

10 BALLOON COMPANY

MISSION

LINEAGE

B Co, 4 Squadron organized November 13, 1917
Redesignated 10 Balloon Company
Demobilized, May 1919

STATIONS

Fort Omaha, NE
France
Camp Lee, VA, May 1919

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

COMMANDERS

Lt Koenig
Lt Palmer, 27 Nov 1917
Lt Henske, 18 Jan 1918
Lt Lavers, 4 Apr 1918
1Lt Dale Mabry, 25 Jul 1918

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The company was organized November 13, 1917, at Fort Omaha, Nebr., with Lieutenant Koenig commanding.

On November 27, 1917, Lieutenant Palmer assumed command, Lieutenant Koenig being transferred to a unit proceeding overseas.

January 18, 1918, the enlisted strength of the company was increased from ninety-one to two hundred men, Lieutenant Henske replacing Lieutenant Palmer as Commanding Officer.

The first week in February orders were received to move to Camp Morrison, Virginia. That could only mean one thing: embarkation for overseas for Camp Morrison, was known as and expressly established for an embarkation port. Excitement ran high: the one thing hoped, for seemed about to be realized. February sixth Company B boarded the train bound for Camp Morrison. Three days later, February 9th, the company arrived at Camp Morrison, were marched about 200 meters from the tracks and quartered in a large warehouse. Rumor had it that the company would embark within a week. Rumor received a severe shock two days later when the company was lined up in front of the warehouse, marched over to the supply depot and presented with a fatigue uniform and a pick and shovel for each man, From that moment on ballooning looked better than it ever had before. February, March, April, May and nearly all of June the company continued its most disheartening work, digging trenched, pulling up stumps all available powder was being sent across building roads, digging drainage ditches and making the jungle generally habitable.

When first coming to Camp Morrison the men of the Company were wearing quite a bit of non-regulation clothing, many of the men having leather leggings tailor made uniforms etc, while in Fort Omaha, Strict orders were in force at this camp relative to regulation uniform; it took several arrests and guard house sentences before the company finally got down to regulation. During the five months at Camp Morrison the Company was placed in quarantine three different times, once from March 12th to March 24th for Scarlet fever, again from April 1st to April 4th on a scare and again from June 2nd to June 11th. These quarantine periods offered the only opportunity for relief from the pick and shovel, so were appreciated more than usual. Fatigue work had taken such a sinister meaning that the men actually volunteered for the much hated K.P. work several times, the largest number of volunteers reporting the day following a double-time with pick and shovel to the scene of work.

June twenty-seventh at the end of five long, hard swaths orders were received for embarkation on June twenty ninth. The spell was broken. That night the company held a grand celebration, a very informal one, in the company barracks.

During the day overseas equipment had been issued so departure was assured. That night of the celebration steel helmets were in greater demand and of more value than at any other time before or since for the celebration turned into a young riot. At midnight the fracas was still going on with 40

signs of alleviating, non-commissioned officers being ducked into cold water when they endeavored to quiet the affair, until Major Hardin was called out of bed at midnight by his wife. Coming over to the barracks he caught the rioters red-handed, lined them up alongside the bunks and gave them a never to be forgotten lecture. What he didn't say was not worth mentioning what he did say is not a matter of record. The company retired peacefully shortly after his departure.

Many men from other companies put in for transfer to company B when it was learned that the company was going across. One man asked his captain for a transfer "What!" said the captain, "You want a transfer to that rough, neck bunch?" That expression of the captain summarized the reputation of the company but the Major was reported as saying: "Rough-necks maybe, but men, everyone." and in spite of the slander the company was listed as one of the most efficient in the States at that time.

Saturday, June twenty-ninth the entire company, all dolled up for overseas service, started at twelve-thirty for the pier, All the latent enthusiasm almost killed at the sign of the pick and shovel returned once more and the ideals of the flaring posters once more dominated, Two bands heading the column putting the finishing touches to the parade.

