

7th BALLOON COMPANY

MISSION

LINEAGE

C Company, 3rd Squadron

Redesignated 7th Balloon Company

Redesignated Balloon Company No. 7 (Coast Defense), 13 Sep 1921

Redesignated 7th Balloon Company, 12 Feb 1923

Inactivated, Jun 1932

Demobilized, 1 Oct 1933

STATIONS

Bois-Bethainville, France

Camp Lee, VA, 8 May 1919

Brooks Field, TX, 23 May 1919-1922

Inactive 1922-1930

Chicago, IL, 1930-1932

Inactive 1932-1933

ASSIGNMENTS

24th Balloon Group, 6 Feb 1923

WEAPON SYSTEMS

COMMANDERS

Cpt Asa J. Etheridge, Jan 1920

1LT Harold K. Hine, 5 Jun 1920

2LT Frank Krick, 1 Jul 1920-Aug 1920

2LT Ernest L. Hurst, Dec 1920

1LT John S. Crawford, 7 Jan 1921

1LT Orin J. Bushey, 6 May 1921

Inactive, 13 Sep 1921-Jun 1930

Unknown, Jun 1930-Jun 1932
Inactive, Jun 1932-1 Oct 1933
1LT Samuel T. Moore

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The Seventh Balloon Company was organized at Fort Omaha, Nebr., November 4, 1917, as Company C of the Third Balloon Squadron, and in less than three months had completed its home training and had embarked for Europe. Training for active service extended over four months in French artillery centers, and it entered the lines July 24, 1918.

From the day of its arrival at the Front until the Armistice went into effect the Seventh Company remained in line with but two days rest at Toul while awaiting orders to proceed to its position for the St. Mihiel offensive. Under the most depressing weather conditions it traveled over eighty kilometers in the Argonne-Meuse offensive. Shell fire, gas attacks and repeated destruction of balloons by enemy planes and shell fire failed to discourage or slacken the progress of the advance. Five men were wounded, one officer was gassed, and epidemics of influenza and dysentery weakened the strength of the company numerically, but failed to weaken its morale. A total of four balloons were destroyed by enemy avions and two were deflated by shell fire.

It is not the purpose of this history to relate the technical work accomplished by the balloons; it is a record in which every man may take just pride; this is, rather, a history of the organization and its personnel. And it would not be complete without a tribute to the courage and zeal of its officers and soldiers who surmounted every obstacle and by cooperation in every section was ready to function, at all times and under all conditions. Particular credit must be given to the telephone detail which at all hours of the day and night, frequently working in gassed areas and under heavy shell fire maintained the lines of communications in an elaborate liaison plan. Sharing equally in this honor is the transportation section, which operated at all hours over unspeakable roads that were pitted with shell holes and mine craters, blocked with traffic jams, and often under harassing shell fire. These tributes in no way detract from the valor of the other sections, the maneuvering squad, machine gunners, vigies, radio, chart room, orderly

room, medical, winch and tender crews, kitchen, rigger and gas detail, which, ignoring hardships, illness and fatigue at all times went forward when the command was given and without thought of reward other than victory.

Of more than two hundred men who served in the company from its organization only one death was recorded. Pvt. Eugene N. Berger, of Napierstown, IL, a private, died in a base hospital near Toul from a complication of diseases. The entire company mourned his death and his cheery companionship was sincerely missed by his officers and messmates alike.

First Lieut. Samuel T. Moore was the first officer assigned to command and he with two corporals and twenty-five privates were the nucleus of the organization, and a day later sufficient recruits arrived from Kelley Field, Texas, to bring the organization to authorized strength, which at that time was ninety-one men. The recruits had a hard trip from San Antonio and when they arrived at the post, they were a discouraging spectacle. Hardly a one had a complete military uniform. Laborers' shoes in four colors, black, red, brown, and even white, comprised the footwear; the clothing was a weird mixture of civilian and twenty years accumulation of quartermaster storage depots. Although the majority had been in the service less than one month, every man was a volunteer and the spirit was splendid. Practically every man had enlisted in the Aviation Section with the idea in view of some day becoming a great "ace." It was something of a disappointment from that rosy vision to hanging on to the end of a rope, holding down a big gas bag, but then disillusionments came oftener than mess calls in recruit days.

