

69 BALLOON COMPANY

MISSION

LINEAGE

69 Balloon Company
Organized, Jul 1918
Demobilized, May 1919

STATIONS

Camp Lee, Virginia, May, 1919

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

COMMANDERS

1Lt James P. Haight

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

The 69th Balloon Company took entity originally as the Provisional Balloon Company, formed under an AEF order. It was at Camp De Souge on July 19 1918, that we were brought together by S.O. No. 180, Hqrs. U. S, Balloon School, July 19, 1918, acting in compliance with Instructions from CAS SOS

(Balloon Section) July 9 1918. The enlisted personnel was drawn from Balloon Wing company B and the 101st Replacement Company, the latter being up largely of men from the 5th and 7th Balloon Detachments, recruits and newly arrived in France, with no balloon training our designation as the 69th Balloon Company came shortly after while we were still in training in preparation for the Zone of Advance

Our personnel contained 170 enlisted men and seven Officers 1st Lieut. James P. Halght was in command and with him were 1st Lieuts Scott M. Duncan and Lew Wallace W Taylor, and 2nd Lieuts. John R. Hall, William S. Barker, John A. Allen and Robert T. Williams. With the exception of Lieuts. Duncan and Taylor who were transferred from the infantry and Artillery respectively all these officers received balloon training and were commissioned in the Air Service at Omaha, NE.

On August 13, 1918, we entrained and on August 17, 1918, we reached Toul. After dark of this day we were moved in trucks to a point near Griscourt where we made temporary camp for the night. The following morning, we moved into more permanent quarters. On August 20, 1918, we began our work with the balloon, alternating with the 7th Company in handling their balloon. On August 23rd we took over the Chart-room and operated the balloon daily.

On August 28th we moved from Griscourt to La Hermitage, where we worked in conjunction with the 43rd Company. We were shelled once in this position, and an ammunition dump near by was blown up.

On September 5th we moved to our position near Neuf Etang where we built our camp and balloon bed, established telephonic communication with nearby batteries, and on September 11th, inflated our own balloon #250.

We were working with Left Group, 4th A. C., 2nd Army, and on September 12th, in spite of a strong gusty wind our balloon was in ascension early and was not deflated during the entire move forward. During the morning we made an important regulation for B Battery, 148th F. A. In eighteen hours, we had reached the Bois de Jury. The roads were congested and maneuvering slow, and it was at 9:00 A. M. of the 13th that we reached this position Just within our old front line trenches. Telephonic communications were immediately established through an old telephone exchange. The next day September 14th we moved forward again and rested in a position near Maizerais, On September 16th 1st Lieut. Stuart W. Kellogg joined us by assignment, a few days later our camp was shelled, and we were forced to move forward on September 22nd to Lamarehe. Where we had an excellent bed and very favorable working conditions, except that we were somewhat handicapped by lack of proper courier and liaison transportation.

Within the course of a few days we had six parachute jumps. On September 24th at 1325 the balloon was attacked by a Fokker with a yellow tail. Observers Lieuts. Taylor and Kellogg were forced to jump and landed safely. The balloon was hauled down and found to be undamaged. We immediately sent it up in ballast until new parachutes could be prepared, these were refolded and ascension continued with the same observers. That same afternoon at 1752 the balloon was again attacked by a Fokker Lieuts Taylor and Kellogg Jumped and landed safely, and when the bag was hauled down it was found

to have 15 bullet holes in the top and in the diaphragm.

The next day, September 25th 1918, at 1015 our balloon was again attacked by a Fokker Observers LTs Barker and Allen jumped and landed safely, The balloon was found to have several bullet and shrapnel holes We were fired at in the air three times by time shells and our balloon bed was shelled twice.

On September 28th we were shelled out of this position. First shells of 88mm caliber and then 150mm caliber continued to follow the winch along the road until it reached a defiladed area near the Bois de Nonsard.

Here we established ourselves in an old German camp and built a new balloon bed. Telephone communications were immediately established. It was in the Bois de Nonsard that 2nd Lieut, Everett M. Dirksen joined us on October 11th from Saumur and 1st Lieut, Fred M. Morgan on October 20th from De Souge, and then came 2nd Lieuts, Warren T. Roberts, Arvid E. Taube and Philip L. Small from Saumur on November 1st and on November 4th 1st Lieut, Joseph G. Halsey came from De Souge to be maneuvering Officer.

