

successful even though there were no sightings or attacks on enemy submarines. This is substantiated by the fact that none of the ships escorted by ZP-41 were attacked or sunk.

In March 1945, a CNO dispatch ordered the withdrawal of ZP-42, the other blimp squadron in Brazil. This left ZP-41 as the only blimp squadron operating in the South Atlantic. As the war in Europe drew to a close, ZP-41's operations in April consisted primarily of ASW sweeps of shipping lanes. When the war ended in May, the squadron's mission was altered to one of air/sea and jungle rescue. All ASW operational sweeps were cancelled on May 15.

ZP-41 experienced various changes as other operational units were disbanded. The squadron remained in Brazil after the war to transfer the squadron's airships and material to the Brazilian government. However, on July 12, 1945, Brazil announced the termination of its LTA program, thereby precluding ZP-41's lend-lease transfer of its equipment.

Despite cancellation of the Brazilian program, ZP-41 continued its rescue mission. Operations were limited in August and September, with routine training as the major activity. In October, the squadron received a dispatch ordering personnel to prepare for disestablishment upon being relieved of

its rescue mission by the U.S. Army. By November 1945, the squadron was operating with only one airship, the K-52. Squadron personnel were reduced to two flight crews and a skeleton ferry crew, with training flights their only activity. On December 28, Lieutenant Commander Jack L. Nolen relieved Lt.Cdr. McLendon as commanding officer of ZP-41. The squadron's last airship, departed Sao Luiz, for NAS Glynco on January 18, 1946, the last U.S. airship to leave the South American area. On January 31, the squadron was disestablished.

The statistics (lower left) cover ZP-41's operations while assigned to Brazil during WW II:

## ZP-41

	1943	1944	1945*	Totals
Escort Flights	72	464	62	598
Hours	872	5,281	520	6,673
Patrol Flights	75	45	82	202
Hours	803	400	641	1,844
Other Flights	10	276	66	352
Hours	95	1,575	492	2,162
Ferry Flights	42	286	90	418
Hours	452	2,530	752	3,734
Training Flights	37	512	150	699
Hours	331	2,294	420	3,045
Night Escort Flights	—	4	—	4
Hours	—	57	—	57
Night Patrol Flights	—	1—	1	
Hours	—	12	—	12
Airships Assigned	3	7	4	
Flight Hours Per Ship	233	142	114	—
Airship on the Line	2	5	3	—
Flight Hours Per Ship	296	180	136	—
Total Flights	236	1,588	450	2,274
Total Hours	2,555	12,152	2,827	17,534
Ships Escorted	628	4,784	196	5,608

\*Jan to 15 May

## ZP-21 in the Caribbean

The Caribbean Sea was a vital area of operation for the U.S. and her Allies during the war. The region included the shipping lanes for merchantmen carrying their cargo between U.S. Atlantic ports and the ports of the gulf states, Mexico, Central and South America, as well as Africa and the Pacific. This concentration of shipping was a major drawing card for submarines. Enemy submarines could enter the deep Straits of Florida and the gulf stream via the Yucatan Channel and drift noiselessly with the gulf stream, making the area a profitable hunting ground.

Mission requirements for units operating in the Caribbean included: air coverage to surface units and convoys; observing and reporting suspicious vessels; protection of friendly shipping; assistance in rescue work; ASW patrols and attacks against subs; participation in ASW killer groups; assistance in convoy rendezvous work, including delivery of special convoy instructions; aid in laying and clearing minefields; and assistance in various types of utility missions.

The characteristics of the airship supported a wide variety of these services and ZP-21 was established to help combat enemy submarine activity in the northern and eastern Gulf of Mexico. On November 1, 1942, Airship Squadron 21 (later redesignated Blimp Squadron 21) was established at NAS Richmond, Fla. Commander Gerald D. Zurmuehlen became the squadron's first commanding officer. The squadron had an inventory of two airships, the K-18 and 19. The airships arrived in October and were immediately used for convoy escort work. Additionally, daily indoctrination flights were flown to acquaint crews with the general topography of the areas in which they would fly ASW patrols.

In order to provide ASW, rescue, escort and utility services in its area of operations, ZP-21 established a number

of detachments at advance bases. Throughout the war, the squadron had detachments located at: Santa Fe and Isle of Pines, Cuba; NAF San Julian, Cuba; NAS Banana River, Fla.; Meacham Field, Key West, Fla.; NAS Houma, La.; San Juan, Puerto Rico; NAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; and Chorrera, Panama.

During the first two years of operation, ZP-21 marked a record of 442 consecutive nights and 730 consecutive days of flying. These two records accounted for a total of 5,833 flights and 65,620.9 hours in the air. The squadron's mission involved escort, patrol, training, rendezvous, ferry and special activities. The services performed by ZP-21 during these missions included submarine contacts and attacks, search and rescue operations, and various assistance and services rendered to merchant shipping.