Infantry drill occupied the greater part of the time when the balloon was not being operated and details were selected to attend school at the garage, the telephone department, and the balloon shed. Outside of drill hours passes, were liberal and all Omaha extended every courtesy to the soldiers. Dances were many and hardly a Sunday or holiday passed that did not include invitations to dinner in the best homes of the city. Christmas Eve, the first company event was staged in the post garage in conjunction with the Headquarters Company, a boxing tournament with eleven entries and, a battle royal at the climax was arranged and \$160.00 was netted for the company fund.

Sgt. Moses W. Vickery was the first sergeant of the company, and when he transferred to the Reserve Corps, Sgt. Pablo M. Herrera, a former captain of the Carlisle Cadet Corps, succeeded him. Sergeant O'Neil has served continuously as mess sergeant since the organization of the company.

In the meantime training was completed, clothing and equipment drawn and a tentative organization was established. January 17, 1918, the company entrained at Omaha for Garden City, L. I., and after three days of monotonous travel in the hardest cold snap of the winter, the company detrained at its destination.

The ten days spent at Garden City was one continuous parade of fatigue with few leaves and those of short duration. On the morning of January 31, the company left the camp in the gray of

morning and by train and ferry arrived at North River Pier where it embarked on the R. M. S. Adriatic which sailed at noon. A stop of four days in Halifax harbor while waiting the make-up of the transport was the only delay and the trip across, though hardly luxurious, was comfortable with little rough weather and lacking a single genuine submarine thrill. We arrived February 16, 1918. Disembarkation at Liverpool was without incident and entraining at the docks, the company sped over southern England, arriving at Romsey that night. The camp at Romsey was a tent camp and the cold nights and cheerless days with limited rations gave the company its first taste of the horrors of war. After two days at Romsey, marked by the out break of an epidemic of mumps which later claimed one third of the company as victims, the company again entrained for Southampton, where it embarked on the Channel boat Hunslet, an old German cattle boat with all the luxurious accommodations implied in its pre-war calling. The men slept in cattle stalls in tiers, and the officers were allowed to sleep on the floor of the two by four dining salon. No U-boats interrupted the passage, and we arrived at Havre the following morning where after lying in the harbor all day we disembarked and hiked to another rest camp. It was only necessary to endure the rest camp one night; on the following afternoon we entrained for our first camp at St. Maxient, which we arrived at two days later. St. Maxient proved to be another fatigue parade, although the weather improved and quarters and food with it.

After two weeks in the historic town we again entrained for Camp de Souge, near Bordeaux, which was to be our home for nearly four months. There we received balloon equipment and our intensive training was begun. Life proceeded pleasantly with good quarters, excellent rations and fine weather for two months. The latter part of April the balloon school for the A. E. F. moved into camp, and with the Sixth Company depleted by reason of being utilized as a replacement depot, practically all work fell to the Seventh Company. Training was speeded up and it was frequently necessary to hold inspections on Sundays, after working from reveille to retreat throughout the week. In the meantime the authorized strength of a balloon company had been increased from 91 to 170 men, and a replacement detachment sufficient to bring the company to the new footing, joined on May the sixteenth, having left the States in April.

On June 20 the company was ordered to Camp Meucon in Bretagne, where it established the balloon camp of an artillery training center. Here the various sections proved their ability and when one month later orders came for the Front it found every man eager to go. In the meantime, eight specialists were sent back to Souge for further training and six soldiers preceded the company to the Front for training as vigies.

