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See Map

423 Infantry Regiment in the Ardennes Battle.
106 Inf. Div. *Chas. Chapman*
26 April

This information obtained from an interview with Lt Col Joseph F. Puett, O288767, CO, 423-2, and Capt Joshua F. Gotherland, O1726875, Bn Surgeon, 423-2, at Camp Lucky Strike (near St. Valerie-aux-Caen), France, on 17 April 1945. These officers are liberated prisoners of war awaiting shipment to the United States. Their statement was given without any of the records of their unit being at hand, but the historian furnished a 1/50,000 map of Germany, sheet 21, and showed the officers a copy of the 106 Division After Action Report for December 1944. As prisoners they had been in a camp with many other officers and men from the 106 Div and had discussed the events which had occurred many times. However, it is to be remembered that this is the first combat by the units of the 106 Div and there was no merging of this with any other combat experience. Puett had no difficulty in giving his story or remembering the events which had taken place, but frequently said that the map did not conform to the terrain. He was bitter in his feeling toward the events which had taken place as he had prepared for fifteen years to lead a battalion in combat -- an experience which had lasted only a few days. He felt that the ground was defensible against any force which could be thrown against it -- had the ^{defenders} ~~units~~ been properly disposed. He denounced as foolhardy the positions given to the two Regiments and the order which forbade any change in the positions taken over from the previous units. He believed that the two Regiments would have been capable of withdrawing if they had done so on the night of the 16th, and that the order of defense in place showed a lack of understanding of the enemy strength and position as of that time.

This information is not to be quoted without personal approval of Lt Col Puett.

John G. Westover, Historian.

On the 11 Dec the 106 Div relieved the 2nd Inf Div in place from their positions to the E of St. Vith. All three regiments were committed with Div res. consisting of 423-2 and a Bn from 424. Col Puett was the commanding officer of the 423-2, then at Bern, Belgium. On the morning of the 16 Dec (0645) 423-3 was alerted for a move. At 0800 Col Puett received word from Div that trucks would arrive at Bern, load the Bn, and take them to an assembly area NE of St. Vith. This was accomplished by 1000, at 1030 Puett reported to the Div Commander and was told to remain alert for further developments. About 1330, Puett was told by the CG to move to the vicinity of Schenberg (953888) and set up a defensive position which would defend the junction of the Luv-Andler-Schenberg rd and the Bleialf-Schenberg rd. The move to this

Coordinates agree with 589 firing chart

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position was completed by 1500 and the men began digging in. One platoon of TDs were attached.

While at Div and waiting for assignment of his unit, Puett discussed the situation with many of the officers. Everyone believed the attack then being received to be a local one except Major General Jones, the Div Cmr. A general officer from a higher headquarters (name, rank, and organization of this general officer are not recalled by Puett) visited the ~~108~~ 108 CP but insisted that the attack was ~~a small affair.~~ *a local natural.*

The position assumed by 423-2 was a semi-circle S and E of Schonberg. Company G was astride the highway a kilometer E of town, ~~a~~ a platoon of F on the highground of Hill 504 SE of town, ~~Company~~ Company E on the road a kilometer S of the town, a platoon in ~~of~~ F Bn reserve in Schonberg, and another platoon of F was ~~in~~ in St. Vith guarding a bridge. Two TDs guarded each of the roads approaching Schonberg. *In a defensive posture Puett should have dug in West of the OUR.*

At approximately 2100, 16 Dec, 423-2 was ordered to move to the high ground just S of Auw to extricate the 568 PA Bn which was being attacked by the enemy. ~~Puett~~ *had been* ~~was~~ *(Chick)* cautioned by Div that he should ~~not~~ not get heavily engaged. The trucks previously used in moving the Bn were again used. Driving was blackout and the men detrucked at (003890) after a move to the SE from Schonberg to the road NE to Auw. *These coordinates are in enemy territory.* At this detrucking point the trucks were released and did not remain with the ~~ammunition~~ *battalion*. The companies ~~were~~ immediately ~~formed~~ formed defensive positions on either side of the road. The Germans at this time held Auw and the roads were filled with their traffic. A small attack was launched on the left of the road leading into

