

5th BALLOON COMPANY

LINEAGE

A Co, 3rd Squadron organized, 4 Nov 1917
5th Balloon Company, 18 Jun 1918

STATIONS

Fort Omaha, NE
Brooks Field, TX, May 1919

DEPLOYED STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

ATTACHMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT SERIAL NUMBERS

ASSIGNED AIRCRAFT TAIL/BASE CODES

UNIT COLORS

COMMANDERS

1LT Maurice R. Smith, 6 Dec 1917

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

EMBLEM SIGNIFICANCE

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The Fifth Balloon Company was organized at Fort Omaha, NE on 4 Nov 1917 with an authorized strength of six officers and 90 men under the name of Company A, 3rd Balloon Squadron which name it carried until 18 Jun 1918. When the organization of the Balloon service into squadrons was discontinued and balloon companies were considered more as individual units which were assigned to different wing headquarters each operating with an Army Corps. Co A was put in charge of 1LT R. L. Snarks.

The enlisted personnel came largely from Kelly Field, Texas and up to the date of the formation of the Squadron had little or no balloon training. The problem presented was to organize equip and train this squadron for overseas duty in the shortest possible time. The men were trade tested assigned to the various technical department which go to make up a balloon company. And were given intensive courses at post schools. Which were at that time following the polices of the British Air Forces as laid down by Maj Hanney of the Royal Flying Corps.

While at Omaha the men had their first real "soldiering" and soon mastered the intricacies of "squads east" and became proficient in the art of "K. P." Balloons and ballooning were soon thoroughly understood.

Many also, although kept pretty busy at this stage of their army careers, became experts on "bunk fatigue." The activities of the company, however, were not confined to Fort Omaha, for, sallying forth nightly on pass, the boys captured the hearts of many fair damsels and won for themselves a permanent place in the hearts of the people of Omaha.

On 6 Dec 1Lt Maurice R. Smith was placed in command.

On 17 Jan 1918, after receiving a rousing send-off from the people of Omaha, the company, as part of the Third Balloon Squadron left on a special train for Garden City. After remaining about ten days at Garden City, we proceeded to Hoboken early one morning when New York was still asleep, embarking there on the S. S. Adriatic. We were given comfortable quarters on board and had scarcely become oriented when the ship slipped quietly from port and out to sea. The ship proceeded to Halifax, laying over three days at that port. Then, picking up a convoy of twelve other ships, she proceeded on a pleasant voyage of thirteen days, the only drawback being the meals, which were the cause of an English steward receiving a barrage of unpalatable biscuits.

The sea was calm during the trip and the submarine zone was passed without incident. On 16 Feb the squadron landed at Liverpool and entrained at once for Romsey. The trip across England was made by daylight amid enthusiastic acclamations of the people in the towns through which we passed. Everyone was impressed by the cleanliness and simple beauty of rural England. Romsey was a so-called rest camp, where we remained three days and then proceeded by train to Southampton and embarked on H. M. S. Hunslet. While crossing the Channel at night the ship narrowly missed collision

with another ship, and after running through one of our own mine fields, docked at Le Havre.

The squadron spent the night at an English camp, where we had our first experience with French outdoor plumbing and the next day proceeded by special train to the replacement camp at St. Maxient. After two weeks at this camp, the squadron was split up and the Fifth Company proceeded to Camp de Coetquidan, an artillery training camp, where we were to gain experience in operation and liaison with the artillery, the main purpose of a balloon being the regulation of artillery fire.

At Camp Coetquidan the company received its technical equipment and transportation, among which were ten "Quads." M. E. Lewis, with many pamphlets on "How to use a Quad," immediately made pets of those ten, with the result that later on at the Front, they acted like spoiled children and often refused to function at psychological moments.

A balloon bed was established a short distance from camp and, much to the regret of most of the boys, the old army pick and shovel were brought into action.

For almost five months the balloon was operated every day except Sunday, weather permitting.

