

44 BALLOON COMPANY

MISSION

LINEAGE

44 Balloon Company

Activated, 23 Mar 1918

Demobilized, Aug 1919

STATIONS

Camp John Wise, TX

Camp Morrison, VA, May 1918

Port of Embarkation, Jun 1918

France

Mitchel Field, NY, Aug 1919

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

COMMANDERS

2nd Lt Glenn E. Wallace

George E. Daniel, 11 Apr

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

2LT Glenn E. Wallace was relieved of duty with the 40th Balloon Co and assigned to take command of the 44th Balloon Company. He will commence immediately with the organization and training of the unit. Under the leadership of a commanding officer who though a strict disciplinarian and severe drill master never failed to have the men's interest at heart and who in turn idolized by them. The company made rapid progress in things military their adaptability was in fact astonishing considering their absolute lack of military experience.

The arduous task of transforming a body of undisciplined citizenry into an efficient military unit was taken in hand. Most of the men had already been initiated into the secrets connected with the operation of the pick and shovel, but with few exceptions military conformations and, drills were still unsolved mysteries. Knowledge of these were gradually acquired together with the more technical training of the various departments of the balloon company and its efficient and coordinated operation.

The men were assigned to schools where they received special training in the various branches in the balloon service, including rigging, fabric, telephony, transportation, mechanics, paper work and a few picked men to Non-com school under the tutelage of student aviators and cadets. Intensive training it was called and the term is true as the balloon company was called out at 0530 and after a day of strenuous duty including maneuvering of balloon infantry drill and cordage and fabric work they would consider themselves fortunate when able to get to their bunks by 0830.

In spite of the intense heat with the thermometer reaching one hundred and ten in the shade the men kept their spirits up in remarkable fashion and though comparisons are more or less odious they were proclaimed the most efficient company in Camp John Wise Within two weeks after receiving their first balloon they broke all records at bedding it down. The following week they made a record which still stands in gassing a new balloon. The latter part of May the company constructed a brush hangar which attained considerable notoriety and drew some very favorable comments and in drilling and balloon maneuvering and discipline they were setting an example.

The officers and men of the company were working overtime; the men furnishing a great deal of the detail work about camp and therefore a state of staleness occurred. It was only the indomitable spirit of the men and the many amusing episodes which occurred during the period of training which overcome the inevitable slump which follows over training.

Fond recollections of our trip to Camp Prentiss as the plebian buck would say the trip to the sticks will long remain with us. The eventual morning when we left Camp Wise should be entered in history as an event worthy of note in our hall of fame. Well do we remember our noble crew assembled in the early dawn with our new packs and pup tents borrowed from the Quartermaster the night before the said packs and pup tents when rolled and ready to be carried well representing the ingenuity of the American Soldier. The top sergeant having lost his manual the men were without instruction in the gentle art of pack rolling consequently each man was left to his own devices and all 57 varieties were represented but we had a drum and one of the company could play with one stick so we marched away happily.

After passing through three sand storms that completely filled up the ditches we were digging across Kelly Field at San Antonio, Texas, we were declared 32nd degree artists with the pick and shovel and were given a chance to qualify for the balloon service. We had the necessary physical requirements for becoming human sand-bags—heavy from the neck down.

We were transferred to Camp John Wise and our training as balloonitics began in earnest. The boys with the largest waist bands were trained in maneuvering the balloon or in plain English, holding her down. The pole-climbers were sent to a telephone school. The "Home, James" boys were taught that a truck is not a limousine. The sailors and tailors were put in a needlework class that had the "Ladies Aid Society" beaten a mile at sewing up balloons. The pen-pushers were sent to the chart-room and paper-work school.

Then came the real seasoning process. First we were taken into the woods below camp, where we lived two whole days in pup tents until it happened to rain and we hustled back to camp. After that we hiked over to a Free Balloon School on the other side of the city and ran an elevator service there for a couple of days with an antique balloon that worked somewhat like a dumb-waiter, being pulled down by hand. We also worked out with some artillery. It was quite a success. After a few days our student observers succeeded in locating the target.

