

4th BALLOON COMPANY

LINEAGE

D Co, 2nd Squadron organized 25 Sep 1917

4th Balloon Company, Jun 1918

STATIONS

Fort Omaha, NE

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

COMMANDERS

1LT J. H. McCawley

Cpt F. A. Post

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

Organized at Fort Omaha, NE, 25 Sep 1917 1Lt John H. McCawley was the commander. The company also had four other officers and 91 enlisted men.

On 27 Nov 1917, the Second Squadron left Omaha amid none of the wild excitement which attended the departure of many of the later units. The only flurry that attended our modest exit was caused by several of the members endeavoring to carry with them the two mascots of the Fort, Bob and Jack, dogs of very uncertain pedigree.

Our arrival at Camp Mills, Long Island, was hailed with joy—by the camp officials. It was a wonderful chance to use about four hundred of the new picks and shovels at the camp. We used them too. If there are any ditches or general construction work in the camp that we did not accomplish, we should like to hear of them.

After a week's stay at Long Island, the squadron again entrained, and traveled to St. John, New Brunswick, where we boarded a transport and steamed for England by way of Halifax.

We are good sportsmen. It is therefore entirely outside our province or purpose to discuss that one long, lonely night spent on that train, with its attendant (in) conveniences. We are likewise good soldiers. Therefore we refrain from discussing the cuisine a la mode—I don't think, served by His Majesty's satanic hirelings. Some people may be able to live on tripe, smoked fish and tea, but Hell! Sherman was right.

On 10 Dec 1917 it sailed for England as Company D of the 2nd Balloon Squadron and arrived at Liverpool England, 25 Dec.

Subsequent movements were Liverpool by train to Southampton and to a rest camp for one night. From there by boat to Le Havre on 28 Dec and landed there on the morning of the 29th. To a rest camp until 1 Jan 1918 then by train to Bordeaux arriving on 4 Jan and going into at Souge 12 kilometers north west of the city. Here after a few weeks of bunk fatigue, we began our first work of building balloon beds. What wonderful beds they were too marvels, so far as wind breaks and camouflaging were concerned. Here Company D started its wonderful career. It began when we cleared a section of woodland, pulled the stumps, and built bed and windbreak in less than half a day. Received part of our transportation; 7 Delahay and 2 Fiat trucks and 1 Harley Davidson motorcycle also all of our balloon equipment and chart room supplies.

We left Bordeaux on 4 March arriving at Haussimont on 5 March. While here we received the balance of our transportation and ten more men. The chart room received instruction from French Balloon 54 at Monte Preux and when a machine gun section was organized they got valuable instruction from the same source. The balloon section flew the balloon several times under French tutelage. The company was equipped with gas masks and steel helmets and instruction in wearing the former. The telephone section had instruction in wireless by American Artillery. It was while we were stationed at Haussimont that our chart room personnel received their training under Captain Wrenn. To his systematic and thorough instruction, we owe the credit of having the best organized and most competent chart room of any company in the A. E. F.

Haussimont was left on 12 Apr 1918 and we arrived on the Front at Lahymeix on the same day. Here we were assigned to work with the French and American artillery connected with the Second American Division. Weather conditions prevented much observation, but a new balloon bed and maneuvering road was built. The balloon bed previously used by the French was improved and

camouflaged and a road was constructed to a forward flying position. The machine gun section had further instruction in the operation and firing of their pieces, several of them going to a target range for practice against moving targets.

On 25 Apr, a new balloon bed was constructed as the old one was too small and was poorly drained. Owing to the topography of the country and season of the year, there was a great deal of ground and serial mist which made such poor visibility that it was almost impossible to accomplish a work. On 3 May 60 men came into the company. An intelligence section was formed and had instructions in its duties and were given opportunities of seeing all hostile planes brought down in the sector so that they could learn to recognize them.

Leaving Lahaymeix on 15 May 1918, we traveled overland to Trondes from whence we took up a position in the Toul Sector, two kilometers south of Raulecourt, and directly in front of the famous Hun Gibraltar, Mount-Sec. There we were forced to build our own camp. Only two barracks, in themselves insufficient to accommodate the company, were provided. Thanks to the ingenuity and energy of the salvage squad, three additional barracks were secured after two nights guarded work in the stillness and gloom of a small patch of woods in No Man's Land. The woods in which the maneuvering field and balloon bed were built were under constant observation from ground observation posts which the enemy had located on Montsec. The visibility was rather poor throughout May so that little work was possible.