On October 30th, 1918, at 1447 a Fokker attacked and burned our balloon. Observers Lieuts, Morgan and Allen both landed safely. The plane attacked twice before the balloon, took fire. There were several over Hattonohatel and seven Bristols in northeast of Beney. After the balloon burned four pursued the Fokker but It returned safely over enemy lines direction St. Benoit. The anti-aircraft had a barrage around the balloon, A new balloon was immediately inflated, November 11th found us still In the Bois de Nonsard.

At Camp de Souge, July 20th, 1918, the Air Service authorized the formation of a Balloon Company, This company, since it was the only one ever-organized overseas, was at first called the Provisional Balloon Company, Later it received the number "69" and has been known to its personnel as "The Flying 69th",

After a brief training period of three weeks, the company was ordered to the Front.

The Company arrived at Toul August 17th, 1918 and was transported to it position near Griscourt that night.

We began operations in conjunction with the 7th Balloon Company the following day.

Soon the preparations for the St. Miniel Drive commenced and the Company was shifted by steps to its battle position near Neuf Etang, our own balloon, #250, was inflated the night previous to the attack and we were all in readiness for H hour of D day.

At 0500 September 12th, 1918, our balloon was in ascension and was not deflated during the move forward with the Corps artillery, there was a strong gusty wind which made it almost impossible to fly the balloon. This Company has the distinction of being the only one to regulate the fire of artillery on

the morning of the attack.

The artillery moved forward the following night and we followed with our balloon in ascension. Due to congested traffic on the roads it took us until 9:00 o'clock the next day to get to a resting place South of the Bois de Jury. Here we were just a few meters within our old front lines.

We were very lucky as telephonic communications were immediately established through an old telephone exchange. We were honored that day by a visit by our Commander of Army Balloons, Major Pagelow.

The next day we moved forward again, crossing old No Man's land, and entering Boche territory of a few days previous. He took a position near Maizerais.

Here the Company had its baptism of fire. The payroll had been received and the men were lined up ready to go through the formality of Pay-Day, when suddenly Fritz put a 150 H.E. into our camp. We all waited patiently for the whistle of the next arrival. We were not disappointed, so we all moved out of the shelled area. Pay-Day was resumed the following day.

We remained at Malserais until the sector fairly stabilized and then we moved to LaMarche.

At LaMarche we had very favorable working conditions with the exception of transportation. At one time for a week we had a broken down Indian. Liaison in a 3 ton truck is delicate work), We were, also using a 3 ton truck for courier service a distance of 40 miles.

The enemy must have known that the 69th was opposite them. Within the course of a few days we had six parachute jumps. One afternoon at 15:25 Balloon was attacked by Fokker with yellow tail. Observers Lieut. Taylor and Lieut. Kellogg were forced to Jump. Both landed safely. The Balloon was hauled down and found to be undamaged. We immediately sent it up in ballast until new parachutes could be prepared. The parachutes were refolded, and ascension continued with the same observers.

On the same afternoon at 17:83 the balloon was again attacked by a Fokker. Lieut. Taylor and Lieut Kellogg jumped and landed safely, the balloon was hauled down and found to have 15 bullet holes in top and diaphragm.

On the following morning at 10:15 a Fokker attacked our balloon. Observers, Lieut. Barker and Allen jumped and landed safely. The balloon was immediately hauled down and found to have several bullet and shrapnel holes.

We were fired at in the air three times by time shells, and our balloon was shelled in the bed twice to cap the climax our winch was shelled one afternoon, and Fritz continued dropping shells just behind our winch as we pulled down the road toward Nonsard. The balloon was first shelled by an Austrian 88mm (Otherwise known a Gressy Heel "Whiz Bang"), The fire was regulated by an enemy plane, their deflection was very good, but their range happily was about 100 meters short. As the winch retreated through LaMarche the Boche followed with shells. Just as the winch and balloon got out of

LaMarche, a wild eyed Colonel was seen spurring his trusty Dodge down the road. He excited the envy of all the winch crew by the speed of his flight. After leaving LeMarche we were supposed to be safe from the 88s, but Jerry with his versatility immediately opened up with his 150 long and he forced further retreat to Nonsard.

