car failed to respond he then ordered his men to fire upon the German car. Some of the men began to fire, but others could not as they had no ammunition and then they began surrendering in small groups. German tanks came in following that vehicle without any negotiations for surrender. The Germans had used the white flag as subterfuge to come inside the circle of defense without drawing

fire. Their tanks closed in from all directions cutting Colonel Drake's forces into small groups. The men who did not surrender were killed by the Germans. One tank came toward Colonel Drake and a German officer pointing a rifle at him called out, "Colonel, you surrender." The Colonel replied, "You go to hell," and turned his back. He then walked away and two German soldiers with rifles followed him at a distance of about fifty yards. Colonel Drake was then stopped by a German Major who spoke good English and was asked to get in the German Major's car where he was taken to German Divisional Headquarters. Colonel Drake was taken to General Schmidt, Group Commander of the 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions at German Divisional Headquarters where the German General immediately came forward to see him, drew up at attention, saluted and said, "I want to compliment your command for the splendid fight they put up. It was a hopeless thing from the start, but they fought like real soldiers." He also stated, "I called my regimental commander, who held you at GARET HADID this morning, and asked him how the Americans were". He replied that 'they were alright; that he hadn't heard a sound from them', and I find you back here. I am glad to have you for now I can go on to fight your comrades at SBEITLA." The German Commander promised Colonel Drake that all the American wounded would be cared for and that he could leave American medical personnel to properly look after them, but immediately upon Colonel Drake leaving the field, the American medical personnel was carried off as prisoners and the American dead and wounded left to the ravages of the Arabs who proceeded to immediately strip the dead and wounded and to beat insensible those wounded who protested to the stripping of their clothes. The American prisoners were assembled in a group and under guard marched back that afternoon and night along the road to DJ. LASSOUDA. Those Americans who were slightly wounded or who became ill because of fatigue, lack of food and water and could not keep up with the column were ruthlessly bayoneted or shot. Many were walking barefooted because the Arabs had taken their shoes from them under the supervision of the German soldiers.

37. The statements of Lt. Colonel Van Vliet and First Lt. Moschel are attached to this report as inclosures No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, which cover the highlights of the report.

38. Prisoners-of-War

a. The men had been left to the systematic robbery of the

German soldiers, and some junior officers, for a period of about an half hour. During this time pockets and kits were thoroughly searched, often at the point of the rifle or the bayonet presented at the unprotected belly, while watches, rings, pocketbooks, pens and all valuables were ruthlessly seized. They were then formed in a column of fours, officers at the head, and started to the rear. Three German tanks brought up the rear of the column, which was flanked by armed guards, waiting to strike, bayonet or shoot, any who for any reason straggled.

b. All day they marched through desert sands with unrelieved thirst almost unbearable. Colonel Drake appealed to the German Commander in the name of common humanity to give the men a drink of water, but was met with the statement, "We only have enough for our troops." Near midnight they were finally halted for the remaining hours of darkness. The men were herded into a circle in the open desert and there practically froze in the piercing cold of the African night.

c. At dawn, 18 February 1943, trucks came, in which the men were packed, and thus transported to SFAX where THE FIRST FOOD WAS EATEN IN FIVE DAYS! Black sawdust bread was issued them along with water, as they were corralled into an open wired-in compound, roughly 100 yards square, and flanked by towers with machine guns in them. The men burrowed into the ground for warmth, scooping out the sand with their hands. No means whatsoever was provided for ordinary sanitation. Officers and men thrown in like pigs.

d. The next day trains were provided, 40 to 60 men in a livestock car built for eight horses. The misery, squalor and suffering endured will remain fresh in their memories. Two days and one night were used to get to SOUSSE where the men were permitted to get out for latrine purposes. During all this time no provision had been made for men to answer the calls of nature as they were kept locked in the cars in darkness. One day in the yards at SOUSSE and then on to TUNIS under exactly the same conditions just described.

