

13 BALLOON COMPANY

MISSION

LINEAGE

13 Balloon Company
Organized, Jan 1918

STATIONS

Ft Omaha, NE
Camp Morrison, VA, Jun 1918
Port of Embarkation, Newport News, VA, Jul 1918
Europe, Jul 1918
Mitchel Field, NY, Jun 1919
Ross Field, CA, Jul 1919

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

COMMANDERS

1Lt Loyal D. Palmer

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The 13th Balloon Company became known as such on January 21, 1918, at Fort Omaha, Nebr., under G. O. No. 4, Headquarters, U. S. Army Balloon School, that station, which changed its name from Company C, Fourth Balloon Squadron to Thirteenth Balloon Company, U.S. Army. It was at that time a skeleton organization consisting of five officers and eight non-commissioned officers, with 1st Lieut. Loyal D. Palmer, as Commanding Officer.

In March, 184 recruits were transferred to the company. These men were all volunteers and had been sent to Fort Omaha from the Aviation Section Concentration Camp at Kelley Field, Texas. This was the starting of the company, which made its camp in the double row of pyramidal tents on the sloping ground to the west of North Barracks. On March 12 the company received and flew its first balloon, keeping it in a canvas hangar on the southern side of Florence Field.

The company was then divided into details and departments and the special details sent by sections to school for two-weeks period of instruction. The balloon was put up regularly, going up at 8.00 A. M. and staying up until darkness prohibited further use; both lunch and supper were sent out to the company on the field and it was not uncommon for the company not to get back to the barracks before 10.30 P. m.

On May 2 the company turned its balloon and hangar over to the 14th Company and took over another balloon and made a bed for it. That day while the balloon was in the air a fin was ripped by the wind and it went through quite a series of dives and plunges, tangling the rigging around the basket so that the parachutes could not be used. This continued for half an hour before it could be hauled down without accident. That evening the balloon which had been turned over to the 14th Company accidentally exploded, killing two of the Fourteenth's men and badly burning thirty others, several of whom were members of the Thirteenth, who were returning their picks and shovels to the hangar at that time.

On May 6 the company moved to Florence Field, being the first to do so. They were located on the sloping ground near the entrance, on the leeward side of a large ploughed field which gave up no limit of dust. From this time on work was very regular—flying and maneuvering the balloon, and digging balloon beds while it was in the air. The men by this time had begun to fully enjoy the freedom and hospitality of the city in their very limited hours of leave each day and will long remember and appreciate it.

As always in the Army, rumor time and again raised the hopes of departure, only to have them again shattered. But finally, on June 15th orders were received to load the train, which was quickly done. The next morning, after a short farewell talk by Colonel Hersey, Commanding Officer of the Fort, the company left there and entrained. The personnel at this time consisted of four officers and 204 enlisted men, after three days of uncertainty as to the destination, the train pulled into Camp Morrison, Va. Here they detrained and moved into Warehouse No. 7, from which they moved to

Barracks No. 1 a week later. There was plenty of work to be done in helping to build the camp, with the pick and shovel as the medium. After about ten days of this the schedule was changed somewhat; long hikes taking the-major position.

On the day before the Fourth the company was placed under quarantine and given its overseas clothing equipment, losing the much-prized russets—and hopes again rose. This time they were upheld and at 2.00 a. m. on July 10 the company marched out of camp. Upon arrival at the pier the company was divided, part embarking on the Matsonia, and part on the Aeolus, At last, they were actually leaving for overseas. There never was a happier bunch of men and the four-hour march to the pier at Newport News had hardly ever been noticed.

They had volunteered for real service, but this far had just been building camps and training regularly, and were now about to attain their objective—the Front. The convoy, consisting of thirteen ships under the escort of the U. S. S. Seattle, steamed out of Newport News at about ten o'clock that morning and headed straight across. On the first day but a fleet of half a dozen American destroyers met the convoy and accompanied it the rest of the trip. After an uneventful voyage the convoy entered the harbor of Brest, France, just eleven days later.

The company was detailed to help unload the ship's cargo and immediately got busy. This job took three days of steady work and on the morning of the 24th they marched down the gang plank and out to the "rest camp" at Pontanezen Barracks.

The next morning the company marched back to Brest and entrained making a new acquaintance the "40 hommes, 8 chevaux," After two days of riding they arrived at Guer, Morbihan, detrained and marched to Camp Coetquidan, where they had lunch with the 11th Company, whom they were relieving at that station. After lunch the company marched out to the camp site assigned to them, about one kilometer distant from the main camp, and got busy building themselves a home. The next three weeks were spent in laying out a canvas camp, cleaning away the brush and rocks, constructing a balloon bed and digging a telephone exchange and riggers work room.

On August 13 the personnel was reduced to 170 men, the others being transferred to the Balloon Replacement Company at the U. S. Balloon School. At the same time several men were picked from each special detail- and sent to the Balloon School and six men were attached to the Eleventh Company to accompany that organization to the Front and receive instruction and experience as "lookouts" until the arrival of this company there. On September 1, Lieutenant Palmer was transferred to the Balloon School, 1st Lieut Roscoe S. O'Hara relieving him as Commanding Officer, and on September 3, Lieutenant O'Hara was relieved by 1st Lieut. Charles L. Hayward, A. S.

The principal work of the company now consisted in working with the Field Artillery units which were in training at the camp, showing to them the work of a balloon in connection with artillery fire. Facilities were made such that this could be done readily, having three separate batteries on the field always in telephone connection with the chart room over separate lines; and regular nightly meetings arranged between the observers and those with whom they had worked that day or would work the next day. Another work was that of giving officers their preliminary training as balloon

observers and preparing them for the course at the balloon school.

