

A black and white photograph of a Navy blimp flying over a coastal area. In the upper left, several flags are flying on poles. The blimp is in the center-right, with "NAVY" visible on its side. In the lower right, there are palm trees and a sign that says "CONFIDENTIAL".

CLEARING WATERS OF

SARDINIA

VOL. III

BLIMPRON 14 OVERSEAS

CONFIDENTIAL

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COPY NO:

thirteen

THE SARDINIAN ISSUE

Volume III of "Blimpron 14 Overseas" continues to record for historical archives the operations of Blimp Squadron 14. This issue covers squadron operations during the period 1 November 1944 to 28 February 1945.

During this period Blimpron 14 airships operated from four bases: Port Lyautey, French Morocco; Cuers, France; Bizerte, Tunisia; and Cagliari, Sardinia.

As Volume II was the "France issue", so this volume becomes the "Sardinia issue" since the significant phase of the squadron's operations during the four-month period was the establishment of an advance base at Cagliari, Sardinia, for mine sweeping work. This maneuver was carried out in November immediately after the completion of the check sweeping of the Tunisian war channel.

Although the accent of this volume is on the Sardinian operation, it contains a pictorial history of operations and life at Cuers, France, and at the home base of Port Lyautey during November, December, January and February.

The Blimpron 14 Overseas series intends to fulfill in part the historical function outlined in Chief of Naval Operations' "Manual for Historical Officers" (Navier 00-250-26). It has not been written as a complete history, but rather to fill the gap which war diaries and action reports leave when it comes to recording for history the story of the personnel of any naval unit.

Port Lyautey, French Morocco
1 March 1945

Lt. (jg) R. C. Kline
A2 USNA
Photographic Officer

The Cover Photograph

Blimp K-109 passes over Elmas field near Cagliari, Sardinia, in December 1944. From the flag staff fly British Royal Air Force and Italian flags.

BLIMPRON 14 MEDITERRANEAN BASES

1 NOV. 1944 - 28 FEB. 1945

FERRY DISTANCES

LYAUTEY - CUERS.....835 MILES

LYAUTEY - CAGLIARI.....850 MILES



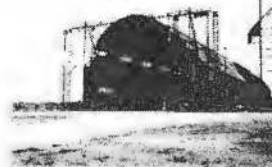
MAIN BASE:

