

HISTORY OF
BLIMP SQUADRON FOURTEEN OVERSEAS
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HISTORY OF
BLI AP SQUADRON FOURTEEN OVERSEAS

COMMAND: Transferred on 22 May 1944 from the U.S. Naval Air Station (LTA), Weeksville, Elizabeth City, North Carolina and from the operational control of Commander Eastern Sea Frontier to Commander Fleet Airships, Atlantic for further transfer to the US Naval Air Station, Port Lyautey, French Morocco for operation under Commander EIGHTH Fleet and Commander Fleet Air Wing FIFTEEN.

BASED AT: U.S. Naval Air Station Port Lyautey, French Morocco.

ADVANCED BASES: Advance Base Number ONE
Cuers-Pierrefeu Airdrome, Cuers, France.

Advance Base Number TWO
Elmas Field, Cagliari, Sardinia.

Advance Base Number THREE
Pisa, Italy.

Advance Base Number FOUR
Lido Beach Airfield, Lido, Italy.

Advance Base Number FIVE
Takali Field, Malta.

Sidi Ahmed Field, Bizerte, Tunisia.

COMMANDING OFFICERS: Commander Emmett J. SULLIVAN, USN
(22 May 1944 - 19 October 1944)

Lieutenant Commander Franklin S. RIXEY, USN
(19 October 1944 -)

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMAND: Commander Fleet Air Wing FIFTEEN
(27 May 1944 - 8 July 1945)

Commanding Officer, U.S. Naval Air Station
Port Lyautey, French Morocco
(8 July 1945 -)

OPERATIONAL COMMAND: Commander Naval Forces Northwest African
Waters (Commander EIGHTH Fleet)

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HISTORY OF
BLIMP SQUADRON FOURTEEN OVERSEAS

CHRONOLOGY

- 16 May 1944 Four combat air crews and skeleton maintenance units totalling 22 officers and 62 enlisted men departed NAS Weeksville, North Carolina, as an advance detachment of Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN to establish an airship base at NAS Port Lyautey, French Morocco.
- 17 May 1944 Advance detachment sailed from Norfolk, Va. aboard the USS REHOBOTH, AVP-50, with masts, and gear necessary for setting up ferry facilities in the Azores and a permanent base at NAS Port Lyautey.
- 22 May 1944 The major portion of Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN was officially detached from Fleet Airship Wing ONE and from the Eastern Sea Frontier and reported to Commander Fleet Airships, Atlantic for orders to duty under the operational control of Commander EIGHTH Fleet and transfer to NAS Port Lyautey. The remainder of Squadron FOURTEEN was designated as Blimp Squadron TWENTY-FOUR, Detachment ONE to operate in Fleet Airship Wing ONE at NAS Weeksville.
- 24 May 1944 USS REHOBOTH arrived at the Port of Praia da Vitoria on Terceira Island in the Azores. Two officers and eight enlisted men disembarked to set up two expeditionary masts.
- 27 May 1944 USS REHOBOTH arrived at Casablanca disembarking the remainder of the advance detachment of Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN. The detachment arrived at Craw Field north of Port Lyautey later the same day to begin setting up an airship base on that field.
- 28 May 1944 Second overseas detachment of Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN consisting of 35 officers and 139 enlisted men sailed from New York aboard the USS MISSICON BAY, CVE 59, for Port Lyautey. On the same day the K-123 and K-130 began their transoceanic ferry flight by departing NAS South Weymouth, Mass. for Argentia, Newfoundland, arriving there on the following day.
- 30 May 1944 K-123 and K-130 departed Argentia for Terceira, Azores, arriving there on 31 May.

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1 June 1944 K-123 and K-130 landed at NAS Port Lyautey upon completion of ferry flight from Terceira, Azores.

3 June 1944 First flight from Port Lyautey was training flight made by the K-123 this date.

6 June 1944 K-123 made first operational patrol flight in the Straits of Gibraltar.

7 June 1944 Second overseas detachment of BlimpRon FOURTEEN arrived at NAS Port Lyautey.

10 June 1944 Two airships were employed for the first time in the patrol of the Straits of Gibraltar.

15 June 1944 K-109 and K-134 arrived at NAS Port Lyautey upon completion of a trans-Atlantic ferry flight which began at NAS South Weymouth on 11 June.

19 June 1944 Two airships on patrol in the Straits of Gibraltar were ordered to depart the area immediately because of the approach of German aircraft.

26 June 1944 First convoy coverage given by BlimpRon FOURTEEN from NAS Port Lyautey.

1 July 1944 K-112 and K-101 completing a ferry flight which began at NAS South Weymouth on 27 June arrived at NAS Port Lyautey.

18 July 1944 BlimpRon FOURTEEN took part in a special anti-submarine training program involving an all night exercise in the Straits of Gibraltar. All units, air and surface, assigned to the Straits patrol participated. K-112 successfully landed and was masted at Gibraltar in the first service test of LTA facilities established there.

28 August 1944 The Squadron moved to a special operating field built by the CBs west of Craw Field.

14 September 1944 In anticipation of airship mine spotting operations near Toulon, eight officers and fourteen men together with a stick mast were flown by R5D from NAS Port Lyautey to Cuers, France.

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- 16 September 1944 K-112 departed from Port Lyautey for Oran, Algeria on the first leg of a ferry flight to Cuers, France.
- 17 September 1944 K-112 landed at Cuers, France, marking the first time since World War I that a U.S. Navy airship operated in Europe.
- 20 September 1944 K-112 made first mine spotting flight along the southern coast of France.
- 24 September 1944 Special all night MAD barrier patrol was established by the K-112 at the entrance to Toulon Harbor to prevent entry by enemy one-man submarines.
- 29 September 1944 K-112 photographed damage to Toulon Harbor to assist French authorities in the reconstruction of that port.
- 3 October 1944 BlimpRon FOURTEEN's patrol of the Straits of Gibraltar was cancelled because of weather for the first time since such patrols were begun on 6 June 1944.
- 19 October 1944 Commander Emmett J. SULLIVAN, USN, was relieved as Commander Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN by Lieutenant Commander Franklin S. RIXEY, USN.
- 3 November 1944 K-109 was ferried from Cuers, France to Bizerte, Tunisia, to conduct mine plotting and sweeping operations in the Tunisian War Channel.
- 12 November 1944 Mine spotting operations in the Tunisian War Channel were completed this date. A total of two mines were sunk and thirty-one plotted during the operation.
- 21 November 1944 K-109 was ferried to Cagliari, Sardinia for mine sweeping operations. Initial survey of outer Gulf of Cagliari was made after completion of two hour ferry flight.
- 22 November 1944 K-109 plotted 61 mines in its first operational mission flown from Cagliari.
- 8 December 1944 K-101 calibrated EDF station at Mogodor, French Morocco, 240 miles south of Port Lyautey.

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- 31 December 1944 K-130 suffered extensive damage to the underside of its car when it struck an embankment during take-off for night patrol.
- 15 January 1945 K-123 was accidentally deflated on the field at NAS Port Lyauty when a jeep driven by a person posing as a French officer became entangled with the airship's rip cord, resulting in the ripping of the ship.
- 1 February 1945 K-112 using facilities at Oran and Bizerte escorted naval vessels in the Mediterranean carrying President Franklin D. Roosevelt to the Teheran Conference.
- 13 February 1945 K-134 photographed underwater mines and underwater barricades along the French coast under the orders of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces.
- 21 February 1945 K-134 photographed shore defense installations at Toulon.
- 28 February 1945 K-134 photographed cities, towns, coast and city fortifications and harbors along the coast from La Ciotat to the Gulf of St. Tropez on the southern coast of France.
- 3 March 1945 K-101 was ferried to Littorio Field, Rome, Italy to aid in locating the sunken USS SWERVE off Anzio, Italy.
- 7 March 1945 K-101 was ferried to Cagliari from Rome after completion of the Anzio operation, during which it assisted in locating the USS SWERVE and in plotting mines around it.
- 17 March 1945 K-130 was flown for the first time after undergoing repairs, due to damage which had resulted on 31 December 1944 when it struck an embankment during take-off.
- 3 April 1945 Advance base located at Cagliari, Sardinia was officially closed.
- 14 April 1945 Officers and men with two stick masts departed NAS Port Lyauty to set up facilities at Lagens, Azores for handling the K-89 and K-114 being ferried to BlimpRon 14 from the States.

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28 April 1945 K-89 and K-114 departed NAS Weeksville on first leg of the trans-Atlantic flight, arriving at Kindley Field, Bermuda the same day.

29 April 1945 K-89 and K-114 departed Kindley Field and arrived at Lagens on 30 April 1945.

1 May 1945 K-89 and K-114 landed at NAS Port Lyautey.

4 May 1945 K-101 arrived at Pisa, Italy and began mine sweeping in the Gulf of Genoa on the following day.

31 May 1945 Stick masts and crews arrived at Lido, Italy to establish an advance base for mine spotting operations there.

6 June 1945 Last operational anti-submarine flight was made by Squadron FOURTEEN from NAS Port Lyautey with the K-112 escorting a 55 ship convoy.

10 June 1945 K-134 was ferried from Cuers, France to Lido, Italy where it began its first mine spotting mission two days later.

1 July 1945 Erection of the deflated K-123 was begun in the Hangar at Cuers, France.

9 July 1945 Fleet Air Wing FIFTEEN (the Squadron's immediate administrative commander) departed the European Theatre. BlimpRon FOURTEEN was then assigned to Commander Navy 214 (CO NAS Port Lyautey) for administrative purposes and remained with Commander Naval Forces Northwest African Waters for operational purposes.

28 July 1945 K-123 was successfully test flown after re-erection at Cuers, France.

30 July 1945 First flight in Yugoslavian waters was made by the Lido airship this date.

31 July 1945 Deflation of K-101 was started in the hangar at Cuers, France.

5 August 1945 NAS Port Lyautey airship was used by French officials to photograph Rabat, French Morocco.

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17 August 1945 K-112 was ferried to Cuers, France from Port Lyautey for deflation and storage.

21 August 1945 Port Lyautey airship was used by U.S. Army to photograph Casablanca.

3 September 1945 K-112 was deflated at Cuers, France for storage.

15 September 1945 Advance base at Pisa, Italy was closed and operations terminated.

19 September 1945 Detachment at Lido, Italy was closed and operations terminated.

26 September 1945 A stick mast was readied on Takali Field on the Island of Malta, thus officially opening a new advance base of Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN.

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HISTORY OF
BLIMP SQUADRON FOURTEEN OVERSEAS

NARRATIVE

Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN was transferred from the U.S. Naval Air Station (LTA) Weeksville, Elizabeth City, North Carolina and from the operational control of Commander Eastern Sea Frontier to the U.S. Naval Air Station, Port Lyautey, French Morocco and the operational cognizance of Commander EIGHTH Fleet to provide airship MAD barrier patrols over the Straits of Gibraltar.

