

8 BALLOON COMPANY

MISSION

LINEAGE

Co D, 3 Squadron
8 Balloon Company

Constituted, 18 Oct 1927

Demobilized, 1 Oct 1933

STATIONS

Brooks Field, TX, Aug 1919
Camp Lee, VA
Brooks Field, TX
Camp Owen Beirne, TX, Nov 1919

ASSIGNMENTS

24 Balloon Group, 8 May 1929

COMMANDERS

1st Lt Daniel E. Kennedy
1st Lt M. L. Witherup, 5 Dec 1917
Capt M. L. Witherus

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

On Sunday morning, 4 Nov 1917, about seventy men arrived at Fort Omaha from Kelly Field, TX, the majority of them from CA, and so the Eighth Balloon Company came into existence as Co. D, Third Balloon 4 Squadron.

First Lt Daniel E. Kennedy, and Flying Cadets R. S. Tait and J. H. Zipf, were assigned to the company, with Lieutenant Kennedy in command. All of these officers were graduates of the Balloon School for Observers at Fort Omaha. The balance of the ninety men required were secured from men already at Fort Omaha. With very few exceptions all the men were volunteers in the Aviation Section, Signal Corps, and knew practically nothing of balloons. They were a class of high grade men, most of them college or high school graduates. A balloon company is made up of specialists, the different units being maneuvering, balloon rigging, hydrogen gas, parachute folding, telephone, radio, transportation, intelligence, anti-aircraft machine gunnery, orderly room and mess.

The company was soon settled and the men assigned to schools for which they were most adaptable. Classes in the various subjects were soon started and part of the day, was spent in infantry drill.

5 Dec, Lt Kennedy was relieved of command of the company and his place was taken by 1st Lt M. L. Witherup, also a graduate of the school for observers, and he remained in command of the company during all the service of the company at the Front.

By 1 Jan the squadron was equipped and trained for service overseas. The companies for the remainder of the stay in Omaha were given a balloon to maneuver.

17 Jan, 2LT G. E. Quisenberry and Harley F. Brown were assigned to the company.

17 Jan, the Third Balloon Squadron left Omaha on a special train for Camp Mills, Long Island, N. Y., arriving at the latter place 21 Jan.

At 0500, on 31 Jan, the squadron formed under cover of darkness and entrained for the 34th Street Pier, New York. From there they were taken by ferry to the White Star Line Piers, Hoboken, NJ, and at noon the squadron sailed for overseas on board the Royal Mail Ship Adriatic.

2 Feb, the Adriatic anchored in Halifax Harbor where they were joined by the remainder of the convoy and sailed 5 Feb accompanied by the U.S.S. South Dakota and the British Auxiliary Cruiser Teutonic.

Calisthenics in the morning, life-boat drill in the afternoon, and watching for submarines in between times occupied the days during the entire voyage. On the morning of 12 Feb the danger zone was reached and the convoy was joined by an escort of British destroyers. The remainder of the voyage no one was allowed below decks during daylight and life-belts were worn at all times.

On 16 Feb the squadron disembarked at Liverpool, England, and was taken by train to Romsey, where they arrived at Camp Woodley the same evening.

The three days spent there were damp and cold, making necessary the issue of extra blankets and coal-oil stoves for the otherwise cold tents. The men were kept occupied with infantry drills and one afternoon Major Boettcher marched the entire squadron the mile-and a half to Romsey, where he dismissed them for one hour. Upon dismissal there was one grand rush for nearby cafes, but much to their disgust and disappointment they found that Major Boettcher was "wise" as they were closing in fifteen minutes.

After dark on 19 Feb the squadron boarded at Southampton the Hunslet, a captured German cattle-boat, and sailed for Le Havre, Le Havre was reached the evening of 20 Feb and after spending the night there left for St. Maxient, Sevres. From the 23d to the 28th, inclusive, the squadron was located here, and during this period the squadron was broken up and the men in Headquarters Company were equally divided between the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Balloon Companies.

On 28 Feb the 8th Balloon Co entrained for Cuperly, Marne, where it arrived 4 Mar after a long and tedious trip. At Cuperly, the men were kept busy erecting barracks and other necessary buildings for a Balloon School. The 3rd Balloon Co was already there and had done considerable work.

1LT C. F. Adams was in command of the company during the absence of Lt Witherup for two weeks.

