

11 BALLOON COMPANY

MISSION

LINEAGE

11 Balloon Company
Organized, 9 Jan 1918

STATIONS

Fort Omaha, NE
Camp Morrison, VA, Feb 1918
Port of Embarkation, Newport News, VA, Jun 1918
Europe, Jun 1918
Camp Lee, VA, May 1919
Brooks Field, TX, May 1919

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

Lt Fred M. Murphy
Lt Lawrence K. Smith
1st Lt Fred S. Dunn, 20 Oct 1917
1st LT William Turnbull, Jan 1920-Jun 1920
1st LT Orin J. Bushey, Jun 1921-Aug 1921

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The 11th Balloon Co came into existence by the hand-picking process. At Fort Omaha, the Fifth Balloon Squadron was created on 15 Dec 1917, and thirteen days later 1LT Fred M. Murphy was assigned as Commanding Officer of A Company of this squadron. On 9 Jan 1918, A and D Companies of this squadron were merged and the result was the 11th Balloon Company.

Until 25 Feb 1918, the days were spent in organization and training. But on that date, after countless inspections and rumors, the 11th Company entrained for the mystical, and almost mythical, port of embarkation. After three days en route, and having traversed seven states, the company was dumped into semi-completed Camp Morrison, VA.

And so it came to pass that the hand-picked, the elite, who had been bothered only by things lighter than air, were quartered in a warehouse and then initiated into the unromantic mysteries of the pick, shovel and wheelbarrow.

Thus it was, that instead of making history in France, the 11th Company helped make Camp Morrison in VA where, above the click of the pick and the skirr of the shovel, two events only stand out and seem worthy of the chronicler's pen, to wit, Flag Raising Day and Grand Review on 30 Apr 1918, and the departure of Lt Fred M. Murphy to his new post as commanding officer of the 41st Balloon Company on 14 May. The vacancy caused by Lieutenant Murphy's departure was filled by ad Lt Lawrence K. Smith.

29 Jun was "der tag" for the Eleventh. That little hike to Newport News, VA, was passed without casualties, but not without bitter curses at the heat and the dirt and the long hard road; at its end was the transport America, which was boarded with freshened step and lifted chin and just a little quickening of the heart-beat, while the strains of "Over There" shattered the sultry air.

At dawn on July 13, we debarked at Brest and the six days in the tented rest camp near Pontanezen Barracks were spent in wrestling boxes and bales with a skill which showed the fruits of Camp Morrison days. Then came orders to move to Camp Coetquidan and move we did in true French style slow but sure.

At Camp Coetquidan another period of intensive training began and the various departmental officers and personnel went to special camps. It was here that the third commanding officer took command of the company, Lieutenant Smith being relieved by 1LT James A. McDevitt on 31 Jul who, in turn, was relieved by 1LT Charles E. Barber on 5 Aug.

On 20 Aug the company entrained for the Front and arrived in the Toul Sector. After devious wanderings, which included Tremblecourt and sundry villages of the Amex Force training

sector, we brought up at Gezencourt where the first ascension' on the Front was made with Lt McDevitt and Stansbury in the basket. This was the first day of the St. Mihiel push. Three days later, near Mamey it was at the height of the offensive—at 12.25 p. m., an enemy Fokker, flying at five hundred meters, successfully attacked the balloon, puncturing it thirty-four times and forcing Lt McDevitt to make the first of his four jumps.

The company first made its entry into the line on 29 Aug, north of Toul. The Balloon Bed and camp were located near Gezoncourt. The Balloon was assigned to the Army Artillery to observe for 1st Heavy Artillery Grouping, First Army.

This grouping commenced firing at 0200 on 12 Sep and did not fire after 0700 the same date, so that all artillery observation work was performed for Corps and Divisional Artillery. This firing was principally on villages inhabited by the enemy and upon frequented roads. A great deal of valuable information relative to enemy activity was furnished to the General Staff.

This grouping commenced firing at 0200 12 Sep and did not fire after 0700 the same date, so that all artillery observation work was performed for corps and divisional artillery. This firing was principally on village inhabited by the enemy and upon frequented roads. A great deal of valuable information relative to enemy activity was furnished the General Staffs.

