

Lighter-Than-Air Craft Produced a Buoyant Part of Aviation Story

by Russell J. Parkinson

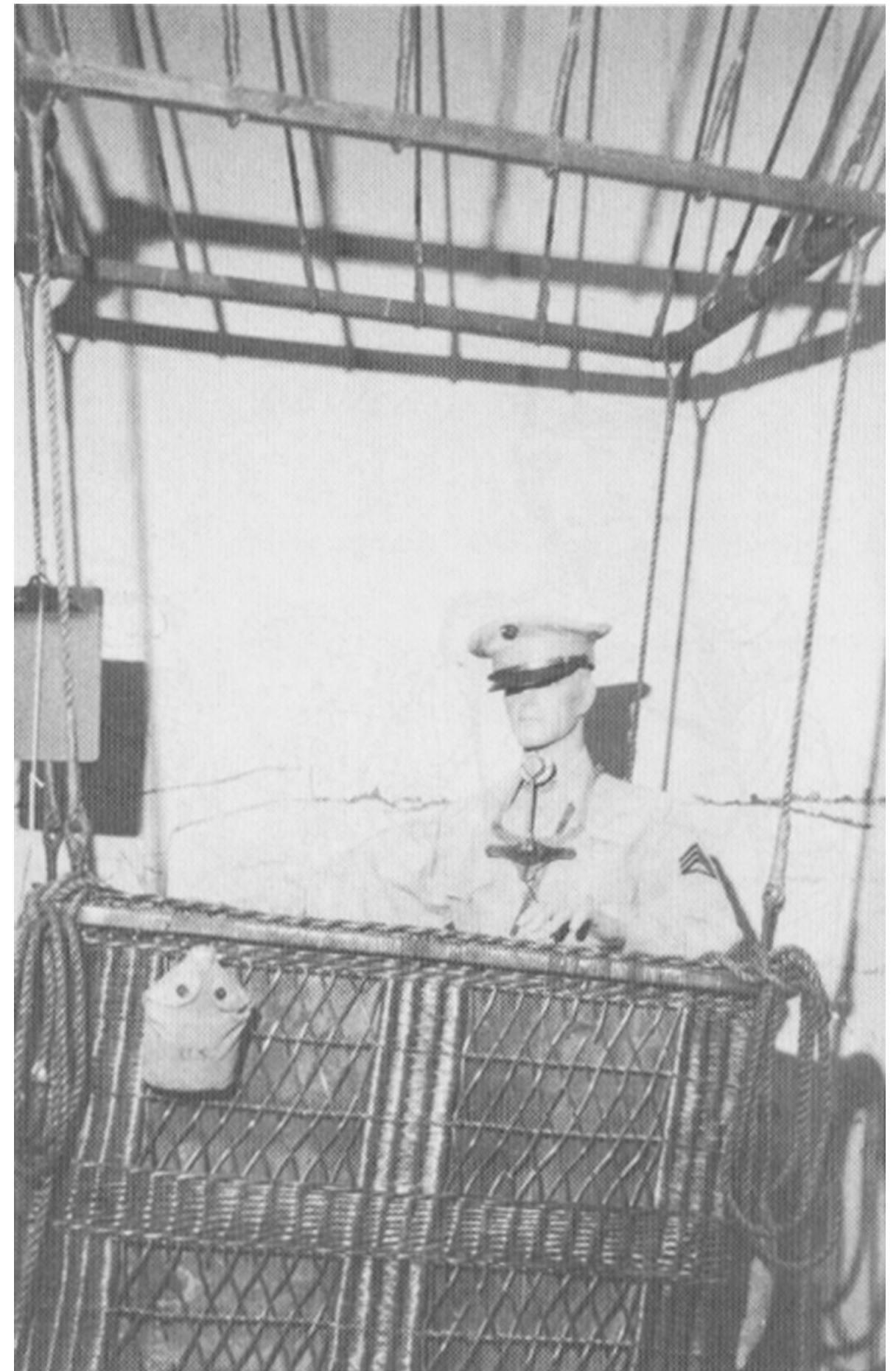
Many visitors to the recently opened Early Aviation hangar at the Marine Corps Aviation Museum at Quantico seem surprised when the first exhibit they see is a balloon gondola with a fully uniformed and equipped manikin representing an aerial observer. The exhibit is most appropriate, for balloons were invaluable in the early efforts to develop modern artillery fire control and direction techniques. Until lightweight radios could be developed rugged enough to sustain the vibrations and shocks of aircraft use, the balloon, using a telephone line, provided greater reliability for artillery spotting.

The military use of balloons has a history dating back to the French Revolution. During the American Civil War, balloons were used by both the Union and Confederate armies. One Union balloon was flown from a flat barge on the Potomac River, offshore from Quantico. Another flew at Budd's Ferry, Maryland to observe the Confederate artillery positions which were located in the present day town of Quantico and the Marine Corps Development and Education Command main base area.

By the outbreak of World War I, observation balloons were usually sausage-shaped to provide a kite or airfoil effect that reduced twisting of the tether lines. Spherical balloons were relegated to the training of observers and airship pilots. Communication to the ground was established by telephone and telegraph key through copper wires contained in one of the tether ropes.

