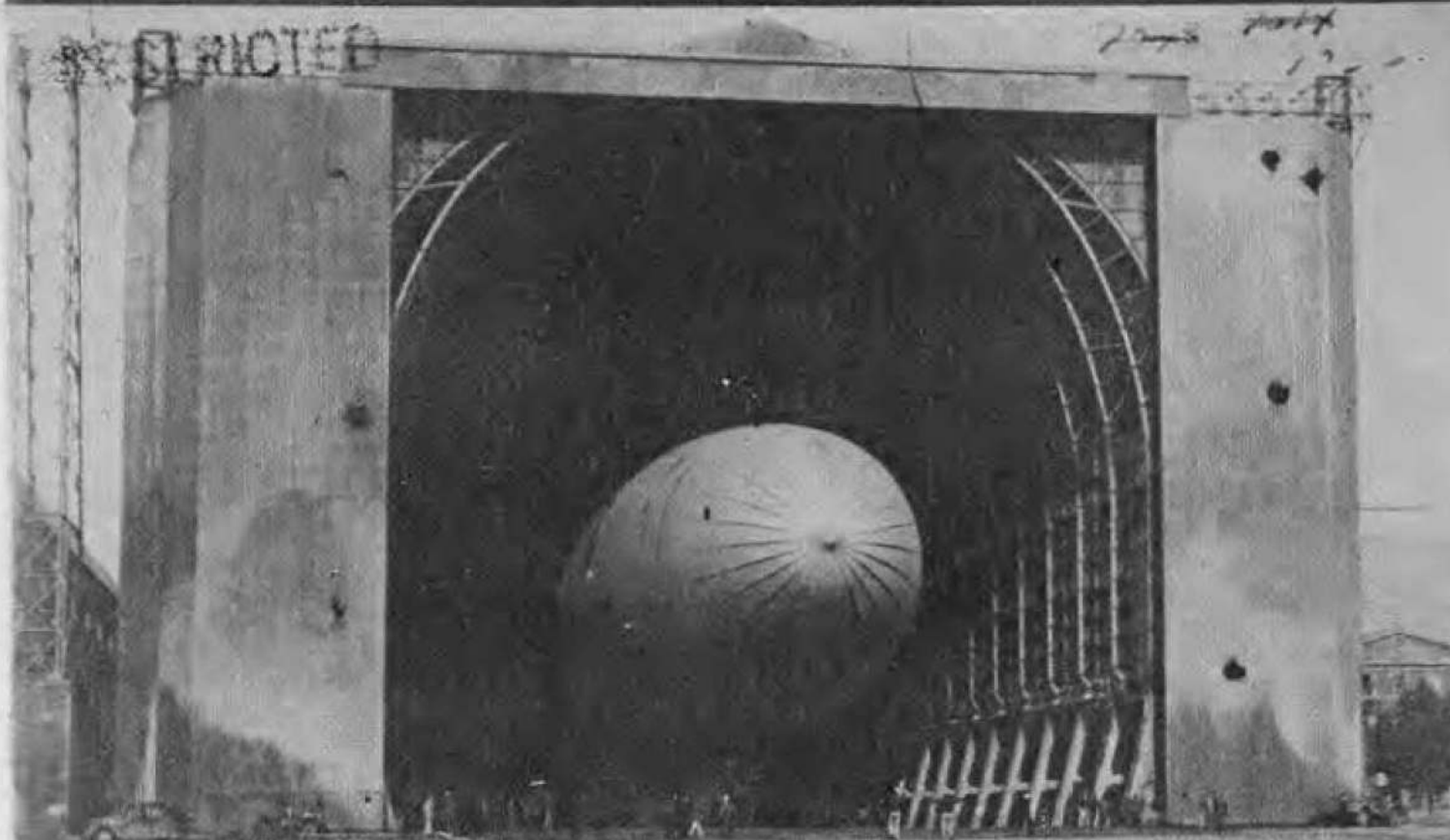


BLIMPRON 14 OVERSEAS VOL I



MEDITERRANEAN
OPERATIONS

RESTRICTED

CONFIDENTIAL

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PICTURE HISTORY

"Mediterranean Operations" is Vol. II of "Blimp on 14 Overseas" issued 1 August 1944. These booklets have been produced to fulfill in part the historical function outlined in Chief of Naval Operations' "Manual for Historical Officers" (NavAer 00-250-26).

It is anticipated that this series of photographic booklets will continue to be issued periodically as part of the permanent history of the squadron.

