

Lt. Erwin Juster
by Troy H. Kimmel
424/HQ
Unknown POW Camp

The Story of 422d Cannon Company

Created on Thursday, 09 November 2017 10:24 | Last Updated on Thursday, 09 November 2017 11:18 | Written by 1st Lt Ervin JUSTER |

The Story of 422nd Cannon Company

On the morning of December 16, 1944, when the Germans started their drive through the Ardennes, we were occupying positions in the Siegfried Line. Our company area and gun positions were located approximately 3,000 yards Southwest of a little town called Schlossenbach, which at that time was our regimental headquarters C.P. Between regimental headquarters and our positions was located the Anti-Tank Company of the 422nd Regiment. We had occupied these positions from December 11 until December 18, 1944. Our guns were so registered as to be firing due East, and we had fired on numerous targets within our zone of fire, one being the town of Waschied.

On December 11, 1944, amid much confusion and in bitter cold, we moved into our positions that were formerly occupied by the 2nd Infantry Division. It was surprising to our inexperienced minds to find such well-prepared gun positions and section huts. The particular position that we occupied was a beautiful pine woods with a broad opening to the East, which gave us excellent fields of fire for our howitzers. We immediately layed our guns, and got everything in instant readiness for whatever surprises might arise. We were all quite excited and anticipative of what was in store for us, this being our first experience in actual combat.

The days between the 12 and 16 passed with routine duties, such as improving our gun positions, establishing O.P.'s, reconnoitering routes to our battalions, and working out fire plans with our S-3. On the morning of December 16, we were awakened at approximately 0530 by artillery fire which began falling in our area. We were quite surprised as this was our first taste of enemy fire. At about 1300 commanding officer of Cannon Company received a message from Regimental Headquarters stating that about 70 German infantrymen and several tanks had broken through to the northeast of our positions and were endangering the positions of the Regimental C.P., anti-tank company, and cannon company, and ordered us to establish a defense line running East and West, with our positions facing to the North. We quickly organized our company into three platoons, leaving just enough men behind to man the howitzers. We established this defensive line which ran along the road from Schlossenbach to Auw to St. Vith. Shortly after establishing these positions we received word by radio that our company was to advance to the northeast and attack the town of Auw. We were to do this with the help of Company "L". Our company being a cannon company had only carbines, M1 rifles, and a few anti-tank

grenades. This attack had to be made across wide open terrain which offered us absolutely no protection or concealment.

After we had proceeded about 250 yards, we were pinned down by enemy machine gun fire. We had also noticed a German armored car to our northeast. We dispatched a patrol to investigate this armored car. The majority of the machine gun fire seemed to be coming from a small clump of woods located to our northeast. We dispatched another patrol to make a wide encirclement and come into the woods from the rear of where this machine gun fire was located. In the meanwhile we had contacted our company C.P. and asked for some support. We were given two howitzers, which firing from our original company positions were able to knock out two enemy machine guns and route an enemy tank.

After this we pressed the attack further, feeling that our patrol which had gone down to silence the machine guns in the woods was at that time reaching its objective. At this point we received a message from our regimental C.P. telling us to withdraw to our original company area and set up a perimeter defense. We had to inform our patrol of these instructions. Pfc. Eldon E. Marks volunteered for this assignment. Showing outstanding courage, and at great personal risk, he crept, crawled and finally ran to the woods, enemy fire constantly kicking up the dust behind him. Our withdrawal to our company area was executed without suffering any casualties. We returned to our C.P. and established a perimeter defense for the night. On December 17, we had our communications with regimental C.P. severed.

At 1100 of that day was the time it happened, and we tried to combat this deficiency by sending Lt. Clarence A. Husterlid with his radio operator and another man as liaison. On their way to the C.P. they had to pass through the area occupied by our anti-tank company. As soon as they reached this area, they were fired upon by members of the Antitank Co. thinking they were enemy machine gunners, and they were never able to complete their mission. Lt Husterlid at this point was very seriously wounded.

Later in the day, the commanding officer of the cannon company made his way to the regimental headquarters, where he stayed, and was able to direct the fire of our howitzers on several enemy convoys, knocking out many horse-drawn artillery pieces, and ammunition trucks. Our observers constantly on the watch throughout the day were able to spot a large concentration of enemy vehicles that were located to our Northeast. That night plotting our fires very carefully we were able to set fire to the woods in which these vehicles were located causing a large explosion and a huge fire, and probably demolishing most of the vehicles.