The company was organized here with officers, non-coms and men in various departments, and all became specially trained in their various branches of activity. It was at this time that our Adjutant, J. Lambert Cain, in his pre-adjutant days, produced a magnificent panoramic drawing, that astonished the world, defying all rules of perspective known to science.

Shortly after arriving at Coetquidan the company had its first pay day on French soil and the fellows, having "bu coo" francs in their jeans, immediately set out to drink up all the liquor in France. However, after our worthy comrade, Saxon, one night while slightly inebriated, embraced the commanding officer, things became normal again.

On 30 Mar 1LT Maurice R Smith, 1LT Malcom M. Mitchell and 1LT Roderick H. Tait, Jr proceeded to Saumur for a special artillery course and 1LT David G. Boyd assumed temporary command of the company.

On 17 May, seventy-two men of the Third Balloon Detachment were assigned to the company, increasing the strength of the company to the authorized strength of 170 enlisted men. We looked upon these as rookies, but they soon proved themselves to be good soldiers and worthy of our consideration. At this time the company had a good baseball team and played a snappy game every Sunday, Armstrong and Strucker being the best white hopes produced.

On 18th Lt Smith after having taken a course at Souge and having spent three weeks at the front, returned and again took command of the company.

While at Camp Coequidan, the balloon was in the air 237 hours and made 39 regulations of fire in addition to often reporting on the general effectiveness of fire when same was not regulated by the balloon.

On 28 May instead of the usual reveille, rendered by our worthy bugler, Bender, we were awakened

by a conglomeration of all notes known in music, amid which his husky voice occasionally hollered "Fire." The officers' barracks was afire and burned quickly, along with several other barracks adjoining, the worst loss sustained being most of our Victrola records which could not be replaced.

On 29 May LT Gagge and twenty-eight men went to Cazeauz for a two week course in machine gunnery and became very proficient. Elmo Dunning, a Michigan country boy, being the shining star of the expedition. On 3 Jul, six enlisted men were sent to the Front to be trained as lookouts.

While at Camp Coetquidan the balloon was in the air 237 hours and made thirty-nine regulations of fire in addition to projectile practice.

On 25 Jul the company left Coetquidan, proceeding by special train to Toul. During the trip across France, which was at the time of the turning of the tide at Chateau-Thierry, the company was enthusiastically cheered by the French people. On this trip the men took along a lot of canned goods of their own, and this, coupled with the "corned willie" a-la-Hyman, helped to make the trip pleasant.

From Toul the company proceeded by its own transportation to its new position near Raulecourt, being assigned to work with the 82nd Division and with the Fourth Army Corps, First Army, assisting the Eighth French Army. The company was also in liaison with the Corps Artillery.

The entire company pitched in with a will and noon three balloon were prepared by the balloon detail and over forty kilometers of telephone wire laid by the telephone detail, There were comfortable barracks here and, although overrun with rats, they were way ahead of the pup tents we were destined to use in, all other positions while in action. In this position the company had 128 hours in the air, made five reglages and spotted three enemy batteries in action.

On 10 Aug, the company was in the line in a position near Raulecourt. The company carefully laid out three balloon beds and had excellent advance and retreat itineraries. Forty kilometers of telephone wire was laid and kept in working order giving all the telephone liaison which could be desired.

On 11 Aug the balloon was attacked by enemy plane but our machine guns turned them away. In this position from 10 Aug balloon was in the air 52 hours made 4 regulations of fire and spotted 3 enemy batteries in action.

On 23 Aug the company moved to a new position near Gironville opposite the point of the St Mihiel salient and was assigned to work with the Fourth French Army. This position had never been occupied by a balloon company and was considered a very important but very dangerous one. A camp was built, telephone liaison established and while operating.

25 Aug, balloon was shelled by a long range gun of medium caliber but not damaged. The balloon was attacked and burned by an enemy plane on 28 Aug, Observers 2Lt J. S. Burrell and 2Lt J.W. Lane jumped and landed safely. The day another attack was made on balloon but same was not burned. Our machine guns did excellent work. 1Lt Lloyd G. Bowers and 1Lt F. J. Durrschmidt who were observers jumped and landed safely.