We embarked on the U. S. T. Amerika June 29, 1918, debarking at Brest, France, July 13, 1918, after an uneventful voyage.

The thermometer was hovering around a hundred or more, but not a man fell by the way, side or dropped out en route. At five thirty the company was lined up at the pier ready to board and in short time were started across the gang plank, onto the Steamship America, a name sufficient to stir up plenty of sentiment. After getting on board it was found out that the ship was an old Italian liner, manned by an Italian crew; sentiment somewhat dropped. At seven the same evening the ship slipped down the river to the lower bay and lay at anchor until the following afternoon at four thirty when the anchor was pulled in and the ship started down the bay. Newport News does not have a Statue of Liberty, still the receding shores of the United States of America was sufficient statue of Liberty to give all the attendant thrills at the thought of leaving home and country. The last sign of shore faded into the distance just as the sun was setting in the west; it was then that every man on board felt what it means to an American to leave his native land.

Next morning at sun rise several other transports hove into sight, gathered together in a convoy and were joined by a fleet of light destroyers and a portion of the mosquito fleet. At noon several other transports and a cruiser joined the transports, completing the convoy. Although the sea was calm and the Weather excellent many of the men took to their hammocks early in the day. Nothing special happened the next few days until after the fourth day out, the escorting cruiser let go of a terrific broadside followed by several more shots. Every one rushed to see to the submarine but when the smoke cleared away Old Glory was floating out on the breeze from the main mast of the cruiser and one by one the transports raised the flag-- it was the Fourth of July.

The remainder of the voyage was very uneventful, in fact, decidedly monotonous especially with the orders at night "Lights out; no smoking." Early in the morning on July 11th, fifteen American

destroyers met the convoy as the cruiser that escorted the convoy all the way across returned. On Friday July the 12th, at six o'clock in the evening, land was sighted. No one knew just where the convoy was expected to land so rumor was rife as to the port of debarkation. The question was settled that evening when the ship anchored in the bay of Brest. Nine o'clock the next morning lighters came out and the company was taken to shore.

After the company had all come ashore it was marched to the outskirts of Brest to a rest camp known as Pontaten Barracks supposedly at one time headquarters of Napoleon and his troops; Napoleon surely had a large number of headquarters in his day. During a short stay at this rest camp Dr Pryor the company surgeon earned undying fame with the company when he ordered all men out at two o'clock in the morning to take a bath; the water was cold, the night colder.

On July 16; the enlisted strength of the company was reduced to one hundred and seventy men, the men transferred out of the company being sent to the Balloon School, Camp de Souge.

We arrived at our training camp, Camp de Meucon, July 17, where we were taught "how the French do it." July 25 Lieutenant Mabry assumed command, relieving Lieutenant Lavers. On August 26 we boarded a French train and proceeded at last toward the Front, arriving at Toul, the jumping off place for the Lorraine Front, the 30th of August. At dusk, the company piled aboard trucks and our journey towards Berlin began. The Boche had succeeded in dropping a shell on a large ammunition dump near Menil-la-Tour. Because of the fact that it was burning and the fixed ammunition was exploding, it was necessary for us to proceed by side roads that were congested with all kinds of traffic.

Approaching nearer the front lines, we observed the signal rockets, flares and Verey lights being thrown up all along the front trenches, these helping to increase our nervousness at being up there for the first time. We all breathed easier when at last we arrived at our new camp in a woods between Menil-la-Tour and Ansauville. Our first night was spent in rat and "cootie" infested old French barracks.

The next morning, because of the fact that it was still raining, there were no big guns firing. We were very much surprised that things could be so quiet up, there.

Fortunately the trip lasted only one day, the train arriving at Vannes at nine the next morning. Trucks carried the company to a camp 12 kilometers away; quite an unattractive place, quite inviting after the box cars and the French trains with their shriek whistles. At this camp training began for active on the front; everything taught in the states had to be relearned for as one man wrote home in his letter, everything is changed, we have to learn everything over again except how to handle the pick and shovel.