Although advanced detachments and arrangements had gotten under way prior to 22 May 1944, it was not until that date that Squadron FOURTEEN was officially transferred from NAS Weeksville. As of that date, the Squadron, consisting of 6 ZNP- K-type airships and specially designated personnel, was detached from Fleet Airship Wing ONE and from the control of Commander Eastern Sea Frontier. The Squadron reported to Commander Fleet Airships, Atlantic for orders to duty under the operational control of Commander EIGHTH Fleet and transfer to the Naval Air Station, Port Lyautey. The remainder of the original Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN continued at NAS Weeksville and was designated Blimp Squadron TWENTY-FOUR, Detachment ONE.

Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN was ordered overseas in May 1944 after twenty-four months of operational flying from NAS Weeksville. When the movement to NAS Port Lyautey, French Morocco had been completed several weeks later, these LTA "firsts" had been logged in the Squadron's record:

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1. For the first time in history, non-rigid airships had made transatlantic flights.

2. For the first time in history, an operating airship squadron had been moved overseas as a unit. Previously, when operational requirements demanded an airship squadron for overseas duty, a completely new squadron was formed and sent overseas.

The speed with which the move was made demonstrated the seldom considered mobility of a blimp squadron. The dispatch from the Commander-in-Chief United States Fleet ordering the transfer was originated late on 9 May 1944. On the morning of 17 May, the first detachment of 22 officers and 62 men, together with masts and airship gear, sailed from Norfolk, Va., aboard the USS REHOBOTH, AVP#50, while the remainder of the Squadron--other than those who were to ferry the airships across the Atlantic--sailed from New York City aboard the USS MISSICN BAY, CVE #59, on 28 May 1944.

Transatlantic flights by the first two of the Squadron's complement of six airships began 28 May, and the Squadron was flying MAD barrier patrols in the Straits of Gibraltar on the night of 6 June 1944.

Initial shipments of gear which accompanied the Squadron to Port Lyautey included six mobile masts, two expeditionary masts, and 800 cylinders of helium. Portable purification units, engines for engine changes, and similar gear followed a month or so later.

Commander Emmett J. SULLIVAN, USN, assumed command of the

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Squadron at the time of its transfer from NAS Weeksville on 22 May, relieving Lt. Comdr. Harold B. VAN GORDER, USNR. Lt. Comdr. Gordon H. WINTON, Jr., USNR, who had been Executive Officer of BlimpRon 14 for four months, retained that position when the Squadron was ordered overseas.

The organization of the Squadron was changed somewhat by the transfer overseas. Since blimp maintenance problems were basically different from any of the problems encountered by HTA activities based at fields from which the airships would be operating, it was necessary to bring some maintenance personnel overseas as part of the Squadron. These included ground handlers as well as check crews of riggers, mechanics, and electronics specialists.

On 17 July 1944, these maintenance personnel were placed in an Aircraft Service Group which left only flying personnel in the Squadron. Although the 128 men in this Group were carried on the roster of Fleet Air Wing 15 Hedron, they remained an integral part of Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN. All their records and pay accounts were retained in the BlimpRon files, and jurisdiction in matters concerning duties, liberty, and discipline remained with Commander Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN. Only function actually affected by the division was advancement in rating; these men were advanced within the Fleet Air Wing 15 Hedron complement.

Movement of the Squadron involved ferrying six airships across the Atlantic Ocean. To speed the delivery of the ships

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to the operating area, a northern ferry route was selected. Ferry stops along the route, where two expeditionary masts were set up and an emergency supply of helium established, were Argentinia, Newfoundland, and Terceira, Azores. "Jumping off" field for the flights was the U.S. Naval Air Station, South Weymouth, Massachusetts.

Three flights were made with two airships in each flight. The K-123 and K-130 were the first two blimps to make the crossing. They took off from the Naval Air Station, South Weymouth at 2250Z, 28 May 1944. Six crews were used in the ferrying operation; two crews flew the ships from South Weymouth to Argentinia, then returned to South Weymouth to pick up the next two airships; two other crews flew the blimps from Argentinia to the Azores and returned each time to pick up the next two airships at Argentinia. The other two crews flew the airships from the Azores to Port Lyautey each flight.

The K-123 and K-130 arrived at Port Lyautey on 1 June; the K-109 and K-134 on 1 June; and the K-112 and K-101 on 1 July.

The final flight was the speediest. Weather during this flight was more favorable than it had been on the previous two crossings. Average ground speed during this flight was 60 knots for the 3,162 mile trip. Strongest wind encountered during all the flights was the 48 knots on the starboard beam which the ships encountered between Argentinia and the Azores on the second flight. This resulted in 55 degrees left drift .

Loran gear, dead reckoning, celestial navigation, radar and

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radio aids to navigation were used in navigating the airships across. Both ships navigated, one checking on the position of the other. Naval Academy graduates, who were airship pilots, were used as navigators because they had more navigational training than did reserve officers. The blimps maintained voice communication throughout the flights.

Operating averages, computed from all three flights, showed:

Average rpm: 1400

Average Altitude: 500 feet

Average fuel load: 1150 gallons

Average hourly fuel consumption: 30 gallons

The airships averaged 3,100 pounds statically heavy at take-off.

In the words of the pilots who flew the flights, here are condensed descriptions of flights along each leg of the ferry route:

First Leg: South Weymouth to Argentia (Third Flight)

"K-112 and K-101 took off from NAS South Weymouth at 2216Z 27 June 1944, destination Argentia. Weather conditions were: Take-off - ceiling unlimited, visibility 10 miles, wind southwest 10 knots. At 500 feet, the wind picked up to 25 knots from the same direction. Wind remained from the stern to quarterly during the entire flight. The visibility gradually reduced. From Cape Breton to Argentia, instrument flight was necessary. The airships at take-off were approximately 3,500 pounds heavy. Normal take-offs were effected. Ships flew with 8 to 10 degrees down

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elevator until excessive weight due to extra fuel had been burned. Both ships handled well and had no discrepancies. Departure was taken from North River at 2245Z. Course was set for a point 10 miles south of Cape Sable. The Loran gear in the K-112 would not remain in calibration and gave very poor results throughout the flight although it had been checked prior to take-off. Radar contact with Cape Sable was made at 0115Z, having covered the distance from South Weymouth to Cape Sable at an average ground speed of 87 knots.

"At 0545Z, radar contact of Nova Scotia was lost. Radar contact with Miquelon Islands was made at 0720Z. Due to faulty Loran gear in the K-112, the ships did not agree as closely in their navigation as on previous flights. However, the positions were averaged and no difficulties were encountered. Communications were again set up on 3195 kcs. for ship to base, and 3475 for intra-ship communications. Position reports were transmitted every two hours on the even hour. Communications were very good throughout the flight. Ten miles from the base, after having been told to come directly in, a message was received instructing the airships to stand by for a half hour because of zero-zero conditions at the field. On landing, ceiling was given as 100 feet and visibility $3/4$ mile. The K-101 held 10 miles from the field at 800 feet and the K-112, using the Argentic beam and radar, made its landing. The K-101, using similar aids for the approach, came in and broke through the fog just before the

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landing party was reached. The airships burned an average of 425 gallons of fuel."

Second Leg: Argentinia to Azores (First Flight)

"After a morning take-off, scattering clouds began to form during the afternoon and the wind increased in velocity from 12 to 27 knots. Positions were checked by using the Argentinia and Forbay radio ranges and by lines of positioning obtained from sun sights.

"Loran fixes were consistently accurate. During the evening, the sky became overcast with a layer of stratus, giving a ceiling of about 800 feet. The velocity of the wind was between 25 to 30 knots and veered to WNW. Navigational information received from K-123 checked with data recorded in the K-130.

"Excellent reports were received from a weather ship located some 800 miles out along the flight plan route. With data so obtained it was possible to determine accurately advance weather and to predict the time of passage through a front which extended south-westward crossing the predicted track of the airship some 400 miles west of the Azores. Throughout the night, the sky remained overcast and the ceiling varied between zero and 800 feet. At 2130Z the wind shifted from NW to SSW and increased in velocity to 35 knots. The drift changed from 5 degrees right to 30 degrees left. Heavy rain was encountered with moderate to strong turbulence. At about midnight, ceiling and visibility improved. The wind hauled around to the westward and decreased to 25 knots velocity. The Lagens radio range was picked up some 300 miles from the destination. Loran bearings were used until about the time of

contacting the Lagens range. The islands of Corvo and Flores were sighted on the radar screen at a distance of 85 miles. The altitude of the airship making the contact was 2,000 feet. During the remainder of the flight, radio aids at Lagens and radar were used to fix navigational position.

"While in the littoral waters of the Azores Islands, courses were altered to avoid visual contact with targets obtained on the radar screen. The weather during the last 300 miles of the trip was featured by broken to scattered strato-cumulus clouds and unlimited visibility. The wind was from the southwest, varying from 15 to 20 knots."

"Third Leg: Azores to Africa (First Flight)

"...The K-130 assumed the lead position at cruising altitude on the prescribed course. Engines were synchronized and leaned out at 1420 RPM, giving an indicated airspeed of 54 knots. This speed was maintained through the flight, with the exception of a brief interval of time when it was deemed desirable to slow to 1275 RPM in order to reduce the effect of turbulence while passing through a series of squalls. Light winds from the NNW prevailed during the afternoon and evening. Through breaks in the clouds, the navigators were able to obtain good results from celestial observations. Positions were periodically checked by RDF bearings obtained from Lagens. At about 2000Z, the sky became completely overcast and the wind shifted to a northerly direction and increased in velocity to 15-18 knots. Weather reports broadcast from Lagens were received at regular hourly intervals.

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"An increase in wind was noticed at 0130Z and reached a maximum of about 35 knots at 0300Z. Heavy rainsqualls were encountered from 0200Z to 0400Z. Gustiness without change in direction characterized the wind during this period. Thunder shower activity was general and zero-zero conditions obtained except when lightning flashes occurred. The airships were flown at altitudes varying between 300 and 400 feet. Little or no trouble was occasioned by vertical turbulence. During the early morning twilight, the weather abated and the wind backed to NW and finally to WNW, giving the airships a comfortable tail component. The track was altered in order to intercept the Port Lyautey radio range. Excellent checks were obtained from RDF bearings from Rabat-Sale and Gibraltar. The Port Lyautey range was picked up 130 miles from the station. Satisfactory lines of position were obtained from sun observation."

After the arrival of the ships at NAS Port Lyautey, the Squadron received congratulatory messages from Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet, Commander Air Force, Atlantic Fleet, Commander Fleet Airships, Atlantic, Commander North West African Waters, and Commander Fleet Air Wing 15.

The transfer of the Squadron from the States to the African area resulted in changes of operational command. The direct operational senior of the Squadron while it was operating from the Naval Air Station at Weeksville, Elizabeth City, N. C.

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was Commander Eastern Sea Frontier. In the African area, the direct operational commander was Commander Fleet Air Wing 15. Commander Fleet Airships, Atlantic continued to furnish logistic support.