On 18 May 13 new men arrived in charge of 2LT L. H. Campbell. 5 men were transferred to the Company on 22 May 1918.

On 1 Jun the company moved out to Gerard-Sas and from then on night flights were made on an average of once a week and on 13 Jun early morning flights were begun. On 6 Jun the first Reglage was made with an American Battery. From 16 Jun, except for occasional days of rain, low flying clouds or poor visibility, there was good flying weather so that the observers had every opportunity of making themselves familiar with the terrain of the St Mihiel Salient and extensive reports of enemy movements operations etc were turned in. Extensive liaison with French and American Batteries was carried on by the observers.

On 16 Jun 1918, the Germans made their attack on Xivray. Shortly after daylight, our balloon ascended with Lieutenants Wermuth and Brown in the basket. Connections were established with the artillery and reglage work started. We evidently caused the enemy some annoyance because their balloon which operated opposite us moved from its regular position so that its observers had an unobstructed view down the road leading past our balloon bed. At 0758 they began shelling the winch and maneuvering field with H. E. and shrapnel and this was kept up until the balloon was hauled down at 0849. No sooner was it put in the bed at 0858 than it was hit and badly damaged. Breakfast was being served to the men on the field when the first H.E. arrived. It landed so close to several members of the company, that only the fact they were sitting on the ground saved them from pushing daisies in the fertile fields of France. Had Mr. Hoover been there he would have wept at the way that perfectly good chow was scattered over the landscape. And it was remarkable, the speed some of our men developed. After maneuvering for over an hour amidst a horrible maelstrom of bursting shells, the balloon was finally hauled down and placed on the bed. Three minutes later a shell landed fifteen feet from the nose of the balloon and the first American balloon was destroyed at the front.

On 27 Jun the company moved to L'Hermitage and during the month which followed there was good visibility and some very effective work was done. Constant liaison with the artillery resulted in the completion of 38 Reglages. On 22 Jul at 1213 with Lt Rooney and Ferrenbach in the basket a Boche plane attacked the balloon and succeeded in burning it. Both observers jumped and landed safely. At 1637 just four hours and 24 minutes later another balloon had been inflated and ascended with the same observers in the basket.

On 22 Jul 1918, the balloon was suddenly attacked by an enemy plane. The machine guns took the occasion to jam at the critical moment and the plane escaped after setting fire to the balloon. The observers, 1LT P.N.A. Rooney and 1LT L.C. Ferrenbach jumped and landed safely. Balloon 1571 burned Three hours and fifty-five minutes later, they again ascended in a new balloon, wherein the Fourth Balloon Company established another record.

On 2 Aug the company started for the Chateau Thierry Front and arrived at Dravigny where we relieved the French Balloon 90 on 4 Aug. Here we were subject to considerable enemy artillery fire and gas and enemy aerial activity was so active that it was not feasible to maneuver closer that 7-8 kilometers from the lines. The visibility was seldom over eight kilometers so very little real work could be done. On 22 Aug with Lt Rooney in the basket the balloon was shelled with shrapnel but clever maneuvering forestalled any damage to it.

On one occasion, the balloon was riding serenely when two shells exploded, one to the right and one to the left of the balloon. These were followed immediately by more. Shrapnel was scattered rather freely among the men on the ground. The chauffeur on the winch had some trouble in cranking the engine preparatory to moving the winch. It seems that the main trouble was that there were so many feet sticking out from under the machine. However, the balloon was maneuvered safely out of danger.

While Lt MacBrayne and Flight Sgt Brunell were in the basket on 2 Sep, an enemy plane threatened an attack and both observers jumped and landed safely.

The next position occupied was at Courville where camp was made and the balloon bedded on 4 Sep but the stay was of short duration as the French Balloon relieved us on 8 Sep and we moved to Graves Farm near Chateau Thierry to await further orders. The next move was to Nixieville on the Verdun Front where we arrived on 13 Sep and on 16 Sep moved to Fromereville and relieved the French Balloon 38.

On 26 Sep 1918, when the Argonne-Meuse drive started, the balloon was moved forward with the advance. It was attacked by an enemy plane and the observers, 1Lt P.N.A. Ronney and 2Lt E. S. Montgomery, were forced to jump. Owing to the good work of the machine gunners, the attack was unsuccessful. Balloon not burned

The same night the balloon was bedded at le Claire farm. The lines to the east of the Meuse had not advanced, and the enemy had an unobstructed view of the balloon bed. As a result, the balloon was shelled on the bed, which necessitated bringing it back to Fromereville.