The static nature of the western front in France made balloons quite useful despite their inherent lack of mobility. For that reason, the Marine Corps organized a small unit of balloon observers at Quantico on 28 June 1918 for service as artillery spotters with its recently formed artillery regiment, the 10th Marines. The detachment, commanded by Capt Arthur H. Page, used *Ciquot* (sausage) balloons for observing.

The first phase of the student observers' training involved parachuting. Since the hydrogen-filled balloons were favorite targets of enemy planes firing incendiary bullets, the observer's life depended upon his ability to exit the balloon's gondola with

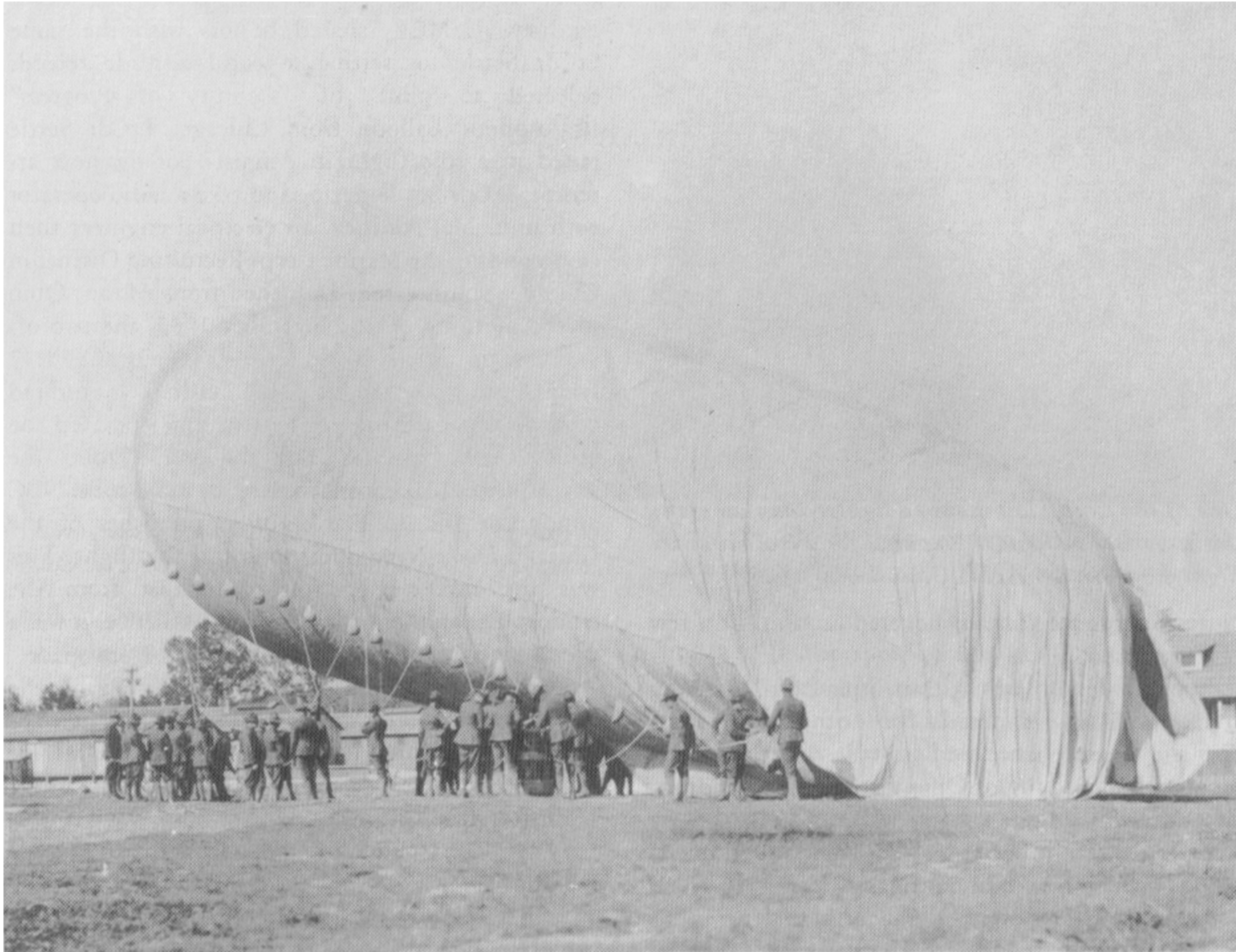


Representing a Marine balloonist of the interwar period, this manikin in a gondola "greet" Early Marine Aviation hangar visitors at Quantico.

great dispatch. Subsequent training included controlling actual artillery firing at Quantico. The guns fired from the north end of the base, now the site of Chamberlain Village enlisted housing. The rounds arched over the hill now landmarked by Liversedge and Harry Lee Halls. Lejeune Hall occupies the former target area.

The balloon detachment did not get to France during the war and was disbanded on 7 April 1919 as part of the postwar reduction in the Marine Corps. Some aviation mechanics, however, continued to be trained in both lighter-than-air rigging as well as aircraft maintenance. The riggers and handlers at Quantico were part of Squadron A.