While ZP-14 was operating out of NAS Weeksville, its chief function had been to patrol FIFTH Naval District waters and to escort shipping which passed through those waters. MAD gear was employed regularly during these patrols. The transfer to North Africa changed the emphasis of the function of the squadron. In the African theater, the chief function of the airship was to provide a MAD barrier at night in the Straits of Gibraltar. As the Squadron became established at NAS Port Lyautey, it was assigned additional duties--escorting convoys, searching for survivors of crashed aircraft, and utility flights such as calibrating United States Army radio direction finder stations.

Later, the new airship function of joint operations with surface craft in sweeping for mines was developed by the Squadron during operations along the southern coast of France.

The assignment of the airships to the Straits patrol made it possible to maintain a 24 hour MAD barrier in the Straits of Gibraltar to prevent enemy submarines from passing through. When Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN was ordered to Port Lyautey, Patrol Bomber Squadron 63 maintained the barrier in the Straits during daylight hours, and, on three occasions, had detected submerged U-boats attempting to pass through. But the barrier, or "fence" as it was called operationally, was not maintained at night because of

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the low altitudes imposed by the use of the MAD gear. The 100-foot altitude, at which any aircraft using the gear had to fly in order to employ it successfully, coupled with the restricted area in which the aircraft had to operate in the Straits of Gibraltar, made night flying by the PBY squadron too hazardous to be practical. Therefore, the blimps, which could fly at the low altitudes required, were assigned to maintain the patrol at night.

Operational patrols in the Straits of Gibraltar by BlimpRon 14 began the night of 6 June. The K-123 and K-130 were made available for operational employment 2 June, which was the day following their arrival from the States. However, assigned Gibraltar patrols were not started until 6 June because of the time needed to "brief" all commands concerned regarding the employment of blimps in the Gibraltar area. Two airships were flown on the Gibraltar patrol for the first time on the night of 10 June 1944. Flying of two airships in the Straits was especially hazardous during the first few nights since both blimps were blacked out and they were constantly passing each other at distances of approximately 1,000 yards as they made their rounds of the "fence". Radar^{was} used to avoid collision courses. Risk of collision was so great under these conditions that the British issued an order permitting the use of running lights on the airships when two or more were operating in the Straits. Two airships became the regular patrol, except when operational intelligence indicated the presence of enemy submarines near the

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approaches to the Straits; then three blimps were used.

Flights scheduled for the Gibraltar patrol took off from NAS Port Lyautey at 1800A, and arrived in the Straits about 2000Z--depending upon wind conditions. The patrol was made at an altitude of 100 feet indicated on the radio altimeter. The airship went off station at 0615A and usually was landed about 0830A--making an average flight of 15 hours. Four pilots and six enlisted men were in the crew. To reduce to a minimum the hazard resulting from constant low-altitude flying, watches were changed every hour. Benzadrine sulphate was carried in the navigator's kit to be given to any personnel the command pilot thought needed it to prevent dangerous drowsiness. Radar was used to "keep on the fence" which covered the waters between the 100-fathom curves along a line drawn from Point Bartolomo, Spain, and Point Malabata, Spanish Morocco.

The patrol of the Straits by the blimps was maintained without interruption from the night of 6 June until 3 October when the airships did not take off because of frontal activity. On several occasions, the airships returned to the base early because of winds of 50 knots in the Straits.

The first night the airships returned from patrol early was 19 June when Gibraltar radio notified the two blimps on patrol that enemy aircraft were approaching them from the northeast. The airships immediately were blacked out and each was flown out of the Straits over the Atlantic ocean. During this hurried exit, which was made directly into a 30-knot wind, the two ships hugged

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as close to the "neutral" shores of Spanish Morocco and Spain as they safely could because, on the night before blimps started flying in the Strait, 12 enemy bombers had passed through the "fence" at an altitude of 200 feet to make an attack on Gibraltar. During the first six weeks operations, the airships left the "fence" three times on receipt of warning from Gibraltar concerning enemy planes. A Squadron doctrine was set up establishing tactics to be employed by the blimp when enemy aircraft were near. This provided for the blacking out of the airship, flying at as low an altitude as possible--50 to 75 feet, keeping close to the shore, and proceeding slowly out of the Straits. It was believed that the slow speed might confuse any attempts at radar tracking made by the enemy. It was thought that he might possibly confuse the slowmoving airship with surface craft.

The airships obtained and developed several MAD contacts during their patrol of the "fence" and on one occasion -- 2 July, 16 Mark IV contact bombs were dropped. However, during the period that the blimps were operating on the fence, intelligence reports indicated that it was extremely unlikely that any^{enemy}/submarines had attempted to "run the Straits". To test the efficiency of the patrol, British submarines conducted exercises with both the PBYs and blimps in the Straits. On 22 and 23 August, five airships worked with HMS VORACIOUS and detected this submarine on 14 out of 16 submerged runs through the blimp-patrolled "fence".

Operational training emphasized joint flying by two or more airships at low altitudes and in close formation. Detection and

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trapping patterns for two and three airships were developed. Italian and British submarines operating from Gibraltar, and French submarines operating from Casablanca, French Morocco, were used to conduct exercises employing the procedures and tactics developed for two or more airships. Teamwork between the airship crews was thus developed to a point at which blimps could actually do "formation" flying safely. To simulate actual operational conditions, British submarines attempted to run through the Straits at night on several occasions as a training exercise for all craft--surface and air--operating in the Straits of Gibraltar and its approaches. On these exercises, the submarine either was detected before it reached the blimp "fence" or passed through the blimp "fence" at a time when the blimps were not on patrol, so its value as a training exercise was lost to the airships.

Strong winds were the only weather factor that seriously hampered airship operations in the Straits. Because the area covered during the patrol was so small, winds had to reach 30 knots or more before they seriously interfered with flying the "fence". Experiments indicated that as long as a ground speed of 18 knots was maintained, detection with the Mark VI MAD gear was possible. Occasionally, patrols were maintained in winds as high as 45 knots. Since the winds through the Straits were always at right angles to the fence, it was possible to drift up and down the "fence" in winds as high as 45 knots. Under such conditions, however, the efficiency of the "fence" was very low because the altitude flown had to be above the desired 100-foot altitude, and

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the ground speed was at times at the extreme minimum at which MAD signals could be expected. Usually the airships returned to the base if winds were 35 knots or more.

Beginning in October 1944, morning fog at Port Lyautey, which at times did not burn off until noon, prolonged flights four or five hours since the airships had to circle the field until the fog lifted.

A mobile mast was set up at Gibraltar which served as an emergency landing field for airships. An airship pilot was kept on duty at Gibraltar to direct any landings or ship handlings that might be necessary. Landings were made 18 July to test the Gibraltar facilities. Wind spill from the 1,396 foot "Rock" made ship handling dangerous but not impossible. The mast at Gibraltar was dismantled in September and shipped to Cuers, France.

In addition to the routine patrol of the Straits, the Squadron was occasionally assigned missions escorting convoys. The first escort mission in African waters was flown on 26 June. Other missions in the African theater included calibration of United States Army high frequency direction finder stations and searching for survivors of crashed airplanes.

There were three blimp fields at Port Lyautey. During the first two months, the airships operated from two temporary fields near the HTA runways at Craw Field. Field Number 1 was a small, rough field used as the blimp maintenance area. It was wedged between HTA shops, taxi ways, and seaplane ramps on the Sebu

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River. Take-off from this field was hazardous and landings arduous in no-wind conditions. In operating from the field, the drag rope was used as often as the long lines. Field Number 2 was a cleared area north of the east-west runway at Craw Field. This field was clear of obstructions and offered ample room for blimp operations except when four airships were moored on the field. Craw Field tower controlled the movements of both blimps and airplanes and no trouble was experienced in the operation of both types of craft from the same field.

Field Number 3 was a field especially constructed for the blimps by the SeaBee units on a hill one mile west of Craw Field. Surfaced with "spoil" from a nearby quarry, which consisted of clay, rock, and rock dust watered and rolled, the field was 820 feet by 1,020 feet with a 247 foot runway, 202 feet wide, projecting westward from the long dimension. Since the field was cut into the top of the hill, it had a three degree slope. A 20-foot bluff edged the high side of the field. Five mooring circles with concrete blocks for anchoring masts were built into the field. Four airships were operated from this small field. When all six ships were at Port Lyautey, two were kept on the maintenance field where purging units were located.

Maintenance problems at NAS Port Lyautey were the same as those encountered in the States, but their solutions often had to be effected by new methods. Because of the temperate climate at Port Lyautey, the airships did not undergo much deterioration as the result of being moored in the open all the time. Winds were

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mild and temperatures seldom climbed above 90 degrees Fahrenheit during the dry summer months. The helium supply and purification problem was met successfully. Early in July 1944, two portable purification units were placed in operation. Designed by the Bureau of Aeronautics and E. I. DuPont de Nemours and Co., Inc., the purification units operated on the principle of selective absorption of air from helium by refrigerated activated charcoal. Purity of the airships was kept at desired levels, although the two plants gave considerable trouble. Vibration caused many pipeline leaks.

Engine changes were made by use of crane trucks during periods of no wind conditions. Repairs to tail surfaces were successfully made after web ladders had been modified by squadron riggers to make possible rigging checks and inspection of the upper vertical fin.

Loss of the K-101 was averted on 15 September 1944 by fast work and the cooperation of all hands. The accident was the result of a freak shot during blasting operations on Field Number 3. Two stones were hurled through the envelope after the airship had been moved to what was considered a safe area by the SeaBee personnel doing the blasting. Temporary patches were applied, but not before about 8,000 cubic feet of helium had been lost. Placing the K-101 back in flying status was temporarily delayed by the breakdown of the portable purification units about the first of October.

The K-109, on 7 August, was struck by a target tow cable when

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a PBY released a target sleeve over Field Number 2. The cable ripped through sixteen inches of the envelope. Within 25 minutes after the cable had struck the ship, temporary patches had been applied with the loss of only 8,000 cubic feet of helium. The ship was declared to be in an operational status for flights the next night.

On the night of 19 June, the K-130 struck the water while on patrol in the Straits of Gibraltar, resulting in the loss of the radar hat and radio altimeter antenna. At the time of the accident, the ship was proceeding out of the Straits after having received a warning that enemy aircraft were approaching.

The movement which led to the development of joint operations between an airship and surface craft for minesweeping began in September. Two combat air crews arrived at Cuers-Pierrefeu airfield in southern France, on 14 September 1944 to establish facilities there for operating one blimp. Commander EIGHTH Fleet ordered a single airship to France in order to conduct experiments in mine spotting and plotting. The K-112 arrived at Cuers on 17 September 1944 and experimental mine plotting began on the morning of 20 September. The airship had been ferried to Cuers in an uneventful trip which included an overnight stop at Oran, Algeria, where a stick mast had been set up.