3-4 BLIMPS; 10-11 CREWS;
PATROL, ESCORT, CALIBRATION,
MINESPOTTING, PHOTO-
TRAINING, UPKEEP
OF BLIMPS



Port Lyautey

ORAN: STICK MAST;
FUELING STATION
FOR FERRY HOPS,
EXTENDED ESCORTS



CUERS: 1 BLIMP;
3-4 FLIGHT CREWS;
MINE SPOTTING;
ESCORT; SEARCH;
MAINTENANCE



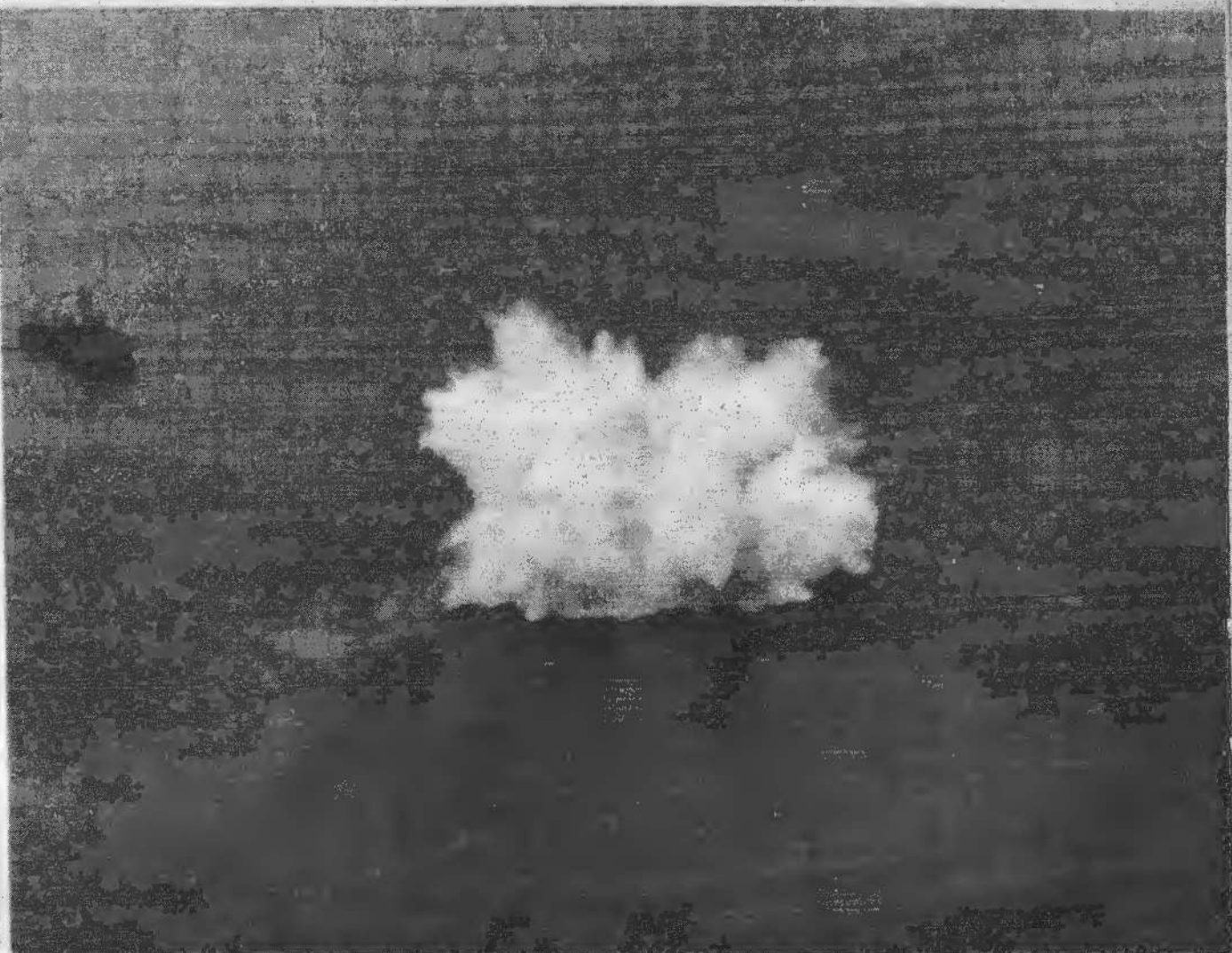
CAGLIARI: 1 BLIMP,
4 FLIGHT CREWS,
MINE SPOTTING,
PHOTO MISSIONS

CANNES:
STICK MAST FOR
EMERGENCY USE

BIZERTE: STICK MAST,
MINE SPOTTING
3-18 NOV. 1944;
FUELING STATION
FOR MISSIONS

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Seven weeks after the start of airship operations along the southern coast of France, the K-109 arrived at Bizerte, Tunisia, and Blimpron 14's second advance base in the Mediterranean was established. From Sidi Ahmed field near Bizerte on 4 Nov. 1944, the blimp began a check sweep with surface craft of the Tunisian war channel. Upon completion of this 14-day maneuver during which 2 mines were found and sunk, the blimp detachment was moved to Cagliari on the Italian island of Sardinia from which joint sweeping operations with United States minesweeps began 21 Nov. For this advance base, the stick mast at Cuers was taken down and flown to Cagliari. Arrival of the mobile mast at Cuers from Gibraltar late in October made the stick mast not vital to operations at the French base. In photograph above, taken from blimp, mine has exploded when swept by surface craft. Not all mines exploded when cut.



At Cagliari, the blimp operated with units of Task Group 81.12. The mast was located on Elmas field near incompleted Italian hangars (in foreground of photograph at lower left). The tent at base of mast was used to stow airship gear (lower right). During sweeping operations, blimp marked mines with smoke floats and then remained ahead of sweeps directing them by voice radio and loud speaker into the field (upper right). When a mine was cut and did not explode, the blimp marked it with a smoke float so that the "sink boat" could find it quickly. Because of danger of mine exploding, the airship did not attempt to sink mines with 50-calibre fire. However, net baoy were sunk by fire from the blimp during sweeping operations. Greatest number of mines swept in single day was 97. Flying weather at Cagliari generally was good. Mountains which ringed the field protected it from high winds. Highest gust recorded was about 45 knots.



Officers and men of the blimp detachment --four flight crews of 4 officers and 6 men each and an officer-in-charge--were quartered in large horseshoe-shaped building in photograph above. Architecture and planning at Elmas field reminded many of Italian exhibits at New York's WORLD FAIR. Despite its modernistic lines, the quarters in which ZPL4 personnel were housed were cold, uncomfortable. There was no warm water for showers, no heating system, no glass in most windows. Stoves for rooms were fashioned from oil drums, and for 3 hours daily there were warm showers in a nearby building. On foul weather days, shutters were kept closed. Also operating from the field was an RAF transport command detachment, an U.S. Army communications center and a unit of Italian co-belligerents. Blimp crews used British sick bay, aerology and communication facilities. Stick mast is just outside photograph in upper right.