The trip to the Front was without incident and when we arrived at our position on the 24th of July we were the fourth American balloon company on the Front. We relieved the 34th French Company at a position half way between Griscourt and Jezainville, in the Saizerais Sector and we were attached to the 32d Corps of the Eighth French Army, composed of the 64th and 65th French Divisions. The activity of the sector was confined to the air, and in our stay of thirty-four days, part of which was spent in training the 69th Balloon Company, there were four parachute jumps. Lieut. James A. Higgs, Jr., and Aspirant Petit-Jean of the French company made the first jump. The attack failed to develop and they immediately reascended.

30 Jul 1918 1Lt J. A. Higgs and Adjutant Petit Jean (French Army) jumped; balloon not burned.

4 Aug 1918 1Lt B. T. Burt jumped balloon not burned

11 Aug 1918 1Lt B. T. Burt and Sgt First Class H.O. Nicholls jumped; balloon 127 burned.

21 Aug 1918 1Lt J. A. Higgs and Cpt P. Arthur was conducting a reglage when the balloon was attacked. Under terrific machine gun fire Lieutenant Higgs remained in the basket to assure the safe departure of the artillery officer before jumping himself. The balloon, although perforated, did not burn.

The night of Aug. 28th we proceeded to Toul where we were encamped outside the city limits for two days. The morning of Sept 1st we left Toul under our own transportation and late that night arrived in a position making camp in the Bois de Loupe, near Rattentout. The balloon bed was constructed in a ravine working entirely at night, and the following week was devoted to preparing our maps, preparing our telephone lines and in liaison with the artillery of the 5th Army Corps which we were designated to work with.

Our battle training was complete in every particular when we arrived at a position in the Bois Vaux de Loups, near Rattentout, September 1. For ten days it was necessary to remain concealed during daylight hours and all the preliminary work was accomplished during the night. The day before the St. Mihiel offensive opened, a change in tactical assignment made it necessary to move to another position in a ravine a short distance from Sommedieue. During this sharp offensive, the balloon was attached to the Fifth American Army Corps, and advanced but three kilometers, as it was our fortune to be the left flank balloon in the attack and the advance of the lines in our sector was immaterial.

Two days of poor visibility prevented accomplishment of much in the beginning but in the following three days much was done. The second day of good visibility four enemy batteries were spotted and destroyed by our observers and an enemy supply train was wrecked and abbreviated by artillery fire directed from our balloon. This offensive also served to give the company its initial baptism of shell fire. Saturday morning the enemy attempted to bring down the balloon by shell fire with time fuse. Several shells broke in the vicinity and it was necessary to maneuver the balloon, but no hits were obtained. The day following our camp was located by an enemy avion and thirteen shells of 240 mm caliber were dropped during the day. Fragments entered the kitchen and noncommissioned officers' barracks, officers' quarters, and one truck was struck twice. Several men were thrown to the ground by the concussion of shells bursting nearby, and trees on all sides of the camp were uprooted. The company took refuge in a dugout utilized as a chart room and orderly room, and miraculously no one was injured. The same afternoon the balloon was attacked by an Albatross DIII, but due to the accurate barrage of our machine gunners, the plane was forced to rise when about two hundred meters from the balloon and failed to burn it. Lieutenants Higgs and Burt jumped and landed in trees in the

nearby woods, fortunately without injury. During the remainder of our stay in Sommedieue the whistling of enemy shells over our camp continued day and night.

Sept. 9th in order to improve our tactical disposition we exchanged positions with the 12th Company which moved from a position one half a kilometer west of Sommedieue. This necessitated the reconstruction of telephone lines and the preparation of new maps, but on the morning of Sept. 12th when the offensive opened the balloon was in the air.

The first two days of the offensive the visibility and a high wind made it impossible to accomplish much work of value. It was advisable after the second day to advance our point of ascension, although by being on the extreme left flank of the salient our position was not so much affected as were the other balloons. The original point of ascension was about a kilometer north of camp and maneuvering thru Sommedieue which was a maze of telephone wires, camouflage and wireless antennae, we constructed a new balloon bed and selected a new accessional point about two and one half kilometers from our original camp. The chart-room and telephone system remained intact.