The company was put through daily drills, taught the use of gas masks how to use helmets, special selected men were sent to various schools for training, lecturers were given on ballooning on the front, tactical disposition of the balloon, building of balloon and everything else connected with the proper handling of balloons

On 13 Aug Dr Pryor gave his too famous lecture, subject keep your minds clean which was more paraphrased than president Wilsons most famous speeches.

During all this time the company had absolutely no transportation of any kind or description so the first week in August Lt Lavers was sent away with orders to get our allotment of transportation on 14 Aug back he came with 7 Kelly Springfield trucks, 3 fords and one old Martini touring car that had been rescued from the salvage pile and coaxed all the way across France. The transportation has survived to date in spite of the most strenuous use.

24 Aug the long looked for orders for duty at the front were received, equipment was packed, everything gotten in readiness and on the twenty-sixth of Aug the company left camp for Toul this time traveling in regular third class coaches and not box cars

Arrived at Toul early on the morning of 30 Aug. As the company was bound for the zone of advance all traveling had to be accomplished at night as the company layover in Toul until evening. The night was as black as pitch, lights of any kind meant aerial bombs galore. The sensation of nearing the actual front where the fighting was going on gave sufficient incentive for compliance with any order regarding safety of lives.

Along about midnight the road became crowded with vehicles of all kinds, guns, transports, of every description. Darkness everywhere except in the distance where the shells were bursting in the air. The truck drivers were all tense and nervous, this was their first experience driving trunks at night without lights and over strange roads; the men were all keyed up to high pitch. Suddenly without warning there was a terrific bombarding up ahead a few kilometers, shells went screeching bombs bursting and bullets flying and the whole sky lighted up for miles around; ammunition dump had been fired by the Boche shells. This meant a wide detour to avoid the bursting shells so it was nearly three in the morning before the company finally arrived at the place to be set for the camp.

Just after noon on September 1 we were brought to a nearer realization of the war when a big Hun shell fell and exploded about two hundred meters from the Camp. Half the company started on the run to get souvenirs, the other half did their running towards-their gas masks, and tin derbies. No more shells fell nearby, so it was a fifty-fifty proposition between those who were so anxious to procure souvenirs and those who played "safety first."

At 4.30 a. m., on September 4, and after the balloon 146 was taken from the bed and adjusted to the winch, two observers climbed into the basket. The balloon arose to 300 meters and the journey to the forward position began, we had just left the forward position to bring the big gas bag back to its bed, because of poor visibility, when five enemy planes made their appearance. They looked things over but flew away without making any attempt to shoot down our balloon because the anti-aircraft batteries began pegging away at them. The balloon was taken from the bed again at 12.30 p.m., and we journeyed back to the forward position. The bag was at about 500 meters 'when the corporal of the lookouts reported he heard the humming motor of an-enemy plane. The balloon was ordered to be "hailed down." It was' descending rapidly when at an altitude of about 350 meters an enemy

plane -dove at it from the clouds. The machine gunners opened fire and as" the first' clip in their guns started to spit several anti-aircraft batteries opened up and the battle was on. Both observers, Lieutenants Likens and Boyd, 'jumped and" their parachutes carried them through the heavy barrage to a safe landing in a nearby field. In his first and second attempts to fire the gas in the balloon, the Boche failed but his third attempt was successful and the balloon fell to the ground a mass of flames. The enemy avion turned towards his own lines and by doing a number of spectacular stunts escaped the barrage. When we last saw him, he was crossing our lines closely pursued by two "Spades," trying to "sit on his tail." Infantry observation posts reported that his plane came to earth behind his lines "out of control."