Blimp K-109 personnel at Cagliari tired soon of Sardinia's chief crop--cauliflower--which they got often at the British mess at which they ate. Note window shutters and barrel-stove in men's room (upper left). Lt. (jg) F. W. Bellinger cuts wood for his room stove (left in photo upper right). Italian co-belligerents aided as groundhandlers (right center). RAF truck furnished fuel (lower right). Souvenirs were well picked over when Blimp personnel arrived (lower center). Commander E. J. Sullivan at detachment's operations "office"--blanket-covered table in officers' room, (lower left). Because of political unrest and civilian rioting in nearby Cagliari, liberty for all hands was restricted much of the time. Blimp K-109 returned to Lyantey in February for purging. K-101 replaced it.



A stick mast on La Senia field near Oran, Algeria, was used as a fueling station during ferry flights and extended operational missions in the MEDITERRANEAN. In top left photograph, K-134 is shown at Oran in December during 4-day layover there because of weather. Oran Naval Receiving station provided ground handlers who were directed by officer flown from Port Lyautey. U. S. Army Transport Command serviced the airship at Oran. By using warehouse carryall, repairs were made on tail skid of K-134 (photograph at right). Winter rains caused sand bags to deteriorate quickly despite crude shelter (lower left). NOB Oran provided command car for transportation while airship remained on La Senia field. No stop was made at Oran when K-112 flew non-stop from Guers to Port Lyautey during December in 16.4 hours.



The K-134 was flown to Cuers during first week in December for minespotting operations while engines were changed on K-112. Forward surge patches were replaced and all major control cables on K-112 were renewed on K-112 during the engine change. The K-112 returned to Port Lytaey on 29 December for purging. Since the stick mast at Cuers had been moved to Cagliari, both ships operated off the one mobile mast there. The hangars made this possible. Because there was only one mast, only one ship was flown at a time because high winds sometimes made docking in the narrow doors impossible. The operational ship was docked each night if winds permitted. The U. S. Army air-sea rescue unit, which came to the Cuers airfield shortly after arrival of blimp detachment, left during December. French continued to operate squadron of Walruses from the field.



Inside the hangar, the engines on the K-112 were changed with ease. Flight crew mechs did the work under the supervision of ASG chiefs, (photo top left). Mechs found the arrangement much more satisfactory than the changes which had been made at Port Lyautay while the airship was riding at the mast (lower left). The rigging of a bos'n's chair speeded work of replacing forward surge patches and renewing major control cables (lower right). Riggers (top right) inspect patches removed from K-112. Plans had been made to paint the top of the K-112 during the engine change, but paint did not arrive in time. Leaky hangar roof slowed somewhat work on envelope. A tour of duty at Quers made CAC crew personnel versatile--they erected masts, did check and maintenance work on the airship, stood pressure and security watches, constructed small buildings besides flying.



CAC crew radiomen gained wide electronics experience at Cuers. They flew as operators on an airship which contained loudspeaker, they did check and repair work on the ship's receivers and transmitters, set up and stood watches in radio shack and laid 10 to 12 miles of telephone lines. All under the supervision of ASG chiefs. In top photograph CAC member is directing two German prisoners laying telephone line. Generators supplied current for operation of refrigerator unit, radio shack and aerology tower. Note disposable gasoline tank from Spitfire which has been rigged as fuel tank on generator at lower left. In this picture French civilian is inviting W. E. Hayden, ACEM, to Christmas dinner. Arrival of RBG receivers (lower right) and BC22-D U.S. Army transmitter made it possible for the radio shack to work ferry airships all the way to Port Lyautey--800 miles away.



Knottiest problem which the Guers detachment had to solve was the obtaining of a fuel truck. In succession, fuel trucks belonging to British Spitfire squadrons, United States Army air-sea rescue unit and to French Walrus squadron were used. Each time these units moved, the blimp was left without a fuel truck. German trucks which were located were in such bad condition that they could not be repaired. Since no truck could be found, the engine pump shown at right above was used to fuel the airship directly from 50-gallon drums. Drums were stored in small HTA hangar (lower left). The 12,000-gallon underground German tank (top left) was cleaned and made ready for use in case fuel truck was obtained. Some gasoline was delivered on French railline which ran onto field.