The third day we accomplished some work, although the balloon was shelled by the enemy with 240 mm caliber with time fuse. Although uncomfortably close no damage was done. Favored by fine visibility the following day we accomplished a splendid day's work. Spotting a supply train and securing two direct out of ten salvos fire, we also spotted and destroyed an enemy anti-aircraft battery, and directed artillery fire against three other enemy batteries, putting them effectively out of action. This was in addition to making many observations of moment and it should have been possible to have regulated four times as much artillery fire had not the offensive been successfully terminated, and the artillery been under orders to restrict its fire.

On Sept. 16th our artillery moved out and it was impossible to perform more work with them. The company received its baptism of fire the same day when the enemy dropped fifteen shells of 240 mm caliber in the proximity of the camp. Fragments were blown into the officers' quarters, one truck was struck twice and several men were knocked down by concussion. The kitchen and non-commissioned officer's quarters were also damaged. The company found refuge in a dugout and fortunately no one was injured. The same morning Lieuts. Riggs and Burt were again forced to jump when an enemy avion dove at the balloon. The attack failed to develop.

On the evening of September 20, after the men had retired to the barracks for a well-earned rest, orders were received to effect an immediate move. Within three hours the balloon was deflated, all equipment packed, and the convoy on the way. The company enjoyed a moonlight ride through the deserted streets of Verdun to the accompaniment of the distant rumbling of artillery firing. At about 2.00 a. m. the convoy reached its destination in the Bois de Bethainville, near Dombasle-en-Argonne and the men stiffly descended from the trucks to pitch their tents under the scattered brushwood. The next few days disturbed by gas alarms and harassing fire from the uneasy Germans, were occupied in preparations for the coming

offensive. As the only American balloon to fly on this sector during this period, French cocardes replaced the American insignia.

23 Sep 1918 1Lt S.C. Farrenbach and 2Lt M.D. Sapiro jumped; balloon not burned.

All the American balloons, except that of the 7th Balloon Company, were not inflated until the night of September 25, 1918. Captured documents proved that the enemy was unaware of their presence. The 7th Balloon Company took over the position of a French company, and, with French cocards¹ on the balloon, ascended on September 24th and 25th

On the morning of the 26th of September, the balloon ascended as the eyes of the 37th Division, and at 10.00 a. m. started to follow the advance over the congested roads through Montzeville end Esnes, reaching a portion just east of Avocourt, at about 3.30 p. m. Here the balloon was attacked, and Lieuts, Leo Ferrenbach and Harry Sapiro, temporarily attached to the company, jumped. The balloon was not burned, but Lieutenant Sapiro, unfortunately strained his back in landing. The transportation and mess being unable to advance until dark, and then only over roads that had that morning been No Man's Land, were unable to reach the company until nearly dawn. During our stay of five days in this position, we were unable to fly the balloon because of exceptional inclement weather; the men existing in half wrecked and leaky dugouts.

Owing to the continued traffic congestion and the shell-torn roads, our advance through the village of Avoncourt, a distance of only two and one-half kilometers, required an entire day. It was at this point that the nested American "ace," Lieut. Frank H. Luke, Jr., circled the balloon and dropped a message addressed to this company.

During all these hardships the morale of the men had remained excellent, as was evidenced by the fact that many of the men voluntarily assisted the engineers in repairing the roads. A continuation of this advance brought the company to the Ravin de Lai Fuon, just south of Montfaucon. By this time every man was equipped with a salvaged rifle, ammunition of all descriptions, and souvenirs for the folks at home. As additional ordnance equipment, the machine gunners had four captured machine guns, complete with belts of ammunition.

1 Oct 1918 1Lt B. T. Burt and Sgt First Class H.O. Nicholls jumped; balloon not burned. Due to the machine gun and rifle barrage from the ground, the avion was unable to burn the balloon. This acquisition to our defense was again the means of preventing the burning of the balloon, and perhaps the means of saving the Company Commander's life.

