

24th SERVICE SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

Balloon Company No. 24 organized, Jan 1918

Inactivated, 30 Sep 1921

Reorganized, 15 Aug 1922

Redesignated Service Company No. 24 (Airship), 6 Sep 1922

Redesignated 24th Airship Service Company, 12 Feb 1923

Reorganized and redesignated 24th Airship Service Squadron, 4 Nov 1933

Inactivated, 27 Feb 1935

Redesignated 24th Service Squadron, 17 Jul 1937

Disbanded, 14 May 1943

STATIONS

Fort Monroe, VA

Camp Morrison, VA, Mar 1918

Port of Embarkation, Newport News, VA, Jun 1918

Europe, Jun 1918

Mitchel Field, NY, Aug 1919

Fort Omaha, NE, Aug 1919

Crissey Field, CA, 1920

Fort Baker, CA, 1920-1921

Fort Miley, CA, 1921

Inactive 1921-1922

Scott Field, IL, 1922-1935

Inactive 1935-1941

ASSIGNMENTS

21st Airship Group

21st Balloon Group

COMMANDERS

Cpt Frederick J. Durrschmidt, 20 May 1919

Cpt Ivan B. Snell, 1 Jul 21
Inactive, 29 Sep 1921-5 Sep 1922
1LT Clyde A. Kuntz, 6 Sep 1922
Cpt George S. Warren, 6 Sep 1923
Cpt Douglas Johnston, 20 May 1926
Cpt James F. Powell, 11 Sep 1927
Cpt Michael E. McHugo, 1 Dec 1931
Inactive, 1 Mar 1935-7 Dec 1941

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The 24th Balloon Company, no doubt you have all heard of it. Perhaps you have and never were the wiser because the beginning of us was called the fifty "angels of hell" who were sent from Fort Omaha in September, 1917, to a sister, Fortress Monroe. The 24th Balloon Company had personnel of 200 men and seemingly that amount of officers, because every time I turned around there stood one inviting me to some light-order fatigue, gassing the balloon or lightening a freight car of its burden. It was generally understood that the first fifty were only going to Fortress Monroe to assist in schooling a few ninety-day wonders and would come back before long; indeed, they came back just like the prize fighter who was knocked out for the last time; have you ever known it to occur? The news soon passed back to Omaha that the first fifty were nothing more or less than shanghaied.

The train stopped at Fortress Monroe and the boys alighted with a glad smile at the nice surroundings, especially the enlisted men's quarters. After a hike of a mile they came to a halt and the Major pointed to a lot of brush and briar covering no small space of ground, saying, "Here's your camp, boys," and thus passed into oblivion the dream of steam-heated quarters.

Lumber and tents were furnished in short order and for several days' lumber and carpenter tools, tents, brush and briar, commandeered by hands in khaki jangled with the shrill voice of some prospective non-com., while the eagle-eyed Major commented "You've only been here a short while and are beginning to look like soldiers already." Hard work of this brand was not these boys' ideas of soldiering though. More like this—swell uniform, never work, girls galore,

receive a rifle, go to Germany, kill fifty or a hundred, return, receive a medal of honor, live in luxury the balance of their days.

Third class at Fortress Monroe meant fatigue from 8.00 a. m. to 10.00 p. m. for from one to as many days as the Major could spare; he never ran short. His eagle eye overlooked no one, so it is needless to say that at some time or other every soldier under Major McElgin at Fort Monroe had his little dose of third class. The misbehaving got it for misbehaving, and the good for good measure. He didn't confine all his third class medicine on the enlisted men, he seemed to find considerable time for the ninety-day wonders issued him. The Major was an old army man and didn't see why these new officers should miss third class any more than other men under his command. Every time the Major handed some "lieut" third class the "lieut" would pass the buck on to the men, so what's the use?

Shortly after the first fifty landed at Fortress Monroe a car-load of new officers dropped in from Omaha where they had passed with high honors and came up feeling like prophets of the air until Major McElgin laid his eyes on them, then all one could hear from them was, "Yes, Sir! Yes, Sir!" These newly-made officers were to take charge of detachments scheduled to arrive from time to time. The following January twenty-five more men came from Omaha. The latter part of the same month two detachments of fifty men each arrived from Camp Meade, Md. The Omaha boys showed their appreciativeness to the Meade boys by allowing them to do all the K.P., guard and extra fatigue for several weeks. The pressure was somewhat relieved when another twenty-five came from Omaha about March 1, making the company 200 strong.

One each of the new officers was put in charge of a detachment and given his first try at handling men. It was more trying on the men than on the officers as far as I could see. Things hummed for a few weeks. From then on there were countless inspections of equipment C. Equipment C consisted of everything ever issued including personal belongings. Private Pell, one of the first fifty, was punished with an abundance of third class for trying to go overseas with but one toothbrush.

