

12 BALLOON SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

12 Balloon Company, 1919
Redesignated Airship Company No. 12, 13 Sep 1921
Redesignated 12 Airship Company, 25 Jan 1923
Inactivated, 16 May 1929
Redesignated 12 Airship Squadron, 1 Oct 1933
Redesignated 12 Balloon Squadron, 17 Jul 1937
Disbanded, 14 May 1943

STATIONS

Fort Omaha, NE
Camp Morrison, VA, Feb 1918
Port of Embarkation, Newport News, VA, Jun 1918
Europe, Jun 1918
Langley Field, VA, 20 Mar 1919
Fort Omaha, NE, 1919-1921
Scott Field, IL, 28 Oct 1921
Inactive 1929-34
Chicago, IL, 1934-41

ASSIGNMENTS

1 (later 21) Airship Group, 19 Jul 1922

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Pony Blimp
Airship
Caquot R type Balloon

COMMANDERS

Capt Ashley C. McKinley, Sep 1918-7 Jun 1921

1st Lt George C. Lundberg, 16 Jun 1921
1st Lt Angier H. Forest, 17 Aug 1921
1st Lt James H. C. Hill, 1 Oct 1921
1st Lt Ashley C. McKinley, Dec 1921
1st Lt James H. C. Hill, 14 Apr 1922
Capt John P. Temple, 1 Jul 1922
1st Lt Ira R. Koenig, 15 Jan 1923
1st Lt Douglas Johnston, 11 Jun 1923
Capt Warren B. Gates, 12 Sep 1923
Capt Ronald W. Wittman, 1 Jul 1925
1st Lt William J. Flood, 3 Mar 1926
Capt William O. Butler, 7 Jun 1926
Capt Karl S. Axtater, 9 Apr 1929
Inactive 16 May 1929
Unknown, Apr 1934-7 Dec 1941

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The 12th Balloon Company came into existence on the fifteen day of December, 1917, at Fort Omaha, Nebr., the cradle of the balloon service. It received its balloon training there. Then it proceeded to Camp Morrison, Va., adding to its balloon learning the art of ditch digging and camp construction.

A period of training then started for the company each department specializing in its own work along with the regular drill and routine duties. On 9 Feb 1918 the 5th Balloon Squadron was dissolved and became the 11th and 12th Balloon Companies.

On 25 Feb the company left Fort Omaha on its trip to the coast and arrived at the Aeronautical General Supply Depot and Concentration Camp, Morrison, VA on 28 Feb where we stayed until 29 Jun when we left this camp and marched to the pier at Newport News, VA where we embarked on the transport America and on 30 Jun left for overseas. Personnel consisted of the commander, 1Lt Jeremiah S. Alexander, Medical Officer, 3 more officers and 204 enlisted men.

One day, the 30th of June, 1918, the company embarked on the U. S. transport America and for thirteen days we steamed across the Atlantic.

On 13 Jul we landed at Brest, France after an uneventful trip where we debarked and marched to Pontanezen Barracks and Rest Camp remaining there until 25 Jul when we entrained for Training Camp at LaCourtine, arriving at that point on 28 Jul.

Then we departed for a training camp, La Courtine, which we reached July 23. Here we received balloon training and equipment. There was another balloon company at La Courtine and there was always a keen spirit of competition and rivalry in the various stages of the game. We directed and regulated artillery fire on the range and did other work in connection with the balloon.

During our stay at LaCourtine our enlisted specialists, including the Machine Gun, Chart Room, Radio, Telephone and Winch sections were sent to school at Camp de Souge (Gironde) and the lookouts to the front with the 8th Balloon Company for training. Our transportation and equipment was drawn while at this camp.

On August 26th, 1918 the Company left on train for Toul, arriving there on August 29th. Here we received instructions on gas and also sent two men to gas school at Langres.

Our first position was at Sommedieue where we arrived on September 1, playing a waiting game for several days, and keeping out of sight of Boche photographing planes. Before our work was really started we were ordered to change locations with the Seventh Company, a move which a little later resulted in much grief for us. The new location was at Rattentout which boasts of a succession of hills and valleys, through which the wind had a gay time. Owing to the condition of the road it was impossible to reach the proposed point of ascension.