On October 2, Lieutenant Moore, when alone in the basket, was attacked by eight enemy planes, two of which fired on the balloon, two on the winch crew on the ground, and a fifth on the observer's parachute; the remaining three hovered over the balloon. Lieutenant Moore landed safely, and the balloon was not burned, although the balloon, parachute, and basket were riddled with holes. This same evening, while the company was assembled at mess, a formation of five enemy planes, flying low, swept down the ravine scattering machine gun bullets at random. Fortunately no one was hit as the men made a rush for their newly acquired

rifles, and the planes were driven away. This style of individual effort was much enjoyed by all of the men, but was thought advisable to be discontinued, because of possible damage to neighboring units. During our stay in the ravine, the men were nightly lulled to their slumbers by the intermittent drone of enemy bombers, who occasionally dropped their "Tail Gates" in our vicinity. About this time the 37th Division was relieved by the 32d Division, and we immediately established liaison with the battalion assigned to fugitive targets.

The assignment of Lieutenant Burt to the command of the Sixth Balloon Company, the illness of Lieut. Junius A. Smith, and the departure of one of our student observers, had sadly depleted our roll of officers. To partially fill the vacancies Lieut. Dasche M. Reeves, an aviation pilot, was attached to the company as a student observer. On his initial balloon flight, 9 Oct 1918, accompanied by Sergeant Nicholls, the balloon was attacked by an enemy avion, and burned, both observers reached the ground safely. Sergeant Nicholls remained in the basket to assure the safe departure of Lieutenant Reeves, before jumping himself.

As the lines had advanced, the camp was moved to a point near Ivory, and there a new balloon was inflated. On the night following inflation the new camp was heavily shelled. Two men, Chauffeur Roger S. Steele and Pvt. Joseph E. Bush, were wounded, and M. S. E. Bernard F. Gillespie slightly gassed, and the balloon practically deflated. The men on the following morning, seeing what damage had been done to the winch tender by a shell fragment, immediately decided to "dig in" deeper. During our stay in this position, we salvaged two German 37mm flaming onions, in good condition and complete with several boxes of ammunition.

These were used to great advantage during the later attack upon our balloon. Just before the company advanced four new officers joined it, Lieut. David Q. Hammond and Lieut. George E. Quisenberry as observers, and Lieut. Jacob B. Rivers and Lieut. James R. Robinson as students. Because of decreasing visibility, the company was moved to Gesnes, which at that time, October 20th, was only four and one-half kilometers from the lines. This move fully justified itself, in that we were able to obtain five relages, on days when other balloons were unable to work. While at this station, the 32d Division was replaced by the 89th and an exceptionally elaborate liaison system was installed by our telephone detail. The men were all very comfortably quartered in well protected places, formerly occupied by the Germans.

Although subject to intermittent heavy shelling, and having the balloon partially deflated on two different occasions, by shell fire when in the bed, the company fortunately suffered no casualties. Pvt. George C. Hamilton a member of the telephone squad, was severely wounded, while repairing broken telephone lines in an advanced area. Other members of the telephone squad escaped injury, although subjected on numerous occasions to heavy shelling, necessitating their taking refuge in shell holes.

On October 23 Lieutenant Quisenberry and Lieutenant Reeves were obliged to jump twice in the same morning, the balloon 312 being burned on the second occasion. On October 29, the balloon was again burned; the observers, Lieutenant Higgs and Lieutenant Rivers, were

conducting a reglage, and remained in the basket until the last moment. Both observers landed safely, and great credit must be given to the winch detail for their expert maneuvering of the burning balloon. Lieutenant Hammond while on a liaison mission to the front lines was seriously gassed. It was while we were stationed at Gesnes that our Company Commander received his well-earned promotion to Captain.

Captain Moore, who had been sick for some time, had to be evacuated to a base hospital, and Lieutenant Higgs commanded the company from this time until the signing of the Armistice.