Putting the facilities of the Cuers airfield into shape for handling an airship taxed the ingenuity of the two aircrews since they arrived at the aerodrome only 18 days after the liberation of the port of Toulon, 11 miles to the northwest. At one time, the field had been an elaborate lighter-than-air establishment, with

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two 300-foot hangars and five gasometers for storing hydrogen. When the K-112 arrived on 17 September, three Spitfire squadrons were flying strafing missions from the field. The British cooperated wholeheartedly in setting up blimp facilities on the field. They indicated the areas near the field which had not yet been de-mined. RAF engineers, using dynamite left behind by retreating Germans, aided in blasting holes for mast anchors in the tough, rocky soil. Australians aided in ground handling the airship during the first few days after its arrival. During the first weeks of operation, fuel and gasoline trucks were supplied by the British squadrons. In order to make possible communications between blimp and the field tower, a VHF transmitter-receiver from a Spitfire was installed temporarily in the airship.

During the first week at Cuers, the blimp crews lived on army C and K rations. When arrangements had been completed with Navy activities in Toulon, chow was excellent. Officers and men cooked their own food and washed their own clothes during the first few weeks. Officers lived in a French villa--which a few weeks before had housed German officers. The enlisted men lived in French enlisted men's barracks.

Except for roofs that leaked and doors which had no gear for opening or closing them, the hangars at Cuers were in good shape. After a naval mine disposal officer had inspected the structure and declared it free of "booby traps", the doors on one of the hangars were put into operation by the blimp crews. Gear for operating them had long before been made inoperative, so block

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and tackle were rigged so that trucks could be used to pull the doors open and closed. The 120-foot hangar sill made docking operations risky--especially without a mobile mast and when using inexperienced groundhandling personnel. The mobile mast, which was dismantled in Gibraltar and shipped to Cuers, did not arrive until the last week in October. But the ship was successfully docked during the first weeks without the mobile mast during periods of no wind conditions. One hundred twenty hour checks were held in the hangar, and gear still in the hangar which had been used for working on rigid airships was put to use for checking the K-112.

At about the time that the RAF moved from the field, a United States Army air/sea rescue unit moved in. The fuel truck which this unit brought with it replaced the British truck which had been used for fueling the airship, and gasoline was hauled in 50-gallon drums from Toulon. A few weeks after the arrival of the first blimp, a group of German prisoners was assigned to the Cuers aerodrome, and the French Commandant of the aerodrome assigned some of them to the Blimp Ron to aid in ground handling and other duties.

The static Italian-French battle line was about 70 miles east of Cuers. On 29 September the K-112 searched for mines in the Gulfs of Juan and Napoule--which were within 25 miles of this battle line. Officers and men on pressure watch while the ship was moored outside could see, on moonless nights, artillery flashes from this front. German reconnaissance planes frequently were over the Cuers aerodrome and on one occasion dropped flares.

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Violent "mistral" winds caused the blimp personnel more trouble than anything else at Cuers. Not until 16 October 1944 were aerology facilities established at the field which made it possible to predict the mistral which is a gusty, turbulent, northwest wind. It rushes out of the Rhone Valley with velocities of 50 and 60 knots and sometimes persists for days. The K-112 rode out three such "mistral" storms during which gusts of 60 knots were registered and the wind averaged 40 knots. Inspection of the ship after each of these storms revealed that no undue wear had occurred in the nose assembly or mast. After the arrival of the aerology unit, which consisted of personnel from Fleet Air Wing 15 and EIGHTH Fleet, it was possible to forecast the "mistrals" and dock the airship(s) before winds became too strong.

Aerial mine plotting and spotting work from the K-112 began 20 September 1944. The mine fields along the southern coast of France were moored beneath the surface of the water at depths of about 20 feet. In order to see them from any aircraft, it was necessary to fly almost directly over them at altitudes of about 300 feet. The slow speed of the blimp, along with the unobstructed view of the water beneath the ship, made the airship an ideal platform from which to spot the mines. By use of ASG radar gear, it also was possible to plot the position of the minefields.

When the K-112 had been sent to France for the mine spotting experiments, it had been fitted at Port Lyautey with a loud speaker unit to make possible rapid communication with surface craft. Tests with minesweepers in the Toulon area indicated that they

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had no difficulty in understanding instructions given over the loudspeaker. This unit also made possible communication with craft as small as rowboats. On 1 October 1944, the loudspeaker was successfully employed in Rade d'Hyeres to guide a rowboat from YMS #27 to a submerged object suspected to be a mine. Investigation proved the object to be a submerged net buoy. However, this was an excellent demonstration of the use to which the loudspeaker unit could be put.

A dispatch from Commander EIGHTH Fleet to Chief of Naval Operations on 29 September 1944 declared the plotting of mines by the blimp had been completely successful, and the blimp was more suited to the work than airplanes. Commander Task Group 81.4, the unit to which the blimp was assigned for the mine plotting work, suggested during first week in October a joint operation between the airship and minesweepers in an actual sweeping maneuver.

On 9 October, the K-112 spotted and plotted a field of 15 mines 6.5 miles off Ciotat bay. This field had not been previously reported and it was selected as the site of experimental joint operations between the airship and minesweepers. This experiment was started 13 October 1944 under weather conditions of visibility of 2-3 miles and ceilings of 400-800 feet, with rain showers. Five French-manned YMS's and an SC were assigned to conduct the experiment with the blimp.

All the surface craft were United States vessels which had been turned over to the French. Two French officers were aboard the airship, along with an American officer from the staff of

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Commander Escort Sweeper Group, to observe and aid in the coordination of the operations of the blimp and surface craft.

All communications were in French, so the French officers handled the radio and loudspeaker microphones aboard the airship.

After rendezvous had been effected about 12 miles off the French coast, and the loud speaker and radio gear had been tested and found operating satisfactorily, the airship proceeded to the minefield unprotected; the function of the airship was to locate the last mine in the field, mark it with smoke flare, and then guide the leading minesweeper to it.

After approximately an hour's investigation, the airship signaled the five minesweepers to enter the field streaming their gear from the starboard. Smoke flares were dropped on which the lead ship could guide. Instructions by voice radio and flashing light were given constantly from the blimp as the ships neared the mines. On one occasion, the lead YMS was turned away from a mine in its path. On the first sweep, one mine was cut. The SC sank it with gun fire. Two more passes were made and a mine cut each time. Because of the visibility being so poor, the sweeps could not see the coast line six miles away for navigational purposes so they requested that the operation be delayed until the next day. On the following day, 11 more mines were cut and sunk in the same joint operation employed the day before. Since 15 mines had been counted originally by the blimp in the field, a check was made on the third day. The blimp, after investigating the entire area again, reported an object deep in the water. The YMS's were instructed to stream their gear at greater depths than they had

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been using and to pass over the area marked. The fifteenth mine was thus found and sunk.

Commander Escort Sweeper Group, in his report to Commander EIGHTH Fleet on the operation, sent this dispatch at the conclusion of the second day of the experiment:

"150520A--FRENCH DRAGGEURS OPERATING WITH AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE PARTY IN BLIMP TODAY COMPLETED TWO DAY OPERATIONAL CLEARANCE OF STRIN OF MINES BETWEEN 43 03.12 NORTH 05 36.45 EAST AND 43 04.82 NORTH 05 33.08 EAST X TOTAL 14 MOORED CONTACT MINES CUT AND SUNK BY GUN FIRE X THIS FIRST TIME COMBINED BLIMP AND SWEEPING OPERATIONS ATTEMPTED X BLIMP OF GREAT ASSISTANCE TO SWEEPER USING VOICE AND VHF RADIO AND DROPPING FLARES AND ON ONE OCCASION TURNING SWEEPER AWAY FROM MINE IN HIS PATH X FULL REPORT FOLLOWS BY MAIL X CHECK SWEEP OF AREA WILL BE MADE TOMORROW."

The K-109 arrived in France on 24 October in order that mine spotting operations might continue while the K-112 was undergoing an engine change. Shortly after this airship arrived at Cuers, Commander EIGHTH Fleet directed an airship at Bizerte, Tunisia, for mine plotting work in Tunisian waters. The K-109 was flown from France on 3 November in the execution of these orders.

On 19 October 1944, the command of Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN was changed. Commander Emmett J. SULLIVAN, USN, was relieved as squadron commander by Lieutenant Commander Franklin S. RIXEY, USN, in ceremonies conducted on the airship field at Port Lyautey. Lt. Comdr. RIXEY was ordered to BlimpRon 14 from BlimpRon 12 where he was squadron commander. Commander SULLIVAN became Air Group Commander (LTA) on the staff of Commander Fleet Air Wing 15.

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Historical highlight for BlimpRon 14 during the three-month period--November, December and January--was the establishment of a detachment at Cagliari on the Italian island of Sardinia. It was from this detachment--which became Advance base Number 2--that regularly scheduled joint mine sweeping operations between blimps and surface craft were first carried out. The setting up of the Cagliari detachment began late in November after the completion of mine spotting operations in the Tunisian war channel.

Commander Task Force 81.4 initiated the operations in the Tunisian waters when he requested on 29 October 1944 by confidential dispatch 291326 the use of an airship for making a check sweep of the Tunisian war channel. When his request was approved by Commander EIGHTH Fleet, the last stick mast remaining at Port Lyautey was flown to Sidi Ahmed Field near Bizerte, Tunisia during the first week in November. Two flight crews from Port Lyautey erected it and the K-109 was flown from Cuers, France on 3 November to Bizerte.

Flight operations began 4 November and, during the two-week operation, two mines were sunk and 31 plotted in the waters in which the airship and sweeps from MinRon 11 operated. Blimp crews flew 76.2 hours in minespotting missions during this two-week maneuver.

While the operation from Bizerte was underway, Commander Amphibious Forces 8th Fleet requested on 13 November in his 121624A that an airship be made available for joint sweeping operations in waters around Sardinia. The setting up of this additional advance base meant the procuring of a mast. No stick

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masts remained at Port Lyautey. The arrival of the mobile mast at Cuers, France from Gibraltar late in October, had made the stick mast at Cuers not vital to airship operations since the hangars there made it possible to operate more than one airship with the single mobile mast. Therefore, the stick mast at Cuers was taken down and flown to Elmas Field near Cagliari, Sardinia and erected in time for the K-109 to begin operating from it on 21 November after the Tunisian work had been completed 18 November. The mast was left on the Bizerte airfield so that location might serve as an alternate base for blimps operating in the Mediterranean.

The flight crews which had flown the airship during operations at Bizerte were moved to Cagliari and the Squadron's Advance Base #2 came into being. Another flight crew was taken from Port Lyautey to make a 4-crew detachment at this advance base.

After arrival at Cagliari, the K-109 immediately began making preliminary surveys of the waters around Sardinia. This aerial survey work sometimes proved previous plots of the mines in error. Such a case occurred 25 November, when 83 mines were plotted. A minute diagram of the mine pattern was made and the fact that only two lines existed instead of three lines as reported by intelligence was established. During this preliminary survey work, 268 mines were plotted from the airship.