This booklet covers the period from 1 August to 31 October 1944. The significant squadron operation during this period was the aerial mine spotting in connection with joint mine sweeping operations along the southern coast of France which began 14 September. This was the first time that an airship had worked jointly with surface craft in sweeping mines. Therefore, this issue is centered around that maneuver.

Important events occurring at the main operational base at Port Lyautey, French Morocco, during the period are pictured on pages 22 and 23.

During the closing days of October, one airship was ordered to Bizerte, Tunisia. Although this blimp did not arrive there until 3 November, pictures of the initial phases of that operation have been included in the final pages of this booklet. A subsequent booklet will deal fully with these operations.

Cuers, France

Lt. (jg) R. O. Kline,
A2 USNR,
Photographic Officer

COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Blimp K-112 being undocked from hangar at Cuers, France, during October 1944.



LYAUTEY-GUERS FERRY ROUTE

SOUTH FRANCE OPERATIONS BLIMPRON 14 (SEPT. OCT. 1944)

SIX-WEEKS WORK
WATERS WITHIN 100-FATHOM
CURVE BETWEEN MARSEILLE
AND TOULON PLOTTED DURING
SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER.



K-112 ARRIVED 17 SEPT.
K-109 ARRIVED 24 OCT.

U.S. NAVAL COMMUNICATION SERVICE

TO: CTS 81.4
FROM: ROUTINE
SUBJECT: CONFIDENTIAL

1500239A

ACTION: CTS 80.4, CTF 81,
1ST FLOT, 3RD REGION MARITIME NAVAL FRANCE

FRANCE DRAGGERS OPERATING WITH AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE PARTY IN
BLIMP TODAY COMPLETED 8-DAY ORPHEUS CLEARANCE OF STRIP OF
WATERS BETWEEN 45-05-10 NORTH 05-30-45 EAST AND 45-01-52 NORTH
05-33-08 EAST. THIS FIRST TIME COMBINED BLIMP SWEEPING OPERATIONS
ATTEMPTED. BLIMP OF GREAT ASSISTANCE TO SWEEPERS USING CLOUD
HALLER AND WAF RADIO AND DROPPING FLARES AND ON ONE OCCASION
TURNING SWEEPERS AWAY FROM MINE IN HIS PATH. FULL REPORT FOLLOWS
BY MAIL. CHECK SWEEP OF AREA WILL BE MADE TOMORROW &
FOR 2350/16 BY COURIER

1500239A

DISTRIBUTION: C.O., OPS-ACTION, BLIMP-NA, COMNA (2) 1500239A

COMBINED OPERATIONS
NEAR CIOTAT DAY BLIMP K-112
GUIDED MINESWEEPERS INTO FIELD
DURING OPERATION STARTED UNDER
ADVERSE WEATHER 13-15 OCT.

CONFIDENTIAL
(ZPM PHOTO LIBRARY)



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7016

Eighteen days after the liberation of the French naval port of Toulon--14 Sept. --two Blimpron 14 combat air crews arrived at the Cuers rigid airship "aerodrome" 11 miles northeast of the port to set up an expeditionary blimp base. The 14 men and 8 officers, the mast and accessories were flown on an R5D from Port Lyautey in a swift move which was made on 12 hours notice. Sinking anchor holes in the rocky earth of the Alpine foothills was tough, slow work, and posthole diggers were ready to be surveyed when the job was done. To speed the work, dynamite left behind by retreating Germans was used to blast the anchor holes. Crewmembers (above) watch a charge set off.



7017

Cuers-Pierrefeu aerodrome (above) was built at World War I's close as an elaborate rigid airship establishment with hydrogen gasometers (foreground) and two large hangars. The hangars have door sills of 120 feet, are approximately 800 feet long and 130 feet high. Except for the engines for operating the doors and leaky roofs, both were in good condition. Four hangars were dismantled in Germany to build these two as part of reparations payments. Last airship to use the field before the arrival of the K-112 was the Graf Zeppelin in 1929. Occupying Germans used the field for operational training of dive-bombing units.



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Twenty-two hundred land mines reportedly were removed from the field and vicinity before it became operational 29 Aug. As late as the middle of October, German prisoners still were demining vineyards surrounding the aerodrome (lower right). Three Spitfire squadrons were flying strafing missions from the field when blimp K-112 arrived (top photo). Squadron personnel inspect (lower left) monuments to DIXMUDE--rigid airship lost in 1923 while operating from Cuers. A French squadron of Walruses occupied hangar at left. Blimp storerrooms were located in this hangar.