In 1920, 12 Marines went to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center to attend courses in aviation mechanics plus balloon rigging. At least three of these Marines subsequently went to Pensacola for balloon flight training. Tragically, their balloon



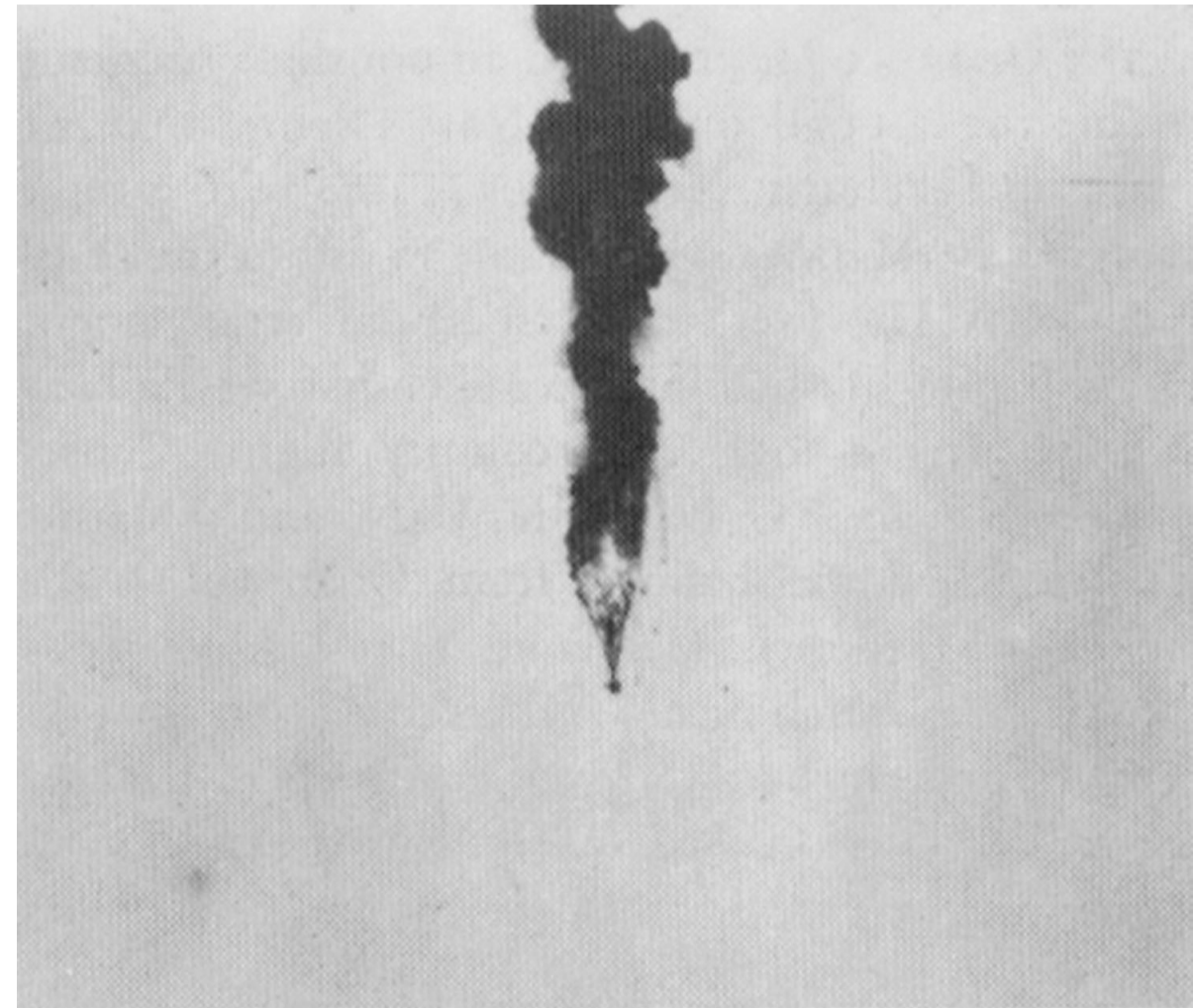
Marines of the 10th Regiment use hydrogen gas to inflate an observation balloon intended for use in

France in 1918; neither the balloon nor the artillery regiment saw combat in World War I.

overshot the coastline during a training flight and drifted out over the Gulf of Mexico. The gondola was recovered several days later but no trace of the three Marines was ever found.

Meanwhile at Quantico, the energetic BGen Smedley Butler staged a series of large field maneuvers during the 1920s on those Civil War battlefields within marching distance of Quantico. Marine aviation played a major role in these maneuvers. The Marines' De Havilland fighter-bombers flew communication flights between Quantico and the maneuver areas plus tactical support and reconnaissance missions.

During these years, the balloon became increasingly obsolete as an artillery observation platform. The advantage quickly shifted to airplanes as advancements in radio technology gave the airplane greater flexibility. Further, balloons were unsuitable for the emerging doctrine of amphibious warfare.



Victim of the airplane's greater versatility, an observation balloon burns and falls during the 1922 Gettysburg maneuvers, shot down by a Marine fighter.



One of the Corps' last manned lighter-than-air craft, this spherical balloon is prepared for a cross-country flight from Brown Field, Quantico in 1928.