On the morning of September 12th, the great St. Mihiel drive opened with a heavy artillery barrage at one o'clock. The great guns roared about us and a battery of 240s that were emplaced directly behind us shook our barracks and made sleep or rest impossible. The next morning, during a heavy wind, our balloon took-a "nose dive" into the trees, destroying the balloon and throwing both observers out of the basket. Lieutenant Likens escaped uninjured but Lieutenant Boyd received injuries so severe that he was subsequently invalided home. We immediately procured a new balloon, inflated it, and started forward the next night. We moved each night under cover of darkness along roads all shell torn and terribly congested with all sorts of traffic going forward ammunition and food for the infantry; ammunition, food-and forage for the artillery, and reserve troops.

Our last move took us into a woods two kilometers south of Essay and this was our position until September 21. While in these Essay woods, we received our first real taste of shell fire. A German battery of 105s opened up about midnight and immediately a company race towards the old German dugout was on. No fatalities resulted but there were a number of narrow escapes racing around corners and plunging into the trenches leading into the dugouts. About thirty shells fell, two so close that dirt was thrown around our tents from their bursting.

On September 21, we moved to Jezainville arriving there at noon. After the company had been fed, a balloon bed was constructed and the balloon inflated.

There was no observation here, the first few days because of poor visibility. The men busied themselves ill picking up odd bits of lumber lying around the hill and built a regular settlement of small shacks, with the result that our observers reported that the camp from the air looked more like a Divisional Training Area in the S.O.S., than a balloon company on the Front

We remained at this position until the signing of the Armistice and during our stay there, the Boche aviators were successful in burning two of our balloons. On the first of these occasions, September 25, Lieutenant Lavers jumped, and on the second, October 6, Lieutenant Likens made his second drop at the Front.

The enemy artillery made several attempts to shoot our balloons down and while their deflection was perfect the range was always short and no damage was ever accomplished. Night bombers were very active here and they dropped a number of bombs on roads leading into camp, too close for

comfort.

We took part in several demonstrations here, compelling the Germans, to hold heavy reserves in this Sector as our aid to the Americans that were making the drive along, the Argonne.

Infantry observers reported a big fire within the German lines one night and we received orders to fly the Balloon at once. Two observers went up and after several hours working in a heavy rain that made accurate observation next to impossible the balloon was hauled down. The observers reported the fire was in Noveant, a small town south of Metz, and that it had probably been caused by our artillery, which, assisted by our balloon, had shelled Noveant Bridge that afternoon.

It was while we were at Jezainville that the "dugout slide" was invented and we found our helmets were not surplus weight as they had been back in the S.O.S., for the big shells whizzed and rumbled overhead frequently.

The company had completed all plans for taking part in the long expected drive on the fortress of Metz, scheduled to begin on the morning of November 12, but instead of a victorious advance, someone had signed an Armistice, and as far as the company was concerned, the world relapsed into a period of prolonged silence, a silence unbroken by the roar of huge guns, the scream of Boche shells, and the hum of Boche planes, a silence which persists to this day, even as the Tenth Balloon Company sinks deeper and deeper into the bottomless mud of Ville-sur-Cousances".

Arrival in France 12 Jul 1918

Arrival at the front 30 Aug 1918

Days ascensions made in S.O.S 15

Days ascensions made in Z.O.A 29

Total days ascensions made 44

Number of ascensions made in S.O.S. 91

Number of ascensions made in Z.O.A. 46

Total number of ascensions made 137

Total number of hours in air S.O.S. 71.00

Total number of hours in air Z.O.A. 88.49

Total number of hours in the air 159.48

Artillery adjustments in S.O.S. 26

Artillery adjustments in Z.O.A 3

Total number or artillery adjustments 29

Enemy shells observed 66

Enemy aircraft observed 204

Enemy balloons observed 139

Enemy artillery batteries observed 16

Enemy traffic on road and railroad observed 13

Smoke, fires and flares observed 7

Explosions observed 15

Jumps from basket 4

Balloons attacked 3

Balloons burned 3
Balloons destroyed
Observers killed
Observers captured

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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Sources

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