

Combat Orders at Kasserine Pass 1943

U.S. Army II Corps was badly defeated at Kasserine Pass in February 1943. The first combat between the U.S. Army and the German Army in World War II occurred in Tunisia. In a series of battles fought during February 1943, II Corps was surprised, outflanked, outfought, and humiliatingly defeated.

II Corps was commanded by Major General Lloyd R. Fredendall. It consisted of three divisions: 1st Armored Division under Major General Orlando Ward, 1st Infantry Division under Major General Terry Allen, and 34th Infantry Division under Major General Charles Ryder.

The 1st Armored Division was II Corps' strongest unit. A new brigade-level organization, the "Combat Command" gave this division the flexibility to task-organize for multiple missions. Combat Command A (CC A) was led by Brigadier General McQuillin. Combat Command B (CC B) was led by Brigadier General Robinett. CC A defended *Faid Pass* on 10 February 1943.



In just two days, 14 and 15 February 1943, II Corps lost 1,600 men, 100 tanks, 57 half-tracks, and 29 artillery pieces. General Fredendall, losing control of the battlefield, then pulled back toward Kasserine Pass, where his forces were again mauled days later. Following this debacle, three generals, including General Fredendall, were relieved.

General Fredendall's II Corps could not issue clear, concise, combat orders.
One of his Kasserine Pass orders is printed below.

- It is not a corps-level order at all. It is not even a division-level order. It is essentially a poorly-written brigade order containing detailed guidance to battalions for the defense of two hills, Djebel Ksaira and Djebel Lessouda.
- There is no mission statement. There is no intent. There is no overall plan.
- It does not follow the then-existing five-paragraph Army format.
- It bypasses the division commander and micromanages the brigade commander, tasking battalions, patrols, and even individuals, four or five levels down, a level of detail far beyond II Corps' span of control.
- It is excessively long, wordy, and difficult to understand.
- It is full of micromanaging and more-of-the-obvious "how-to" guidance, indicated by the large number of "must" and "should" statements.
- It was even unclear to the General, so he added a handwritten postscript.

General Fredendall issued these detailed dispositions from a map in a bunker 100 miles behind the front. This misguided order doomed two reinforced battalions to destruction on Djebel Ksaira and Djebel Lessouda.

Comments:	Headquarters II Corps	Notes:
<p>II Corps is directly tasking units of one brigade inside 1st Armored Division.</p> <p>There is no Corps mission. There is no division mission. There is no brigade mission.</p> <p>Brigade scheme is dictated: two</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">APO NO. 302 11 February, 1943</p> <p>SUBJECT: Defense of FAID position</p> <p>TO: Commanding General, 1st Armored Division</p> <p>1. You will take immediate steps to see that the following points concerning defense of the FAID position are put into effect:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">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 counterattack. 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 a company of tanks for defense of DJ LESSOUDA. Remainder of artillery is at present satisfactorily</p>	<p><i>Faid Pass lies between two hills, Ksaira and Lessouda.</i></p> <p>DJ is short for <i>djebel</i> or hill.</p>

<p>battalions positioned on two hills.</p> <p>A third CATK battalion is placed at Sidi Bou Zid.</p> <p>II Corps specifies the locations for listening posts(!)</p> <p>II Corps delegates responsibility to liaise with adjacent British forces.</p> <p>II Corps passes training guidance on good patrols, and tasks specific locations for patrols.</p>	<p>located. It should, however, furnish its own local protection, and be prepared to shift rapidly.</p> <p>b. Additional Reserves: The 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry, now under your control, should immediately send a liaison officer to HQ., CC 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 ensure rapid movement and employment of this Battalion once it has been ordered.</p> <p>c. Reconnaissance: It is extremely important that reconnaissance and counter reconnaissance be conducted by you from HADJEB EL AIOUN on the North to the pass between DJ MAIZTLA (Djebel Maizila) and DJ GOULEB 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 Derbyshire 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 AIOUN-MAIZTLA-GOULEB PASS.</p> <p>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 debouch 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 RECHAIB and DJ BOU DZEL (Djebel Bou Dser). The latter would, of course, be of great importance in the event we decide to capture FAID.</p> <p>e. 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 material is available and should be used immediately.</p> <p>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 (Ain Rebaou) - MATLEG PASS. I have asked that every effort be made to secure good pictures of the pass at T8358, FAID PASS, and MATLEG PASS.</p>	<p>CCA is BG McQuillin.</p> <p>Battalion-level guidance.</p> <p>British forces were adjacent to II Corps.</p> <p>Company-level patrol guidance.</p> <p>Battalion-level defense guidance.</p>
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<p>II Corps would prefer to micromanage CCA directly.</p>	<p>2. I desire that a copy of this directive, together with your own comments, be sent to McQuillin.</p> <p>3. You will inform me when the instructions enumerated in this directive have been complied with.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">L. R. FREDENDALL Major General U.S.A. Commanding</p> <p><i>In other words, I want a very strong active defense and not just a passive one. The enemy must be harassed at every opportunity. Reconnaissance must never be relaxed – especially at night. Positions indicated <u>must</u> be wired and mined <u>now</u>.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">L. R. F.</p>	<p>CCA is BG McQuillin.</p> <p>Handwritten defensive guidance.</p>
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General Fredendall's verbal orders, passed by radio, were equally wordy, ambiguous, and difficult to understand:

"Move your command, the walking boys, pop guns, Baker's outfit and the outfit which is the reverse of Baker's outfit and the big fellows to M, which is due north of where you are now, as soon as possible. Have your boys report to the French gentleman whose name begins with J at a place which begins with D, which is five grid squares to the left of M."

This type of verbal order, intended to deceive German radio intercept teams, was unintelligible to the General's *American* subordinates. Since the General preferred to stay in his headquarters miles from the front, he had little contact or observation of his units, and thus his orders were often tactically unsound.

Kasserine Pass is often used as an example of what happens when an experienced, well-trained army meets a green, amateur army. Leaders must know the orders process. Leaders must train to make and communicate tactical decisions. Verbal orders, especially, need to be practiced in order for leaders to develop clear concise procedures. To "train like you fight," tactical decision making and orders training is essential.