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The men were assembled fifteen or twenty times by the top sergeant for the inspection of our identification tags, looked over by the medic to see that no one had contracted the hoof and mouth disease since the inspection of the previous day, and a few general orders read, telling each man to maintain a grave-like silence concerning our destination in order to delude the canteen janitor who was suspected to be of German descent.

One of the greatest events in the history of the 44th is that long to be remembered morning we left Wise.

After a good night's rest on the bare wire springs of a steel army cot we arose at 4.00 a. m. for a cup of coffee and stood in formation until 8.00 a. m. when someone awoke the C. O. and we were ready to start, a ten-mile ride through that beautiful sand bed, called Texas, to the site of our new home, Camp Bullis.

We might digress for a moment to describe this camp. The company making this camp had truly simulated all the conditions surrounding a balloon camp in France as described by the Ladies' Home Journal. The side of a hill had been chosen for the site of the balloon bed and maneuvering 'field,' and how this location would warm the heart of a tactician, as the balloon was the most noticeable object in view when approaching from the valley some five miles below

As an added improvement in the event that a passing plane might mistake the place, a white stone winch road was constructed across the maneuvering field, flower beds with white stone borders were laid out around the tents. The only thing lacking was a 'welcome mat' for the enemy in the shape of a 'landing T.'

Immediately upon our arrival at the camp the company which, we relieved departed in our trucks leaving us in entire possession. And now the real work of war started, each department taking charge of its individual work.

The supply sergeant immediately began an inventory with the idea of ascertaining what we had assumed, and that inventory sure looked like a Salvation Army rummage sale but consisted mostly of the tools of the aviation section, the pick and shovel.

The chart room corporal received his orders as follows: 'Prepare the chart house,' much as Queen Anne must have said, 'Prepare my bath!' Fortunately, this department carried its own equipment, two of the men having stubs of pencils in their pockets and another one found an old note book. All that was needed now was to find the chart room.

After diligent search this was discovered in the woods back of the balloon hangar and consisted of a tent, housing a broken switchboard, a camouflaged rustic bench and sortie wonderful flower beds (incidentally the company preceding us had been too busy building the flower beds to repair the switchboards, but this was merely an incident). Just previous to leaving, one of the men in the other company informed us that there were some four or five miles of telephone wire strung through the woods about the camp, unfortunately he did not know where, so during the first day our telephone gang resembled the hounds in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' tracing out the various lines, but they managed to establish a good telephone system with the aid of our three or four second-hand buzzer sets.

The second day we were ready for business and with fast beating hearts we watched our faithful balloon ascend to observe for the artillery stationed nearby. Much was learned the first day. Before night we knew that 'on the way' meant gun fired, and that 'deflection' had something to do with range finding. Some slight delay was caused the first day as we had no maps except those furnished by the artillery and these must have been very poor as our cadets were unable to locate the target range in three ascents. But by afternoon things were working smoothly, as an officer from Wise came out and did the observing and was able to locate the exact hill, with a few, exceptions, which held the target at which the artillery was firing. As we had an artillery captain in the chart room all that day much was learned about artillery, as well as many of the expletives used by artillery officers in directing fire. No doubt by night we would have recognized a gun had we seen one.

The third day the camp was moved across the road into the shelter of a small grove and that afternoon the 'battle of the woodtick' started, continuing for several days.

The men soon became so infested with several species of vermin in spite of the most arduous labor on the part of the company 'Vet.,' who administered 'C. C.'s and numerous other pills by the gross, but all in vain as trench conditions were so closely simulated, and our return to Camp Wise resembled the return of that chosen band after their seven years' sojourn through the plague-infested forests. This incident in fact so shook the faith of those men wearing the insignia of the snake around the tree in our company, that one of their number has followed us in search of the festive flea, ever since.

After three or four days in this camp we returned to Wise, hardened and trusty troops ready for service in France.

Toward the end of June the company left Camp Wise for Morrison, Va. We arrived at our destination Aeronautical General Supply Depot and Concentration Camp, Morrison, VA the morning of 1 July. Our stay in this camp was spent in equipping the men for overseas taking long hike and undergoing numerous physical examination.