29 Oct 1918 1Lt J. A. Higgs and 2Lt J. B. Rivers jumped; balloon 254 burned

On November 2d the point of ascension was moved to a position in the Bois de Bantheville, about four kilometers north of Gesnes; this movement took place at night, the balloon being maneuvered by hand across barbed wire entanglements and shell-torn terrain. Finally the balloon being bedded down, the men found shelter from the drizzling rain in half-roofed barracks.

Here it was the men had their first experience with mustard gas, and here also, on November 4, we had our anniversary celebration in the form of an extra well prepared dinner. After two days of continuous rain, a record move of twenty-five kilometers was made, about twelve of which the balloon was maneuvered by hand. Being rejoined at Bantheville by the trucks and reserve equipment, the entire convoy advanced through Buzancy, to a point near Nouart. Here the balloon was bedded for the night and in the early hours of the following morning the advance was continued to Taily. During the entire advance each man carried his pack and was practically without rations for thirty-six hours. Nevertheless, a few enterprising men raided a commissary wagon and obtained some "corned willie and hard tack" which seemed to have exceptional flavor. Within an hour of our arrival at Taily, Pvt. Howard W. Boden and Pvt. William R. Mahoney were wounded by fragments from bombs dropped by an enemy avion. Throughout our stay at this place our quarters were the most comfortable of any we had while on the Front. This was due to the fact that the rapid flight of the Germans had prevented the destruction of the villages.

On the morning of November 11, the company personnel car with Lieutenants Higgs, Quisenberry and Rivers, crossed the Meuse and entered Stenay, with the advance American patrols. The high standard of discipline and morale which had been prevalent throughout the offensive did not relax in the slightest after the signing of the Armistice.

The company history would be incomplete without mentioning the two enlisted men of the organization who received recommendations for commissions, but the signing of the Armistice prevented their obtaining them. Sgt. Pablo M. Herrera was appointed first sergeant at Omaha, Nebr., in November, 1917. He ably executed his duties, with fairness and justice, until the time of his leaving the company, November 4, 1918, He proceeded to the Infantry Cadet School at La Valbonne, Aisne, France, where he passed with a very high grade just after the conclusion of hostilities. Sgt First Class. Harold O. Nicholls was recommended for a commission after

completing the course at the A. E. F. Balloon School, Camp de Souge, France. He accompanied the company to the Front and served as an observer during the entire time we were at the Front. In October, 1918, he passed the physical examination for a flying officer, and in November proceeded to the Third Aviation Instruction Center at Issodun, France, for training as a pilot. , training of enlisted men had been suspended and Sergeant Nicholls returned to the company at his own request. The entire company is very proud of the fact that Sergeant Nicholls was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Arrival in France 20 Feb 1918

Arrival at the front 28 Jul 1918

Days ascensions made in S.O.S 67

Days ascensions made in Z.O.A 55

Total days ascensions made 122

Number of ascensions made in S.O.S. 417

Number of ascensions made in Z.O.A. 118

Total number of ascensions made 535

Total number of hours in air S.O.S. 302.24

Total number of hours in air Z.O.A. 163.56

Total number of hours in the air 466.20

Artillery adjustments in S.O.S. 26

Artillery adjustments in Z.O.A 14

Total number or artillery adjustments 40

Enemy shells observed 110

Enemy aircraft observed 2950

Enemy balloons observed 193

Enemy artillery batteries observed 34

Enemy traffic on road and railroad observed 93

Smoke, fires and flares observed 242

Explosions observed 20

Jumps from basket 2

Balloons attacked 12

Balloons burned 4

Balloons destroyed

Observers killed

Observers captured

Arrived at the port of Newport News, VA, 4 May 1919 on the U.S.S. Susquehanna as Balloon Company No. 7.

23rd Balloon Company made Active Associate of the 7th.

The 9th Airship Company made Active Associate on 14 March 1923 in lieu of the 23rd Balloon Company.

Organized by June 1930 with Organized Reserve personnel as a RAI unit at Chicago, IL.

Inactivated by June 1932 at Chicago by relief of personnel.

Designated mobilization training station was Scott Field, IL, 1923-33.

Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 10 Sep 2011

Updated:

Sources

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