Nevertheless, the *Caquot* hovered around for a few more years.

Continual problems within Squadron A arising from conflicting demands for both balloon and airplane maintenance led to the creation of a separate balloon unit at Quantico. A new squadron, ZK-1M, was organized on 8 August 1924 by transferring a number of Marines from Squadron A, along with a few trained riggers from the other squadrons. 1stLt Lester H. Medaris was the unit's first commander and led it at the Antietam maneuvers that year. The squadron used spherical balloons for training flights until 1929 when ZK-1M was disbanded and the balloons on hand were turned over to the Navy.

The Quantico Marines used an unusual expedient to ship the last balloon to the Navy's lighter-than-air center at Lakehurst, New Jersey. Faced with a tight budget, the Marines were unable to afford the shipment costs. However, the Navy had an arrangement for returning its balloons to Lakehurst via Railway Express after a long cross country flight. Consequently, LtCdr T.G.W. Settle, USN, and a Marine sergeant flew the balloon from Quantico to the vicinity of Frederick, Maryland. They landed in the middle of a church picnic and accepted generous offers of fried chicken and welcome help in packing the balloon into the gondola. Putting the balloon on a farm wagon, they drove it to the nearest railroad station where it was tagged for "return" to Lakehurst. This ended ballooning activities at Quantico.

In 1933, a Marine Corps officer, Maj Chester L.

Fordney, USMCR, shared honors with the same LtCdr Settle for setting a world altitude record. Selected to pilot the "Century of Progress" stratospheric balloon from Chicago, LtCdr Settle failed in a solo flight in August. For his next attempt, LtCdr Settle decided to take a radio operator with him. Maj Fordney, an electrical engineer then commanding the Marine Corps Recruiting District in Chicago, volunteered. Launched from Akron, Ohio in the morning of 20 November 1933, the two officers set an official world altitude record of 61,237 feet. During the flight, Maj Fordney monitored cosmic ray measuring equipment and operated the radio; Settle piloted the balloon. From the stratosphere, Maj Fordney talked by radio to an NBC announcer and to Frank Knox, publisher of the *Chicago Daily News* and sponsor of the flight. This was the first public voice broadcast from the stratosphere to the American radio audience. It was a precursor of the much later broadcasts from space.

The National Broadcasting Company gave the recording to Maj Fordney after the flight. His children, including World War II Woman Marine Mary Diggs, have since donated the recording to the Marine Corps Historical Center.

When World War II began, Britain used barrage balloons against German air attacks. These sausage-shaped balloons, tethered on strong wire-rope cables, reached as high as 10,000 feet into the air. Barrage balloons were visible, morale-building devices, but antiaircraft artillery and fighter aircraft were considerably more effective and flexible. By the end of the battle of Britain in 1941, American observers concluded that barrage balloons were ineffective and inefficient. Momentum for their use, however, continued in the United States.

The Marine Corps had already formed its first barrage balloon squadrons. In 1940, Maj Bernard L. Smith (Naval Aviator No. 6 and the second Marine to become an aviator) had been recalled to active duty to organize six barrage balloon squadrons.

The 1st Barrage Balloon Squadron deployed to Panama in 1941 and later joined the 5th and 6th Squadrons in Noumea, New Caledonia. The 2d Barrage Balloon Squadron went to Samoa and the 3d sailed to Tulagi via Wellington, New Zealand.

By 1943, U. S. combat experience confirmed that antiaircraft guns provided a better defense against air attacks than a few barrage balloons. Additionally, the balloons could serve the enemy as excellent navigational aids when attacking Pacific bases. The