On 10 Jul at 0330 with jubilant feet and heavy packs we left camp Morrison for Newport News and the many colored transports which was to carry us to that goal to which all American Soldiers aspire France. The morning air was exhilarating and every one was in high spirits as we climbed aboard and settled ourselves for the long voyage ahead of us.

Our ship the Charles weighed anchor off Newport News at 0635 without the sign of a cheer or God speed. Our movement having been sudden and secretly carried out. We were saluted farther down the bay however and were greatly enthused by the sight which met our gaze. As we steamed by Uncle Sam's dreadnaught; USS Minnesota marine band struck up Over There while about 500 men aboard dressed in spotless white stood at attention. Pointing her nose to the open sea on this beautiful Jul morning with a passenger list of 9 officers and 204 men our ship joined convoy some forty miles out. There were 12 transports Easter Eggs as the sailors called them 2 destroyers and one battleship. We quickly fell into place in convoy formation flanked on either side by the destroyers and led by the Battle Wagon. A few hours after our departure from our shores our spirits started downward our stomachs entered a state of revolt and many of the men charitably inclined fed the Aquarian subjects of old Neptune with involuntary regularity. Day after day our staunch old transport rolling and tossing on a zig zag over-changing course steadily plowed through the restless turbulent brine. Throughout the trip our men were on duty as lookouts constantly watching from the crow's nest bridge and upper deck for the elusive and destructive submarine. Among all the duties on board the KP or Kitchen Police which is the army term for pot washer, floor mopper or cook's helper referred to collectively at times as the dirty dozen it is no easy task to scrub an enormous greasy pot in a stuffy foul smelling ships galley with the deck dropping away or trying to sneak out from under you with frequent violent and nauseating side lurches. About 300 miles from our destruction we were met by more of our destroyers which swarmed about us for all the world like bees about their

queen. Several of these agile little guardians had one or more white stars painted on their decks or stacks. Proclaiming the destruction of a German submarine the murder of our women and children had been avenged. At last on the 21Jul after 11 days at sea we reached the French port of Brest. We were taken ashore in a clumsy little tug boat which bumped into every other craft in the way. It was a motley crowd which met our gaze as for the first time we set food on French soil. There were French soldiers in varied colored uniforms escorting German prisoners from labor to and from the docks and American Stevedores of a negro regiment who joked and sang at their work.

After about two hours hard marching, our senses of balance slightly confused and our stomachs still in a high state of rebellion we arrived the little field allotted to us for our camp, plot 83 Pontanzen Barracks. Our stay at this camp is not among the happiest recollections we will carry back with us. Cold wind blowing from the sea carrying with it an equally cold rain made the pure shelter of our pup tents almost unbearable The ground was always damp our rations sometimes insufficient and water so scarce that it became necessary to limit each man to one canteen full each day. It was with great relief after five days spent at this place, to receive orders to move to Vannes, (Morbihan), France.

On the morning of 27 Jul the men were loaded into box cars, less than half the size of American cars, 40 men to the car. We had to take turns sitting down. We passed thru many stations very much alike with their quota of furloughed American and French soldiers. We arrived at Vannes and changed there for the short trip over the little narrow gauge railroad which connects the camp and town. This little railroad had very sharp curves and steep grades. The engine slowed down perceptibly on the grades and coughed laboursly on the curves, but contrary to our expectation managed to make the top of each grade.

Our next station was Camp Meucon, near Vannes. There the company operated a balloon continually, directing fire for the artillery which was in training there, while additional training was given us by French balloon experts. This period of our history is undoubtedly that which most satisfies our memories. We were having intensive training for service on the Front, our work with the artillery brought the most satisfactory results for them and hence for us, our life was busy and full of interest and devotion to our work, and we were anticipating with the greatest confidence and excitement that day when we would first be able to bring American guns to play upon German batteries and trenches and columns of troops and transport.

While at Meucon various members of the company were sent to Camp de Souge for special training, and the lookouts were sent to the Front. Various generals of the brigades of artillery with whom we worked wrote letters of appreciation and thanks to our commanding officer, 1st Lieut. F. W. Youry, and on the whole things looked so very bright and important for our star of success that Jack decided to remain for good in the 44th Balloon Company, feeling that in his post there he could most effectively serve his country, and besides, he had seen too many young aviators wandering around without planes to make him want to take a chance in that line of the service.