From about 1600, we had been out of contact with the regimental C.P, and had no information as to what the situation was, as our commanding officer did not return. We received a message at about 1900 stating that supplies of food and ammunition would be dropped at certain coordinate points, and that we were to send a patrol out to pick these up. Whereas regiment could contact us, we could not contact them. Later we received a message that these supplies would not be dropped. Sensing the worst, a meeting was called, and it was decided that if we had

no further word, we would withdraw from our positions, and head in a Southwesterly direction the following morning. We laid plans to destroy the weapons and vehicles, so as not to cause any alarm.

At about 0500 of the morning of the 18th of December we contacted the company commander of regimental headquarters company by radio and asked him what the situation was. He said he could not tell us over the radio but that there was a plan. The reason he could not tell us more was that the Germans were in on our radio frequency and had succeeded in tapping some of our phones. As we were making ready to vacate our positions the morning of the 18th, we received a message from the regimental headquarters stating that we were to fire smoke and whatever remaining ammunition at points designated by regimental headquarters to cover their withdrawal, and the withdrawal of regimental headquarters company.

After firing this mission, we made ready to vacate our positions. Our instructions were that after firing this mission, we were to destroy our howitzers. We left in vehicles by a route which we had reconnoitered earlier that morning. After we had gone approximately four or five miles, we ran into the 423rd Regiment of our Division, which was going to attack the town of Schönberg. Later that afternoon, we contacted elements of our Regiment, namely, "HQ" Company, Anti-Tank Company, and together with them, and the majority of the regimental vehicles, set up positions about four miles west of Schlossenbach. We were told to remain here while the remainder of our regiment went into the attack of Schönberg with the 423rd Regiment.

We spent the night of the 18th being constantly harassed by enemy patrols. The following morning we set up a perimeter defense around the woods that we had occupied during the night. For the first time in our army career we found the men anxious to get their foxholes dug a little deeper and to have their fields of fire exact enough. As the day progressed we noticed a large number of men at a great distance to our northeast. At first we thought, perhaps, they were the advancing Germans, and we were getting ready for a real fight. At this point, two officers from our regiment came upon us and told us that the men we saw in the distance were our own men that had been captured by the advancing Germans. These two having escaped capture. We were also told that the Ninth Armored Division was on its way to assist us, and at this time should be at the town of Bleialf.

At this point, Captain E. Bruce Foster, the commanding officer of the special units battalions namely, Cannon Company, Anti-Tank Company, and "HQ" Company, asked for a volunteer to go to the town of Bleialf and contact the Ninth Armored Division. A patrol of three jeeps was organized. As the patrol proceeded to the town of Bleialf, we realized that the Germans were already to our rear, as we captured two German linesmen stringing communication wires, but we decided to proceed to the town anyway.

As we approached the outskirts of the town, we were met by overwhelming enemy forces which opened fire on us as we went down the road, causing the vehicles to stop. Showing exceeding courage, Corporal Troy H. Kimmel manned a 50 caliber machine gun and emptied a full belt of ammunition into the onrushing enemy. After

doing this, he wanted to bring up another jeep and continue firing into the advancing Germans, but he was ordered not to do so.

By this time, our patrol numbered about twelve men. We had all left our vehicles and were lying in a ditch alongside of the road. It was decided that we would try to withdraw over a hill to our left and rear. As we made our way up the hill, being hotly pursued by the advancing enemy, we discovered that the hill was much steeper than we had anticipated, and we were forced to stop. Corporal Kimmel was sent to the top of the hill to have a look on the other side to see whether the coast was clear so that we could continue our withdrawal. As we got up to continue our withdrawal several men were wounded, one of them by a land mines. As we once again paused to regain our breaths, we decided to make one more try to get over the hill. However, we were so greatly outnumbered that we were overtaken and captured by the enemy. As to how the remainder of the special units battalion was captured is not known by me, as I was a member of the advance patrol.

As it was my pleasure to be an officer with the Cannon Company from its inception until the day that it no longer existed. I wish to commend each and every man for the spirit and loyalty which they displayed throughout their training as well as their fighting days.

Source: The CUB: 106th Infantry Division Association, December 1946
<http://www.battleofthebulgememories.be/stories26/us-army25/896-the-story-of-422d-cannon-company.html>
Henri ROGISTER, webmaster

I was an enlisted man, United States Army. I am proud of that. I was drafted and I am not ashamed of that. I received sang deferments against choice I was ashamed of evenwith the draft boards reason, it was more important hauling those bombs and ammunition.