We entered Nonsard and were forced to halt until the telephone wires were cut. A Colonel appeared and seemed to dislike the idea of our passing through his town in such a manner. Perhaps we had interrupted his chat over the phone. Just then two big shells exploded in town, and no one was ever known to change his tune so quickly. He ordered his own men to climb every telephone pole in sight, and it is claimed he acted like a squirrel himself. Things were not going quickly enough to suit himself so he said "If you can't get that thing out in a hurry, I'll give you enough men to carry it out, anyway we reached our present location, Bois de Nonsard, in an exceptionally short time.

We now occupy an old German camp and claim the best quarters on the Western Front. This camp, as nearly as we have been able to find out, was used by the Germans as a Rest Camp for wounded officers. It is admirably chosen in the Bois de Nonsard and is built in such a way that it is invisible to aerial observation.

The quarters both for men and officers, many of which were built of concrete and made splinter proof, are remarkably comfortable and possess all the conveniences that the German mind was able to give them under the circumstances. The kitchen furnished with running water and a complete stove with huge iron pots and all necessary equipment, might be taken as a model for other kitchens on account of the way it is built and arranged.

There is a bath house with a huge porcelain tub in it, containing also a huge cauldron for heating water placed over a fire box. The bowling alley containing with pins and balls, offered a means of amusement for the men and the most advantage possible was taken of it. The theatre, built with a stage and containing seats enough for two hundred people gave us a very satisfactory place to present our company show to our many friends, who came very often to visit us. The piano which this theatre contained enabled us to have accompaniment to the voices of aspiring songsters who gathered around every evening to sing "The Darktown Strutters' Ball" and other of our well known American classics. It is a very comfortable camp and with all it contained it has all the advantages of an ideal balloon camp. The bed, placed in the woods, is very well camouflaged and protected from the elements. An ascensional point, completely defiladed from enemy balloons, offered itself and gave us plenty of room to maneuver the balloon in any direction with very little difficulty. The lines of advance and retreat were very plainly marked, and the camp is no near to the main highway that we would have been able to move out on the shortest notice. We think that a better camp than this one cannot be found, and we are very proud of it.

We were all greatly concerned when on October 30th, 1918, our first battle scarred bag #250 descended in flames. A Fokker attacked our balloon at 1447. Observers, Lieut, Morgan and Allen jumped both landed safely. The balloon did not burn on the first attack and the plane circled again firing on the balloon and succeeded in burning the balloon. At the time the balloon was attacked there were seven Spads over Hattonchatel and seven Bristols in Northeast direction of Beney, After

the balloon burned four Spads pursued the Fokker, but the Fokker out maneuvered the Spads and returned over his lines direction of St. Benoit. The Anti Aircraft put up a barrage and our machine runs fired steadily. A new balloon was immediately inflated.

We claim now to have had all the experiences necessary to make us a veteran balloon company with a clean casualty slate.

Most of our work was done with the Left Grouping of Corps Artillery under command of Major Garrett. We have carried out many successful missions. At various times we were attached to the 89th, 42nd and 28th Divisions.

Arrival in France 12 Jul 1918

Arrival at the front 17 Aug 1918

Days ascensions made in S.O.S 11

Days ascensions made in Z.O.A 48

Total days ascensions made 59

Number of ascensions made in S.O.S. 22

Number of ascensions made in Z.O.A. 99

Total number of ascensions made 121

Total number of hours in air S.O.S. 63.03

Total number of hours in air Z.O.A. 142.36

Total number of hours in the air 205.39

Artillery adjustments in S.O.S. 3

Artillery adjustments in Z.O.A 16

Total number or artillery adjustments 19

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 8

Balloons attacked 4

Balloons burned 1

Balloons destroyed

Observers killed

Observers captured

69th BC

24 Sep 1918 1Lt S. W. Kellogg jumped balloon not burned

1Lt L. W. Taylor

24 Sep 1918 1Lt S. W. Kellogg jumped balloon not burned but had 15 holes

1Lt L. W. Taylor
25 Sep 1918 2Lt W. S. Barker jumped balloon not burned riddled with bullet and shrapnel holes
2Lt J. A. Allen
30 Oct 1918 2Lt J. A. Allen jumped balloon 250 burned
1Lt F. M. Morgan

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

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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.