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After 23.5 hours flying time, the K-112 (above) landed at Cuers field at 1831A 17 Sept. Australian Spitfire squadron men groundhandled the ship. An overnight stop was made at Oran where the before-dawn takeoff was accomplished with 15 men--7 of them members of the ferry crew. Because of required flying in "corridors", the flight covered 951 nautical miles. The K-109 arrived 24 Oct. Crew which flew the initial ferry flight (right): standing (left to right) Lt. (jg) W. F. Gasner, Lt. (jg) E. B. Russell, Comdr. E. J. Sullivan, Lt. J. J. Barefoot; (kneeling) Louis Brodsky, CBM; J. Grimaldi, AMML/c; William Nicol, AMML/c; L. W. Ahlstrand, BML/c; F. J. Platt, ARML/c; H. E. Israel, ARML/c.



French and British units based at Cuers co-operated wholeheartedly in the establishment of blimp facilities on the field. Australian "fitters" (mechanics) (above) provided fueling facilities until their squadrons departed. Then an United States Army air-sea rescue unit fuel truck was used. Gasoline--100-octane--was hauled from Toulon in 50-gallon drums (lower right). F. G. Smith, ACMM, and George A. Harris, AML/c, fashioned a work platform for engine checks from scrap metal found around the airfield (lower left). The ship was put in the hangar for 120-hour checks.



German soldiers who had been captured near Suers a few weeks before aided flight crews in ground-handling operations (lower left). These prisoners were used only for landing and docking operations. Flight crews handled the ship on take-offs. Occasionally, a single cigaret was given to each German prisoner and French guard after completion of a landing (lower right). Australian and French enlisted men acted as ground-handlers during the first few days of operation in southern France (top photo). German prisoners also were used to de-mine areas near the field. On moonless nights, flashes from artillery on the Italian front 75 miles away could be seen by personnel on pressure watch.

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Selection of one of the docks for use automatically resulted in naming it "Dock No. 1", the doors of which were put into operation 18 Sept--for the first time in years. Before the hangar was prepared for use, a mine disposal officer inspected it thoroughly for "booby traps". Nothing was found except German "No Smoking" signs (lower center). French civilians (top photo) aided in the clearing of years' accumulation of debris and block and tackle was rigged for leverage. Machinery designed to operate the doors was inoperative (lower right). An American tank lobbed the shells which put the holes in the doors. These did not interfere with the opening operation or do any damage inside the hangar. Opening and closing the doors became a 5-minute operation with the permanent apparatus--cable and block rigged to be used with tractor.



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The lack of a mobile mast made docking operations in the 120-foot sill hangar a risky operation. A mobile mast did not arrive until the last week in October. When time for 120-hour check came, the K-112 was docked for the first time 8 Oct in practically calm wind conditions. The hangars have doors on the east end only. For daily operation the ship was kept on the mast except when "mistral" winds of gale force were predicted. But, because of the lack of aerology units closely during the first weeks' operations, the K-112 rode out three such storms.

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7038.



Ring bolts along the sides and in the deck of the hangar were adapted easily to the mooring lines of the K-112. A 25-foot rigid airship platform (left) was in good condition and used extensively for inspection of nose and tail assemblies. Trim of the ship was altered to bring the ship within reach of the platform. A trough in the center of the hangar deck (can be seen under platform above) simplified problem of keeping airship wheel centered. The five catwalks across the top of the hangar were thoroughly inspected and cleared of debris before the ship was docked. Note hole in hangar roof at right. Water was piped into hangar but there were no electrical connections.

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Flight operations in southern France require close scrutiny of the weather because of the violence of "mistral" winds. Communications setup made it difficult to receive regularly forecasts from Marseille. During the second week in October, a Navy aerology unit was established in the steel and concrete tower on Cuers field (top photo). A schedule of two maps daily began on 16 Oct. In the photo lower left (left to right): L. J. Picco, AERML/c; W. E. Griner, ARTL/c; J. L. Whitsell, AFRMC/c; Ens. J. J. Bussone; Lt. P. N. Retson; J. V. Deegan, AFRMC/c; N. Somborn, AFRMC/c; W. L. Priest, AFRMC/c.

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The "mistral" is a violent, hard-to-predict northwest wind of southern France which rises rapidly and persists for one or more days. The three "mistrals" which the K-112 rode out during the first six weeks operations lasted about 24 hours. Highest steady winds were 45 knots, and gusts reached 60 knots. During such "riding out", a cable was rigged from the base of the mast to the taxi wheel to insure that the ship would not blow away from the mast in case it broke loose (right). Two officers and four enlisted men stood pressure watches during high winds in order that rip cords could be manned quickly. Fall rains (top) at times slowed ship handling but never interfered with flights.