On 26 November, commanding officers from several units attached to MinRon 11 were flown around the Gulf of Cagliari to observe mine fields and types of mines and to investigate suitable anchorages for surface craft. Aboard the airship during this flight were commanding officers of MinDiv #32, of the USS INCESSANT (AM248), of YMS unit attached to MinRon 11, and of YMS #200. A second

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such demonstration flight was flown on 29 November when Commander H. W. ROBINSON, who was relieving Captain G. H. WILLIAMS as Commander Task Group 81.12, flew aboard the airship.

Captain WILLIAMS, before being relieved as commanding officer of Task Group 81.12, directed from the K-109 the first joint operations at Cagliari between airship and surface craft. The airship operated with 5 sweeps and 3 trawlers at the approaches to the Gulf of Cagliari.

It was 6 December--when AM boats operating with the airship cut and sank 8 mines--before any mines were cut at Cagliari. In a typical operation, the blimp would work with 5 or more surface craft, marking with smoke flares the positions of mines before and after their mooring cables had been cut by sweeps. This marking increased many times the speed with which an area could be swept safely. Efforts to sink the mines by gunfire from the blimp proved unsuccessful. On 13 December, the K-109 fired 60 rounds in an attempt to sink a mine which had drifted into unswept waters. The danger of damage to the airship which would result if a mine exploded forced pilots to remain so far away from the mine that gunners could not hit it. If it were not for the danger of the mine exploding when hit by gunfire, the mines could have been sunk. This was demonstrated on 26 November when the airship sank two net buoys with gunfire.

During December, the K-109 flew mine sweeping flights on 17 days during which 56 mines were cut and sunk. Except for one other day when a utility flight was made to Bizerte to pick up supplies, the weather kept the blimp on the ground. There were

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no days on which surface craft could operate and the airship could not because of weather.

During January 1945, the Cagliari airship was flown on 15 days. No mines were swept during this month, most of the flights being plotting missions with officers from minesweepers aboard. On 18 January, while escorting a YMS which was sweeping an anchorage near Port Guinea, the airship warned the surface craft that she was heading for a shoal north of Berni Rock. The YMS immediately made a sharp turn to starboard, avoiding the shoal but losing her gear on the rocks. Subsequently, the airship directed the YMS through deep water, enabling her to recover the sweeping gear by point^{ing} out the shoals over voice radio.

Meanwhile a single airship continued to be operated from Cuers, after the establishment of the advance base at Cagliari. The Cuers detachment did not participate in any joint sweeping operations during November, December, and January. The airship which operated from there during these months was flown on mine plotting and escort missions. French minesweeping units late in December announced plans to begin sweeping operations 15 January, but, at the end of January, sweeping of mines along the southern coast of France had not yet started.

During these three months, the coastal waters from Nice in the east to within 40 miles of the Spanish border in the west were surveyed from the blimp. Repeated sweeps were made in areas which presented special sighting problems. One such area was the waters into which the Rhone River, made muddy by winter rains, emptied. Muddy water in this area made the spotting of

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submerged objects almost impossible at times. If surface winds exceeded 12 to 15 knots, spotting conditions were not suitable and areas swept under such wind conditions were always re-swept when lighter winds were blowing.

To avoid waste of flight hours in areas where winds were too strong for minespotting, two missions were assigned daily. One of these was west of Toulon, the other east of that French port. Only in rare instances were winds too strong in both areas on the same day for mine spotting. Northwest winds rolling down and out of the Rhone valley gave most of the trouble in the western areas. Winds east of Toulon generally were light.

Minespotting missions were assigned by French authorities about a week in advance. Airship plots of the areas were delivered to the French upon the completion of the plot. The airship was under the operational control of a British Air Group which controlled Allied operations in that theater.

Flights at Cuers ordinarily took off about 0730 and landed about 1630. Briefing took place at the officers' villa the evening before. The crew, which had flown the flight on that day, would report the work they had done to the crew which was to take out the flight the next day. Enroute to and from the plotting areas, the blimp made daily sweeps of the approaches to the harbors of Toulon and Marseille. These harbor sweeps were made because the almost nightly presence of enemy planes over the area made it seem probable that mines might be dropped in swept channels from the air. One such object which could have been a mine dropped by planes was found by blimp near Toulon on 7 January.

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The flights of German reconnaissance planes over Toulon, Marseilles, and the Cuers field were frequent during the months of November, December, and January. Some flares were dropped which were plainly visible to blimp crews at Cuers, and, on the night of 25 November, a German plane was reported shot down over Toulon--11 miles from the field. At the time of the German break through in northern France during December, all of southern France was alerted to the possibility of German parachutists being dropped in the area. After 6 Germans, dressed as American army officers, were picked up near Toulon and Marseilles, all United States officers were armed. The guard on the German prisoners held at the Cuers field was tripled and the blimp crews set up special security watches. The 50-calibre machine guns were removed from the airship and set up on the hangar deck. A French PBY was parked in the hangar door in such a way that the machine guns on it could be used to sweep the field. Parachutists were reported dropped within 8 miles of the field. The alert caused one BlimpRon officer some uneasy minutes when he was caught away from the field after dark, the FFI, which was patrolling and blocking all roads in southern France at the time, picked him up. Since he could speak no French, and they no English, he was held 4 hours, until an English-speaking French doctor in the village assured the FFI leaders that this "American" was authentic.

A particularly delicate job of mine plotting was undertaken by the airship on 25 November when the French requested the blimp to plot a channel through a mine field so that construction material

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--bricks chiefly--could be shipped from the small port of Bandol to Toulon for repairing war damage. The blimp spent three days plotting the channel through 19 mines which were placed across the 1 1/2 mile entrance to the bay. The work of plotting mines this accurately was painstaking. The Cuers airship occasionally was assigned missions other than minespotting. On 12 November, the airship was sent inland to search for a missing P-39 among the foothills of the Alps. The P-39 turned up at an alternate airport. Another crashed plane, which had not been reported previously, was spotted. The escort missions which the airship was assigned frequently were intended to protect the surface vessels during their passage through waters in which floating mines were likely to be encountered.

The "Mistral" winds kept the airship in the hangar at times, but these did not seem to be as severe as those encountered during the first days the airship operated at Cuers. During November the airship flew 21 days and in December 14.

In January, snow and icing conditions at Cuers sometimes kept the airship in the hangar. Flights went out on 12 days during the month. The planned erection of a stick mast at Port Vendres, on the south coast of France about 5 miles from the Spanish border, was dropped after an inspection party visited the area. Winds as high as 100 knots were reported as "not uncommon". On 30 January, the airship operated with sweepers off Port Vendres for the first time by flying from Cuers and returning the same day--a distance of about 150 miles each way.

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The mast for the Port Vendres maneuver had been flown from the Azores where it had been used in the ferrying operations during May and June of 1944. When the Port Vendres project was dropped, the mast was erected near Cannes--on the French Riviera east of Cuers. During the erection work, gunfire on the Italian front, 25 miles away, could be heard. This mast was to serve as an emergency port and for sweeping operations to the east as soon as the Germans moved from Italy.

At Port Lyautey, where 10 crews remained, patrols of the Straits of Gibraltar continued along with other missions assigned. The number of blimps on patrol in the Straits nightly depended upon the current submarine estimate. Most of the time, only one airship was used nightly in the Straits, but occasionally two, and once during the period of November through January, three blimps were on the "fence".

The Gibraltar patrols, which ordinarily were of about 15 hours duration, were lengthened to about 18 hours frequently because of fog at Craw Field which prevented landing until noon. Radar talkdown training flights were inaugurated 16 November to make possible emergency landings under instrument conditions if necessary. The training exercises worked well with the airship landing on the HTA runway on Craw Field. However, one morning in February, when the talkdown was attempted under actual zero-zero conditions, the landing party was unable to catch the airship on two passes it made at the field. However, experience gained during these attempts indicated that with more careful planning of the

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project and slight modifications in the routine, an airship could be easily landed on the runway in zero-zero conditions. Reasons for the failure to land during the first experiment seemed to be that (1) the Radar operator talked the airship down behind the landing party on the first pass and (2) the airship was kept statically light during the approaches which made it impossible for the approach to be slow enough for the landing party to catch the ship.

Chief objection to the 18-hour flights was the loss of helium which resulted from them. The airship usually was so light that 30 to 60 seconds of helium had to be valved daily to insure a safe landing. Because of the small operating field which was edged with embankments, the blimps could not be taken off with enough ballast to offset this landing time lightness.

Besides the barrier patrol, escort, photographic, calibration and minespotting missions were assigned the Port Lyautey airships. Ordinarily there were 4 airships available. On two escort missions, the masts at Oran and Bizerte were used for fueling stops. On 6 November the direction finder station at Port Lyautey was calibrated and on 8 December a United States Army direction finder station located at Mogodor, French Morocco, was calibrated by an airship. The Mogodor mission required a 15.9 hour flight since Mogodor is located about 250 miles south of Port Lyautey.

No mines were found on the minespotting missions flown near the Straits of Gibraltar. Photographic missions included photographing bombs dropped from a PBV of VPB 63 to check installation of bomb racks.

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Anti-submarine training exercises with tame submarines was discontinued after 25 November because of the need for the airships for operational missions.

During the three-month period from November 1944 through January 1945, ^{at least one of the} Squadron's 6 airships was out of commission because of an accident. The K-101, which was damaged 15 September in a blasting accident on the field, was back in flight status 6 December. Purging of this blimp, which was delayed because of repairs needed by the portable helium purificator, began 5 November. After purging was completed, adjustment of the horizontal surfaces was necessary to counteract dynamic nose heaviness of the ship.

The K-130 was damaged extensively on the night of 31 December when the airship struck the bank during takeoff from the airship field at Port Lyautey.

The K-123 was deflated on the field on 15 January 1945 when a person posing as a French officer accidentally drove a jeep into the long lines and rip cord extender which had been rigged on the airship because of high winds. The envelope was damaged beyond local repair and the car was shipped to Cuers, France where the ship was to be re-erected in the hangar.

Weather at Port Lyautey remained mild throughout the "wet" season. Rain did not interfere with airship operations. Only factors which hampered blimp flights were the fog over Craw field and occasional squalls which passed over the field with gusts as high as 45 knots. During one of these squalls, the 80-pound lower rudder of the K-123, which had been staked down behind the operations hut, was torn loose from the stakes and carried an 1/8 of a mile to

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the enlisted men's tent city. On another occasion, gusts became so severe that the handrail to which the emergency wheel on the K-130 was rigged after the accident of 31 December was broken off. An emergency support for the wheel had to be rigged from 2 by 6 timbers. The Commanding Officer of the Squadron commended Ens. W. C. WARD, and E. L. JONES, AR3c, for skillfully riding the ship at the mast during the squall after the wheel had broken off.

There were two ferry flights between Port Lyautey and Cuers in December. On 2 December, the K-134 was flown from Port Lyautey to Cuers on the first leg of the flight. A pre-dawn takeoff was made the next day and the ship was halfway across the Mediterranean when the Cuers detachment ordered the pilot to Oran because of Mistral winds on the Cuers field. The K-134 returned to Oran where it remained until 3 December--5 days--because of bad weather. On that day, weather had improved enough to permit a flight to Cuers.