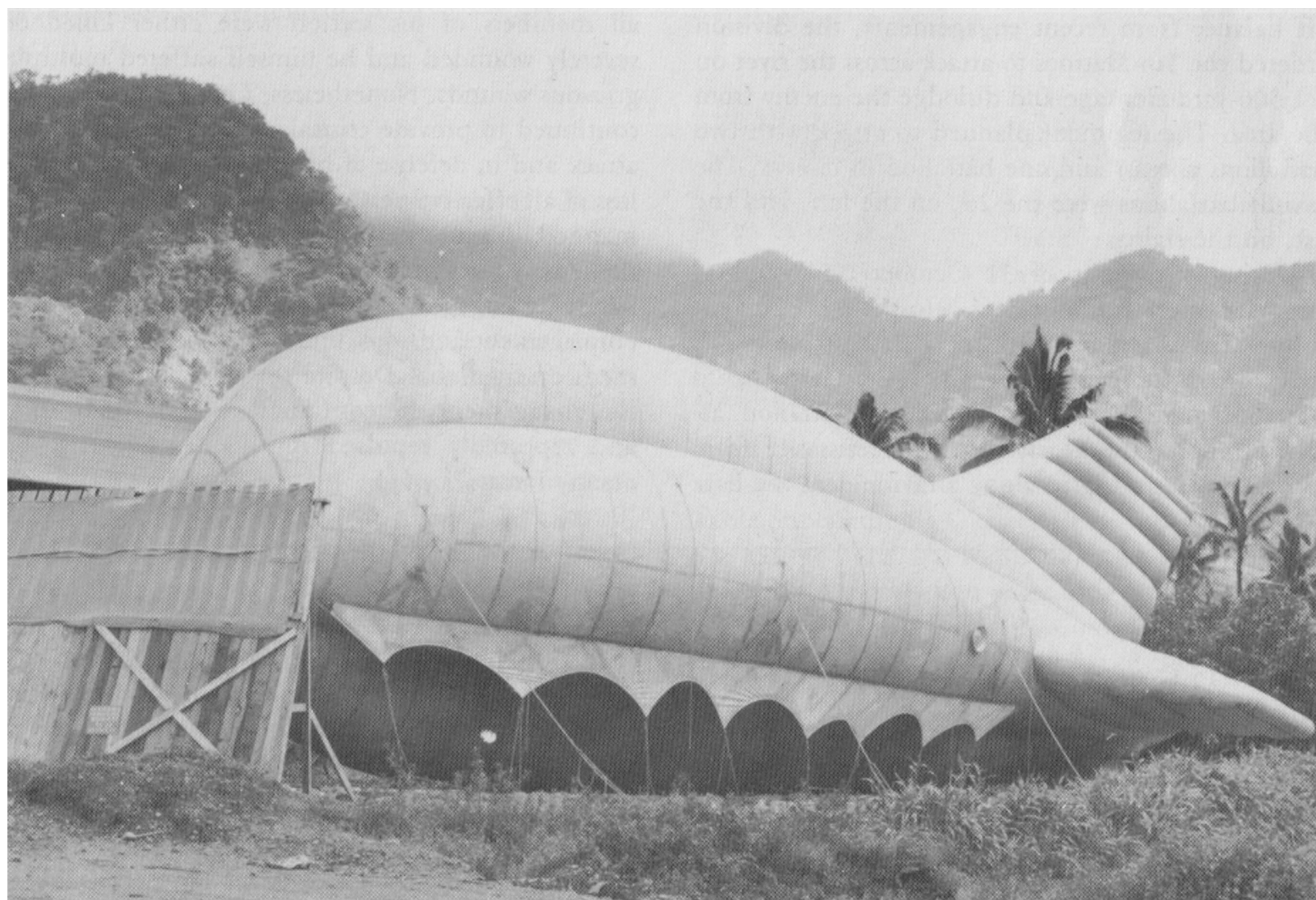
During the island campaigns in the Pacific, barrage balloons such as these over Samoa in 1943 provided

balloon squadrons disbanded and shipped their balloons back to Lakehurst. Their personnel transferred to antiaircraft artillery units and island defense forces. Lighter-than-air activity ended within the Marine Corps.

little protection from enemy air attack and were potential navigation aids for Japanese bombers.

Today, the only Marines flying balloons are those engaged in the sport of hot air ballooning during their off-duty hours. Aerial observers remain; however, their observation platforms are aircraft cockpits rather than balloon gondolas.

Symbolic of the end of the Marines' lighter-than-air era, a barrage balloon rests on the ground in Samoa, 1942.



Latest MOH Recipient

Anthony Casamento

Tours Historical Center

On 11 September 1980, former Marine Anthony Casamento, of West Islip, NY, and his family were escorted by BGen Simmons on a tour of the Marine Corps Museum. At the White House the following day, President Carter presented the Medal of Honor to Mr. Casamento for gallantry in action on Guadalcanal during World War II.

Mr. Casamento is the 293d Marine to be awarded the Medal of Honor. He is one of 20 members of the 1st Marine Division to receive the medal for service during World War II.

On 31 October 1942, then 21-year-old Cpl Casamento was a machine gun section leader with Company D, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. The 5th Marines then held positions along the east bank of the Matanikau River, an area of heavy fighting earlier in the campaign. Believing the Japanese were off balance from recent engagements, the division ordered the 5th Marines to attack across the river on a 1,500-yard frontage and dislodge the enemy from the area. The regiment planned to attack with two battalions abreast and one battalion in reserve. The assault battalions were the 2d, on the left, and the 1st, on the right.

During the night of 31 October-1 November, engineers erected footbridges across the Matanikau. By 0700 the next morning, both assault battalions had crossed the river and began their attack. The 2d Battalion made rapid progress. The 1st Battalion, attacking along the coast, met stiff resistance from Japanese troops dug in along a ravine near the base



His pride of service showing, Mr. Anthony Casamento views the Museum's Iwo Jima flag display.

of Point Cruz. It was during the ensuing fighting that Cpl Casamento earned his Medal of Honor.

According to his citation, Cpl Casamento "... directed his unit to advance along a ridge near the Matanikau River where they engaged the enemy ... all members of his section were either killed or severely wounded and he himself suffered multiple grievous wounds. Nonetheless, Corporal Casamento continued to provide critical supporting fire for the attack and in defense of his position. Following the loss of all effective personnel, he set up, loaded, and manned his unit's machine gun, tenaciously holding the enemy forces at bay. Corporal Casamento single-handedly engaged and destroyed one machine gun emplacement and took under fire another emplacement on his flank. Despite the heat and ferocity of the engagement, he continued to man his weapon and repeatedly repulsed multiple assaults by the enemy forces."