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7051



Mission of blimps in South France was to plot mines. Early flights proved the airship ideal for the assignment, and later experiment proved it also ideal for guiding sweeps safely into minefields. Installation of loudspeaker (can be seen in rear window in photo at left) proved indispensable in the safe guidance of small boats to suspected mines (top photo). In briefing conference on jeep hood (lower right) Comdr. E. J. Sullivan discusses day's mission with minesweep liason officer. French officer (second from right) during flights manned radio and loud speaker to relay messages to French minesweepers. German buoys (lower left) were used to mark mines. Note water-filled ballast at

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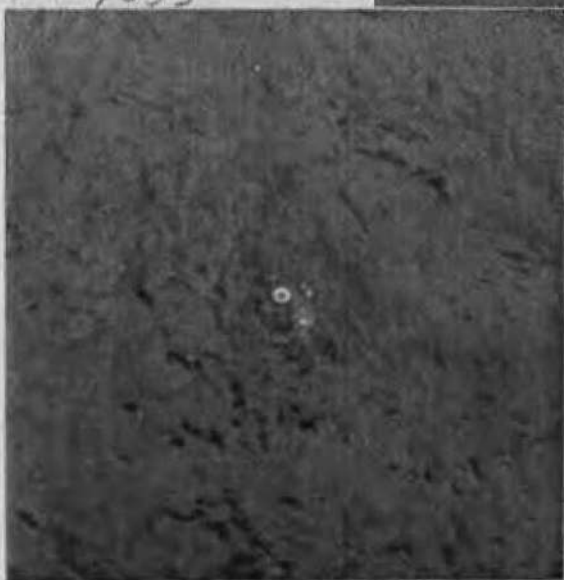


First combined sweeping operation between blimp and mine sweeps ever attempted began morning of 13 Oct. under adverse weather (large photo)--ceiling 600 feet, visibility 2-3 miles. Photo (right) shows how moored mine looks to blimp crew. Blimp located first mine in string of 15 previously plotted by blimp, marked this mine with smoke flare and directed 5 French-manned YMS's into field. Large photo shows 2 minesweeps making first sweep near flare on which one mine was cut. Two more were cut before minesweeps requested operations be delayed until next day because visibility was so low that navigational bearings on coast 6 miles away could not be taken. Operation was completed 15 Oct. Dispatch from Commander Escort Sweeper Group describing operation is reproduced on page 2.

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7055



SC691, French manned, sank with gunfire mines cut by the sweeps. Small photograph is closeup taken from blimp of mine being fired at in large photograph. None of the 15 mines cut and sunk exploded. The 8-day operation was complete success. Waters within 100-fathom curve between Toulon and Marseille were plotted during first 6 weeks. One plotting mission--in Gulf of Juan--was within 25 miles of Italian battlefront. Waters of Etang de Berre were swept preliminary to setting up seaplane base.



Although mine plotting and sweeping were primary missions of detachment in France, two other assignments were carried out during first six weeks. On two occasions, an all-night barrier was set up at entrance to Toulon harbor to prevent enemy one-man submarines from entering. On a photographic mission, damage to Toulon was photographed in connection with surveys for the reconstruction of the city. The Under Prefect of Toulon in appreciation wrote "the blimp . . . has perfectly fulfilled the mission he had given her." Lower photo is type taken on this mission. Upper photo shows small harbor blocked by ship in which 7 mines were reported by blimp during early operational flight.

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Living at Cuers during the first weeks was under "field" conditions. For a few days food consisted of Army "C" and "K" rations. All gear was transported from Port Lyautoy by plane (lower left). Lavatory facilities consisted of outside artesian wells (upper center). Commander Sullivan (upper right), as did all hands, washed his own clothes. Such necessities of life as the "outillage" were set up (lower right). During spare moments mine-warfare crews went souvenir hunting (upper left). Fireplace wood was obtained from German foxholes (lower center).

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Officers lived in villa formerly occupied by German officers (upper photograph). A French farm family occupied part of the villa which had electricity but no other modern conveniences. When the K-109 arrived 24 Oct., another villa nearby was obtained. Enlisted men lived in one section of French enlisted men's barracks (lower photo). Ship's cook prepared enlisted men's chow. Officers cooked own meals for first six weeks with aid of 2 French domestics.