DeVance Ponder, chief pharmacist's mate, (left in photo at right) and G. N. Baker, HAL/c, (right in same photo) kept a check on the physical well being of Cuers detachment personnel. Cuers was 40 miles from nearest sickbay when navy detachment moved from Toulon. At Cagliari, RAF dispensary facilities were used. The Cuers detachment's sick bay was set up in No. 2 hangar. Periodic immunization shots were given personnel and minor ailments were treated. Officers being promoted by alnav's had to return to Port Ly-autey for flight physicals. "ship's service" at Cuers was single locker (top left) from which rations were issued weekly--1 can of beer daily, 5 packages of cigarets weekly, couple packages of gum, candy was usual ration. Aerology unit sent up radiosonde balloons once a day, supplied forecasts to French.

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The German breakthrough in northern France during December put all of Southern France on the alert. When German parachutists dressed as United States Army officers were seized near Toulon and Marseilles, all U. S. officers were ordered to carry sidearms. During the alert one Blimpron officer was held 4 hours by the FFI when he was caught away from the field after dark. Machineguns were removed from the airships and set up in front of blimpron duty shack in hangar (top right). Officers practised their marksmanship with G.I. .38's and souvenir lugers (lower left). There were thousands of rounds of ammunition of all types left on base by Germans (lower right). Blimpron duty officer chats with Commandant Noel, french commander of the uers station (top left).



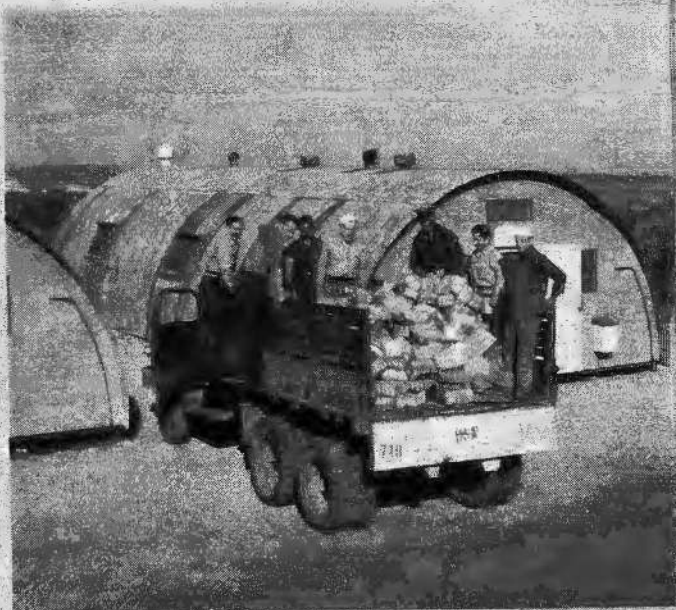
Chow at the Cuers detachment was, in general, excellent. At Bizorte, too, where the crews ate at NOB the food was good. At Cuers a refrigerator unit was obtained in which fresh meats and vegetables were kept (top right). Two officers' stewards prepared meals for the officers and the men's food was prepared by two ship's cooks. A German prisoner helped at both places. The enlisted men's galley (lower right) was small and separate from the French galley. Squadron storekeeper checks out day's ration for officers' villa to Stewards mate (top left). K-rations were used for flight rations. Food supplies were drawn from naval stores in Toulon and Marseille and officers' pay accounts were checked for subsistence while they were at Cuers. About the only item missing from the Cuers chow most of the time was fresh milk.



Enlisted men's mess hall was shared by army and British (lower right). Men ate from their mess kits and washed their own kits when they had finished. The enlisted men brightened up their wing of the French barracks with paint and improvised stoves for heating. Hot showers were available for an hour daily in the enlisted men's barracks--to officers and men. Hundreds of mosquitoes made netting necessary before cold weather set in. Temperatures at night reached 10 degrees Fahrenheit and two inches of snow fell on the field once. The men's living quarters (top left) were kept shipshape by a compartment cleaner assigned daily from GAC crew.



When transportation could be spared, CAC crews went on liberty as a crew--officers and men going together. They visited Marseille, Toulon, Hyeres, St. Tropeze and the French Riviera coast where they viewed German anti-invasion fortifications (lower right). Enlisted men were invited to occasional dance in nearby village of Pierre-Feu (top left). Stephen J. Kubarych, PhoMI/c, squadron's only photographers mate, had his picture taken with Pope Pious XII when he visited Vatican City on his way back from photographic assignment in Cuers. Abandoned German equipment such as searchlights (lower left) when encountered during liberty sightseeing trips sometimes yielded useable gear. Useable electrical relays were taken from these lights.



German parachutist activity in southern France marred the Christmas spirit for the Cuers detachment. Liberty was on a restricted basis and all hands were in an "alert" status during the holiday week. Many of the detachment's personnel received invitations to eat a Christmas meal with French civilians. Feature of the Cuers Christmas meal was unexcelled French white wine and American turkey. Lt. E. W. Steffen, officer-in-charge of Cuers detachment, poured wine (lower right) while officers sing carols Christmas night. Lights on Christmas tree in Photo (lower left) were adapted by electronics officer from signal bulbs taken from abandoned German searchlights. Lt. Comdr. F. S. Rixey, squadron commander, and administrative office personnel look over first load of Christmas mail which arrived at Port Lyautey in October (top right). Packages being passed out in "Helium Acres" (top left).