Two months after the squadron was established Lieutenant Commander Alfred L. Cope assumed command of the squadron from Cdr. Zurmuehlen. Intensive ASW patrol and escort missions were the daily routine, as well as search and rescue operation. There were also visits by VIPs from Brazil, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Chile and China. On June 19, 1943, the K-53, while on a night convoy escort patrol, made radar contact with an object six miles from the nearest ship in the convoy. The pilot of the K-53 decided to home in directly on the contact, but when the target was at a distance of one mile it disappeared from the radar screen. A MAD (magnetic anomaly detection) search was instituted with no results. The radar contact was evaluated as a "probable," and although the K-53 did not attack the suspected submarine, her presence probably forced the submarine to submerge, thus preventing it from making an attack on the convoy.

During WW II, LTA lost only one airship to enemy action. It occurred during a routine night patrol on July 18, 1943. ZP-21's K-74 departed NAS Richmond for an evening patrol at 1909. It was a moonlit night and visibility was excellent. The designated patrol area was off the southeast coast of Florida. At 2340 the airship's radar picked up a contact at a range of eight miles. The crew manned their battle stations and the K-74 headed for the contact, which was sighted at a range of one-half mile off the port side of the airship. It was a surfaced enemy U-boat silhouetted in the moonlight.

The submarine was cruising at 15-18 knots and the specific characteristics of the conning tower were evident to the airship's crew. K-74's pilot, Lieutenant N.G. Grills, believed the U-boat was of the 740-ton class. In order to keep the submarine in view, the K-74 made a turn to starboard in order to circle back around the U-boat. During this maneuver, the K-



74 lost sight of the submarine but was able to locate it again from its wake.

There was no indication that the U-boat had spotted the airship nor did it identify itself in any way. The decision was made to attack, and at 2350, the K-74 began her run against the U-boat, heading straight for the submarine's starboard quarter. When K-74 began her attack run, she was at an altitude of 250 feet, with a ground speed of 53 knots and a target angle of 30 degrees. As the airship approached the target the U-boat suddenly made a hard port turn and opened fire with two guns located aft of the conning tower.

Gunfire was immediately returned by the airship.

Until then the crew of K-74 believed they had not been spotted. The airship's return fire silenced the U-boat's guns momentarily. However, as the K-74 approached the submarine, the U-boat fired its heavier-caliber gun. One shot was fired as the K-74 approached and two more after she passed over the U-boat. The U-boat maintained heavy machine gun fire, which bracketed the K-74. The bullets hitting the airship bag

could be heard by the crew. The K-74 fired 100 rounds from her .50-caliber gun in less than 31 seconds. Orders were given to drop the airship's depth bombs as she began to cross the U-boat at a 15-degree angle. The bombardier pulled the releases, but the bombs did not leave the racks. It is believed he pulled the release handles to the selective notch in the quadrant. They locked because he failed to keep pressure on the release knobs which would have permitted movement of the handles to the "salvo" position.

When the airship passed over the U-boat, antiaircraft fire hit her engines. The starboard engine caught fire, but it was quickly extinguished by the mechanic. K-74's controls failed to respond after this and the airship began to ascend at a steep angle of attack. There was an attempt to gain control by throttling back on the port engine. The elevator wheel appeared to operate but it did not reduce the steep rate of climb. Rudder control was also inoperative. It is believed that the loss of pressure in the envelope (bag) caused it to sag, forcing the elevators up and making the rudder controls slack.

The K-74 began to fall, tail first,



equipment (radar and MAD gear) or disarming the bombs. He swam around the airship to rejoin his men, but was unable to locate them. He stayed alongside the fins of the airship for several hours. Then, believing they had left on the raft, he decided to swim the 36 miles to the Florida Keys.

Later that night, the remaining crew members returned to the airship. Four of the crew used her for buoyancy while the other five remained near the airship. The two groups of crew members in the vicinity of the airship were located at 0749 by a J4F assigned to ZP-21. The aircraft left the survivors and sought out USS *Dahlgren* which was in the area. While the men were waiting to be rescued, the K-74 finally sank at 0815, the morning of July 19. When she went under, her depth bombs detonated, but the blast did not injure any of the crew members. Before *Dahlgren* arrived to pick up the two groups, one man died in a shark attack. *Dahlgren* picked up the first group at 0945 and the second group at 1000. Lt. Grills swam six miles before he was sighted and rescued at 1930, after more than 19 hours in water.

The U-boat, which was identified as U-134 after the war, reported by radio its encounter and downing of the K-74. U-

**Left, the LTA air station at Houma, La., used by ZP-21 during WW II. Note the unique clam-shaped hangar doors, which are on tracks. Below, a ZP-21 K-ship overhead and members of the native ground handling crew at Santa Fe, Isle of Pines, Cuba, in early 1944.**

134's radio message indicated she had received some damage from the airship's attack. Her main ballast tank number five and diving tank number four had been damaged, but the U-boat was able to continue her patrol. The submarine was again attacked later in the day of July 19 by aircraft, and received severe damage to her battery. U-134 continued on patrol while attempting to make repairs.