After the arrival of the K-134 at Cuers, the engines on the K-112 were changed and forward surge patches replaced. All major control cables on the ship were renewed. The K-112 had been at Cuers since 17 September, and after completion of the overhaul work, the airship was flown to Port Lyautey on 29 December in a non-stop flight which required just over 16 hours for the 850-mile trip. This was the only flight from Lyautey to, or from, any of the Mediterranean bases in which a stop was not made at Oran.

When the specially constructed blimp field atop the hill west of Craw Field became operational late in August, maintenance offices

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and work spaces were not moved from their locations on Craw Field proper. This separation between maintenance units and the operating field slowed repair and check work, so, in December, two additional Quonset huts were erected near the blimp field and all maintenance units were moved into them. The Squadron's Supply Office remained on Craw Field because of the lack of room in the four Quonset huts which housed all Squadron offices on the hill.

The ordnance gang converted old French bomb shelters into office and stowage space for ordnance gear and a semi-permanent installation was made for the portable helium units when they were installed near the "slot" mooring circle on the blimp field. This new location simplified somewhat the problems involved in purging and topping-up operations, particularly the latter. After the plants were moved, practically all top-ups were made through the purging lines laid under the mat from the center of the mooring circle to the purifying plants, where helium storage cylinders were located. Before the plant was moved, helium cylinder or multi-cylinder units had to be transported to the airship.

When the purification units were moved, trailer dollies and all wheels were removed, and a semi-permanent installation was improvised by placing twelve concrete blocks under each plant. This arrangement aided materially in reducing vibration which at all times had been a serious problem.

The blasting accident in which the K-101 was damaged in September left that ship with a purity so low that it could not be measured with a Cambridge analyzer, and imposed an unexpected

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and heavy burden on the purifying plants. Since the purity could not be determined, results of a preliminary purge from 24 September to 1 October could not be measured. By means of an effusion type analyzer, the purity was found to be 62.2% on 5 November, the date a second purge was begun. This purge ended on 27 November when a purity of 96.9% was attained. Approximately 1,027,250 cu. ft. of gas were run through the plants during the first purge, and 2,051,000 during the second. To replace the air removed from the helium and plant losses, and to top up the airship, 291,150 cu. ft. of helium were added to the K-101 during the second purge.

Besides returning the K-101 to a flight status, the helium ~~gas~~ was able to maintain a satisfactory average purity in the rest of the Squadron's airships despite the fact that three of the airships were absent from Port Lyautey for periods of as much as three months. At the end of the year, the average purity for all six ships was about 96.0%. At the end of February, the average purity for five ships was about 96.5%. The purity of the K-109 was raised to 98.0% on 22 October, just before it departed for an advance base; the K-101 purity was 98.1% before it left Port Lyautey on 25 February. At one time the average purity for all six ships was 97.1%.

Inasmuch as most purges were accomplished while airships were undergoing maintenance checks or were not required operationally, purging did not interfere with operations. Especially during February, however, many of the purges were made during a short eight hour to twelve hour period between flights.

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Between June 1944, the month the squadron arrived overseas, and the end of December 1944, approximately 1,350,000 cu. ft. of helium were expended--an average of about 225,000 cu. ft. for each airship for a six months' period. From purity records over this period, it appeared that the average drop in purity per week was about 0.3%. Despite maintenance problems, aggravated by lack or delay of replacement parts, the operating time of the portable purifying plants was considered highly satisfactory. One of the plants was in operation purifying helium 50.2% of the total time from July through 31 December.

During the 8 month period of February through September 1945, the European war came to an end and, with this cessation of hostilities, came an end also to the anti-submarine missions which airships had been flying in the Gibraltar area for a year. The minesweeping program, which the airships of BlimpRon 14 had been carrying out as an adjunct to their anti-submarine patrols, then became the primary function assigned to the Squadron. To carry out these missions of spotting and plotting enemy minefields, airships operated from bases at Cuers, France; Cagliari, Sardinia; Rome, Pisa and Lido in Italy; the island of Malta--these besides the main home base of Port Lyautey, French Morocco.

The number of airships remaining at NAS Port Lyautey varied during the 8 month period. Usually it was four until after VE day. Until VE day, primary function of these airships was to carry out the night patrol of the "fence" in the Straits of Gibraltar. During these last few months of the European war, only one airship was

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kept on the "fence" nightly. Late in March, an additional daylight MAD patrol was established by Fleet Air Wing 15 for the airships. This consisted of a daylight patrol of a ridge which was located on the ocean bottom just west of the Straits and was an area of good bottom at relatively shallow depths. It was considered ^{possible} that enemy submarines might be lying on this bottom during hours of daylight. Several wrecks on and near the ridge made this patrol especially difficult and required constant pin-point navigation.

Frequent daylight escort missions also were carried out by the airships during the last three months of the war in Europe and the month following VE day. Fleet Air Wing 15 devised a special blimp-plane coverage for escort missions which was tried not more than 3 or 4 times during the period. Under this escort plan, the plane covered the area 5 to 7 miles outside the convoy, and the blimp--with its MAD gear--covered the area over which the convoy was passing. This meant that the airship constantly was weaving in and out among the ships of large convoys at MAD altitude--about 100 feet. With the ending of hostilities in Europe, this plan was dropped during the additional month that the Port Lyautey based airships escorted convoys. After VE day, blimps and planes did not work jointly on convoy coverages.

The last anti-submarine mission was flown by a BlimpRon 14 airship on 6 June 1945 when a 55-ship convoy was escorted. This was exactly one year after the first anti-submarine patrol was flown in the Straits of Gibraltar on 6 June 1944 by an airship.

During February, an airship based at Port Lyautey--the K-112--

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escorted the United States naval vessels carrying President Franklin D. ROOSEVELT to the Crimea Conference. Early in the month, the airship took off from Port Lyautey and stayed with the vessels carrying the presidential party until they had passed Bizerte. Two flight crews were employed in the operation. One of these flew the blimp from Port Lyautey to Oran, (escorting the vessels through the Straits of Gibraltar); the second crew picked up the airship at Oran when it stopped for fuel there. At the completion of the operation, the airship returned to Port Lyautey.

Late in February, the K-109, which was based at Cagliari, escorted the President—carrying vessels on their return voyage. Since the K-109 was in need of check and overhaul work which could be accomplished only at Port Lyautey, this airship was returned to Port Lyautey when it left the naval vessels in the Atlantic well clear of the approaches to Gibraltar. To replace the K-109, the K-101 was ferried to Cagliari on 19 February.

On 13 March, because of the increased U-boat activity in the approaches to the Straits of Gibraltar, Commander Moroccan Sea Frontier in his ~~secret~~ dispatch 131110A initiated a request to Commander EIGHTH Fleet asking for the immediate return to Port Lyautey of the two blimps operating at Cuers and Cagliari. On the same day, Commander EIGHTH FLEET directed by secret dispatch 132148 that the blimps in the Mediterranean return to Port Lyautey on 15 March where they were used to increase the number of daylight convoy coverages provided by BlimpRon 14.

These ships remained at Port Lyautey until 11 April, when

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the K-101 departed Port Lyautey for Cuers to resume minesweeping work there in compliance with orders from Commander EIGHTH Fleet. The K-101 arrived in Cuers on 14 April.

On 26 March, the K-109, which had returned from Cagliari the week before, was completely demolished on the field at NAS Port Lyautey in a freak wind. There were no personnel injuries. The K-130 was damaged slightly at the same time. The K-109 was torn from the mobile mast to which it was moored in a violent whirlwind, or updraft, which was so local in character that it apparently affected only the small area in which the two airships were moored on Field No. 2. The airship caught fire and was completely destroyed about 500 yards from the mobile mast which was overturned and so badly twisted that it had to be surveyed.

The accident occurred at 0837A (local time) after a night of moderate winds which averaged 15 to 20 knots with intermittent rains. Because of the unsettled weather, the Squadron Operations Officer at 0745 had requested a weather forecast. There was nothing in this forecast to indicate the violence of the winds which were to pass over the immediate area in which the two airships were moored about 40 minutes later.

To replace the K-109 and the K-123, which had been accidentally ripped at Port Lyautey in January, Chief of Naval Operations late in March directed that two more airships be ferried from the States. As a result, the K-89 and K-114 arrived at Port Lyautey on 1 May after an uneventful transatlantic ferry operation which included stops at Bermuda and the Azores.

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After 1 June, only 7 flight crews remained at Port Lyatey; the rest were at advance bases in the Mediterranean carrying out minesweeping operations. With the end of anti-submarine missions, these Port Lyatey crews formed an air-sea rescue unit.

After 13 June, when the K-130 was ferried to Cuers, France, only two airships remained at Port Lyatey. Since at Port Lyatey the crews were on a standby status as an air-sea rescue unit, a light flight training schedule of about 5 flights per week were carried out. These included air-sea rescue procedures and radar talkdown exercises.

A month later, on 15 July 1945, the K-89 was ferried to Detachment #3 leaving only two airships at Port Lyatey. And in August the K-112 was ferried to Cuers for deflation because of the condition of the envelope. This left only the K-114 at Port Lyatey.

During the period from VE Day--8 May--until the end of September, the Port Lyatey crews were called on for an air-sea rescue assignment only once. This was on 4 July when the ship was ordered out to search for a Piper Cub overdue at the Naval Air Station. The airship was ready to take off 12 minutes after the "first call" but, just prior to takeoff, Station Operations notified the Squadron that the plane had been located.

Several photographic flights during June-September were made over Casablanca and Rabat. Two radio direction finder station calibration flights also were flown.

With the departure of Fleet Air Wing 15 from the European Theater on 9 July, there were slight changes in the senior commands under which BlimpRon 14 operated. The Squadron reported to the

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Commanding Officer, Moroccan Task Group, who was also Commanding Officer of NAS Port Lyautey for administrative control.

From February through September 1945, BlimpRon 14 maintained an advance base at Cuers, France--the only base from which BlimpRon 14 operated which had hangar facilities. This detachment was the original minespotting unit and had been established in September 1944. Operations from here were sporadic with airships arriving and departing the unit at irregular intervals. Up until 16 March 1945, the K-134 was based at this French base and was used for plotting mines along the south coast of France. The entire coast line from the Spanish border to Cannes was covered. Actual sweeping work was sporadic. The airship was recalled to Port Lyautey on 16 March on the day after actual sweeping had started with French units. On this operation in the Baie de Sanary, 7 mines were cut by the French vessels which consisted of 5 sweeps, 2 minelayers and 2 PC boats. The K-134 saved one sweeper from probable damage, or even destruction, when it warned the vessel that it was drifting toward a moored mine only 10 yards away.

Before the K-134 returned to Port Lyautey in March, four photographic missions were flown from Cuers. On 13 February 1945, on orders of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces, the blimp was used to photograph underwater mines in the Baie de Sanary and Grande Passe and underwater barricades along the French coast from Sete to Pte. de L'Espiguette. These photographs were taken for the army photographic research branch, War Office, London and were of an experimental nature employing polaroid lenses

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in an effort to determine depths of moored mines from photographs. Results of tests were never learned by the blimp detachment.

