

BY NOLAND NORGAA RD

WITH U.S. FORCES ON THE TUNISIAN FRONT, MARCH 5-(AP)-(DELAYED)-(AP)- BECAUSE A GERMAN TANK CREW WAS MORE INTENT ON COLLECTING PISTOLS AND WATCHES THAN PRISONERS, 17 OFFICERS AND MEN OF AN AMERICAN FIELD ARTILLERY BATTERY AND A MEDICAL UNIT ESCAPED CAPTURE EVEN AFTER THE TANKS KNOCKED OUT MOST OF THEIR VEHICLES AND LEFT THEM FAR IN THE REAR.

THE HEADQUARTERS AND MEDICAL VEHICLES WERE CLOSE BEHIND THE GUNS WHEN THE GERMANS DROVE TOWARD SBEITA AND WERE WITHIN RANGE OF THE NAZI TANKS WHEN THEY ATTEMPTED TO WITHDRAW.

THE TANKS' 47-MILLIMETER GUNS KNOCKED OUT A HALF-TRACK WITH THREE DIRECT HITS. ANOTHER HALF-TRACK, MANNED BY SERGT. DAVID THIBAUT OF 3831 FAIRVIEW ST., DETROIT, MICH., FORMER DETROIT NEWS REPORTER, STALLED SO HE SET FIRE TO IT AND THEN SET OUT AFOOT.

THE OCCUPANTS OF THE AMBULANCE VEHICLES AND OTHERS IN THE RED CROSS RAN INTO THE FIELDS WHEN THE TANKS OPENED UP, MASTER SERGT. CLIFFORD HUTCHISON OF LOUISVILLE, KY., RELATED.

"FIVE OF THOSE GERMAN MARK IV TANKS CAME ACROSS THE FIELD TOWARD US AND THEY COULD HAVE MOVED US DOWN," HUTCHISON SAID. "INSTEAD THEY DROVE UP AND THE TANKMEN TOOK OUR PISTOLS. SOME OF OUR MEN HELD UP THEIR HANDS, EXPLOSING THEIR WATCHES. THE GERMANS TOOK THOSE, TOO. I KEPT MY HANDS DOWN AND THEY DID NOT SEE MINE.

"THEY DIDN'T FIRE ON THE RED CROSS VEHICLES. THEY WAVED FOR US TO GO ON OVER TO A NEARBY ARABIAN VILLAGE OUT OF THE WAY. MAYBE THEY FIGURED THEIR INFANTRY WOULD COME ALONG AND PICK US UP.

"WHEN WE GOT IN THE VILLAGE WE FOUND TWO WOUNDED MEN. ONE WAS HIT BADLY AND SOME MERCIFUL GERMAN TANKMAN HAD TAKEN TIME TO PUT HIS HEAD DOWN IN A SLIT TRENCH TO REDUCE THE INJURY FROM SHOCK AND THEN ASSURED HIM IN THE BEST ENGLISH HE COULD SPEAK THAT HELP WOULD COME SOON.

"THE ARABS WERE EXTREMELY FRIENDLY. ONE WANTED ME TO HIDE UNDER HIS ROBE TO GET AWAY SAFELY. THEN TWO OTHERS BROUGHT US TWO VERY OLD FRENCH RIFLES AND AN OLD BAG FULL OF AMMUNITION. THEY TOLD US TO GO RIGHT AWAY, TO KEEP AWAY FROM THE GERMANS.

HUTCHINSON AND OTHERS LOADED THE WOUNDED MEN INTO AN AMBULANCE WHICH CAPT. ROBERT C. BATEMAN OF SPRINGFIELD, KY., A MEDICAL OFFICER, DROVE OUT THROUGH THE GERMAN LINE.

OTHERS WHO HIKED OUT 17 MILES TO REJOIN THEIR UNIT INCLUDED CORP. JOSEPH LONGORIA OF MISSION, TEX.

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EARNINGS