While the position of the lines at the close of the day was not definitely known although it was known

that the Boche had been driven back several kilometers it was decided to move the balloon to a forward position at le Claire Farm. As no offensive had been made on the east of the Meuse, the Germans still held the towns of Brabant and Consenvoy with the high observation posts to the northeast of them, and this put us within eight kilometers of the lines in such a position that the enemy could see our balloon in the bed, every maneuver carried out with it and could direct fire on the company from ground observation posts. As a result our position was shelled during the night and the balloon punctured by shrapnel. The next morning the balloon was taken back to Fromereville, repaired and reinflated.

From the beginning of Aug, the Fourth Company was assigned to the Third Army Corps, as the Corps Balloon. Our duty was to work with the Corps Artillery, and also to perform special missions. During the Argonne-Meuse drive, one of the special duties was to string and keep open a line of communication for the Group Commander. This involved a line over twenty-five kilometers long. The telephone section rose nobly to the occasion and kept the line in order despite heavy shell fire and the horses, which persisted in walking through the stake lines.

The balloon was not again moved forward until the start of the offensive east of the Meuse on 4 Oct in which Brabant and Consenvoy were taken and the line pushed back to such an extent that a position one kilometer east of Bethincourt became tenable. Here the poor condition of the roads made it very difficult to get gas for the balloon and provision for the men. Although a good advance had been made east of the river our position was still open to such good ground observation by the enemy that for three days no ascensions were made because of orders to the contrary.

From 4 Oct until 9 Nov the balloon was kept at the same position as sufficient advance was not made east of the Meuse to enable us to move farther north. Our mission while here was to observe on that part of the lines to the north east and balloon made almost daily ascensions but during the whole time the weather was for the most part bad and poor visibility made it impossible to do but very little work with the artillery. A ground observation post was established three kilometers nearer the front lines which enabled the observed there to send good detailed reports on much that would have been impossible to observe from the balloon. 9 Nov the balloon was moved up to a position two kilometers south west of Vilosnes where it remained until the armistice was signed.

During the advance, the balloon was moved forward over forty kilometers. After the Armistice was signed, it was flown for several days in front of the Infantry, near Peuvillers. It was deflated there on 16 Nov 1918, and the company moved back to a German camp situated about two kilometers east of Brioules.

A change in the command of the company was made on 20 Oct when Lt McCawley left the company and was assigned to duty as CO Balloon Group, Third Army Corps. Lt Claude E. Smith was then given command and LT Paul N. A. Rooney succeeded him as maneuvering Officer.

On 13 Nov the balloon was moved to a station on the lines near Peuvillers and during the three following days made several ascensions. It was deflated and the company move back to the camp in Bois de La Cote Lemont to await further orders.

The 4th Balloon Company was on the front without rest for, 218 days. During that time only one

balloon was burned and two damaged by shell fire. The original transportation as issued is still in good serviceable condition with the exception of the Fiat personnel car which was salvaged on 13 Sep. During this time a minimum of sickness has existed rarely more than two men on sick report at the same time and even then nothing serious. Only three men were injured and then through the explosion of unauthorized hand grenades.

Arrival in France; 28 Dec 1917
Arrival at the front; 12 Apr 1918
Days ascensions made in S.O.S;
Days ascensions made in Z.O.A.; 96
Total days ascensions made; 96
Number of ascensions made in S.O.S.
Number of ascensions made in Z.O.A.; 149
Total number of ascensions made; 149
Total number of hours in air S.O.S.;
Total number of hours in air Z.O.A.; 274.31
Total number of hours in the air; 274.31
Artillery adjustments in S.O.S.;
Artillery adjustments in Z.O.A.; 46
Total number or artillery adjustments; 46
Enemy shells observed; 578
Enemy aircraft observed; 89
Enemy balloons observed; 109
Enemy artillery batteries observed; 20
Enemy traffic on road and railroad observed; 112
Smoke, fires and flares observed; 313
Explosions observed; 10
Jumps from basket; 6
Balloons attacked; 4
Balloons burned; 1
Balloons destroyed; 1
Observers killed;
Observers captured;

Air Force Order of Battle
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Sources
The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.