During this first six weeks the biggest problem was that of transportation. The Company's only truck was an old Delehay which could just pull itself along, and all the drinking and washing water had to be carried a distance of about four kilometers in a tank trailer. Also, all the fuel and supplies had to come from the main camp and the hydrogen cylinders had to be carried a distance of about ten kilometers from the railroad station. The roads were in very poor condition and practically every time the tank went for water it was necessary for twenty men to accompany it and pull it through. In the first part of October two more Delehays arrived, relieving this situation.

The camp had been fixed up very comfortably by the first of October and everything was running along very smoothly. It was the middle of the blackberry season and the kitchen put out large "cobblers" every day or so, and put a large keg of jam away for future use—which time came while on the train en route for the Front. A baseball team was organized and a very successful series of games played with the artillery teams in the camp.

In the middle of October the fall rainy season started and combined with freezing weather; conditions soon became unpleasant in the tents. Fortunately, a room was made for the company in the main camp, so that on the 16th of October they moved in, going into fine stone barracks. Here the time passed rapidly, maneuvering the balloon along the roads and over obstacles to working positions occupying the days, and the "Y. M." entertainments making pleasant the evenings.

At last, on the eighth of November the 23d Company came to their relief and two days later orders were received to leave for the Front, without the transportation equipment. But, the Austrian Armistice had been signed and the French were concentrating the railroad cars for an immense troop movement so that none were available at that time; however, on the evening of the tenth word was received that the cars would be ready the following morning. This meant that twenty-two of the men, who had contracted the Spanish influenza during the previous two days, must remain behind in the hospital and, accordingly, the same number were transferred into the company from the Twenty-third. The personnel at this time consisted of eight officers and one hundred and seventy-four enlisted men.

At eleven o'clock that morning the train of "40 hommes, 8 chevaux" pulled out. Headed for the Front at last—everyone's topmost thought! Three hours and a half later the train arrived at Messac, Ille et Vilaine, and here it was that the news of the signing of the Armistice was first heard. Too late, too late, for even a chance at the Front

The train crawled along, stopping at Rennes, Chartres, and Noisy le Sec for from six to twelve hours each, and finally arriving at Toul at 8.30 A. M. on the morning of the 14th, where the company detrained. The "flu" had been spreading among the men steadily and twenty more men were left at hospitals along the way, too sick to go farther.

After waiting in vain all day for trucks to carry them out to their camp, the company marched into

Toul and billeted there for the night. Late the next day four trucks arrived and carried most of the men out, the equipment remaining behind under guard. The camp that night was located in an ex-German motion-picture theatre in the Bois de Pannes, between Nonsard and Heudicourt, Meuse. The next day the rest of the company and part of the equipment was carried out and the camp moved about a half a kilometer to some well-laid-out German barracks.

Again transportation was the problem. Orders were received to advance on the 18th with the Fourth Corps, following up the German withdrawal, but they could not be carried out on account of the lack of transportation facilities. The winch and tank trailer had to haul all the supplies except rations, for the first couple of weeks. Then the engineers came to the rescue with an abundant water supply and a truck borrowed from a neighboring company did the rest.

The quarters were soon made very comfortable with the aid of salvaged glass, stoves, furniture and duck-boards. A fine shower-bath was built, a laundry fixed up and a transportation park built. The company alternated with the 60th Company in flying and maneuvering their balloon, until December 19, when it received one of its own and constructed a bed for it.

The 24th and 26th Companies soon became neighbors, each bringing with them football teams in which they had a good deal of pride. Both teams had long and excellent records and were as yet unbeaten or even held to a tie. This spirit forced the Thirteenth to get busy and get up a team of their own, which team was tried out on and beat the Sixty-ninth and Fifteenth teams. With this little experience they challenged the Twenty-sixth and Twenty-fourth teams. The former was tied and the latter beaten, but the former moved away before another game could be played. These four were the only companies in the sector.

Thanksgiving and Christmas were celebrated with big dinners, including chickens, geese and ducks. The work went along slowly and smoothly, though most of it was done in the rain. There was no form of evening entertainment available, being so far from any troop center and the nights being pitch dark, but the long evenings were somewhat relieved by a salvaged German piano.

Orders were received on January 22 to move to Pont-a-Mousson, Meurthe-et-Moselle, a distance of forty kilometers, maneuvering the balloon. This was accomplished by the 24th, carrying along all of the stoves, stove-pipe, window glass and furniture. Here the company occupied houses which were in fairly good shape.

Soon the quarters were fixed up very comfortably, a fine shower-bath was built and a laundry fixed up. The work was very steady and consisted of flying the balloon, infantry drill and practice marches. This date, March 23, 1919, finds us still carrying on at Pont-a-Mousson.

Arrival in France 21 Jul 1918

Arrival at the front 14 Nov 1918

Days ascensions made in S.O.S 44

Days ascensions made in Z.O.A

Total days ascensions made 44

Number of ascensions made in S.O.S. 191
Number of ascensions made in Z.O.A.
Total number of ascensions made 191
Total number of hours in air S.O.S. 140.34
Total number of hours in air Z.O.A.
Total number of hours in the air 140.34
Artillery adjustments in S.O.S. 38
Artillery adjustments in Z.O.A.
Total number or artillery adjustments 38
Enemy shells observed
Enemy aircraft observed
Enemy balloons observed
Enemy artillery batteries observed
Enemy traffic on road and railroad observed
Smoke, fires and flares observed
Explosions observed
Jumps from basket
Balloons attacked
Balloons burned
Balloons destroyed
Observers killed
Observers captured

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Sources

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