It was at Cuperly that the company experienced its baptism of fire, caused by falling anti-aircraft shrapnel fire of French, batteries in the vicinity who were firing at enemy planes overhead. The white chalk roads in the vicinity of the camp made excellent targets for Boche night-bombing planes and on every fair night they took full advantage of it, for it became almost a nightly occurrence for enemy bombers to pass over the camp on the way to bomb Chalons and vicinity all the while sweeping the roads in that region with harassing machine-gun fire.

On 28 Mar the company went by train from Cuperly to Romilly-sur-Seine, remaining there billeted in an abandoned French textile mill for two days on Easter morning the company was assembled and stood muster, after which they hiked to Marigny-le-Chatel (Auge).

On 15 Apr the company moved to Haussimont (Marne) by truck train, There they received their first balloon equipment, including motor trucks, balloon and accessories, winch, technical supplies, anti-aircraft machine guns, etc, A balloon bed was selected about two kilometers from the camp and prepared for receiving the inflated balloon, On 3 May 1LT Zipf and 2LT Quisenberry and Brown were relieved from duty with the company, and 1LT, C. J. Ross, E. B, Brown and G, E, Hinman were attached to the company for duty.

Telephone lines were constructed, and a chart room was set up, and work in connection with, the artillery in the camp was actively begun. Several ascensions were made with artillery officers as passengers, and Lts Ross and Hinman as pilots. Besides balloon work proper, the days when visibility did not justify flying the balloon were spent in rifle, machine gun and pistol practice on a nearby range, and had considerable gas mask and infantry drill as well. During the company's stay here Major Arthur Boettcher, the Squadron Commander, visited the camp and inspected the records and personnel.

On 18 May 2LT E. J. Felt and seventy-four privates were assigned to the company, thus bringing it up to the new authorized strength.

On, 14 June 1LT H. B. Baird and 2LT H. H. Jennings were assigned to the company for duty.

On 27 Jun the company left by train, for La Courtine (Creuse) for one month's training in cooperation with artillery units there. Here, a new camp had to be built, and for some time the men had to sleep in "pup" tents until barracks could be erected. A balloon bed was built and under the direction of a French liaison officer the company started its final training preparatory for service on the Front.

On 27 Jul the 12th and 25th Balloon Companies reached La Courtine and relieved the Eighth Company. Lieutenant Hinman was assigned to the 12th Company and Lt E. E. Brown to the 25th Company, while 2LT H. H. Holland of the 25th Company and 2LT H. B. Post of the 12th Company were assigned to the Eighth Company for duty.

On 30 Jul the company left by train for Toul (Meurthe-et-Moselle), arriving there on August 2. The company took up station near Royameux, and was now attached to the Fourth Army Corps of the First Army.

About the middle of the afternoon of 4 Aug, while Lieutenants Ross and Temple were in the basket, the balloon was attacked by an enemy plane, and although twenty-two machine gun bullet holes were made in the balloon, it failed to ignite. The balloon was immediately hauled down and a new one inflated. On the same day 1LT K. S. Axtater was attached to the company for duty. Two days later 1LT H. D. Baird was relieved from duty with the company for the purpose of taking instruction in gas defense.

The balloon was attacked again on 11 Aug, this time unsuccessfully also, as the only damage. Done to it was three holes torn by anti-aircraft shrapnel shells. The repairs were made in the

field by the company balloon riggers.

On 15 Aug the balloon was again attacked, while Lieutenants Ross and Holland were in the basket. Both observers jumped and landed safely, and while the balloon failed to ignite, the damage caused by the attack amounted to eighty-five machine gun bullet holes and one large hole caused by anti-aircraft shrapnel. Due to the extensive damage done, it was decided impractical to make repairs in the field, and a new balloon was procured and inflated the same day. The total time lost through the attack was three hours and thirty-five minutes.

The Eighth Company was relieved by the 43d Balloon Company on 18 Aug and on 29 Aug the company left by truck trains for Toul, arriving there late that night. After staying here three days, the company left by truck train to take up a position about six kilometers north of Rattantout.

The balloon was never inflated here, and on September 1 the company moved to a new camp about two kilometers north of Rattantout where the balloon was inflated, but due to bad weather no ascensions were attempted, On September 15 the company moved to Amblonville Farm for two days, from which point some observing was carried on, next moving to Les-Sparges on the St. Mihiel Front, Poor visibility prevented doing much good observation work.