7066



The "original" all-hands at Cuers detachment--the first three crews to serve there: standing, left to right) Lt. W. M. Bishop, Rad. Elec. A. M. Pontus, Lt (jg) W. F. Casner, Ens. Chalmer Litteral, Lt. H. F. Bogren, Lt (jg) E. R. McMillan, Lt (jg) E. B. Russell, Lt. Comdr. Oscar Loeser (present on inspection tour), Commander E. J. Sullivan, Lt. J. J. Barefoot, Lt (jg) W. H. Ireland, Ens. R. T. Emory, Ens. F. J. Kroll, Ens. W. K. Kaiser, Ens. A. W. Hagedorn. Kneeling (left to right) S. R. Reece, CBM, R. J. Varca, ARM2/c; A. D. Trudeau, ARI/c; F. J. Platt, ARM1/c; William Nicol, AMM2/c; L. W. Ahlstrand, BMI/c; H. A. Snider, ARM1/c; H. E. Israel, ARM2/c; Joseph Grimaldi, AMM1/c; G. A. Harris, AM1/c; G. H. Hetzel, SC2/c; J. P. Shimkus, ART1/c; A. S. Milinowicz, AMM-2/c; Donald McEachern, ARI/c; E. E. Bradshaw, AMM2/c; Paul Baldasare, ARM3/c; Manuel Papastergiou, ARM2/c; James M. Droher, AOM2/c; J. W. Marsh, AMM2/c; Louis Brodsky, CBM; not in picture P.G. Smith, ACMM.

7062.



While the minesweeping operation was being conducted along the southern coast of France, airships remaining at Port Lyautey continued their special equipment barrier flights in the Strait of Gibraltar. A freak blasting accident 15 Sept. at Port Lyautey temporarily grounded the K-101. Two 2-pound stones were hurled through envelope of ship which had been moved to what was considered by C.B. unit going blasting as safe area. Quick reaction by all hands saved the airship. About 80,000 cubic feet of helium were lost. On 31 Oct. purging and repair work on K-101 was continuing.

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During last week in August, airships began operating from C. B.-constructed field atop hill west of Craw field (lower photograph). Blimpron offices can be seen at lower left. On 19 Oct. command of Blimpron 14 changed. Comdr. E. J. Sullivan (left in top photograph) was relieved as squadron commander by Lt. Comdr. F. S. Rixey (right) in ceremonies conducted on the airship field at Fort Lyautey. Lt. Comdr. Rixey was ordered to Blimpron 14 from Blimpron 12 where he also was squadron skipper. Commander Sullivan became Air Group Commander (LTA) on the staff of Commander Fleet Air Wing 15, operational command under which Blimpron 14 operated.

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During last week in October, Blimp K-109 was ordered from France to Bizerte, Tunisia, for mine sweeping operations. The last stick mast remaining at Port Lyautey was flown to Bizerte by PBYS (above being loaded) and R4D. This mast was erected at Sidi Ahmed field southwest of Bizerte (lower right). Because water level was so close to earth's surface, timber deadmen, instead of iron anchors, were used to anchor the mast. Three 8" by 8" timbers 7 feet long which were sunk 5 feet were used as deadmen. Each deadman was test pulled at 7,000 pounds.

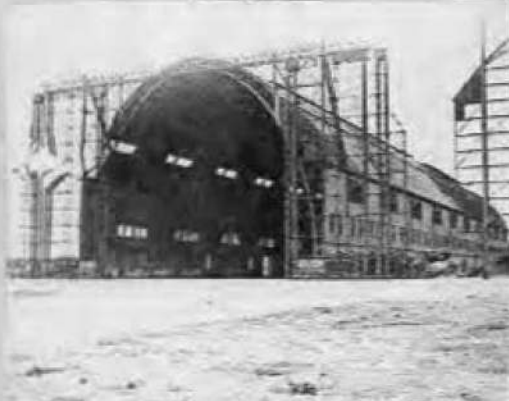
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The K-109 arrived at Sidi Ahmed field 3 Nov. after an 8-hour flight from Cuers (top photo) with Lt. Comdr. F. S. Rixey, squadron skipper, (right in photo at left) as pilot. Commander Sullivan discusses flight with him. War-damaged airship hangars at Bizerte (lower right) had no covering on doors. The door sill was about 100 feet. Two flight crews from Port Lyautay were flown to Bizerte. These, with the ferry crew, made a 3-crew detachment there. Loudspeaker from K-112 was placed in K-109 for the Tunisian operations.