On July 19 or 20, the submarine was discovered by fast-moving, land-based aircraft. Following this incident, the German Submarine Command on July 29 ordered the U-134 to return for repairs. En route to her home base, the U-134 ran out of luck and was sunk with all hands lost in the Bay of Biscay in August 1943. The data on the U-134's patrol was reconstructed from her radio reports by the German Submarine Command after she failed to return to her home port.

Evaluation of the loss of the K-74 produced several important conclusions. The airship failed to follow proper procedures by not immediately transmitting a contact report. Doctrine called for trailing tactics and not to attack until a submarine began to submerge (tactics not to be followed if friendly shipping was threatened by an attack from a submarine). Tactics called for the airship to work as a team with other antisubmarine units in prosecuting an attack on a submarine. It is suggested that the airship failed to follow some of the procedures required when an attack was to be made. Also, K-74 crew

towards the sea. The U-boat had ceased firing after the airship was about a half-mile from the submarine. Due to the steep angle of ascent, the airship's tail obstructed the view of the submarine. It is unknown what actions were taken by the U-boat after it quit firing.

The K-74 hit the water at a 30-degree angle, stern first, at approximately 2355. The rear of the control car filled rapidly with water, but all personnel were able to safely escape the sinking airship. However, they were unable to use the life raft that was tossed out when the airship hit the water. After the crash, a hole about a foot in diameter was seen between the nose battens.

Lt. Grills was able to throw the confidential folder overboard before he abandoned the airship. Watching the airship, it became apparent the K-74 was not going to sink immediately so he swam back to the airship. He entered through the elevatorman's window and found the deck covered with water and the section aft of the mechanic's panel completely submerged. Since the control car was quickly filling with water, he departed without destroying the special



members had not been adequately trained in the operation of life-saving equipment and survival. This incident indicated the need for more effective combat aircrew training, the need for better machine guns, less complicated bomb release gear on airships, and a better fuze for the depth bombs.

The debate over the vulnerability of the airships to anti-aircraft fire raged on after the loss. During the attack, mistakes were made by both sides. It appears that if the American crew had made fewer errors, the K-74 may have been successful in sinking the U-boat.

March 12, 1944, the M-2 airship landed at NAS Richmond. She was assigned to ZP-21, making the squadron the first fleet operational unit to receive and operate the new M-type airship. ZP-21 also received the M-3 and 4 later.

On March 12, 1944, the M-2 airship landed at NAS Richmond. She was assigned to ZP-21, making the squadron the first fleet operational unit to receive and operate the new M-type airship. ZP-21 also received the M-3 and 4 later. On August 15, the M-4 conducted the first night flight for an M-type airship. Besides ASW patrols and escort duties, the three M-type airships were utilized in a variety of other missions while assigned to ZP-21.



Above, VIPs from Saudi Arabia visiting ZP-21 in September 1943. Below, one of the new M-class airships assigned to ZP-21 during WW II. Note the massive size of the control car, which was almost three times as large as the K-class control car.



On April 15, 1944, Lieutenant Commander Henry C. Spicer became the third commanding officer of ZP-21 when he relieved Cdr. Cope. Lt.Cdr. Spicer remained until February 5, 1945, when he was relieved by Commander Jack H. Nahigian.

Special assignments were given to ZP-21 at various periods throughout the war. During November 1944, the squadron flew 16 special missions to assist in clearing a minefield in an area near Key West. The CNO had ordered the removal of this field, which was 45 miles long and consisted of approximately 3,500 mines. ZP-21's mission was to determine the value of MAD on submerged mines and on mines floating on the surface; the value of it quickly locating and assisting in the buoying of obstructions in the minefield, such as wrecks, etc; the general value of an airship in detecting gaps in the minesweeping formation by observation; the airship's value in shepherding stray mines and assisting surface craft in locating mines brought to the surface; to determine the airship's value as a mine disposal craft; to provide general utility services to speed up and increase safety of personnel in the operations; and to establish a standard procedure that might be used in any minesweeping operation.

The conclusions reached on ZP-21's participation was that "the airship is extremely valuable to any minesweeping operations since it increases safety to personnel, permits a definite check to be kept on mines that are brought to the surface, can dispose of mines in a much shorter time and with a much greater economy of ammunition than surface craft, can provide the officer in charge with accurate checks on proper station keeping on minesweepers to prevent holidays, can quickly and accurately locate wrecks and assist in buoying them, can provide assistance in innumerable ways to the entire surface force."

Many of ZP-21's special missions were photographic in nature. Flights were conducted to make motion picture training films and for experimental research. One unit of ZP-21 photographed smoke screen experiments being conducted by surface vessels. On May 22, 1945, after the cessation of hostilities in Europe, the squadron's primary mission was changed from ASW patrol and escort to utility and air/sea rescue. The next day all routine patrols were discontinued. ZP-21 was directed to fly only special missions as assigned during the summer and fall of 1945.