The Inspector General Reports

As of 15 October, the units achieving an "outstanding" in the IG inspection since the last issue of *Fortitude* were:

Det 4, Truck Company, 6th Motor Transport Battalion, 4th Force Service Support Group, FMF, USMCR,
New Haven, Connecticut

3d Battalion, 14th Marines, 4th Marine Division, FMF, USMCR, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Marine Barracks, Vallejo, California

In Memoriam



LtGen Robert O. Bare, USMC (Ret), died 30 September 1980 after a long illness. He was cremated and his ashes scattered at sea. Gen Bare graduated from the Naval Academy in 1924. As a lieutenant, he became involved with competitive

marksmanship. At the outbreak of World War II, he was Assistant G-3, Amphibious Corps, Atlantic. In 1943, he went to London to help plan, and later observed, the Normandy landings. He was on the Expeditionary Troops staff at Peleliu and chief of staff of the 1st Marine Division at Okinawa. During the Korean Conflict, he was Assistant Division Commander, 1st Marine Division. Upon promotion to major general, he commanded the Education Center at Quantico. His last command was the 1st Marine Division. Gen Bare was promoted to lieutenant general upon his retirement in 1957.



BGen Fred D. Beans, USMC (Ret), died 13 September in Annapolis and was buried in the Naval Academy cemetery. Gen Beans enlisted in the Navy in 1924 and later entered the Naval Academy, graduating in 1930. After Basic School,

he served in Nicaragua and China. Early in World War II, he served with the 8th Marines. He later commanded the 2d Defense Battalion and the 3d Raider Battalion. When the raider program ended, he became executive officer of the 4th Marines during the Okinawa campaign and commanded the regiment in Japan. Later, he served at Headquarters, Marine Corps in the Plans and Policies Division. Gen Beans was promoted to brigadier general upon retirement in 1948.



MajGen William P. Battell, USMC (Ret), a former Quartermaster General of the Marine Corps, died in Florida on 20 June after a long illness. Gen Battell enlisted in the Marine Corps after briefly attending Iowa State College. He attend-

ed radio school at Quantico and served at the Naval Research Laboratory for two years before going to Officers Candidate School in 1930. As a young officer, he became closely associated with communications and supply. At the outbreak of World War II, he was in the Radio Division, Bureau of Ships. He remained there until becoming Signal Supply Officer, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific in 1944. As a brigadier general, he commanded the Marine Corps Supply Center, Albany, Georgia for four years. Gen Battell became Assistant Quartermaster General in 1962 and Quartermaster General the following year. Gen Battell retired in 1965.



BGen Arthur T. Mason, USMC (Ret), died 24 August 1980 at his home in California. His remains were cremated and his ashes will be scattered at sea. Gen Mason was commissioned upon graduation from the University of California in 1923.

After Basic School, he served on sea duty and with the 4th Marines in China. In 1938, he went to the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre. He was in France when war erupted and was commended by the U.S. Ambassador for his work in evacuating Americans. Later he was on the staffs of the Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet and of the commander of the South East Asia Command in India. As a colonel, he commanded the 1st Marines at Okinawa and in North China. His last assignment was as chief of staff and deputy commander of the Department of the Pacific. Gen Mason was promoted to brigadier general upon his retirement in 1954.