A volley ball court was made, while near Raulecourt, for the amusement of the troops and later a

tournament was held of various sports in which the balloon detail proved their valor, carrying off first honors.

The balloon was attacked and burned on 28 Aug by an enemy plane, the observers landing normally. The following day the balloon was attacked again, but not burned, the machine gunners doing excellent work. 2LT J.W. Lane and 2LT J.S. Burrell jumped balloon burned

29 Aug 1918 1LT F.J. Durrschmidt and 1LT L.G. Bowers jumped balloon not burned

About a mile from the camp, through a woods with many diverging paths, was a little quarry town containing plenty of good cheer for the troops. Here-our men fought the battle of "Vin Blanc" and after a most successful campaign spent the remainder of the night wandering through the woods, Vainly trying to find the camp. The balloon was in the air sixty-one hours, made one reglage, and spotted one enemy battery in action.

On 8 Sep, the Company was transferred to the First Army Corps, First American Army, with LT McFarland commanding the Corps balloons and was ordered to the vicinity of Dieulouard, near Pont-a-Mousson, where a position was to be established but no ascensions were to be made until the day of the attack. The Company was the Corps Balloon for the First Army Corps, First Army. Before daybreak on the day of the attack, the balloon ascended and in spite of a violent storm remained in ascension for four hours, and during the afternoon another attempt was made to work but it was found to be impossible. However, during the second and third day considerable time was spent in the air and much information was obtained. On the third day of the attack, 14 Sep the balloon was attacked and burned while adjusting fire at a distance of 26 kilometers on the railroad bridge directly west of Metz. 1LT Maurice R. Smith and 1LT Joseph M. Fox jumped and landed safely. Cpl Coakley, at great risk of injury, succeeded in saving the balloon basket.

On 15 Sep all the companies of the Wing were in ascension, giving lengthy reports on general observations, covering enemy movements, hostile and friendly fire. The Fifth Balloon Company reported the burning of three enemy balloons and made two adjustments.

On the 16th, the Fifth Balloon Co. spotted five enemy batteries, and made two adjustments of fire. The Second Company made two adjustments, all the companies making excellent reports on general observations

On 21 Sep the company was ordered to proceed to Auzeville near Clermont-en-Argonne, to go into reserve, where pleasant rest was enjoyed.

25 Oct 1918 1LT C.L. Furber and 2LT J.W. Lane jumped balloon 555 burned

On 17 Oct the company was ordered to proceed to Apremont-en-Argonne to relieve the First Company. We were assigned as a corps balloon to the First Army Corps, First American Army, also to work with the 78th Division, The balloon was shelled in the bed on 20 Oct and pierced in several places, The men sleeping nearby had a very narrow escape, Rumor has It that Pvt Ireland took refuge in a "G, I." can, The balloon was in the air seven hours at this position.

On 21 Oct the Company moved forward to Chatel Chehery where an excellent liaison was established with Army, Corps and Divisional artillery. The company had an excellent tactical position and had the visibility been good the Company would have been able to do excellent work in the regulation of fire, but on the only day of visibility at that position, 23 Oct, the balloon was attacked and burned while making a reglage. Observers 1Lt Joseph W. Lane landed normally and Cpl Coakley again succeeded in having the basket of the balloon and instrument.

During the night of 26 Oct position of the Company was shelled but no damage done to personnel or equipment.

On 30 Oct balloon was attacked by an enemy plane and riddled with machine gun bullets but did not burn. Observer Phelps and SFC Joseph L. Cain landed normally. While at this point the balloon was in the air 16 hours, and three reglages and spotted three hostile batteries in section.

On 2 Nov the 5th Balloon Co maneuvered forward to Chatel-Cheehery. Beginning 3 Nov, the balloon companies started a continuous advance, which was maintained to 10 Nov, advancing more than 25 kilometers. The victorious pursuit of the enemy by our troops was so rapid that observation work was impossible. Despite the fact that roads were congested with traffic, and rendered almost impassable by adverse weather conditions, the companies kept up their advance to maintain proper liaison with the artillery. On 10 Nov the 5th Balloon Company was attacked by two planes, Spad type with allied insignia and burned. The observers jumped and landed safely.