Officers quarters at Giers consisted of two villas located near the field. The villa originally occupied (top right) became "senior officers quarters." All meals for officers were prepared and served in this villa. Located 1/2 mile away, the junior officers villa was more modern--it contained running water, inside toilet and galvanized metal bath tub. Both villas were heated by fireplaces (lower right). Note German souvenirs--flour sack beneath typewriter, helmet and sign over fireplace on mantel. Both villas were occupied on reverse lend-lease agreement. Each officer took turn at holding 0630 reveille and going after German prisoner and French domestics who did housework. During December, Commodore B. V. McCandlish, commander naval advance bases, United States 8th Fleet, visited the detachment (lower left).



With four crews at each detachment, 10 crews remained at Port Lyautey to fly the Strait of Gibraltar patrol and other assigned missions. To keep squadron morale up, plans were made to rotate crews between Port Lyautey and the advance bases. Most crews sought an opportunity to serve at an advance base. Scarcity of air transportation slowed the rotation plan and on 1 March, 10 crews had served or were serving at an advance base. First crews to serve at Guers earned right to wear star in their European-Middle Eastern theater ribbon. At Port Lyautey, the small, compact blimp field shown in photograph above in December became maintenance field as well as operating mat when maintenance shops were moved to top of hill. The 4 huts housing operations, administration and maintenance offices can be seen at corner of mat. "Helium acres", onlisted men's tent city can be seen in extreme right foreground.

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When the hill-top blimp field at Port Lyautey became operational in August, shops of the squadron's Aircraft Service Group remained on Caw field. This separation between maintenance and the rest of the squadron slowed check work. In December two more Quonset huts were erected near the blimp field and all ASG shops moved into them. Photograph above shows the new maintenance area which was directly behind operations and administration huts. Tent at left was used by groundhandlers. Lister bag in center was only water supply on the hill. Electricity for field lights and for lighting the huts was provided by 15 kilowatt generator. Because of the lack of space in the 4 huts, the squadron's supply office remained on Caw field proper.



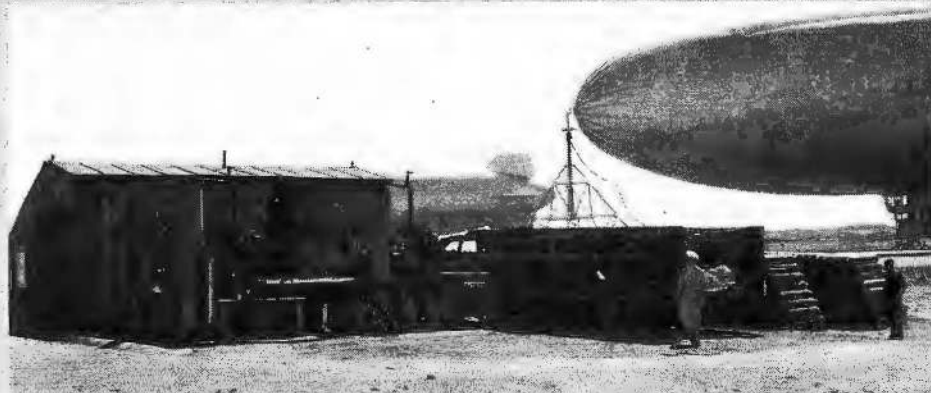
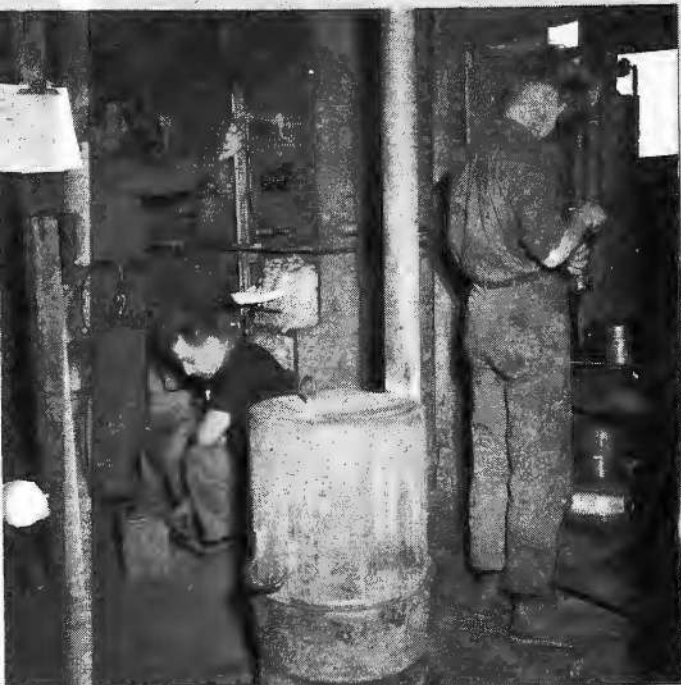
African nights were cold during winter months even though most of the days were warm. Heat for Quonset huts was needed during the early morning hours. Few stoves were available so heating units were improvised from oil drums. At right is the electronics shop with one such stove. Picking case wood from the naval air station dump was used as fuel. The electronics department had half a Quonset hut for their shops. An auxiliary radio tower which was set up on blimp field during first day's of its operation was abandoned in November. The engineering department also had half a hut for shop spaces. This was crowded by fuel tanks removed from K-130 during welding operations (left above). Engine changes were made both at Cuers and Port Lynautey. Little maintenance work was done at Cagliari.