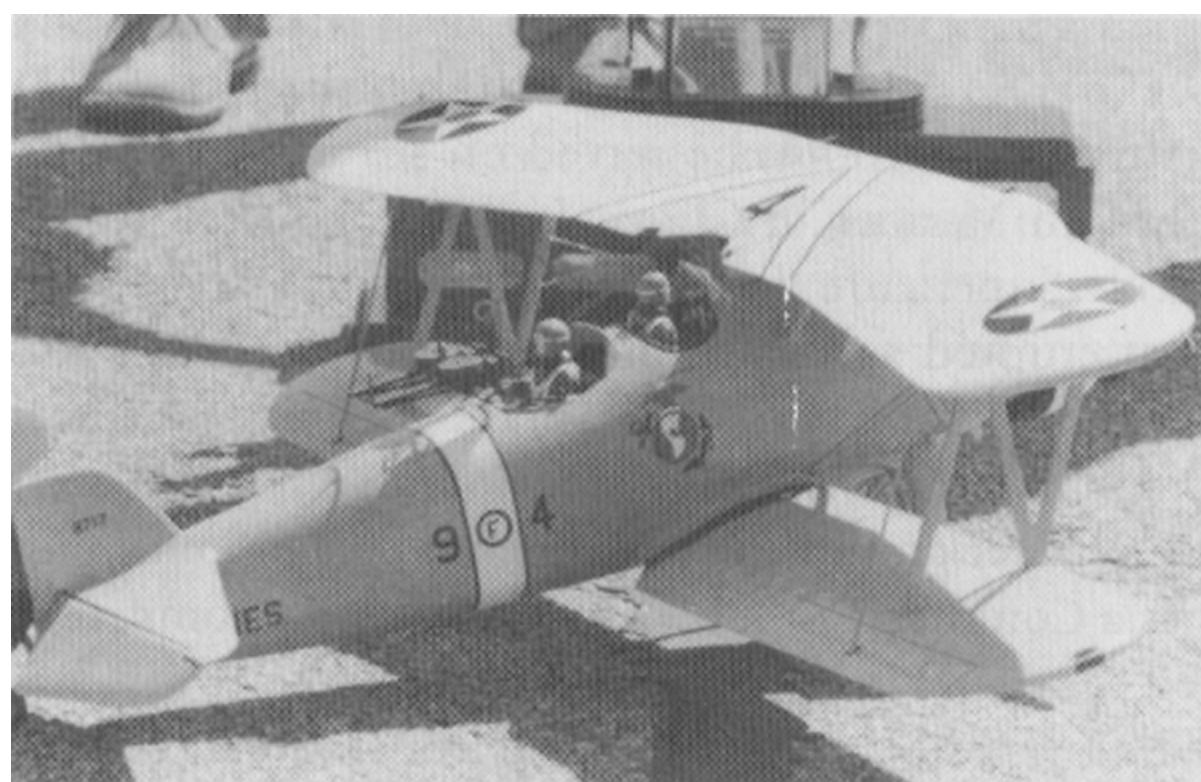
Events at the Center

6TH MARDIV REUNION

Members of the 6th Marine Division Association including the former division commander, Gen Lemuel C. Shepherd, 20th Commandant of the Marine Corps, were guests of the Center on 4 and 5 September. The Association was holding its annual reunion in Washington and shuttled members from the gathering's headquarters to the museum by bus. Gen Shepherd organized and commanded the 6th Marine Division in World War II.

QUANTICO RALLY

The Second Annual Marine Corps Scale Rally was held on 23 and 24 August adjacent to the Marine Corps Aviation Museum at Quantico. The Aviation Museum and the Virginia and Woodbridge Radio Control Clubs jointly sponsored the meet. The rally provided "pilots" the opportunity to compete in a fast/slow fly by, precision flying, a "bomb drop,"



Mr. Bud Fletcher, a former Marine sergeant, won the 1980 Gemeinhardt Trophy for this scale model of an F8-C Helldiver.

and acrobatic feats. The highlight of the rally was the awarding of the Gemeinhardt Trophy on the 24th. This trophy is named in honor of retired MSgt "Fritz" Gemeinhardt, the master modeler who created the dioramas in the Aviation Museum. LtCol Brown, OIC of the Aviation Museum, related that the trophy is presented annually to the entrant who, through attention to detail and fidelity to the original, produces a master's model of a Marine Corps aircraft. This year's winner was Mr. Bud Fletcher, of Bronx, NY, a former Marine of the Korean War era. His model was an F8C Helldiver, a plane flown by Marines in the 1930s.

MR. FRANK AT SEMINAR

Mr. Frank was the discussant at the first session of the 1980-81 Military Classics Seminar at the Fort Myer officers club. His topic for the evening was John Prebble's book, *Culloden*. That English victory in 1746 ended "Bonnie Prince Charlie's" pretension to the British throne and destroyed the autonomous political and military power of Scotland's Highland clans. To add an appropriate atmosphere prior to and following the discussion, Mr. Frank's son, Mike, played the bagpipes. Other special guests were a number of kilted "Highland Gentlemen," all friends and fellow clansmen of Mr. Frank. Wearing the Caledonian (old colors) tartan for the occasion, Mr. Frank made his own sentiments genially evident during his presentation. The Military Classics Seminar, an informal organization of persons interested in military history, meets monthly during the fall, winter, and spring.

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Departing the Center during October was Dr. Russell J. Parkinson, who had been an historian and writer with the Division for more than five years. Dr. Parkinson earned his graduate degrees from Duke University and taught at Point Park College in Pittsburgh, Stephens College, Duke University, and the U.S. Naval Academy prior to joining the staff at the Center. The avid hot-air balloonist left the Division to accept a position as a command historian with Headquarters, U.S. VII Corps at Stuttgart, Germany.

Mr. Richard A. (Buzz) Hillman has joined the division as illustrator in the Publications Production