After many weeks of all sorts of fatigue and army routine we began wondering how long must this be endured before going to France. A few more weeks passed; we were ordered to turn in fatigue clothes, same being complied with amidst shouts of joy and laughter. Sure signs of going overseas. Two weeks passed, no signs of packing up—something wrong—misplaced orders most likely.

Saturday, March 23, 1918, the 24th Balloon Company, under command of Lieutenants Dunn, Keefe, Montgomery, Hillabold, Patrick and "Doc" Ford, left Old Point Comfort.

After two hours ride by train we arrived at Morrison, Va., where we spent three months under command of Lieutenant Dunn at fatigue and infantry drill, never seeing a balloon during this time. The 24th by this time was well organized and trained, and having out-lived the hard knocks of rookie days "Hard Luck" became its godmother. A more persistent and uncharitable godmother an organization never had.

On June 29, 1918, we shipped our duty overseas. Two weeks on the ocean were spent uneventfully and ended by docking at Brest (a rest camp). For two weeks here our company seemed to do the heavy work while stevedores attended to minor details about the dock, with now and then a look at our men—such a look as we all know—that which comes from a self-assumed superiority that only long experience in the A. E. F. can give. We wear it now as a mask of our true feelings, but at that time it convicted us as rookies again and the stevedores watched us work to their advantage. We have often wished for some distinguishing balloon insignia to be worn on our fatigue uniforms. How often our work would belie the insignia, though, only a member of a balloon company can know.

I have referred to Brest as a rest camp in a spirit of humor. These camps are so called in all seriousness by Headquarters, but if the rest is a physical one we arrived at the wrong time; on the other hand, if the rest is mental then the camp was pitched in the wrong mud hole.

We left Brest in the dust of our own foot work. We could enumerate various reasons for our speed but I shall leave that to your imagination. But I shall always think of speed in connection with any reference to that "get-away" and there are those of a certain regiment that we passed—a regiment that thought it was marching—who will sustain me in my views.

There is always the funny side and it presented itself in various lights on this march with particular interest to one—Peckham. Now his indifference to orders and inconveniences had caused him to start the hike with the extra burden of a large ham. A ham has its virtues and values, more especially in France than elsewhere; and in consideration thereof it was tolerated by Peckham's squad, each man taking his turn at carrying the thing and the responsibility of keeping it hid from the officers. It, was camouflaged, of course, but was still distinguishable as excess baggage when Lieutenant Dunn caught sight of it in Peckham's arms. The natural and expected question came and Peckham's wit saved the ham by a ready "Something I couldn't get in my pack, sir" and the incident was passed as bona fide.

Randanne, France, not on the map, was our next destination. Reaching there in good condition was an endurance contest. Forty-five men crowded into "side-door Pullman" cars, the "8 cheyaux" type, is a haunting dream, for we still have to reach the coast from northern France.

We detrained at Clermont-Ferrand, July 31, 1918, and came to an old French cavalry post within the city. We rested there for one day in which time fourteen men were detached to be sent to a balloon school somewhere in the vicinity of Bordeaux.

Lieutenant Montgomery was assigned to another Company, then in action at Chateau-Thierry, for the purpose of getting all the dope on balloon observation at the Front. He not only annexed all this but a Croix de Guerre as well.

The first day of August we received another assignment of officers, 1st Lieut. Kenneth P. Hill and 1st Lieut. Webster W. Eaton. The company was loaded in trucks and came to Randanne. It

is merely a name for a mark on the highway, said mark consisting of two small cafes and out-buildings; These marks are sustained by the patronage of tourists en route to Mont Dore and other summer resorts in these mountains., The company journeyed into the mountains and as truck trains sometimes will, the three faster trucks were far in the lead. The leaders, passed Randanne and advanced three kilometers to the village of Aurierres, pitching camp in a field on the southeast boundary of this inviting village? The remainder of the trucks in command of Lieutenant Hill halted at Randanne and under his direction pitched camp on an ideal plot of ground at the base of an old volcano crater.

When Lieutenant Dunn arrived the following forenoon he issued an order for the striking of the camp at Randanne to join the advanced detachment. However, in favor of better sanitary conditions, the advanced detachment was required to retreat to Randanne. It may be the rain of that night by which we will always remember the "Retreat of Aurierres." During the three months spent in this camp the company worked long and hard for a reputation as a balloon outfit.