The blimpron ordnance gang dug-out partially caved in French bomb shelters and converted them into shops and spaces for ordnance stowage. By whitewashing walls and constructing a small oil stove from small drum, ordnance personnel built warm, bright, neat shop at top left. Shop was "safe" for checking firearms since projectile fired accidentally could not penetrate thick concrete walls and injure anyone outside. Note stove pipe protruding from ground in photograph of entrance to shop at top right. Ordnance gang did all the landscaping, masonry and painting work. Water bombs set in ground served as safety barriers around entrances to underground spaces. Ammunition was stored in separate shelters (lower left).



The portable helium purification units were moved to the top of hill in December when the rest of the ASG shops were moved from Craw field. A semi-permanent installation was made near the "slot" mooring circle. Purging and topping up lines were laid under the mat from the center of the circle to the plants. Helium was stored between the plant and the circle. This arrangement simplified purging and topping up operations. Cylinders no longer had to be moved to make top ups. Fuel tanks for the plants can be seen in photograph at top (left). Dollies and wheels were removed from the purging units and concrete blocks placed under each to reduce vibration, which had caused most maintenance problems on the units. The tar-paper covered shelter housed shop and instruments on which purity was read.



A "barrel" stove heated the helium plant shelter (top left) which contained work bench (top right). In lower photograph is trailer onto which barrage balloon was rigged. This was used occasionally to transfer helium from an airship near pressure height to another. Its use was not altogether satisfactory. Biggest job which the helium gang had during the 4 months was the lifting of the purity of the damaged K-101 from less than 62.2% to 96.9% in two separate purges. Approximately 880 hours of plant operation were required for the purge during which 3,078,250 cu. feet were purified and 291,150 cu. feet were added to the airship. During the first six months at Port Lyautey, approximately 225,000 feet of helium were added on the average to each of the 6 airships. Average purity of blimps was once 97.1%—and never below 95%—with some airships away from home base for as long as 3 months.



Squadron riggers were kept busy under far from ideal conditions (right). The extensive welding work which was necessary on the damaged K-130 had to be performed while ship was on the mast and moving. This constant movement made temperature control problems difficult. Web ladders were modified and re-modified to make possible painting and work on upper vertical fin (top left) and mobile ladders were used to make repairs on lower vertical fin (top left). Painting of the top gores of the squadron's airships began in January at Port Vautey (top right). This work was slow because it could not start until noon when envelope had dried and could not be done except during periods of practically calm winds. By 1 March, painting of the third airship had started.