Initial flight made 0605 12 Sep at Gezancourt. Move 8 kilometers north to Mamsy following advance on 14 Sep. On 15 Sep at 1225 balloon attacked by Fokker plane, 56 bullets entering envelope but same did not burn. Observer reported to General Staff, 90th Division intense barrage along our front line for distance of 3.5 kilometers at northern edge of Bois des Rappes, northwest of Villers-sous-Frany at 1820 17 Sep. Liaison the following day brought out the fact that counter barrage had been executed upon receipt of our report which had been received five minutes before any other report. The infantry reported that the enemy had just started a counter attack as a counter barrage reached their lines and that the artillery fire had entirely dispersed the attacking troops. Balloon attacked by Brequet plane carrying French cocarde at 1845 17 Sep without damage. Balloon fired upon with shrapnel and high explosive while in the air on 16 and 17 without damage.

The Company entered the Argonne-Meuse sector on 21 Sep locating in the Bois de Bouchet near Germonville. First flight 26 Sep. At 1417 balloon attacked by Fokker plane unsuccessfully, plane being driven off and destroyed by French Spad. Following advance company moved four kilometers to Mort Homme Hill on the evening of 27 Sep. On 4 Oct the company advanced six kilometers to a position one kilometer east of Cuisy. At this point our position was a very precarious one. To the north the lines were 5.5 kilometers with the river 4 kilometers to our east the enemy holding the eastern bank. At 1530 on 5 Oct, the balloon was attacked by an enemy plane. Large number of bullets pierced envelope, basket and parachute but attack was unsuccessful. Attacks were made by enemy planes on 6 Oct at the following hours 0831, 0943, 1602 and 1710. The first three attacks were unsuccessful but balloon was burned in the final attack. On this day observer regulated fire on machine gun nest located in trenches on hill

south of Brioules, Army Corps commander complimenting battery on efficiency of fire stating it was the most effective fire with the corps during the offensive.

On 8 Oct at 0808 balloon while being hauled down was struck by high explosive shell tearing one ten inch hole in the envelope. Company moves ten and half kilometers to the north east on 9 Nov crossing river at Dun sur Meuse and locating at Fontaines where they were located at the time the armistice was signed.

On 13 Nov the company moves to Louppy for the purpose of observing the movements of the enemy carrying on the work until 17 Nov when it was apparent that the enemy had withdrawn beyond the limit visibility.

Enemy plane sighted in southeast 1225 15 Sep attacked first balloon on our right southeast balloon hauled down rapidly barrage put up by French antiaircraft guns "Anson". Plane then attacked this company's balloon which did not burn putting sixteen holes in fins nine holes through gas bag and nine holes through ballonet banked to right flank of balloon leaving position in northwesterly direction setting fire to two next balloons this company's right. Observer received no order to jump balloon did not burn observer remained in basket.

This company's balloon attacked by enemy aeroplane flying at 900 meters from NW 1723 5 Oct altitude 700 meters firing MG at distance of 300 meters. Observer 1LT James A. McDevitt jumped at altitude 400 meters landing safely. Second enemy aeroplane from north. Flying altitude 500 attacked firing at balloon. Eight holes in balloon, basket, struck apparently four times not burned. Rapid hauling and bullet holes caused flabby balloon hauled down to add gas visibility disappearing balloon returned to bed.

On 6 Oct at 0943 enemy aeroplane approached this company's balloon from NW at altitude 800 meters being fired upon by HE from DCA circled to east being fired upon this company's MGs. Balloon altitude 420 meters hauled down to 300 meters but not attacked and observer not ordered to jump. Observer, 2IT George D. Armstrong jumped at 300 meters landing safely. Same balloon has been attacked unsuccessfully five times.

On 6 Oct at 1602 two enemy Fokkers coming from NE headed toward balloon #236 altitude 700 meters and banking directly toward balloon driven away in NW direction by MC and DCA fire Lt JA McDevitt jumped at 455 altitude landing safely $\frac{3}{4}$ kilometer north by northeast.