The reward was won partly through energetic endeavor and partly through the brilliancy of Lieutenant Hill as chief observer and Commanding Officer, he having succeeded Lieutenant Dunn the latter part of August, Lieutenant Hill had other duties, though, as, Headquarters saw it, and he was required to leave the company about the first of November on a tour of the Front with a view of returning to the States to instruct student observers.

To all indications this meant promotion; yet I believe he would have preferred to have remained with the company. The signing of the Armistice left Lieutenant Hill with a-choice of returning to the States and being discharged or remaining in the A. E. F. until he could take the company back. He chose the latter and returned to us after an absence of a month and a half.

During this month and a half, the company moved to the Front under command of Capt. Henry C. White, who had relieved Lieutenant Hill. Hard luck did not forsake us in this for the Armistice was signed three days after we were ordered to the Front. Probably Germany heard that we were on the way.

As a matter of history we must mention a few days spent in French barracks outside of Toul and then moved to formerly occupied German officers' quarters at Nonsard.

In these quarters we fared well save for the mud and water. The water by the way, made the building of another balloon bed necessary and three days later it was completed and we moved. Here we had been commanded by Lieut. E. J. Keenan, who had been left in command when Captain White reported to command Balloon Group, Sixth Army Corps.

So we left our new balloon bed for a distant and unknown small village where we were alone under the command of Lieutenant Hill who had returned to the company. Of course we again built a temporary balloon bed which was proved unnecessary when the balloon was inflated and the observers got up to find a deserted French balloon bed close by.

Just to build and move and then build again—what fortune—since we are not a labor battalion. As a whole, though the 24th Balloon Company has a will that must surmount; so in Malaumont we persevered and were nearing that point in our career that would see us well quartered, and quite peaceable; but our ever watchful godmother decreed that we should leave St. Mihiel and we have landed there.

In fact, it is from St. Mihiel that this comes—comes from out the inevitable mud. But even now the mud has begun to give ground to our advances and we see new barracks and a gravel company street under construction.

Here we hope to rest idling away our time with the routine of company duty the while nursing our balloon and the hope that we will soon be traveling westward, either afoot or otherwise, preferably otherwise since it would be the quickest.

I have made this statement before and because I know it to be a fact repeat again. The predominant spirit of the 24th Balloon Company has been to do with the firm belief that whatever we did would be done well. Just so we would have operated against the Hun and with this spirit we shall continue, all for one and one for all until that time when we shall be civilians again, each man of us proud to have been an active member of the 24th Balloon Company.

Arrival in France 12 Jul 1918

Arrival at the front 19 Nov 1918

Days ascensions made in S.O.S 48

Days ascensions made in Z.O.A

Total days ascensions made 48

Number of ascensions made in S.O.S. 238

Number of ascensions made in Z.O.A.

Total number of ascensions made 238

Total number of hours in air S.O.S. 287.09

Total number of hours in air Z.O.A.

Total number of hours in the air 287.09

Artillery adjustments in S.O.S. 88

Artillery adjustments in Z.O.A

Total number or artillery adjustments 88

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 1
Observers killed
Observers captured

Arrived at the port of New York, NY, on 1 August 1919 on the S.S. Pocahontas as Balloon Company No. 24.

Transferred to Mitchel Field, LI, NY, and arrived there on the same day.

Transferred on 12 August 1919 to Fort Omaha, NE.

Transferred on 10 April 1920 to Crissey Field at the Presidio of San Francisco, CA.

The company temporarily served at numerous locations to include Fort Barry, CA, Fort Worden, WA, Camp Lewis, WA, Fort Winfield Scott, CA, and Fort Miley, CA, for short periods over the next five months for the purposes of conducting aerial spotter tests with various coast defense commands.

Transferred on 30 September 1920 to Fort Baker, CA.

Assigned to the Coast Defenses of San Francisco on 20 December 1920.

Transferred on 1 August 1921 to Fort Miley.

Inactivated on 30 September 1921 at Fort Miley and the 1st Balloon Company designated Active Associate.

Assigned on 19 July 1922 to the 1st Airship Group (subsequently redesignated on 1 January 1923 as the 21st Airship Group).

Reorganized on 15 August 1922 at Scott Field, IL.

Redesignated as Service Company No. 24 (Airship) on 6 September 1922.

Redesignated as the 24th Airship Service Company on 12 February 1923.

Reorganized and redesignated as the 24th Airship Service Squadron on 4 November 1933.

Inactivated on 27 February 1935 at Scott Field, IL.

Redesignated as the 24th Service Squadron on 17 July 1937 and assigned to the 21st Balloon Group.

Designated mobilization training station was Scott Field, IL, 1935-37 and Pope Field, NC, 1937-41.

Disbanded 14 May 1943.

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 10 Sep 2011

Updated:

Sources

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