The company was awakened early on the morning of 1 Sep, and after a hasty breakfast, the truck train left Toul at 0500 and started on the journey to a new position about six kilometers north of Rattentout. The company lived in pup-tents which were pitched in a thick woods, which provided both good shelter from the elements and from the watchful eyes of enemy observation planes. The balloon was never inflated at this point although telephone lines were installed and an outpost maintained.

On 10 Sep the company moved to a position about two kilometers north-east of Rattentout which had been selected by Lieut. Jennings immediately upon receipt of orders to move. The inflation of the balloon was completed about midnight in a pouring rain and the next morning telephone lines had been completed and everything was ready for ascension.

At 0400 on 11 Sep the 12th the artillery preparation for the St. Mihiel drive started, and soon the order to fly the balloon was received. As the weather conditions were very unsuitable for balloon work, this order was later rescinded, and the balloon was deflated the next day and placed on the winch-tender. The truck train that conveyed the company to a new position at Amblonville Farm, and inflation of the balloon was at once begun, and by midnight inflation was completed. The following morning the balloon ascended at 0550 with Lts Ross and Temple in the basket, and much aerial activity was displayed. About noon an American Salmson plane was forced to land near the balloon position, the motor being out of commission and the observer having been badly wounded.

15 Sep after operating the balloon until 1600 the company moved to a more advanced position in the village of les Eparges. The old French lines run through the town and the surrounding

country, including the roads, had been badly torn up by shell fire. Rainy weather for most of the time at this place made it impossible to do much observing.

The company moved on 20 Sep to Brabant-en-Argonne, where an old French balloon position was taken over. The next day the company's chart room was established at an advanced position, and telephone lines were constructed to the batteries assigned to our balloon. The balloon was not inflated at once, due to the fact that our position was to remain concealed until the beginning of the great Argonne offensive to come.

During the night of 24 Sep the balloon was inflated late at night on 25 Sep the artillery preparation for the offensive began, and early the next morning the balloon was maneuvered to an advanced position north of Recicourt. The weather was favorable for observing work, and much important information was gained during the forenoon. Several times during the forenoon, also, it became necessary to haul the balloon down on account of the approach of enemy planes.

Between H hour on 26 Sep 1918 and 1100 am on 11 Nov 1918, American balloons in the Meuse offensive made an aggregate advance of 45 kilometers. This estimate is computed by measurement in a direct line from original position to ultimate position. The actual road miles practically doubles the mileage. Much of the transport was conducted by hand; the balloon being taken over open field, through country ridden by shell holes and strewn with barbed wire. In several instances, the balloon was transported without a winch for distances of ten kilometers at a time. It is known that the balloons, in a few cases were within 12 hours behind the infantry in crossing No Man's Land.

On 26 Sep at 1630 the balloon ascended to a height of twelve hundred meters for the purpose of adjusting artillery fire on a fleeting target on the road between Montfaucon and Romagnous-Montfaucon, and before this adjustment had been completed, the balloon was attacked and burned by a Fokker D-7 plane. Of the two observers in the basket—1LT C. J. Ross and 2LT H. B. Hudnut—the latter jumped immediately and got away safely; but there seemed to have been some obstacle which prevented Lieutenant Ross jumping immediately after Lieutenant Hudnut, and when he finally did jump, he was too late, for soon after his parachute opened, pieces of the burning balloon fell upon it, igniting it instantly, and crashing the observer to the ground from a height of nearly one thousand meters, killing him instantly. His body was taken immediately to an ambulance, and from there taken to the 315th Field Hospital at Blericourt. The next day Lieutenants Witherup, Holland, Temple and Hudnut attended the burial near the hospital.

28 Sep the company started to move to a new position, but because of the high wind it was impossible to maneuver the balloon, so Lieutenant Jennings and the maneuvering squad spent the night in the old camp while the transportation and the rest of the company went on and was caught in a traffic jam at Avecourt, and the men spent the night in the trucks.

The muddy roads were rendered almost impassable by the heavy rains and shell fire of the few

days previous, but the maneuvering squad got the balloon in the air at daylight and overtook the transportation at Avecourt, and the entire company proceeded to the new position in Cheppy Woods. While camped here the visibility was too poor for any ascensions, and on the 30th the Commanding Officer placed the entire personnel at the disposal of a Sanitary Train, whose hospital was close by. Two days and one night were spent in assisting to evacuate and otherwise care for the great numbers of wounded which had accumulated at advanced dressing stations at Very and Eclisfontaine, while the company transportation assisted in bringing wounded back from the dressing stations.