e. At TUNIS they were turned over to the inquisitors headed by a German called "Charley" who at the "School House" amused himself by stamping an iron shoe heel onto a soldiers instep or twisting his fingers while backed up by loaded and bayoneted rifles, all in an effort to obtain military information. Another method was softly saying

a little trip out in the dark and the soldier's mother would never know what became of her darling boy. However, "Charley", although he had lived many years in America, was very gullible and was soon assiduously writing down fantastic stories that had no basis of fact.

f. From TUNIS the men were marched to the airport eight kilometers from the city and there most of them were transported by air in JU 52's to ITALY. Others went by water. All ended up at CAPUA, a collecting camp which stood out as a new low level. The men slept on the ground, which was dusty, and the nights were very chilly. No utensils were provided and the men procured rusty tin cans from a heap in the camp and with improvised spoons from boards which contributed proportionate dignity to the menu of cabbage water provided once daily. Two weeks of CAPUA and then they were ready to leave for the regular prison camps in Germany and Poland.

2 Incls:

1. Statement of Van Vleit
2. Statement of Moschel

Thomas D. Drake
THOMAS D. DRAKE, 015384
Colonel, G.S.C., WDGS
(Formerly Commanding 168th Inf)

SUBJECT: Brief of Statement of Lt. Colonel John H. Van Vliet, Jr.
(To accompany Report on Operations of 168th Infantry
between 24 December 1942 and 17 February 1943)

1. Consolidated position of Third Battalion on DJ KSAIRA on 13 February 1943. Completed plans on 14th. Last ration for one day arrived early morning hours 13th. Communication by telephone lasted until 2020 hours, 16 February.

2. Dropped message by air at 1643 hours, 16 February - two typewritten sheets. Gist of message:

"Dear Drake: The tank battle which you saw Sunday went rather badly for us. It appears that your best hope is to cut your way back to SHEITLA. (A description followed of coordinates - that positions on way back should be reported on.) If done by day a diversion attack and air umbrella would be given".

The message was too long so it was condensed and encoded in special regimental code and sent to Regimental CP at 1800 hours.

3. About 1430 hours, 16 February, received code from Colonel Drake. "How long would it take you to cut your way out and join me at GARET HADID? Be prepared for prompt move, but make no change in disposition until you receive direct order from me." Reply sent immediately, "Will not attempt until after dark on order. There are eight 88's between you and me."

4. About 2025 hours received another code from Colonel Drake, giving route to be taken on withdrawal to start at 2200 hours. "Withdraw to GARET HADID, proceed to west along there, thence S.W. following foothills until clear, thence N.W. to EL HAMRA." Left at 2310 hours (plans already having been made), one platoon (Lt Hatchett) left engaged with enemy as covering force, to withdraw on three signal flares, which were fired from flats near SIDI BOU ZID at about 0230 hours. Proceeded by route following in rear of Regimental Group. No enemy encountered - tail of column had brush with a half-track (one of ours manned by enemy). Rifle fire and grenades destroyed the half-track, all killed in vehicle except one man who escaped. Near foot of HADID mountain saw a shelter with light in it - heard voices - passed within 75 yards, but not accosted. Passed through the enemy tank park

after turning northwest. During movement in dark over distance of 26 miles the battalion became divided into four groups besides the platoon of Lt. Hatchett's which followed in rear.

5. About 0730 hours, Wednesday, 17 February, became engaged with enemy. The sound of heavy firing came from ahead of us which I thought was the Regimental Group. Some small units of Second Battalion had become mixed among my men. Organization was practically gone, due to lack of food, water and extreme fatigue. Ammunition was very scarce. Many M1 rifles were jammed and would not function. After we had been exposed to their fire for some time I saw it was hopeless and put my white handkerchief on a stick and waved it - that was that!

6. The end of Lt. Colonel Van Vliet's statement to Colonel Drake. Later he made the same statement to Colonel Drake in presence of the Third Battalion's Executive Officer, Major Emanuel M. Robertson.

I certify the above is a true statement made from the notes I took down at the time it was made to me.