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but not go far
 A 589 FA (M) -3-
 Aww Btrys ~~B~~ and ~~C~~, were able to withdraw with ease, but ~~A~~ was unable to do so. The btry was located in a draw at (002896) and was badly bogged in ~~the~~ ^a muddy area. Whenever motors were started in the area, ^{C coordinates dont look rig} mg and mortar ^{fell nearby} ~~within~~ the area. Toward daybreak it didn't seem possible for the btry to be withdrawn and Puett still had in mind his orders not to become heavily engaged, so Lt Col T. Payne Kelly asked and received permission to destroy the guns in the Btry ~~C~~ position. This was done. The other Btrys had already withdrawn.

During the night a patrol had been sent to make contact with the 422 Regiment at Schlausenbach. Enroute the patrol ran into three enemy tanks. In a small engagement the patrol leader was killed ~~but~~ ^{but} the patrol continued on to meet the AT Co, 422. They then returned by a circular route which brought them ~~back~~ ^{farther} to the the S. The information that there were enemy tanks at the RJ (010889) influenced Puett to put AT guns on his right flank during the night. Twice during the night the enemy made attacks S from Aww. These were at 0230 and 0430. All of the Div arty was ^{used} ~~received~~ on call and with small arms and automatic weapons fire they were turned back. ^{C what Div Arty!!} A patrol to the left went to Laudesfeld and found Germans there. Two prisoners were captured ~~there~~ and they reported the presence of a panzer CT and an infantry CT ^{in Laudesfeld.}

At 0600 a radio order from the Div Cndr was received ordering 423-2 to withdraw thru Laudesfeld. Puett told the general that this was impossible. He was then ordered to withdraw thru Schonberg. ^{The} ~~last~~ of the 589 FA Bn was then pulling out and a motorized patrol was guarding it. ^{C Faras I know 589 was long gone at 6A} The 590 FA Bn was to follow in column. The motorized

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Coords dont look right

column advanced to the RJ at (957867) but after most of the 589 PA Bn tanks had turned W on the road, enemy ~~armor~~ approached in large numbers and fired on the RJ. The last few vehicles of 589 were set ablaze and the 590 PA Bn was unable to get through. Lt Col Kelly, who was at the rear of his column of 589 vehicles, did not get through. Puett made a reconnaissance of all roads to Schonberg and St. Vith and found that all were blocked either by enemy armor or mud. German columns were found to be moving N from Bleialf, almost far enough to make a junction with those coming S from Schonberg.

590 still in position.

must have been patrol

Always thought junction was made in SCHONBERG.

By 0600 Puett realized that his unit was cut off by vastly superior enemy forces including a large amount of armor. As daylight approached (app 0700) the three enemy tanks which the patrol going to the 422 had observed, began to move W on the road to Auw. At the same moment fifteen to twenty enemy tanks with infantry riding on them began moving S from Auw. The 423-2 with their attached TD platoon took them under fire. The three tanks moving W were taken under flank fire by two 57 mm guns of 423-2 and all of them were destroyed and burned. Another TD and a 57 mm gun were on the Auw road and took the tanks moving S under fire. Four of these burned and probably many others were hit. The attack ceased within twenty minutes but from the direction of Hills 549 and 551 came flat trajectory fire which destroyed a TD and a 57mm gun and damaged another TD so that it could not fire.

About this time Puett decided to join the ~~422~~ 423 Regiments. He knew that he was cut off from Div, he had no communication with them

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as his radios had all been damaged, and that to remain near Aww would mean immediate ruin. He therefore, ^{moved the 390 FA and his Bn.} ~~withdrew~~ to the E in good order and only had one casualty in the withdrawal when an ammunition truck was hit ~~and~~ and blew up. During the fighting he had lost 1 TD, 1 57mm gun, 6 mgs, and had 2 MIA and 10 WIA. His force was still in good fighting shape.