Late in the afternoon of 3 Oct the company moved to a new position one and one-half kilometers south of Montfaucon, and the company remained here until 10 Oct. In the evening of 10 Oct the company moved to a position just north of Montfaucon by truck train, and took up a position which had formerly been the location of a French battery of artillery. Later in the evening the immediate vicinity of the camp was shelled, and while no casualties occurred, the balloon was deflated by one shell. The following day the company moved back to the old position just south of Montfaucon, and a new balloon was immediately procured and inflated.

On 12 Oct Lts Snow and Williams, F. A., were assigned to the company for duty.

On 17 Oct moved by truck train and took up an advanced position at Eclisfontaine, and the following day 1LT R. H. Tait, Jr., and 2LT A. R. Stubbs, A. S., were assigned to the company.

From this point several ascensions were made with more or less success, and during one flight the enemy attempted to destroy the balloon by shell fire, but was unsuccessful.

5 Aug 1918 1Lt C.J. Ross and 2Lt H. H. Holland jumped balloon 135 not burned but burned by enemy aircraft and AAA fire

26 Sep 1918 1Lt H. D. Hudnut and 1Lt C.J. Ross jumped balloon 135 burned Lt Ross' parachute set on fire by falling pieces of balloon causing him to crash to earth killing him instantly

28 Oct 1918 2Lt Arthur R. Stubbs jumped balloon 314 burned

On 28 Oct, while Lt Stubbs was in the basket, the balloon was attacked and burned by a Fokker, D-7 plane. As Lt Stubbs was much interested in an air battle then going on and being deafened by the machine-gun fire under him, he did not hear Lt Jennings' first four commands to jump, and when he did jump the balloon was already on fire. , the wind was favorable, and he got away successfully and made a safe landing. This proved to be the last jump any officer of this company made during the war.

2LT H. H. Holland was relieved from duty with the company on 30 Oct.

1 Nov saw the beginning of the final drive of the war. The artillery preparation commenced about midnight, and the infantry followed the barrage shortly after daylight. The following day

the company moved forward by truck train to a position in the Bois de Bantheville, where the company slept under cover for the first time since leaving Brabant-en-Argonne. The company remained in this position until November 5, on which date another advance was made to Nouart. While here 2LT H. W. Pyle, C. A. C., and 2LT O. C. Myers and G. D. Wiley, F. A., reported to the company for duty. While here the balloon was moved to an advanced position at Lanauville, and some ascensions were made from a point near Stenay.

The Commanding Officer, 1LT M. L. Witherup, received his promotion to a captaincy while here and was placed in temporary command of Balloon Wing, Fifth Army Corps, afterward assigned to duty with the Second Army. 1LT H. H. Jennings, who had just received his promotion from a second lieutenancy, was placed in command of the company on 6 Nov.

On 11 Nov the Armistice went into effect at the eleventh hour, eleventh day of the eleventh month, and the same day eleven men left for a seven days leave at Grenoble.

On 25 Nov the company moved by truck train to Ville-sur-Cousances (Meuse), and occupied barracks there. The following day they took up regular garrison duties, including calisthenics, guard and infantry drill while awaiting orders which would send the company back to the United States.

Arrival in France 20 Feb 1918

Arrival at the front 30 Jul 1918

Days ascensions made in S.O.S 33

Days ascensions made in Z.O.A 37

Total days ascensions made 70

Number of ascensions made in S.O.S. 154

Number of ascensions made in Z.O.A. 60

Total number of ascensions made 214

Total number of hours in air S.O.S. 163.20

Total number of hours in air Z.O.A. 173.25

Total number of hours in the air 336.45

Artillery adjustments in S.O.S. 29

Artillery adjustments in Z.O.A 4

Total number or artillery adjustments 33

Enemy shells observed 399

Enemy aircraft observed 953

Enemy balloons observed 159

Enemy artillery batteries observed 14

Enemy traffic on road and railroad observed 49

Smoke, fires and flares observed 1103

Explosions observed 12

Jumps from basket 5

Balloons attacked 3

Balloons burned 2

Balloons destroyed
Observers killed 1
Observers captured

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.