On the morning of September 12th after a short trial flight the balloon left the ground with George W. Hinman, 1st Lieut. A.S. and Roland S. Tait, 1st Lieut. A.S. as observers. On account of poor visibility and high wind the balloon was hauled down. The point of ascension was in a valley and as the balloon neared the ground a sudden gust of wind caused it to nose-dive, which snapped the cable and fouled both parachutes. The balloon thus freed rose rapidly and with the wind behind it was last seen entering the clouds and heading directly for the enemy lines. Since the armistice we have had the pleasure of seeing Lieutenants George W. Hinman and Roland S. Tait and hearing the story of their trip, landing and treatment in German Prison Camps. After attaining an altitude of approximately 4000 metres they started valving and in about 40 minutes after the accident had managed to make a safe landing in the vicinity of Conflans.

The accident of September 12th left us without observers, Harold C. Fischer 2nd Lieut. A.S., who was assigned to us as an observer, acting as Maneuvering Officer at the time. Permission was received from Major John H. Jouett, A.S. to allow M. E. Mayer L. Cohn and Private Robert F.

Scott to fly. On the evening of September 12th we obtained and inflated a new balloon and on the following day maneuvered it by hand to a new position near Rupt-en-Woevre, where four ascensions were made, but nothing of importance noted.

Sept 13th, maneuvered balloon by hand to new position at Rupt-en Woevre. Four flights were made but nothing of importance was observed.

We were forced to move again on September 14th by the rapid advance of our troops, this time to position near Mouilly. We made five ascensions at this point but on account of low visibility we were unable to work to any advantage. We were attached to a 400 m.m. Railway Battery at this time and their objective was Conflans and Mars-la-Tour, so our work was confined to general observation work of the front.

Sep 15th three flights were made. Visibility was too poor for artillery regulation. General observance of front, considerable; smoke and apparently railroad operations around Conflans and Mars-la-Tour.

On September 16th we changed our position two kilometres east. On the first flight we were attacked by an enemy plane and the observers, M.E. Mayer L. Cohn and Private Robert F. Scott were forced to jump, both landing safely. The balloon was not burned so another flight was made by Ashley C. McKinley, 1st Lieut. A.S. and M. E. Mayer L. Cohn, which was uneventful.

On the night of 20 Sep the balloon was deflated and the Company moved to Jouy-en-Argonne, arriving there on the 21st of September, remaining there in reserve until the 26th when we moved to Very, arriving at this place on September 29th, 1918.

Our balloon was inflated September 30th, no ascensions being made on account of poor weather conditions.

On October 1st, 1918 one ascension was made which lasted only 15 minutes, as the enemy started shelling our winch position. The balloon was hauled down and it was decided to maneuver it to a position farther from the enemy lines. A zigzag course was followed during this Movement but the enemy evidently had direct observation on our position. As these movements were followed by very accurate fire. After several shells had fallen very close to the balloon and crew, several shell fragments from these cutting the balloon, the rip panel was opened and the men ordered to a place of safety. About 30 seconds later two direct hits were obtained on the balloon.

A new balloon was obtained from the Advance Supply depot on October 3rd, but was not inflated.

A move to Dombastle on October 7 was our next move and at this point we rested until ordered to relieve the Sixth Balloon Company on October 15 at Montfaucon. Arriving at the Sixth Balloon Company's position in the dark made it impossible to take over the balloon until

the next day. Directly after taking it over we started for our new position near Exermont. There were batteries of 155s in the valley and on the hill nearer the lines were 75s. Between these "Hun-hunters" firing irregularly and the Boche shells arriving, sleeping was rendered more or less difficult. "Fritz" had a peculiar habit of shelling us twice a day, each day at exactly the same hour.

October 18th, while at this position the balloon and observers were in the air whenever weather conditions permitted. During this time we in constant communication with the artillery and Anti-Aircraft batteries and directed artillery fire upon the town of St. Georges. During this period two observers were forced to make parachute jumps, landing stately.