On October 5, Lieutenant Commander Donald W. Defay relieved Cdr. Nahigian and became the last commanding officer of the squadron. On November 5, K-93 made her last flight for ZP-21. The

## ZP-21 Operational Statistics

	1942	1943	1944	1945*	Totals
Escort Flights	18	153	6	10	187
Hours	253	2,352	79	127	2,811
Patrol Flights	57	1,566	561	128	2,312
Hours	741	19,931	6,657	1,556	28,885
Other Flights	2	127	199	239	567
Hours	23	1,222	1,575	1,835	4,655
Patrol & Escort Flights	—	71	32	20	123
Hours	—	983	422	259	1,664
Experimental Flights	—	6	8	—	14
Hours	—	27	48	—	75
Ferry Flights	12	126	197	71	406
Hours	165	1,287	1,396	602	3,450
Training Flights	—	369	883	89	1,341
Hours	—	2,448	4,625	398	7,471
Night Escort Flights	—	51	22	—	73
Hours	—	859	399	—	1,258
Night Patrol Flights	—	511	1,362	332	2,205
Hours	—	6,211	19,039	4,727	29,977
Night Escort & Patrol Flights	—	18	55	12	85
Hours	—	239	830	181	1,250
Airships Assigned	2	8	10	8	—
Flight Hours Per Ship	295	354	267	231	—
Airships on the Line	2	7	8	7	—
Flight Hours Per Ship	295	396	334	254	—
Total Flights	89	2,998	3,325	901	7,313
Total Hours	1,183	35,565	35,072	9,688	81,508
Ships Escorted	—	3,011	682	98	3,791

\*Jan to 15 May

squadron was officially disestablished on November 14.

### **ZP-14 in the Atlantic and Europe**

Airship Squadron 14 (later Blimp Squadron 14) was established at NAS Weeksville, N.C., on June 1, 1942, the third airship squadron to be established after the war began. Lieutenant Commander D. J. Weintraub became its first commanding officer. The squadron began operations with the airship K-8 which had arrived from NAS Lakehurst just before the establishment ceremonies.

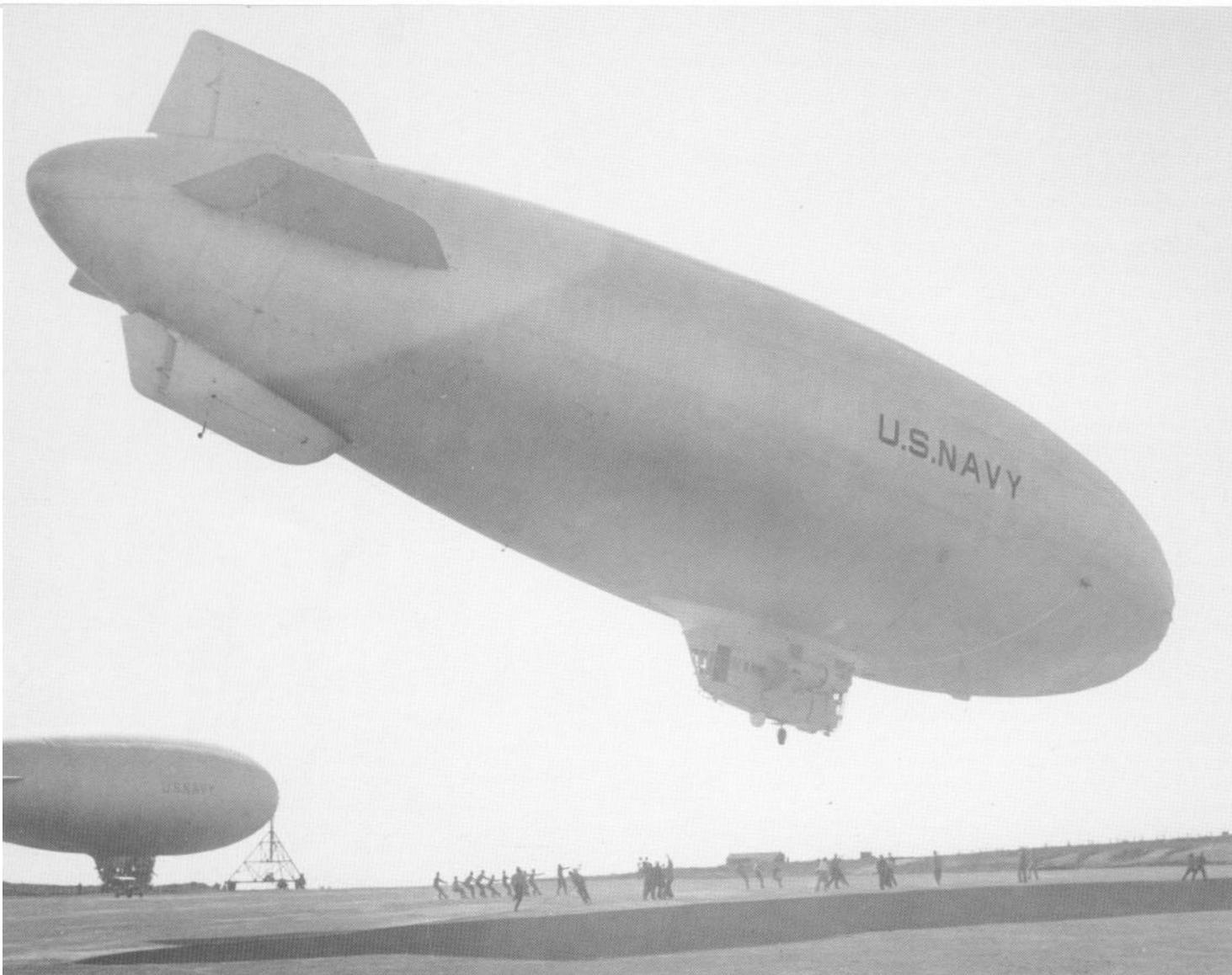
Patrols by ZP-14's airship were initially conducted from the Coast Guard Station