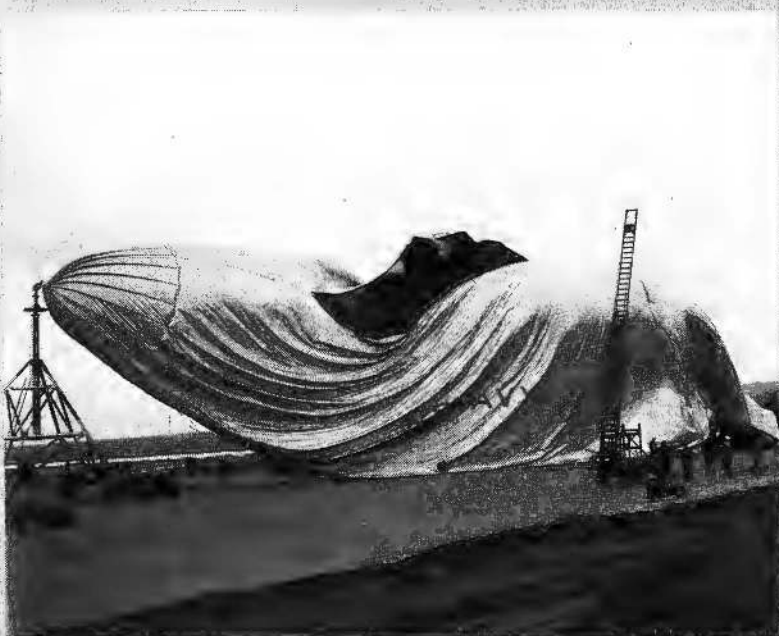
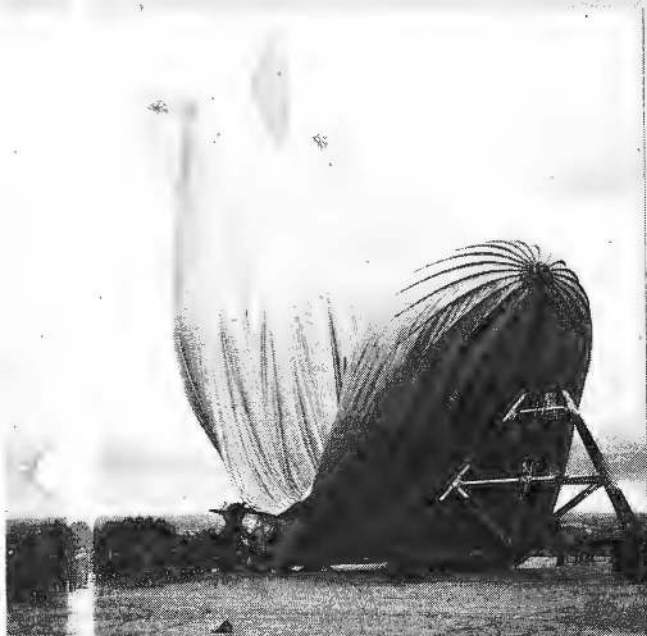


Two weather factors hampered airship operations at Port Lyautoy. They were strong winds in the Strait of Gibraltar and fog over Craw field. When winds in the Strait exceeded 40 knots and turbulence was moderate, the blimp ordinarily was not sent out. With the "MADCATS" (PBV's from VPB63) operating during the day in the Strait and the blimps operating at night, a constant check was kept on Strait weather. The fog sometimes did not clear from Craw field until noon. Blimp flights were never cancelled because of fog. The airship simply waited until fog lifted for landing upon return from patrol. This stretched the normal 15 hour flight sometimes to 18 hours. Radar talk-down procedure was practised so a landing could be made in fog if necessary. Photographs at top and right show airship making landing during break in fog. In lower left photo, mid-morning fog obscures men falling in for monthly inspection, on airship field.

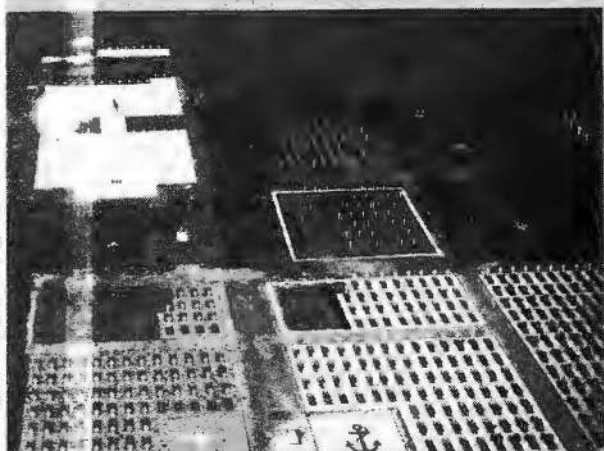
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First serious in-flight accident to Blimp 17 airship while squadron was overseas occurred on 31 December 1944 when K-130 struck ridge of soft earth on western edge of field during takeoff for Strait patrol. The trouble board assigned the pilot 90% error and the terrain of the field 10%. Aft handrail was broken loose in accident and emergency wheel had to be rigged to forward handrail. Several nights later, the forward handrail to which the emergency wheel was attached was ripped from the car during a squall. A bomb dolly was rigged temporarily on the car until timbers could be lashed amidships and the emergency wheel attached to them (top left). Capt. Rixey commended Ens. W.C. Ward and E. L. Jones, AR3/c, for skillfully riding out ship after accident (top right). To prevent further damage ballast was rigged on blimp as shown lower left. On 1 March repairs were almost complete on the ship (lower right).