The 423-2 reached the 423 Regiment by 1200. As Puett had no communication with Div he placed himself under the command of his Regimental Commander, Col. C.C. Cavendar. His troops were faced to the W to guard the rear of the encircled regiments; ~~and~~ on his left (S)

Puett had physical contact with 423-1 and on the right had patrol contact with the 422 Regiment. ^{The line was along the high ground S of the hill from Buckshot 4 (199)} 423-2 dug in and waited for ~~the~~ orders.

Puett privately figured that an attempt would be made by the two regiments to cut their way out almost immediately. Neither organization had any pressure at all against their front. However, communications were extremely poor as the enemy was jamming all of the radio channels and the ~~last order~~ standing order of defense in place had not been rescinded. Col. Cavendar was the senior officer of those who were encircled but to the knowledge of Puett he did not take command of the cut off forces. Puett believed that this had a great deal to do with that which followed. As Puett's men waited they had very few casualties.

Early on the morning of the 18th (0430) 423 Regiment received a message from 106 Div which Puett said he heard was seventeen hours delayed because of the channel jamming. The message said there was

a panzer CT on the Schonberg-St Vith road with its head two or three miles E of St Vith. The 423 was to withdraw to the high ground S of this column and do as much damage to it as possible. The regiment should then withdraw over the Our River. The 423 ^{was} to inform the 422 in case they should not have received the message to withdraw.

Word was sent to the 422 in regard to the move and both regiments began their march at 1000. The 422 was on the right but moved independently of the 423 and ~~there~~ no liason or contact kept between these units to the knowledge of Pruett. In the 423 CT the order of march was 2nd En, ^{3d} En, ^{1st} Bn and the 590 FA Bn. Route of march was Halenfeld-Oberlascheid-Radscheid. Just beyond Radscheid at the RJ (971862) ^{Coords look OK.} ~~considerable~~ heavy ~~considerable~~ opposition was encountered. The fighting began at 1030 and by 1130 all of the 2nd ^{Bn} was committed. The enemy was entrenched on the hill S of Radscheid and E of the Bleialf (app 968850) and brought heavy automatic fire on the CR. To get vehicles across this position Pruett had to send most of his force ~~to~~ toward Bleialf ~~while~~ yet pushing ~~it~~. A few vehicles did move beyond the CR but did not get far. As 423-2 pushed ~~the~~ the enemy gave up their ground gradually. Around noon Pruett called for help from ~~the~~ regiment but none was forthcoming until 1630 when 423-3 was committed on the right flank. Unfortunately, this Bn went too far to the right to aid 423-2 and left a considerable gap. Because of this it did not relieve any of the pressure from Pruett's force and he could not concentrate further. He therefore kept his force pushing to the ~~west~~ to hold off the Bleialf enemy. This developed into a heavy engagement. As soon as the hill (968850) was secured Pruett had command of the ~~entire~~ ~~country~~ Bleialf rd. On the 17th Pruett had

found a truck load of 81mm ammunition which belong to no one and had taken over the entire 450 rounds. This was ~~all~~ to a large extent white phosphorus. All of this ammunition was expended in the afternoon.

~~the~~ Four trucks brought reinforcements to the enemy from Bleialf about every thirty minutes. These ^{replacements} were hit by the mortar fire immediately. Puett figured that his battalion, mostly the mortars, killed about six hundred enemy in the afternoon. In one small area he counted ninety-five dead who had been killed by WP shells. The flesh was badly burned in every case. But Puett knew that he could not advance farther to the S and that he could not exert pressure to the W while holding off the enemy from the E. The battle became a stalemate in the 423-2 and remained so until the mortar ammunition was expended. Then the men continued the defense of the area using only small arms fire. ^{This day cost 2nd Pbn 250-300 casualties.} The first Bn was not committed until just at dark and it was then too late to employ them successfully as the night was very dark. During the day the 422 had not maintained contact with the 423.