On 21 February 1945, shore defense installations along the southern coast of France were photographed for the British. This mission was repeated on 28 February.

The Cuers detachment had no airship after the K-134 returned to Port Lyautey on 16 March 1945 until the K-101 returned on 14 April for the resumption of minespotting work. Minesweeping work was resumed on 17 April with Task Unit 125.13.2--a unit of United States minesweeps. The airship worked with these American vessels until 22 May when they were ordered to Palermo, Sicily.

From 1 May until 9 May 1945, the detachment had no airship to work ^{with} these ships. The K-101 had departed on the first of the month for Pisa, Italy where Advance Base III was being established. The K-134 was ferried from Port Lyautey to Cuers on 8-9 May to replace the K-101. The K-134 remained at Cuers until 10 June when it was ferried to Lido, Italy when Advance Base IV was established there. Again the Cuers detachment was without an airship until 15 June when the K-130 arrived from Port Lyautey as a replacement.

During the periods that the Cuers detachment had no airship, the crews there busied themselves with setting up facilities for reerection of the K-123 which had been ripped accidentally in Port Lyautey on 15 January. The airship car, which was not damaged, was shipped to Cuers after COMINCH & CNO approved on 13 March plans for the re-erection of the airship at Cuers.

This approval also provided for the establishment of overhaul

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facilities for overhaul of the Squadron's airships in the Cuers hangars. It carried with it the stipulation that this work was to be carried out with no increase in personnel and no base construction was authorized.

Two civilian technicians from Goodyear Aircraft Corporation arrived at Port Lyautey in March 1945 and were sent to Cuers in April to supervise the erection work.

Slow delivery of needed gear from the States made it impossible to start actual erection of the K-123 until 1 July 1945. On 2 July, the groundcloth was spread and the envelope unpacked preparatory to erection of the airship. On 6 July, the inflation of the envelope began. Twenty-seven days after the ground cloth had been laid, the K-123 was successfully test flown.

Because of the condition of the envelope, the K-101 was deflated and the car crated for storage during the first week in July at Cuers. The K-112, also because of the poor condition of the envelope, was deflated in Cuers during the first week in September.

Mine spotting operations by the Cuers detachment were resumed with the French on 21 August 1945. The Cuers-based blimp worked with French minesweeps at the mouth of the Rhone River.

On the first day of the resumption of sweeping, a French SC struck a mine and sank with the loss of four men. The accident occurred while the airship was working with the sweeps and three SCs were about four miles away sinking mines already cut. One of the SCs had drifted into unswept waters while attempting to sink a mine. The blimp proceeded immediately to the scene and dropped

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life rafts, life jackets, and a first aid kit. The airship stood by until all survivors had been taken aboard surface craft.

Mine sweeping operations continued throughout September 1945 whenever weather permitted. Up until 15 September, 67 mines were cut during these operations.

Photographic missions were flown for the Army and the French over Marseilles and Toulon. And for this work, both the Army and the French sent notes of thanks to the detachment.

From February to June 1945, the Cuers detachment had an alternate field at which to land in case of mistral winds at Cuers. This was on La Bucco field about 4 miles west of Cannes. Cannes is about 70 miles east of Cuers and because of mountains, does not feel the effect of the mistral winds as does Cuers. A stick mast was set up on this field in February but was never used by the airship. With the establishment of Advance Base III and IV in May and June in northern Italy, Cuers became in fact a maintenance base for the airships operating in that area. Therefore, the mast near Cannes was moved to Cuers in June to handle the increased traffic.

Advance Base III at Pisa was only four hours flight time from Cuers and that base's airship returned to Cuers regularly for maintenance work. Advance Base IV also sent its airship regularly to Cuers for check work; this flight from Lido, Italy, to Cuers required about 8 hours.

Advance Base #2 at Sardinia during February, March and April continued to aid American minesweeps in clearing the harbor of Cagliari of mines. The joint operation between airship and surface

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craft in minesweeping operations had first been tried in October 1944 off the coast of France. The Sardinia operation proved the worth of such teamwork. At the close of the Cagliari operation in March, Commander of the YMS unit engaged in the operation evaluated the part the blimp had taken in the work with these words:

"A blimp is invaluable in clearing sweeps of shallow fields. On at least two occasions, ships were saved from probable mining by warnings from the blimp. Under average conditions of sea and visibility, a YMS should be safe from contact mines in any water in which a blimp can see mines. It is considered desirable to have a M/S officer in the blimp as observer and for liaison with the C.T.C. The blimp should also be equipped with MN radio to provide instant reliable communication with the ships".

On the day before the beginning of a special operation off Anzio, Italy, the airship, working with the sweeps, aided in the cutting of almost a hundred mines in Cagliari harbor. This minesweeping work at Cagliari was interrupted for a week by the Anzio operation during the first week in March. This operation was carried out swiftly and efficiently. Between 1600 on 1 March and 1700 7 March, the Cagliari detachment of 4 flight crews had moved so swiftly that the officers and men had:

1. Dismantled the stick mast at Bizerte, Tunisia--120 miles from Cagliari and 300 miles from Rome--and re-erected it on Littorio Field in Rome within 18 hours.
2. Ferried K-101 to and from Rome and flew the airship on 5 minespotting missions.

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3. Dismantled the mast which they had set up 5 days previously and stored it on a Rome airfield.

The blimp and all hands--the first of whom left Cagliari at 1600 on 1 March--were back at Cagliari, ready to resume normal operations at 1700 on the 7th of March.

Commander Minesweeper Squadron 7, with whom the Cagliari detachment operated in Sardinia, initiated the Rome maneuver when he recommended in confidential dispatch 261747 February that the airship be employed to assist in sweeping mines near the USS SWERVE, AM, which had been sunk northwest of Anzio, Italy. The sweeping was undertaken as a preliminary step to the salvage of gear aboard the minesweep which was sunk in 35 to 40 fathoms of water. On 2 March, Commander EIGHTH Fleet approved the recommendations for use of the blimp on the mission and directed that air transportation for the mast between Rome and Bizerte be furnished. This approval was contained with Com8th Fleet's confidential dispatch 020135 March 1945.

In anticipation of the approval of the use of the blimp for the maneuver, the site for the erection of the mast in Rome had been selected on 28 February by Comdr. E. J. SULLIVAN, Air Group Commander (LTA) on the staff of Commander Fleet Air Wing 15, and Lt. M. H. NORTON, Officer-in-Charge of Cagliari blimp detachment. Littorio Airfield, a Mediterranean Air Transport Service field, controlled by the United States Army Air Force, was chosen and preliminary arrangements for setting up the mast there were made. So when the final approval for the maneuver was received, all hands

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at the Blimp Detachment were ready to move swiftly.

A Mediterranean Air Transport Service C-47 arrived at Cagliari in the early afternoon of 1 March, and two officers and the men of one flight crew were flown south to Bizerte where they dismantled the stick mast on Sidi Ahmed Field and loaded it on the plane before dark. This plane took off from Bizerte at 0530 the following morning and arrived at Rome at 0815A. Because of the assistance given by Lt. Col. Douglas KEENEY, Commanding Officer of the air base, the mast was ready for operation by 1330. The problem of deadmen for anchoring the mast was solved quickly by using portions of pillars from bombed-out Italian hangars.

Meanwhile, at Cagliari, on both the first and second of March, the K-101 operated as usual with Task Group 81.12 and on those two days played an extremely vital role in the complete clearance of a contact mine field of 97 mines. This operation would not have been attempted without the assistance of the blimp. At 0320 on the third of March, the blimp took off from Cagliari for the Rome mission. The blimp was on station in the area of the wreck at 0815 and immediately began minespotting work after plotting the position of the sunken minesweep by use of MAD gear. Mines in the vicinity of the wreck were plotted during this first mission. When the first day's flight was completed, the K-101 proceeded to Littorio Field where it was landed at 1600. The landing party at Littorio Field was made up of American soldiers based there and of two blimp crews which had been flown in from Cagliari by plane.

The next day--4 March--Comdr. H. W. FORD, Assistant Air

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Operation Officer for United States EIGHTH Fleet, flew as an observer aboard the airship. On this flight, the blimp flew ahead of the minesweeps as they sought a clear channel into the position of the sunken ship. The blimp spotted moored contact mines and directed the sweeps safely around them by voice and radio.

On 5 March, Comdr. E. A. RUTH, Jr., Commander Task Group 81.15, the group which was charged with carrying out the mission of salvaging gear from the sunken sweep, flew aboard the airship. Specific mission of this flight was to mark accurately and permanently the position of the wreck. MAD gear on the blimp was again used to locate the wreck, and smoke flares were dropped on the spot. By use of the smoke flares, the AM261 was guided to the spot and that vessel laid a marker buoy. Upon completion of the day's flight, Commander RUTH was dropped at Anzio so it would be unnecessary for him to drive the 40 miles from Rome after the airship landed there. This was accomplished by making a wheel landing on a fighter strip near Anzio, and Commander RUTH stepped out of the airship car after it was slowed to about five knots. No landing party was used.

On the final day of the operation, Capt. J. L. CALLAN and Capt. BUTLER, both on the staff of Commodore H. W. ZIRCLI, Senior United States Naval Officer at Rome, flew aboard the airship. A final check of the area of the operation was made during this short flight. Lt. Col. Douglas KEENEY, Commanding Officer of Littorio Field, was also a passenger on this flight.

On 7 March, the K-101 returned to Cagliari. After the airship had taken off from Littorio, the two crews remaining there dismantled

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the mast and loaded it aboard a truck for storing on Ciampino field-- another U.S. Army controlled field near Rome. The mast was not stored at Littorio because it was expected that Littorio field was to be returned to the Italian government within a few days.

Immediately after the mast had been loaded on the truck, the two crews boarded a waiting C-47, and these two were back at Cagliari at 1700--a few minutes after the K-101 had landed there-- thus completing one of the swiftest movements of any BlimpRon 14 maneuver.

Commander 8th Fleet sent this commendatory message after completion of this maneuver:

"I HAVE NOTED THE OUTSTANDING DEGREE OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE LTA GROUP, THE MINESWEEPING GROUP AND SALGROUP PURSUANT TO THE TASK INVOLVING THE EX SWERVE X THE JOINT ENDEAVOR (LOCATION OF THE STRICKEN SHIP X PREPARATORY SWEEPING X SALVAGE TASK) IS AN EXAMPLE OF OPERATIONS AGGRESSIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY PERFORMED."

After Commander Moroccan Sea Frontier recalled the airships from Cuers and Cagliari in March, the advance base in Cagliari was closed since the minesweeping operation there was completed. The mast and airship material were shipped by surface craft to Bizerte, then by rail to Port Lyautey. The mess equipment and provisions, as well as transportation, were turned over to an Army Air Force Communications service detail at Elmas Field. All personnel from Sardinia had returned to Port Lyautey by 3 April.