Balloon #236 attacked by Fokker aeroplane at 1710 and burned at 0715 7 Oct 1918 new balloon was ready for trial flight Fog and rain visibility one kilometers This was eighth direct attack this balloon had encountered and seven parachute jumps had been made from same.

8 Oct 1918 0803 Balloon by piece of HE shell while being hauled down to take LT Barber as observer for visibility making two holes in left of nose of balloon. One ten inch square and the other 18 inches long leaking gas very badly. At 0820 balloon on bed for repairs and to be replenished with gas. 1150 balloon leaves bed.

The 5th Balloon squadron was organized at Fort Omaha, NE on 15 Dec 1917. A month later companies A and C of this squadron were merged into the 11th Balloon Co under the command of 1LT Fred M. Murphy. This company trained at Fort Omaha until Feb 25 on which date it entrained for the coast and arrived at Camp Morrison, Va 3 days later.

The camp was not completed at that time and for four months the 11th Balloon Co joined with other troops to finish the work. It was hard work and there was great satisfaction felt when the task was done and the flag was raised over the camp.

On 14 May LT Murphy was transferred to the 41st Balloon Co and LT Lawrence K. Smith took command of the 11th Balloon Co.

On 29 Jun after a long hot march from Morrison to the sea, the Co embarked at Newport News on the "America". Thirteen days later it reached Breast and became part of the AEF.

The training in France was done at camp Coetquidan an artillery training center in Brittany. Enlisted specialists were sent to school and most of the officers in Brittany. Enlisted specialists were sent to schools and most of the officers to the Balloon school at Souge. While here the command of the company changed hands twice, on 31 Jul to 1LT J.A. McDevitt and on 5 Aug to 1LT C. E. Barber

The company started for the front on 26 Aug arriving in the Toul sector in time for the first big American offensive 12 Sep

The company first made its entry into the line on 29 Aug north of Toul. The Balloon Bed and camp were located near Gazencourt. The Balloon was assigned to the Army Artillery to observe for 1st Heavy Artillery Grouping First Army.

This grouping commenced firing at 0200 on 12 Sep and did not fire after 0700 the same date, so that all artillery conservation work was performed for corps and divisional artillery. This firing was principally on villages inhabited by the enemy and upon frequently roads. A great deal of valuable information relative to enemy activity was furnished to the General Staff.

The initial flight was made at 0605 on 12 Sep at Gezencourt. The Co moved 8 kilometers north of Mamey following the advance on 14 Sep. On 15 Sep at 1225 the balloon was attacked by Fokker plane 56 bullets entering envelope but same did not burn. Observer LT McDevitt reported intensive barrage along front line for a distance of 3 ½ at northern edge of Bois des Rappes, NW of Willers sous-Preny at 1820 on 17 Sep to the general staff of the 90th Division. The liaison the following day brought out the fact that a counter barrage had been executed upon receipt of our report which had been received five minutes before any other report. The infantry reported that the enemy had just started a counter attack as a counter barrage reached their lines and that the artillery fire had dispersed the attacking troops. The balloon was attacked by a Brequet plane carrying a French cocarde at 1845 17 Sep without damage. The

balloon was fired upon with shrapnel and high explosive while in the air on 16 and 17 Sep without damage

The company entered the Argonne-Meuse sector on 21 Sep locating in the Bois de Bouchet near Germonville where the first flight was made 26 Sep. at 1417 attacked by a Fokker plane unsuccessfully the plane being driven off and destroyed by a French Spad. Following the advance the company moved forward four kilometers on the evening of 27 Sep. On 4 Oct the company advanced six kilometers to a position one kilometer east of Cuisy. At this point our position was a very precarious one. To the north the lines were 5 ½ kilometers with the river 4 kilometers to our east. The enemy holding the eastern bank.

On 17 Sep 1918, at 1700 the basket reported to Headquarters, 90th Division, an intense enemy barrage along the American front line for a distance of three and a half kilometers at the northern edge of Bois des Rappes. This report, which was received five minutes previous to any other information regarding it, enabled the opening of a counter barrage which dispersed the attacking troops before they reached the American lines. Earlier in the day a Brequet plane, carrying the French cocardes, had opened fire on the balloon and caused Lieutenant McDevitt to make his second leap. The mystery of the attack has never been solved.