Several hours after dark ^{1st and 2nd Pbn} the ~~422~~ ^{regiment} fell back to Radschield leaving only a security guard at the RD. At 2500 ^{they} ~~it~~ again moved, ~~and~~ this time to the NW to try for contact with the 3d Bn. The small trail which was selected for the motor transport to move on was too narrow and muddy so that all but a small number of vehicles became bogged and lost. Contact with the 3d Bn was ^{not} established. During the night a message came from Div which said, "For the good of the Nation..." the 422 and 423 will attack Schonberg and then head W. This message was not received

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by the 423 until daylight so they set the time of the jump off as 1000. Puett figured that it was yet possible for an escape to be made. This was despite the fact that no mortar ammunition remained in any of the organizations and that the mgs were limited to ~~about~~ two belts per gun. In second Bn there were now only 19 officers and 405 men and in preparation for the ~~time~~ all of the wounded were left behind.

At 0930, just as the companies were assembling for the move, the ~~second~~ ⁴²³ area came under a terrific artillery barrage. The enemy had ~~perfect~~ good observation ~~of the area~~ from Hills 500 and 504 which are just ~~west~~ of Schonberg. Many men were killed or wounded in this barrage including Lt Col Craig of 423-1 who died from wounds received in the barrage. Nevertheless the movement began at 1000 with two Bns abreast, 3d on the left, 1st on the right, 2nd in reserve, and the 690 FA Bn following. The assault moved ~~it~~ along the ridge to the right of the Bleialf-Schonberg road to the nose of Hill 506 just SE of ~~Schonberg~~ Schonberg. Here the regiment came under terrific fire from an 88 mm gun and tanks in Schonberg which they could see but not reach with ~~any~~ any of their weapons. The leading Bns could not go farther so 2nd Bn went on a flanking movement to the right to approach Schonberg from the E. The Bn went down a ravine and along a stream known as the Linne but suddenly came under intense fire from all directions. This fire came from the 422 Regt which had not been contacted since early the previous day. Puett realized the trouble and within five minutes had gotten his organization identified. But the damage was done. His men had become disorganized by the fire and the 423 further advanced into

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the area occupied by the Bn. Now both the 422 and 2nd Bn had become disorganized and the move toward Schonberg was halted. The reorganization began immediately but took some little time. A patrol was sent on toward the Cur River and came back with the report that the enemy were ~~planning~~ emplacing what appeared to be American artillery pieces just across the stream from the American forces. Puett personally went on a reconnaissance between 1400 and 1500 to see if there was ~~any~~ a covered route to Schonberg. When Puett returned to his organization he found that Colonel Descheneaux, CO of the 422, ~~had~~ had sent Major Garlo, XO of 423-2, and an officer of 422 under a white flag to the German lines to arrange the surrender. This made Puett extremely angry for he said that up to this time he had not entertained the idea of surrender. Descheneaux said that the situation was hopeless and that nothing but ~~any~~ annihilation would result from further resistance. Puett said he thought he would try to move his Bn nevertheless. The Colonel said this was impossible as the white flag had already been sent out and it would go much worse for all. The enemy meanwhile was coming up from the S quite rapidly and while the situation with the 1st and 3d Bns, 423, was not too well known (they were 400 yds away), it was known that the 590 FA Bn had already been taken. Puett went to his men and told them that any who wished could try for an escape. Over a hundred took off. Puett planned to try it but was ordered by Descheneaux to remain. ~~The surrender of this group was approximately 1600, the two Bns of 423 an hour later.~~

The men of 423-2, though new to combat, ~~and~~ fought skillfully and courageously throughout. By the 19th the men felt that they were seasoned soldiers and ~~it~~ could no longer be classed as green.