at Elizabeth City, N.C., utilizing an expeditionary mast (stick mast). The patrols continued from the Coast Guard station until the landing facilities at Weeksville were completed on June 8, 1942. The squadron was involved in extensive ASW activity during its first month of operations. The pace continued during the summer and fall. Numerous MAD contacts were made by the squadron's airships and many depth bombs were dropped on suspected targets.

On November 4, the squadron moved into hangar number one at NAS Weeksville, and on November 13, Lieutenant Commander W. A. Cockell assumed command. He served until relieved by Lieutenant Commander M. F.

D. Flaherty on July 17, 1943. Patrols and rescue missions were routine for ZP-14 during the rest of the year and into the spring of 1944. Lieutenant Commander H. B. Van Gorder assumed command on April 15, but he relinquished command on May 22 to Commander E. J. Sullivan.

Preparations for the squadron to deploy overseas began. ZP-14 was detached from NAS Weeksville and reported to Commander Fleet Airships, Atlantic for orders and eventual duty under the operational control of Commander Eighth Fleet. This was the end of ZP-14's operations stateside and the beginning of its tour in Africa and Europe. Operational statistics for the squadron while it was assigned to NAS Weeksville are as follows:



The K-114 and K-89 arrive at NAS Port Lyautey, Morocco, after a ferry flight across the Atlantic Ocean. These airships were assigned to ZP-14, operating in the Mediterranean Sea during WW II.

	1942	1943	1944*	Totals
Escort Flights	26	34	—	60
Hours	396	498	—	894
Patrol Flights	169	761	306	1,236
Hours	2,077	11,054	4,127	17,258
Other Flights	4	72	33	109
Hours	21	528	230	779
Patrol & Escort Flights	103	309	165	577
Hours	1,404	4,674	2,260	8,338
Ferry Flights	17	18	6	41
Hours	128	168	51	347
Training Flights	35	426	263	724
Hours	201	2,892	1,292	4,385
Night Patrol Flights	—	46	1	47
Hours	—	629	15	644
Night Escort & Patrol Flights	—	26	1	27
Hours	—	433	10	443
Airships Assigned	1	6	7	—
Flight Hours Per Ship	393	267	203	—
Airships on the Line	1	6	7	—
Flight Hours Per Ship	393	282	203	—
Total Flights	354	1,692	775	2,821
Total Hours	4,230	20,880	7,987	33,097
Ships Escorted	—	3,556	2,854	6,410

\*Jan to 22 May

The transfer of ZP-14 to its new home port at NAS Port Lyautey in French Morocco was an involved process. It progressed rapidly even though blimp squadrons were generally considered not very mobile. Four combat crews and a maintenance group made up the advance detachment that departed Norfolk on May 17, 1944, aboard USS *Rehoboth* (AVP-50). Their mission was to set up

ferry facilities in the Azores and a permanent LTA base in Morocco. They arrived in the Azores on May 24, and 10 members of the advance party disembarked to set up a temporary ferry station with two expeditionary masts. The ship continued on to Casablanca with the rest of the team. On May 27, they arrived at Craw Field north of Port Lyautey and began preparing the field for

airship operations.

ZP-14, with six K-type airships and specially designated personnel, officially detached from the NAS on May 22. The remaining personnel and airships that had been part of ZP-14 were redesignated ZP-24 Detachment 1 and remained at NAS Weeksville. The remainder of the squadron other than those involved in ferrying the airships, departed for Morocco on USS *Mission Bay* (CVE-59) on May 28. That same day the first two ZP-14 airships, K-123 and 130, began their transatlantic ferry flight from NAS South Weymouth, headed for Argentina, Newfoundland. They completed the first leg of the journey on May 29, arriving at Argentina. The two airships left the next day for the Azores, arriving on May 31. The final leg of the journey brought the airships into Port Lyautey on June 1. This was the first transatlantic crossing by a non-rigid airship.

The squadron began preparations for immediate operations following the arrival of the K-123 and 130. The primary mission of ZP-14 was to provide a MAD barrier at night in the Straits of Gibraltar. Other duties included escorting convoys, searching for survivors of downed aircraft, utility flights to calibrate radio equipment and other miscellaneous activities. Daylight MAD patrols were maintained by VPB-63 but, because of the low altitude required in these operations, the patrol squadron was unable to make the flights at night. In order to maintain a 24-hour barrier across the Straits, ZP-14 was called in to fly the low-level night MAD flights. The squadron's first flight was made two days after the airship's arrived. It was a training flight using K-123.

