



The Spirit Lives

Vyron Drake
United States Army
3rd Infantry Division
World War II
Recipient of Three Purple Hearts

One Mans account of his attack against Nazi Germany which earned him an incredible 3 purple heart awards.

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The mission of Operation Torch was to secure French North Africa for the Allied forces in order to conduct operations on the European continent. One significant problem was that most of the landing areas were defended by French troops who had declared loyalty to Germany after France fell. This meant that the Americans, British,

and Free-French forces would have to fight their former allies. The invasion was scheduled for November 1942 and would take place in three places, 1st would be Casablanca, an Atlantic port city on Morocco, followed by the capture of the Algerian port cities of Oran and Algiers.



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Vyron Drake at the wheel as a wounded comrade is evacuated

The 3rd Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. Lucian Truscott, was given the task of capturing Casablanca. The 3rd Division embarked aboard transport ships and sailed directly from America to Morocco in what would become the longest sea voyage preceding an amphibious landing.

On November 8, 1942, the 3rd Infantry Division stormed ashore at Casablanca supported by 400 ships and 1,000 aircraft. The invasion was a complete surprise and the 3rd Division quickly established their beachhead but the French forces fought back bitterly. For three days, the American fought the French forces until finally, the French agreed to a cease fire and joined the Allied forces. With Casablanca secured, the Allies could now move men and materiel into the Mediterranean Sea without fear of the Straights of Gibraltar being sealed off.

I entered the Army in February 1940 – two days after my 17th birthday and trained with the 3rd Infantry Division as a combat infantry soldier. At this time I was also schooled in intelligence, reconnaissance and demolition.

I was with the 3rd Division all the way from the invasion at Fedela, French Morocco through North Africa, Tunisia, Sicily Italy at Salerno, the Casino Front, the Anzio beachhead, Rome, then to Southern France and into Nuremberg, Germany. I was involved in 10 major campaigns and four amphibious invasions.

I received my first wound in action at the edge of Rome. I was driving a Jeep carrying the battalion adjutant, leading battalion point in the attack on Rome – our final objective bridge number 2 across the Tiber River. We made a wrong

turn and came out at bridge number 1. The adjutant, Captain Addison Farrell held the battalion point consisting of one tank destroyer, one medium tank and one platoon of A company at bridge number 1 while I ran recon to find a way to reach bridge number 2 across the Tiber without having to cross the river.

I went down a narrow road parallel to an old railroad bed going toward the river. The road I took led into and through a rock quarry. I went through the quarry to where it exited onto the road and saw that the road was clear to bridge 2, so I returned to the platoon. Captain Farrell started the Battalion point down the road; I started back towards the quarry following the path I had previously taken.

As we were in route to the quarry we were stopped by an Italian civilian and informed that the road from the quarry to bridge 2 was mined so we stopped and waited for the platoon to catch up so we could sweep the road for mines. While we were waiting we climbed the banks alongside the road so that we could look across the river. As we were doing this, we spotted a Tiger tank and troops along side a building across the river. Upon sighting the tank and troops we yelled to warn our platoon of the potential danger so they would have time to get into the cut. As we did this, the Tiger tank cut loose at us, and four machine guns opened up from alongside the old railroad bed wounding some of our troops and knocking out our radio. They had us bottled up. A Co. set up a light machine gun in a tunnel that led from the quarry – parallel to the road and about thirty feet away – but the enemy made it too hot for them so they abandoned their weapon leaving our flank unprotected. I ran out and grabbed the air cooled 30 caliber and one of the A Co. guys scooped up the ammo. I set up the machine gun in a 12x12 cave that had been dug into the side of the cliff and opened fire. Captain Farrell came in with his binoculars and was spotting for me while the enemy opened fire with a self propelled 88. Captain Farrell yelled, "Let's get the hell outta here," as the 88 was swinging our way but we didn't have enough time. I rolled to my left to get up when he hit the back wall – I was blown out the front wall. Somehow, I managed to get out of the debris and back into the tunnel. Captain Farrell had six bad hits in his legs but no broken bones. I was hit with small shell fragments in my hands, arms and thumb. The Soldier from A Co. was killed.

After about 20 minutes Captain Farrell's orderly came to me and said Captain Farrell had crawled out a shallow ditch along the road and was going to try to make it back to battalion station. I told the Captains orderly to hit the

ditch, catch the Captain at the group of buildings that was about 400 yards away and stop him there so that I could try to get out with the Jeep. The orderly said, "If you're going to drive out I'm going to ride." I told him that I didn't think we had much chance of making it but that I had to try, because Capt, Farrell was bleeding too badly to make it on foot

As we had no communication, we couldn't get artillery support so my mission was two fold – get Captain Farrell and myself to the medics as soon as possible and then to get wire laid from battalion headquarters to the quarry via a trail to the top of the quarry so that we could set up an Op. to direct fire on the enemy positions. We made it with only four bullet holes in the jeep.

After 2 weeks rest in Rome, we moved back to Naples, regrouped, re-equipped and went aboard ship for the invasion of Southern France at Toulon.

We were attached to the first France Army for 183 days during which time we were in continuous combat without relief. November 4, 1944 at St. Elizabeth, France, we were holding as our 3rd Battalion pushed through us and we moved out on a tangent of attack. While we were holding the Germans were shelling us with artillery and one round hit a telephone pole up high and the air burst got several of us with shell fragments. I got patched up and refused evacuation.

The 3rd Division fought on through the Vosge Mountains; breaking through the Rattle Hitler line and the S. Die front into the Colmar pocket. We spent the worst part of that winter fighting in 30 inches of snow.

After breaking out at Colmar, we kept going to the Rhine and were relieved by the French and we moved up to relieve the 40th Infantry Division in the Bitch Huguenot sector. We crossed the Rhine pushing on through Germany towns, by town to Neuremburg, Germany.

Neuremburg was strongly defended, so we laid in a concentrated artillery barrage. When the barrage was lifted I drove my Commanding Officer and his orderly on a recon into town. As we rounded one corner we took a rifle shot through the windshield just missing the Captain.

I started to back around the corner and as I turned my head I took the next shot through my throat and shoulder. I made it around the corner and backed into an alley where my strength left me shock took over. The Captain and orderly helped me into the back of the Jeep and took me to the

Battalion aid station. That was the end of combat for me.

I have written about the three times that I didn't duck fast enough, but haven't written about the hundreds of like situations where but for the grace of God I should have been killed.

Vyron & Lisa Drake have been a volunteers with the Muscular Dystrophy Foundation 1983-84. Vyron Drake was the President of Central Valley chapter of Muscular Dystrophy Association. Member of the Order of The Odd Fellows Lodge. The Drakes volunteered to work with the "Make A Wish Foundation", granting wishes for terminally ill children until 1990. Vyron was responsible for setting up a scholarship program-giving students attending Gateway High School in Clovis, California. This program is in affect now and is designed for students returning to school to receive their High School Diploma. Vyron Drake is the Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart and is helping homeless veterans.



The tower from where the German sniper shot, piercing Vyron Drakes neck and shoulder with a bullet.