I want to write of another, I do not knew any of his background. This is not important. What is important, correcting the old story, officers were something to be run down. I wish to go the other way, I want to brag on an officer. Some of the gripes about officers being treated better than us, the enlisted men, are true. Not in my story. I want to try and express myself as to what a former officer meant to me.

This man is former Lt. Lieutenant Irvin Jester. A better man and officer, there was none. In these late years and finally a get together by mail with this man and some others of our old company, I have heard nothing except praise for our Lt. The Lt. is still his ole self, giving credit and praise to others, nothing for himself.

I knew the compassion of this man. I was the recipient of a dear John Letter from my wife. This man stood by my side, he guided me. He was there when I needed some one close to talk to. This man was an inspiration, some one to look up to. He was a man you would have followed to hell. All he would have had to do was ask. This was a very brief description of this man stateside.

Shortly after starting out some across France, this man proved himself again. Artics were almost none existent. He saw to it that any man who was not assigned to a gun crew or as a driver got them. How?, is still a question.

During battle this man did not depend on the word of ether men entirely en the condition Of men. He saw to every man personally, regardless of where that man happened to be. This man on more than one occasion risked his life to check on the safety of one man. I know, I was one of these men.

This man, an officer, did something for so that no other man has over done. He risked his life, above and beyond, trying to give me some safety. If net for this officer and his own thought of the safety of his met, I am sure I would not be here today. He did not have to **do what he did, he just that kind of a man. Maybe this will explain why I feel the attitude of enlisted men to an officer is wrong. In many cases this attitude is well founded.**

The day this man asked for volunteers for a motorized patrol. Who was the first and wanted to lead that patrol, 1st Lt. Irvin Jester? He did not get th e honor, I did. At least I was in the lead jeep. The Lt. did keep charge. I carried a guilt deep inside as for 35 years over this. I felt I had let him and many more of our comrades down that day. I felt it was my fault that be and thousands of our comrades were captured that day. After hearing of his suppose to be death, I really felt guilty. Fortunately this story turned out to be wrong.

Regardless of what I did wrong that day so many years ago, I was doing it for my Lt. He may have been younger than me. That did not matter, I looked to his and trusted him.

I never saluted this man because I had to. My respect for this man went beyond the uniform he wore, the bare on his shoulders. It was a pleasure to salute him, the man inside that uniform he so proudly was.

I do not knew what decorations and awards this man received. I can only say, if any man, officer er enlisted, Is entitled to every award the Army gives, this man, our Lt. should be included. Combat or otherwise.

In correspondence with Irvin Jester today, he still insists an giving credits praise to some one other than himself. He writes of great courage, not being afraid, very brave, the daring meritorious arrive and outstanding performance of duties of ether people. Never a word of himself. I have studied my notes, read all I could find on heroic soldiers, from these, here is a description of 1st. Lt. Irvin Jester. Gallantry - Intrepidity - Heroic Meritorious service - Outstanding performance of duty - Risked his life above and beyond - Extraordinary heroism. This was 1st. Lt. Irvin Jester.

This man I write of was also a Prisoner of War. Even the brutality of our captors did not break this man's determination to escape. He made it twice. His bravery, his devotion to duty never faltered. Yes, my attempt that cold 19th day of December, 1944 did not keep his and many more from being captured, only delayed it a matter of hours.

In my blundering way, I hope I have described the man as I knew him and served under. A man I respect and admire. Maybe you can understand, when I found out this man was still alive, I went back into time. I dug out a Letter that was written in 1945. That old letter was addressed to Robert P. Paterson., Secretary of ear. That old letter was asking for the Congressional. MEDAL of HONOR for, our Lt. Can you understand why I wrote to my

Congressman at this late date requesting his to try and got this man this high honor? There is much more to the whole story, you will have to wait. If this man does get this honor I will gladly tell the# whole story.

I only wish I could write better of this man. That is an ability I do not have. What I have written comes from my heart. Maybe, if this award is given to this mans it will may what I have failed to say, THANK YOU SIR.

This Veterans Day, 11 November, 1980 as I write this, I want to say, I stopped, stood unashamed and saluted you sir, not once but twice.

Once as an Officer of the United States Army and the uniform you wore, the last and from the bottom of my heart and tears in my eyes, I SALUTE YOU IRVIN JUSTER, the man you were and still are.

With love and Respect,
YourOld Corporal,

Troy H. Kimmel