Operational patrols of the Straits did not begin until June 6, after all commands were briefed on the employment of airships in the Gibraltar area. ZP-14 flew two airships on patrol for the first time the night of June 10. Initially, the airships were flown under darkened conditions, using no running lights. The two airships passed within 1,000 yards of each other using radar for navigation to avoid a collision. This led the British to issue an order permitting ZP-14's airships to use their running lights when two or more airships were operating in the Straits at night.

On June 15, the second group of airships, the K-109 and 134, completed their ferry flight to Morocco. The last two ZP-14 airships, K-101 and 112, arrived on July 1, bringing the squadron's total complement of airships to six.

Barrier flights over the Straits generally included takeoff from NAS Port Lyautey at 1800 and arrival at about 2000. Maintaining a patrol altitude of 100 feet, the airship would be on station

until about 0630 and then return to the base around 0830, making the average patrol about 15 hours long.

Because of the long hours on patrol, the crew of the airship included four pilots and six enlisted men. The hazards of constant low-altitude flying were reduced by changing personnel every hour. Radar was used to keep the airship on her designated course between Point Bartolomeo, Spain, and Point Malabata, Morocco.

Nightly operational patrols were maintained by ZP-14 from June 6 to October 2, 1944. On October 3, the airships could not take off due to inclement weather. They had been on station for 119 days before weather forced a break in their operations, although the squadron's nightly patrols had been cut short on several occasions. On June 19, 1944, the two airships on patrol left the Straits and headed out over the Atlantic after being notified by the British at Gibraltar of the approach of enemy aircraft. This occurred several times during the first six weeks of operations by the squadron.

On July 2, the airships on patrol registered several MAD signals. Contact bombs were dropped, having negative results. During the airships' MAD barrier patrols, intelligence reports indicated that it was unlikely any enemy submarines had attempted to enter the Mediterranean via the Straits. To verify and emphasize the success of these patrols, various exercises were conducted with British, Italian and French submarines to test the procedures and tactics used by the airships and PBYs. A mobile mast was set up at Gibraltar to serve as an emergency landing field for ZP-14's airships. This was particularly important during periods when NAS Port Lyautey was engulfed in morning fogs. It also provided an airship returning from an all-night patrol with an alternate place to land. On June 18, the K-112 successfully landed and moored to the portable mast at Gibraltar. This was the first landing of an American airship in Europe since WW I and the first landing ever of an American-built airship in Europe.

Routine patrol missions were occasionally supplemented by duties as convoy escort. The squadron's first convoy escort mission was flown on June 26 from NAS Port Lyautey. Other utility missions were assigned to ZP-14 but on September 14, a major change in its mission requirements began to take shape. Two of ZP-14's combat air crews and a portable stick mast were flown to Cuers, France, in an R5D to establish airship facilities in anticipation of joint operations between an airship and surface craft for minesweeping. The K-112 arrived at Cuers on September 17

and began to conduct experimental mine spotting and plotting on September 20. The airfield at Cuers was still busy operating British Spitfires flying strafing missions. Toulon, 11 miles southwest of Cuers, had been liberated only 18 days before the arrival of ZP-14's advance team.

The K-112 conducted mine searches in the Gulfs of Juan and Napoule which were about 25 miles from the front. Occasionally, German reconnaissance aircraft would fly over the air station. The slow speed of the airship and the unobstructed view of the water made the blimp an ideal platform to spot and plot minefields. A dispatch from Commander Eighth Fleet on September 29 indicated the experiment in mine spotting, using airships, was successful and that airships were better suited to the mission than airplanes.

Actual minesweeping operations were conducted with surface vessels beginning on October 13. After two days of minesweeping, the joint operation between airship and surface vessels was successful and the minefield was cleared. This was the beginning of ZP-14's minesweeping operations in the Mediterranean Sea.

On October 19, 1944, Lieutenant Commander F.S. Rixey relieved Cdr. Sullivan as commanding officer of ZP-14. In the latter part of October, ZP-14 was ordered to conduct minesweeping operations in the waters off Tunisia. A stick mast was flown from NAS Port Lyautey to Sidi Ahmed Field near Bizerte, Tunisia, in early November.

On November 3, K-109 flew from Cuers, France to Bizerte, and carried on minesweeping operations there for two weeks. During those two weeks, a new base of operation was being set up at Cagliari on the island of Sardinia. When minesweeping in Tunisian waters was completed, the K-109 was flown to Sardinia and began operating from Cagliari on November 21, 1944. Numerous plotting and minesweeping operations were conducted by ZP-14 in the waters surrounding Sardinia. At the same time, barrier patrols continued in the Straits.

The airships at NAS Port Lyautey were also assigned escort, photographic and calibration missions. In early February 1945, the K-112 departed NAS Port Lyautey and escorted the U.S. naval convoy carrying President Roosevelt to the Yalta Conference. The airship remained with the convoy until it had passed Bizerte, Tunisia. In late February, the K-109 acted as escort for the President on his return voyage from the Crimea.