The Boche threw over some shells one night too close for the Comfort of the troops, especially a small party who were holding forth in their "tin shack," Sergeant Rowe sounded a warning, but alas, it was too late, for a shell landed so close that the shack was showered with mud and the party compelled to break up without any consideration as to the time. The result was the next day the company became a company of cliff dwellers, to remove our habitation from immediate danger. Sergeant Costello, however, for the sake of the morale of the troops, remained in his chateau in the face of all danger, At this position the balloon was in the air sixteen hours, made three reglages and spotted three hostile batteries in action.

On 3 Nov when the enemy retreated from the Champignuelle-Grand Pre Line, the company moved forward to Briquenay and the following day proceeded to Germont, where on the afternoon of 4 Nov the balloon operated and succeeded in locating nine enemy batteries in action. Three hours were spent in the air at this place.

On this move, due to the many ailments of the Quads, we trudged along behind the convoy. The balloon was moved forward in the air, which necessitated lowering all overhead telephone lines or maneuvering the balloon over them.

The linemen of the telephone department had the job of lowering and raising the lines all the way. Corporals Nixon and Gary and Privates Price and Springer deserve great credit, as it was only by their untiring energy and skill in handling the lines that we were able to advance so fast.

On 6 Nov the company again advanced to La Berliere, where it laid over one day to await the stabilizing of the line. We were way ahead of our supplies and forced to live on hard tack and "corned

willie" for several days. We all survived the ordeal, however, none the worse for wear and on 9 Nov moved to La Besace. We operated the following morning two kilometers south of Raucourt.

10 Nov 1918 1Lt L.G. Bowers jumped balloon 238 burned by 2 Spads bearing American insignia At 10.15 a. m. the balloon was attacked and burned by two Spads with American markings. The observers landed safely. This was the fifth jump for Lieutenant Phelps, making him the ace of balloon men, Lieut, A. C. P. Gagge, affectionately known by the boys as the "Iron Duke;" holds the honors as the ace of souvenir hunters. It is rumored that his collection is worth a small fortune as old iron. The balloon was in the air one hour at this position.

The following day orders were received to return to Auzeville and the Company started back, arriving at Auzeville at noon, 12 Nov where we awaited orders to start our return journey to dear old U. S. A. and to our homes.

The Fifth Balloon Company has been in the AEF for over nine months and during that time the balloon has been in the air 506 hours and 11 minutes has conducted 57 regulations of fire and has spotted 51 hostile batteries in action. Since 8 Sep the company has been the corps balloon for the 1st Army Corps. 1st Army and took part in both the St Mihiel and Argonne-Meuse operations. During this action, the company had not had a casualty although the balloon has been burned four times, attacked unsuccessfully eight times, shelled while in the air once and the camp and balloon bed have been shelled five times

Arrival in France 20 Feb 1918

Arrival at the front 28 Jul 1918

Days ascensions made in S.O.S 64

Days ascensions made in Z.O.A 49

Total days ascensions made 113

Number of ascensions made in S.O.S. 226

Number of ascensions made in Z.O.A. 109

Total number of ascensions made 335

Total number of hours in air S.O.S. 236.40

Total number of hours in air Z.O.A. 308.24

Total number of hours in the air 545.04

Artillery adjustments in S.O.S. 26

Artillery adjustments in Z.O.A 13

Total number or artillery adjustments 39

Enemy shells observed 320

Enemy aircraft observed 280

Enemy balloons observed 258

Enemy artillery batteries observed 47

Enemy traffic on road and railroad observed 146

Smoke, fires and flares observed 88

Explosions observed 0

Jumps from basket 12

Balloons attacked 6

Balloons burned 4

Balloons destroyed
Observers killed
Observers captured

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.