Now on September 10 came one of the darkest moments in our career as a military unit. With movement orders in our company office and while we were preparing for the Front, an epidemic of Spanish influenza which had been prevalent in the main camp for several days, finally, and despite

every precaution used against it, spread to our company. Every morning and night for several days more of our men reported to the infirmary with rising temperatures. In fact, the number of patients increased so rapidly that three of our barracks were quickly pressed into service as temporary infirmaries, and the inmates quarantined. Out of one hundred and seventy men, ninety were more or less infected with this contagion. As an organization we were completely disabled and our hearts sank when our movement orders were finally canceled. There followed many days of uncertainty. Our medical department under Lieutenant Coen worked incessantly, recording the fluctuating temperatures and trying to give each easels much individual attention as possible.

About five or six of the men with/more stubborn cases were transferred to Camp Hospital No. 31 for special treatment. Two of these men, Pvt. William H. Huntsinger and Pvt. Darrell C. Mitchell, have made the last great sacrifice for "the noble cause and the high ideal for which America and her allies were fighting. True it is that these men did not die in battle, but they did die, and none the less gloriously, in their Country's service, regretting only that that service was so untimely ended, with a cheery "tell the boys good-bye" they bravely went west to the white mart's happy hunting ground, to that great master of human destinies to whom we all in our separate ways appeal.

Only two little mounds of earth, and two tiny wooden crosses mark their resting place in France, but nearly a year of happy associations have indelibly marked the large place they hold in our hearts. Finally, after nearly two weeks of grave uncertainty, the epidemic began slowly to lose its grip and die out. The men were left in a very weakened condition however, and it was fully a month before most of them were able to perform the numerous duties to which they were accustomed.

During the time that the company was held at Meucon after the "flu" epidemic, the company officers conducted a school and instructed artillery officers in the arts, ways and means of observing, preparatory to their being sent to the A. E. F. school for balloon observers at Souge. Soon, however, the word came to move, the school was abandoned and the camp turned over to an incoming company.

After a trip across France we landed at Toul, and from there were taken to an abandoned camp on a hill above the village of Jezainville near Pont-a-Mousson, on the Moselle River, about twenty-eight kilometers south of Metz. This camp was in a deplorable condition and the ground a mass of mud but the-men worked hard and in a couple of weeks managed to put the camp in a decent and livable condition. Everything which came into the camp had to be unloaded at the foot of the hill and carried up, a slippery and sometimes a dangerous job in the mud. As we were entirely without transportation, we had no balloon at this time, and it was almost impossible to drill in the mud. Three of our best men got themselves blown up by a hand grenade, which was a misfortune and a serious lesson to the curious.

Right here is where we have been ever since. The general topic of conversation is "when do we go home?" a question never answered. In the meantime, we have a band, a championship basketball team, a company paper, and a canteen, the profits of which bring us occasional feeds and other benefits. Some of us are always in Paris or London or Rome on leave and once we gave a dance. Shows of the A. E. F. play nightly in Pont-a-Mousson and now there are cafes even, with player

pianos. But we want none of these joys. We want to go home.

After some years our memories of the A. E. F. will undoubtedly be mellow and happy, but today they are not memories but facts and ever present facts such as reveille, drill and inspection. That may be one thing we are certain: balloons are the best branch of the service, and warm always will be our hearts toward our comrades of the Forty-fourth.

Arrival in France 21 Jul 1918
Arrival at the front 18 Nov 1918
Days ascensions made in S.O.S 62
Days ascensions made in Z.O.A
Total days ascensions made 62
Number of ascensions made in S.O.S. 167
Number of ascensions made in Z.O.A.
Total number of ascensions made 167
Total number of hours in air S.O.S. 171.33
Total number of hours in air Z.O.A.
Total number of hours in the air 171.33
Artillery adjustments in S.O.S. 69
Artillery adjustments in Z.O.A
Total number or artillery adjustments 69
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
Observers killed
Observers captured

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Sources

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