In March 1945, due to increased U-boat activity, the two airships operating minesweeping missions at Cuers and Cagliari were recalled to NAS Port

Lyautey, in order to increase the number of daylight convoy missions supported by ZP-14. The squadron continued its ASW missions until the war ended in Europe. Its last ASW mission was flown on June 6, 1945, when the squadron escorted a convoy of 55 ships exactly one year from the date it commenced its operations from NAS Port Lyautey.

ZP-14 had served almost a year in Europe with only six airships. Several of the airships had sustained damage but the squadron's personnel were always able to place them back in operation. On March 26, 1945, the K-109, moored at NAS Port Lyautey, was caught in an unexpected violent whirlwind and torn from her mast. The airship caught fire and was completely destroyed. In late March, the CNO ordered two more airships to be ferried to NAS Port Lyautey for ZP-14.

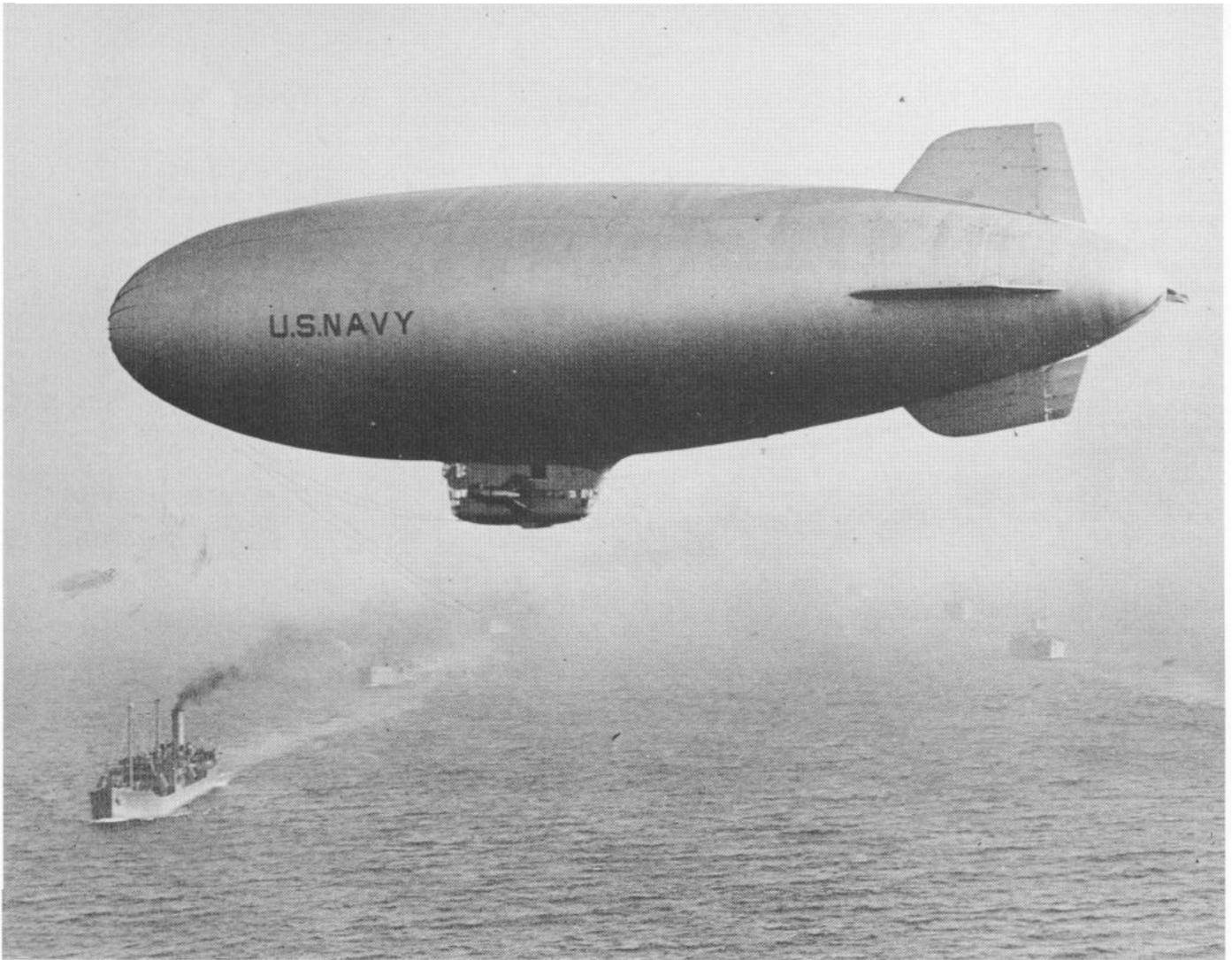
On April 28, 1945, the K-89 and K-114 departed NAS Weeksville on the first leg of their transatlantic crossing en route to Bermuda. From Bermuda, they flew to the Azores and then on to NAS Port Lyautey, arriving there on May 1.