Thomas D. Drake
THOMAS D. DRAKE
Colonel, G.S.C.

SUBJECT; Brief of Statement of First Lt. Edgar P. Moschel, Regimental Communications Officer, 168th Infantry. (To accompany Report on Operations of 168th Infantry between 24 December 1942 and 17 February 1943)

1. Sunday morning 14 February, 1943, maintained direct communication with Combat Command "A" until they were forced out of SIDI BOU ZID - radio contact, but no traffic. Call came from Combat Command "A" about 0630 hours to cut all lines to DJ. LESSOUDA road junction that enemy tanks were coming in their direction. Never heard from the two linemen afterwards.

2. About 0800 hours I heard Colonel Drake talking over the telephone to General McQuillin that Artillery was fleeing the battlefield in panic, and that he, Colonel Drake, was watching one battery at the time. Apparently there was some controversy as Colonel Drake said, "I know what I'm talking about. I know panic when I see it". I then heard Colonel Drake repeat after him that he was to take charge of the situation and the command of all troops in the area. Colonel Drake then sent word to Captain Wilkinson, Company E, to give artillery protection. The lines had been torn out by the fleeing artillery so two messengers were started out, but about five minutes later the line was repaired and the message cleared. The Third Battalion lines went out at the same time, but were soon repaired.

3. About 0830 hours Lt. Colonel Line, Executive Officer, 168th Infantry, received a call from General McQuillin that Combat Command "A" Headquarters was pulling out. He asked the General to talk to Colonel Drake who was forward observing the fighting at DJ. LESSOUDA and the action of the artillery. When Colonel Drake came to the telephone the line was dead and I heard Lt. Colonel Line repeat to Colonel Drake that Combat Command "A" Headquarters was pulling out and that Colonel Drake was to stay where he was. Efforts to contact Combat Command "A" Headquarters were fruitless, so I sent a lineman to Combat Command "A" CP, where he found a dead end. While he was there a staff officer of General McQuillin's came back to the scene and used the lineman's telephone to call Colonel Drake. Shortly after this the entire CP was alerted to move in either direction, to either go forward in attack or withdraw.

4. Some time before noon Colonel Drake sent an order to Captain

Wilkinson to move Company E to GARET HADID and shortly after this the CP was moved forward to GARET HADID. By this time German tanks were behind us and had occupied SIDI BOU ZID. All transportation around the CP, the Cannon Company, 39th Infantry, the AT Company and the Regimental Medical Section was moved forward to GARET HADID. After getting there, shortly before noon, I received a radio message from Headquarters First Armored Division that the SOI had been compromised and not to use it. During the afternoon numerous air targets were sent back, but none acted on. Late that evening during one of the attacks on us, three German tanks penetrated our CP position causing considerable damage, but they were forced back. A German Infantry attack was made on the left flank and every man, including messengers, was sent out to repulse it.

5. In the morning of 15 February a message was radioed by Colonel Drake to Armored Division Headquarters - "How are Moore and Waters?" The reply was, "Things look good for Moore and Waters", (referring to Lt. Colonel Waters, First Armored Division and Major Moore, Commanding Officer, Second Battalion, at DJ. LESSOUDA). (We later learned Waters had been knocked out and captured about 1500 hours the day before and Moore hadn't been heard from). Targets, gun positions, 88's, enemy troops and concentrations of vehicles sent by radio to First Armored Division Headquarters throughout the day. During late evening another tank attack made by Germans on our position, it too, ~~repulsed~~ repulsed though tanks again over ran our position as far as the CP. Before this a message was received. "Help on way - be prepared to climb on Band wagon and take a ride." About 1630 hours a heavy tank battle began just west of SIDI BOU ZID. As it became dark I could see 23 fires from burning tanks.