Early in January the K-123 was deflated on the airship field at Port Lyautey when a person who had posed as a French officer became confused while driving on the field and accidentally drove into the rip cord extender which had been rigged on the airship because of high winds. Photograph at top left was taken few minutes after accident. Photograph at top right was taken when tail was pulled over to collapse the envelope so salvage work could start. The envelope, which was damaged beyond local repair, was prepared for shipment to the States (lower left). The car suffered little damage. It was placed aboard trailer, hauled to Casa Bianca, put aboard ship and sent to Cuers where plans were made for re-erection of the airship (lower right). On 1 March re-erection work had not started but the car had reached Cuers.

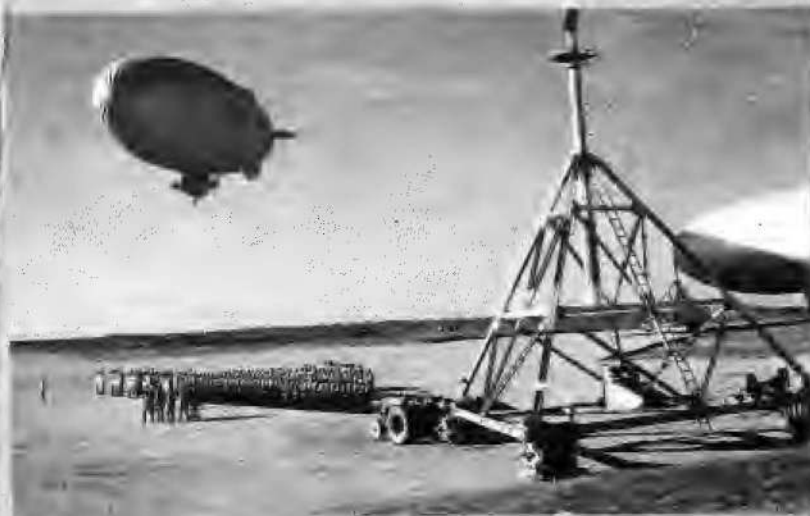


Missions of Blimpson 14 Airships were varied. Along southern coast of France, underwater barriers along coastline were plotted as well as mines (top left). From Port Lyautey the airship flew 250 miles south to calibrate United States Army direction finder station at Mogador, French Morocco. A Port Lyautey airship also took part with heavier-than-air units in celebration flight over Moroccan town of Ouezzan (lower right). The Cagliari detachment photographed for United States Army records the American section of St. Michaels cemetery near Cagliari, Sardinia.

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At Port Lyautey where "every day's a holiday and the skies are always blue" (so ran a local saying) living a. for blimp personnel was geared to a moderate squadron schedule. Personnel were inspected each month (top photographs). Quarters were inspected weekly. Officers' interest in navigation class which started in February was surprisingly good (lower right). Other training included pistol range work and recognition films. Anti-submarine training flights with tame submarine were dropped in November because of need of airships for operational flights. On liberty, personnel hunted boar in the foothills of the Atlas mountains (lower left) ducks, quail, and went sight-seeing in Rabat, Fez, Casa Blanca. During December personnel felt almost "coddled" when snack bar for officers and beer bar for enlisted men was opened on naval air station.



Enlisted men were proud of their tent city--"Helium Acres"--at Port Lyaukey. They worked continuously to make their tents liveable, attractive "mansions of canvas". (lower right). Note USS BENO on tire which is slang for cancellation of flight ('be no flight'). Comdr. E. J. Sullivan (left) and Lt. Comdr. F. S. Rixey, squadron commander, try out porch during inspection tour (top left). Officers lived in quonset huts and BOQ. Those in huts used materials at hand to dress up their quarters. About 12 officers lived in each hut. Note use of African reeds and "indirect lighting" and African clay model in photograph (top right).

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Scarcity of paper overseas ruled out publication of squadron newspaper. As substitute, a NewsCenter, designed to keep all hands well informed and interested in squadron and IFA activities was set up in rear of operations hut. This Center strove to provide all squadron NEWS--whether it was name of the day's movie or last confidential blimp accident report. On constantly changing displays were IFA newsletters; accident reports; naval news magazines; official letters concerning rotation plans, leave, pay, vacancies in rates, changes in complement, income tax, naval schools; squadron photographs; Fleet Air Wing 15 daily news bulletin and orders; personal notes about squadron people. Copies of New York Times, Time, Life, Colliers, Saturday Evening Post, and of the Airship from Lakehurst, Moffett Field News, and Weeksville's Pasquatank Patrol were read extensively. One of most-thumbed items was Montgomery Ward spring sale catalog (on table in foreground) which brought memories of home to many. Officer was in room during 8 hours it was open daily. Squadron educational officer and photographic officer, whose offices were in room, supervised display of news.