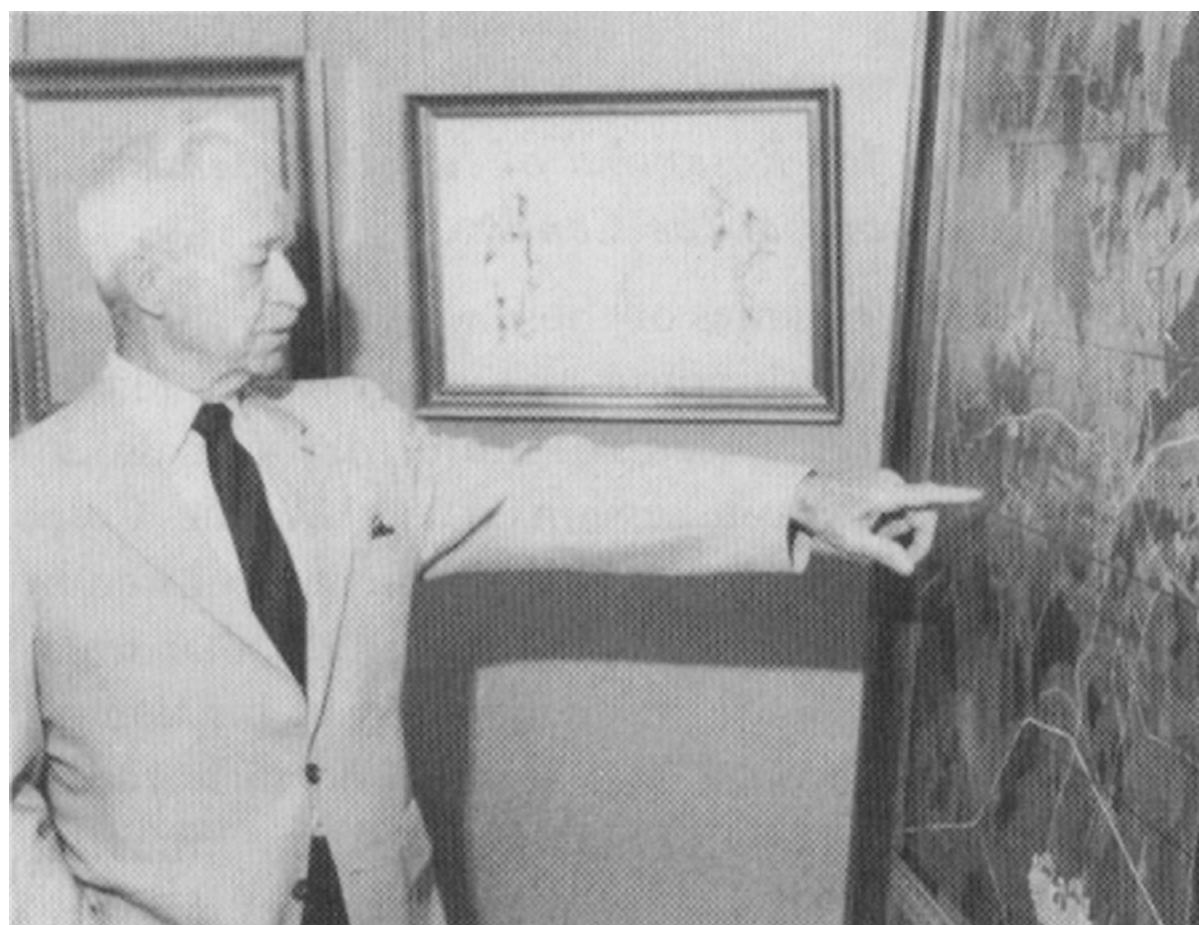
Section. Mr. Hillman is a graduate of Madison College in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and was formerly an illustrator in the Graphics Support Branch, MCDEC, Quantico. He is a captain in the Marine Corps Reserve and a member of the Combat Art program.

MAJ WELLS DECORATED

Maj Edward F. Wells, recently assigned to the Historical Branch, has been awarded the Navy Achievement Medal for his performance as commander of the Marine Detachment on board the USS *Forrestal* (CV59). In addition to his regular duties, Maj Wells was cited for voluntarily becoming qualified as Officer of the Deck Underway for Fleet Operations.

BELLEAU WOOD VET SEES EXHIBIT

Retired LtGen Merwin H. Silverthorn, who took part in the attack on Belleau Wood, paid a special visit to the Center along with his wife on 11 September. They viewed the "Through the Wheat..." exhibit of World War I art then hanging in the Special Exhibits Gallery. Gen Silverthorn, who enlisted in the Marine Corps on 27 April 1917 and took part in the initial assault on Belleau Wood as a sergeant, was slightly wounded in the attack, and was commissioned just three days later on 9 June 1918.



Recalling his commissioning in 1918, LtGen Silverthorn indicates the location on a Belleau Wood map.



LtCol Waterhouse's painting won first prize at an art exhibition at the 7th New York Regiment's Armory.

WATERHOUSE WINS ART PRIZE

A painting he did 20 years ago as a civilian was entered by LtCol Charles Waterhouse in the Centennial Art Exhibition of the 7th New York Regiment Armory 27-28 September. Entries were to show some aspect of 7th Regiment history. Lt Col Waterhouse's painting showed the burning of Barnum's Museum during the 1863 draft riots. The colorful and exciting work shows the flaming building, escaping wild animals, a crazed mob, and 7th Regiment soldiers trying to sort out the mess. LtCol Waterhouse's was judged the best of show, winning the Colonel Abram Duryee Award of \$1,000.

MRS. STROTHER COMMENDED

Mrs. Regina Strother received a Certificate of Commendation for outstanding job performance as a researcher in the Still Photo Depository from March 1979 to March 1980. A cash award accompanied the certificate.

MUSEUM STORE VOLUNTEERS

The Washington Marine Officers' Wives Club reports that its members gave over 3,500 hours of volunteer service to seven organizations during the past year. Almost one-third of this total, 1,015 hours, was given by the 35 wives who work at the Marine Corps Museum store at various tasks from buying and bookkeeping to shopkeeping and fulfilling mail orders. The store provides visitors with books on Corps history and many items bearing the Marine emblem which are not obtainable elsewhere. The store is operated under the auspices of the Marine Corps Historical Foundation and profits go to the foundation to support its activities.