6. Tuesday, 16 February, 0830 hours inquiry from First Armored Division, "Have you seen anything of Stack or evidence of tank battle last night?" Evidence of tank battle was sent back with word that nothing had been heard from Stack. Usual air targets were reported throughout morning. By this time considerable numbers of German troops were between us and the Third Battalion. At 1400 hours radio message from First Armored Division to Colonel Drake. "Up to your decision. Air coverage and such counter action as possible will be given", signed Ward. Repeated calls were sent by Colonel Drake to General Ward asking for rendezvous. This was sent three or four times. Finally message came to be on lookout for planes to drop message. Panels were placed out for the planes. At 1430 hours a message from Colonel Drake to Lt. Colonel

Van Vliet was received stating, "How soon could you get out and join us at GARET HADID? Be prepared for withdrawal, but make no movement except on my order." The reply was "Not by daylight ." About this time six American planes came over, flying very low, disregarded our Headquarters panels, continued on to DJ. KSAIRA and dropped the message. Part of DJ. KSAIRA was in enemy hands so we were fortunate the message fell in friendly hands, even though it was 4 1/2 miles away.

7. About 1745 hours received by radio from the Third Battalion the contents of the dropped message. (At noon that day all telephone communication had been interrupted by Germans.) At 1815 hours all commanders were called together and by then enough of the message had been decoded to give rendezvous. At 1830 hours the route of march was given and order of march. Departure to take place at 2200 hours. At that time message was given to me for Lt Colonel Van Vliet, with orders not to transmit at that time. At 1915 hours release was given to the message which covered the actions of the Third Battalion on withdrawal, although they had been alerted for move at 1430 hours. Radio went out at this time and no messages could be sent or received. This was always true in AFRICA, the radio would die out as the sun went down and come in clear the next morning with the rising sun.

8. My radio sergeant, Barnes, was on the radio set and heard several men of the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion planning on deserting that night and attempt to go to the rear. This was before any information was given out about a possible withdrawal. This information was written out on a message form and sent to Colonel Drake. Throughout the day many groups of men from the various units attached to us had left their firing positions and would come wandering back under the pretext of looking for their officers. In all cases Colonel Drake sent them back to the firing line and I heard him give Lt. Bolten (in charge of Armed Regimental Band) orders to stop all men and send them back, and to shoot any who refused to return to his position.

9. Left at 2200 hours - a guide, Lieutenant from 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, led the way as point, but was not seen after he started.

I certify the above is a true statement made from the notes I took down at the time it was made to me.

Thomas D. Drake
THOMAS D. DRAKE
Colonel, G.S.C.

SECRET

98269

(mc 4)

HEADQUARTERS 34TH INFANTRY DIVISION
UNITED STATES ARMY
APO-34

DMW/rk
6 September 1944

314.7

Subject: Unit History.

To : Commanding Officer, 168th Infantry Regiment.

1. In order to complete the historical file of the 34th Infantry Division for World War II, it is necessary to have a history of your organization from date of induction to arrival in North Africa.
2. It is therefore requested that you submit the above history, in original copy only, to this headquarters by 15 October 1944.

By command of Major General BOLTE:

5546

PERSONNEL SECTION
168th INFANTRY
RECEIVED
6 SEP 1944
14290

[Signature]
DEE M. WHITE, 98269
Lt. Col., AGD.,
Adjutant General.

1200B
Rec'd. Hq. 168th Inf. SEP 14

314.7 - 1st Ind. NK/wwh
Hq 168th Inf Regt, APO-34, U. S. Army, 14 October 1944.

To: CG, 34th Inf Div.

1. Basic communication complied with.

For the Regimental Commander:

1 Incl: Narrative.

17 98269
PM
[Signature]
NATHAN KESSLER,
1st Lt., Infantry,
Adjutant.
To Lt. Lohrey
[Signature]

SECRET

314.7 -

Hq 168th Inf Regt, APO-34, U. S. Army, 14 October 1944.

1st Ind.

NK/wwh

To: CG, 34th Inf Div.

1. Basic communication complied with.

For the Regimental Commander:

1 Incl: Narrative.

NATHAN KESSLER,
1st Lt., Infantry,
Adjutant.