From the St. Mihiel Sector the scene rapidly changes to the Argonne lines, between Fromersville and Germonville. Here the evening of 21 Sep was made light by gas donated by the Boche.

"D" day of the Argonne-Meuse attack found our balloon up—visibility poor of course—and ballpens to the right and across the lines were observed to be in flames. At 1000, Lt Armstrong made his initial jump, the attack being unsuccessful and the Boche being brought down by an American Spad after a ten-minute battle.

Following the advance closely, we moved to a position at the foot of Le Mort Homme where we remained until 2 Oct, blessed with poor visibility and steady attentions from Boche artillery.

5 Oct found our balloon in the air, one kilometer east of Cuisy, sixteen kilometers having been traveled over roads congested with traffic and raked with high explosive. It was en route that Cpl Heintz picked up a wound stripe at the cost of a little blood.

At 1530 a single Fokker ran the gauntlet of H. E. and machine gun fire and punctured the envelope, basket and parachute. Lt McDevitt registered his second jump.

The following day our balloon was attacked four times At 0930 two Fokkers were beaten off after Lt Armstrong had jumped. Fifteen minutes later Lt Armstrong again jumped from 500 meters, the attacking D.F. W. being driven away by the machine, gunners before it could reach firing distance. At 1600 another Fokker attacked and was driven off twice, Lt McDevitt making his third jump; an hour later the same plane drove straight from the northeast, passed through the barrage and burned the envelope. Lt McDevitt, landing almost on the winch, safely made

his of the Marne was fought. And here we watched till he was out of range fourth jump. It was for these gallant actions that LT McDevitt was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

On 8 Oct the new balloon was struck by two pieces of H.E. while at 25 meters.

On 26 Oct, Lt Fred S. Dunn arrived to take command of the company, Lt Barber being relieved. Until 9 Nov we remained near Cuisy on which day the balloon was maneuvered across the Meuse at Dun-Sur-Meuse, being the first army balloon to cross the famous stream. Fontaines was our objective and it was here while quartered in the church that the news of the Armistice arrived.

From Fontaines we moved to Loupy sur Loison on 13 Nov to watch the Boche retreat from the ground he had held since the first battle of the Marne was fought. And here we watched till he was out of range and then began to suffer from varied attacks of that AEF disease, souveniritis.

On 13 Nov Cpt Stuart W. Kellogg relieved Lt Dunn and it was under his command that the company moved from Louppy to Ville sur Cousance there to mark time and patiently await orders for home.

Arrival in France 18 Jul 1918

Arrival at the front 30 Aug 1918

Days ascensions made in S.O.S 17

Days ascensions made in Z.O.A 26

Total days ascensions made 43 **47**

Number of ascensions made in S.O.S. 71

Number of ascensions made in Z.O.A. 58

Total number of ascensions made 129 **139**

Total number of hours in air S.O.S. 76.04

Total number of hours in air Z.O.A. 63.05

Total number of hours in the air 139.09 **155.39**

Artillery adjustments in S.O.S. 14

Artillery adjustments in Z.O.A 6

Total number or artillery adjustments 20

Enemy shells observed 59 possibly **595** but unlikely

Enemy aircraft observed 320

Enemy balloons observed 61

Enemy artillery batteries observed 4

Enemy traffic on road and railroad observed 1

Smoke, fires and flares observed 18

Explosions observed 4

Jumps from basket 7

Balloons attacked 7

Balloons burned 1

Balloons destroyed

Observers killed

Observers captured

Squadron history differs from Gorrell's count, namely in number of ascensions, days and hours.

Squadron history numbers are bolded and italicized.

Stationed at Camp Lee, VA, as of May 1919 as Balloon Company No. 11. Transferred on 22 May 1919 to Brooks Field, TX. Inactivated about August 1921 at Brooks Field and 23rd Balloon Company made Active Associate. Personnel concurrently transferred to 8th and 16th Airship Companies and other units at Kelly Field, TX.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE UNIT HISTORIES

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.