



HISTORY

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522nd FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

For more information on the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion's role in the liberation of Dachau, the Go For Broke National Education Center created "[Unexpected Heroes: The Story of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion](#)," a joint project with the Museum of Tolerance of Los Angeles that includes an interactive component with text, photos and interview clips. Additionally, from the Hanashi archive, 18 oral histories of 522nd veterans are viewable at the Museum of Tolerance's Multimedia Learning Center.

The 522nd Field Artillery Battalion was one of the fastest, most efficient artillery units in the European Theater of Operations. The 522nd supported the infantry by shooting heavy artillery fire from 105mm Howitzers. A Howitzer was a type of long-range cannon with a barrel that was 105mm (about 4.1 inches) wide.

About 650 men served in the 522nd, which consisted of a headquarters battery, three gun batteries (A, B, and C), a service battery and a medical detachment. Each gun battery had four guns that were each manned with a crew of seven.

Officers and enlisted men took turns serving on hazardous forward observer missions where they went to the front line with the infantry. Each forward observer team had an officer who made decisions on the targets, a wireman who laid the telephone wire between the forward observer position and headquarters, an instrument man who calculated the target coordinates and a man who used a crank telephone to call in the information to the headquarters battery. At times, when the wires were cut, the men had to use the less-secure method of radio contact. The headquarters battery coordinated the artillery attack. The battalion's survey team provided accurate gun-position information and the fire detection team determined how the guns were to be fired. Each battery's instrument section oriented the horizontal and vertical controls on the guns.

The members of each gun crew worked in unison, each performing a specific job. They fine-tuned the gun's settings, packaged the correct amount of powder charge, cut the correct fuse setting, assembled the shells and casing, passed the shells quickly to the loaders, loaded the shells into the gun, and pulled the lanyard to fire the gun.

Usually only one gun was fired. The forward observers then reported on the accuracy of the shot. The fire detection center made any needed mathematical adjustments. If the target was correctly ranged, then



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Men of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion are firing a 105MM Howitzer in the battle for Leghorn, Italy.

headquarters called "fire for effect." Soon all the guns fired continuously until headquarters ordered a cease-fire. The 522nd was able to fire a blistering three rounds in less than a minute.

In fact, in mid-July 1944, during the bitter campaign to capture "Little Cassino," the firing was so fast that the 522nd had to stop to cool the guns. At times, the infantry asked for fire much closer than the standard safe distance of 100 yards.

Fighting in the artillery was less dangerous than the infantry. However, many men had close calls, especially the forward observers. During the rescue of the "Lost Battalion" eight forward observers from C Battery fought alongside the 442nd's I and K Companies. Along with the 442nd, they were pinned down by machine gun fire. They ran up the ridge in the "banzai" charge. The 522nd saw the 442nd fall, wounded or dead - one after another - until only 16 riflemen from K Company and 8 riflemen from I Company remained and they finally reached the besieged "Lost Battalion." Incredibly, all eight artillerymen survived unscathed.

On the fourth day that the 442nd was battling to reach the "Lost Battalion," the 522nd had a close call. The 36th Division Commander, General Dahlquist, ordered an immediate artillery strike on a particular set of coordinates. But these coordinates were right on the top of the "Lost Battalion." The coordinates were changed and the battalion was saved from destruction - thanks to the vigilance and intelligence of a fire direction team and a forward observer from the 522nd.

Many of the 522nd's key men had IQs of 130 - 160 and backgrounds in science and engineering. The men needed strong mathematical skills to calculate target distance, gun range, gun angle, and powder strength. Most of the 522nd's officers were Caucasian, and later, a few Japanese American soldiers received battlefield commissions as officers.

In March 1945 the 522nd separated from the 442nd and was sent to help with the 7th Army's jump across the Rhine. The infantrymen were sad to see the gunners go. They really missed them during the Gothic Line Campaign. In the last drive in Italy, when the infantry called for artillery support, there were no effective forward observers.

The 442nd had come to depend on the 522nd for its accurate shooting and its brave and skillful forward observers. So did the 34th Division. Whenever shell supplies were short in the division, the 522nd received the most, because it used the scarce resources most effectively.

The 522nd enjoyed a reputation for something else too - its powerful baseball team. The artillerymen had beaten teams from both the 100th Battalion and the 442nd RCT.

But the men were haunted by memories of the cruelest, most gruesome scene in human history - the holocaust. The 522nd helped to liberate Jewish survivors of the Landsberg-Kaufering Dachau Death March and Dachau sub-camps. The irony of the 522nd's encounter with the Dachau inmates was that many 522nd soldiers and/or their family members were also incarcerated in segregated camps in their home country during the war.