A new position was selected, a balloon procured, inflated and we moved under cover of darkness to Rupt-en-Woevre. From there an ascent was made early the following morning with Private Scott as observer. Poor visibility was experienced and a move was ordered by Major Jouett to a point about one and a half kilometers nearer the lines, at the crossroads Rupt-Mouilly. Here a flight was made by Major Jouett, who seeing the futility of flying with the poor visibility, suggested, that flying be abandoned until such time when the weather should clear. In the afternoon a move was made to a point behind Mesnil.

Company left camp and moved to position near Beaumont, balloon being maneuvered. Here only one flight was made but weather conditions did not prove favorable for any real work.

Upon hearing the first one land one knew that it was 4.00 a. m., likewise at 8.30 p. m. the serenade would become in evidence. Many flights were made at this location and much good work done. On November 1 the big drive started and how they progressed. It seemed that we would never catch up. We started on the 3d and journeyed with the inflated balloon through Sommerance and Landre St. George, then camped for the night about three kilometers north of the latter town. The following morning we were on our way again and passed through Buzancy to Fosse where we encamped. An old Boche aviation field was located near Buzancy to which we moved the following day. Owing to the practically impassable conditions of the roads a couple of days were spent at this point. On the 7th of November we left for a position south of Beaumont, which location proved unsatisfactory, so we moved back about one kilometer. We were at this point when the Armistice was signed and celebrated in due fashion.

We moved to Letanne, a town on the Meuse River, from where we observed the retirement of the German troops. Many flights were made as the weather was fine for several days after the Armistice. On November 26 orders were received to go to Ville-sur-Cousances and we arrived there after a day's journey. Several weeks were spent at this camp in company with eleven other balloon companies. Leaving there January 2d, our destination Colombey-les-Belles, our present writing finds us still at the latter camp, anxiously awaiting the orders which, now that we have seen the fireworks, will result in the biggest move that we have participated in, namely the return to the U. S. A.

Arrival in France 2 Jul 1918

Arrival at the front 28 Aug 1918
Days ascensions made in S.O.S 15
Days ascensions made in Z.O.A 14
Total days ascensions made 29
Number of ascensions made in S.O.S. 54
Number of ascensions made in Z.O.A. 27
Total number of ascensions made 81
Total number of hours in air S.O.S. 88.09
Total number of hours in air Z.O.A. 27.50
Total number of hours in the air 115.59
Artillery adjustments in S.O.S. 44
Artillery adjustments in Z.O.A 4
Total number or artillery adjustments 48
Enemy shells observed 0
Enemy aircraft observed 338
Enemy balloons observed 65
Enemy artillery batteries observed 1
Enemy traffic on road and railroad observed 2
Smoke, fires and flares observed 4
Explosions observed 3
Jumps from basket 2
Balloons attacked
Balloons burned 1
Balloons destroyed 1
Observers killed
Observers captured 2

Arrived at the port of Newport News, VA, 20 March 1919 on the U.S.S. Princess Matoika as the 12th Balloon Company. Transferred to Langley Field, VA, and arrived there on 20 March 1919. Transferred by June 1919 to Fort Omaha, NE.

Redesignated as the Airship Company No. 12 on 13 September 1921.

Transferred on 28 October 1921 to Scott Field, IL. Assigned to the 1st (later redesignated 21st) Airship Group on 19 July 1922.

Redesignated as the 12th Airship Company on 25 January 1923. Functioned as a school and demonstration unit for the U.S. Army Balloon and Airship School. As such, the unit was responsible for training Organized Reserve and RAI balloon and airship units from across the United States.

Frequently participated in the annual National Balloon Races in the 1920s. Inactivated on 16 May 1929 at Scott Field, IL, and allotted to the Sixth Corps Area. Redesignated as the 12th Airship Squadron on 1 October 1933.

Organized by April 1934 with Organized Reserve personnel as a RAI unit at Chicago, IL.

Redesignated as the 12th Balloon Squadron on 17 July 1937 and assigned to the 21st Balloon Group.

Designated mobilization training station was Scott Field, IL, 1933-39 and Pope Field, NC, 1939-41.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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Sources

US Army Order of Battle 1919-1941. Steven E. Clay. Combat Studies Institute Press. US Army Combined Arms Center. Fort Leavenworth, KS. Nd.