Comphib8th Fleet sent this message upon completion of Sardinia sweeping operation:

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"WITH THE COMPLETION OF THE CLEARANCE OF THE GULF OF CAGLIARI I WISH TO CONGRATULATE YOU AND ALL THE VARIOUS FORCES WHICH HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THIS ASSIGNMENT X WHEN TAKEN IN LIGHT OF THE NUMBER AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MINES SWEPT AS WELL AS THE HYDROGRAPHIC CHARACTER OF THE AREA I CONSIDER THIS AN OUTSTANDING ACCOMPLISHMENT PARTICULARLY SINCE THERE WAS NEITHER LOSS NOR INJURY TO EITHER LIFE OR SHIP X WELL DONE X RADIO LYAUTEY PASS TO COMBLIMPRON 14."

During the last week in May 1945, Commander Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN held a series of talks in Naples, Italy with representatives of Commander U.S. Naval Forces, Northwest African Waters and the British Mediterranean Minesweeping Command to discuss establishment of an advance base at Venice, Italy. After a preliminary inspection of Lido Beach airfield, that site was selected as the base from which the airship would operate. On 30 May, a stick mast was loaded aboard a C-47 at Port Lyautey and flown to Lido, arriving there 31 May. The mast was ready for operations on 2 June and the operating personnel (three flight crews) arrived on 4 June. These officers and men had picked up transportation at Naples and driven it overland to the Lido field. The airship for the detachment--the K-134--arrived on 10 June, after being ferried from Cuers via the Savona Pass in the mountains just west of Genoa.

Primary job of Advance Base #4 (Lido) was to assist in the clearance of a channel from Venice to Trieste.

On 12 June, the K-134 was flown on the first mine spotting

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mission in the Adriatic. A string of 150 German "Katy" mines was plotted on the flight 100-200 yards off Lido Island. First joint operations with British minesweeps in the Mediterranean took place on 15 June in an area 5 miles west of Port Quieto, Istria. The airship found and plotted four lines totaling 38 mines and eight obstructors.

During July 1945, the airship based at Lido was flown on 20 flights totaling 225 hours. An officer of the Royal Navy flew aboard the airship on most mine spotting flights as liaison officer. On 30 July, the K-134 was flown over Baker Bay in Yugoslavia. The Karaljevicki channel was checked but no mines were found. Known mine fields in the Gulf of Fiume and the Canale Della Panesina also were inspected from the airship.

In August, the recently erected K-123 replaced the K-134 at Lido. The K-134 was returned to Cuers for purge. Flight from Cuers to Lido required about eight hours and was made whenever a ship needed check or repair work done.

The last operational mission was flown at Lido by Detachment FOUR on 14 September. On 5 September, the K-123 had been requested to locate a wreck and in doing so, found an uncharted minefield around the wreck; between 50 and 60 mines were plotted.

After 7 operational flights had been flown during the first two weeks in September the Lido detachment was officially closed on 19 September and the airship was returned to Cuers on 15 September. Most of the airship gear was flown back by C47. Some of the gear was sent to the island of Malta for the

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establishment of Detachment #5. Personnel were returned to Port Lyautey to replace crews from there who were assigned to the new Detachment 5.

Approximately one month after Advance Base II in Cagliari, Sardinia, had been closed, Advance Base III was established at Pisa, Italy. On 26 April 1945, a dispatch was originated by the British Flag Officer, Northern Area Mediterranean at Leghorn, Italy, ^{which} requested that the airship operating from Advance Base I in Cuers, France, be transferred to the Genoa area for sweeping operations. This request was addressed to Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean (a British Command) who approved it and forwarded it to the Commander United States Naval Forces, Northwest African Waters further requesting that a second airship be assigned to Advance Base I for continuation of minesweeping along the south coast of France. On 28 April 1945, Commander U.S. Naval Forces Northwest African Waters further requested that a second airship be assigned to Advance Base I for continuation of minesweeping along the south coast of France. On 28 April 1945, Commander U.S. Naval Forces Northwest African Waters directed that this transfer be effected at the earliest practicable date.

A stick mast from Port Lyautey was flown to Northern Italy and the mast set up on the United States Army fighter field at Pisa. On 4 May 1945, the K-101 was flown from Cuers, France, to Pisa in approximately 4 hours. First mines in the Geonca area were plotted the next morning when 18 were spotted from the airship in La Spezia harbor.

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The Pisa detachment operated with British Twelfth Mine-sweeping Flotilla which was under command of Captain G. N. RAWLINGS. The British use of the airship was slightly different from that employed by American sweeps. The British used the airship to make preliminary plots of fields and then to guide in the sweeps as they lay dan buoys and made their initial cuts in the field. After the completion of this initial "cut" the British sweeps did not desire to have the blimp over them during the completion of the sweeping process since the dan buoys accurately marked the mines remaining to be cut. Each area was swept 15 times. While the sweeps completed a sweeping operation in this manner, the airship was assigned other areas to plot thus expediting the overall job. The American sweeps in the Sardinian operation employed the blimps as an observer throughout the sweeping operation--not only during the initial cut.

After the surrender of the Germans in northern Italy, charts of mines in the Genoa area were received from them. The blimp based at Pisa plotted much of the Genoa area before these charts had been obtained. Much to the satisfaction of the detachment and the British sweeps, the plots which the airship made corresponded almost identically with the German plots.

This operation was the first that Captain RAWLINGS had with American airships. On 6 June 1945, in a letter to the Officer-in-Charge of the Detachment, he wrote: "The capabilities of your ship are far superior to anything I have known before".

Advance Base III (Pisa) minesweeping routine was broken by

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two air-sea rescue assignments in July. On 2 July, the K-130 was directed to search for two pilots lost off the northern tip of Corsica. The airship became a part of an air-sea rescue team which was made up of two surface craft, three planes, and the airship. After a six-hour search in winds which at times reached a velocity of 55 knots, the K-130 returned to the base, where it was learned that the pilots had been picked up previously. A verbal expression of appreciation was received from the Army air-sea rescue group operating in northern Italy, thanking this unit for "splendid cooperation and effort, especially in view of the very unfavorable weather prevailing".

On 17 July, at 2323B, the Liberty ship JOHN H. HAMMOND struck a mine 11 miles north of Elba Island. At 0430B on 18 July (five hours later), the K-89 was directed to make a search of the area for possible survivors, report extent of the damage to the vessel, and direct surface craft to the scene. At 0526B, the K-89 took off and was over the damaged vessel at 0610B.

When the airship had been ordered out on the search, it was feared that the HAMMOND had sunk after striking the mine. However, when found by the airship crew, it was still afloat 6 1/2 miles north of Elba Island and drifting in a course of 010T. The airship reported to the stricken vessel, plotted her position for her, and advised the skipper of the vessel that the airship would stand by to direct surface craft to the scene. While standing by, the airship made a thorough search of the area surrounding the ship

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for survivors. Three empty lifeboats were all that was found.

At 1036E, the K-89 was recalled to base for refueling. With the same crew, the airship took off again after a short briefing. The airship was assigned the task of safely guiding a British minesweep with salvage crew aboard through mines to the vessel to prevent further drifting, and operations were secured until the following day.

On 19 July, the K-89 returned to the scene to assist in salvage operations. The blimp searched the immediate area and reported the positions of 82 mines. The airship then directed a flotilla, consisting of 5 minesweeps and two tugs, to sweep a channel to the HAMMOND. The entire group, with the HAMMOND in tow, was then led by the airship to Port Pionbino. During this trip, the airship diverted the leading minesweep from a floating mine.

At 1515E, the K-89 was secured and received the following message of appreciation: "Very many thanks for your invaluable assistance".

These air-sea rescue missions interrupted only temporarily the mine spotting and plotting work in the northwest Italian waters. On 9 July, the airship was directed to replot areas already checked near La Spezia and Cecira. This constant re-checking was necessary since moored mines sometimes "walk" with the winds and tides and old plots thus become inaccurate. On an earlier plot, 46 mines had been reported in this area. (The plot had not been made from an airship). The re-plot by the airship revealed 108 mines. Decoy mines and mine obstructors also were

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located and plotted. Marking buoys were laid by surface craft. One floating mine was spotted and destroyed (by surface craft) during this plot. An item of considerable interest located on this mission was the finding of a dummy mine near Cecira. Equipped with wooden horns, the mine carried no charge, but closely resembled actual mines used in the area.

During the last two weeks in July, the detachment at Pisa was busy re-checking an area which extended from Tino Island on the north, Corgona Island on the south, and extended 40 miles seaward from the Italian coast. The entire area was divided into small areas and numbered. Each day the airship covered as many of these small areas as possible. Photographic duplicates of original German plots of the areas were carried on the airship, and changes on these due to mines "walking" were noted.

Mines were found in swept waters which had been declared safe for shipping. On 25 July, the airship found two mines in such waters. Some new fields were found during the re-plotting check. On 27 July, 86 mines were plotted in a field--39 more than had been found on the previous plot.

On 27 July, the Pisa airship aided sweeps in clearing an area 3 miles west of Gorgona Island. Fifteen (15) mines were cut on this operation.

During these last two weeks in July, the airship plotted 430 mines and assisted surface craft in cutting 65.

During August, there were no operational flights made by the Pisa detachment. The British sweeps did not sweep.

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On 23 August, the K-89 was deflated when the airship overrode the stick mast during masting operations. The car was prepared for shipment to Cuers, France, through the port of Leghorn.

Just before the closing of the Pisa detachment on 15 September, two operational flights were flown by the K-134 which was ferried from Cuers to replace the K-89. Mines were plotted and a check sweep made of an area north of the island of Corsica. After completion of this two day's operation, the senior officer aboard the minesweeps sent this message to the Detachment: "Many thanks for your excellent cooperation."

On 10 September, the K-134 was returned to Cuers, marking the end of airship operations at Detachment THREE at Pisa. When notified that the airship had landed safely at Cuers, the mast was taken down and all gear prepared for shipment. On 15 September, C-47 picked up the gear and personnel. The gear was taken to the island of Malta where Advance Base V was established, and the personnel were returned to Port Lyautey.

A few days before the end of hostilities in Europe, Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, a British command, requested on 5 May that BlimpFon 14 be retained in the Mediterranean area for at least four months after the close of hostilities for mine spotting work. On the same day, Commander Naval Forces Northwest African Waters forwarded this request to the Chief of Naval Operations who replied on the 13th of the month that the continued use of the Squadron was approved. The Chief of Naval Operations went on,

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however, to say that should BlimpRon 14 operations not be completed within four months, additional recommendations should be made.

When this four month period was up, Commander Naval Forces North African Waters, after conferring with Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, sent a dispatch to Commander Naval Forces in Europe on 26 August 1945 strongly recommending that Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN be retained through the summer of 1946. This request was in turn forwarded to the Chief of Naval Operations on 30 August by Commander Naval Forces in Europe who recommended that it be approved.

On 5 September 1945, the Chief of Naval Operations authorized the continued use of Blimp Squadron FOURTEEN until 1 January 1946 and announced that orders would be forthcoming to decommission the Squadron about that date.