With the end of the war in Europe, ZP-14's primary mission shifted from ASW patrol and escort to minesweeping, although it still carried out utility and search and rescue flights. From March 1945 to the end of hostilities, ZP-14 had airships flying minesweeping missions from Cuers, France; Pisa, Italy; Cagliari,

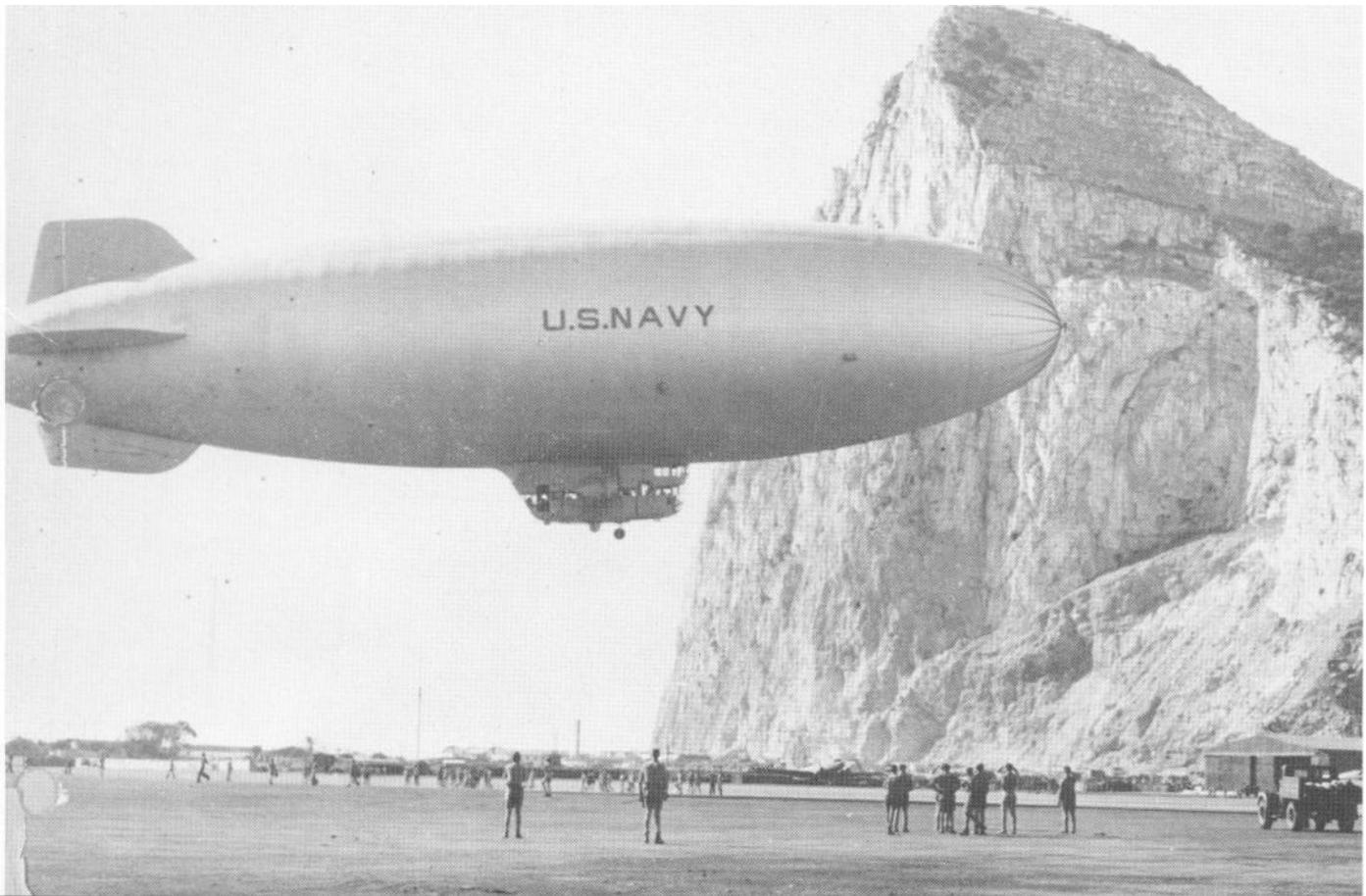


Above, a rare example of "nose art" on an airship. This airship was assigned to ZP-14 and used in mining operations in the Mediterranean.

Right, ZP-14's K-112 became the first U.S.-built airship to land on the continent of Europe when it touched down at Gibraltar on July 18, 1944.



A K-ship provides escort services to a convoy in the Atlantic.



Sardinia; and Littorio Field in Rome, Italy. After the fighting ended, ZP-14 continued its minesweeping from Cuers, France; Lido, Italy; the island of Malta; and Pisa, Italy. ZP-14 continued minesweeping during October 1945.

On October 17, Commander R.B. Bretland relieved Cdr. Rixey as commanding officer of ZP-14, at a time when the disposition of ZP-14 was still in question. The CNO had previously issued a directive authorizing continued operations into January 1946, when the squadron was to be disestablished. In November 1945, Commander Naval Forces North African Waters, Mediterranean Zone Mine Clearance Board and Commander in Chief Mediterranean (a British command) strongly recommended that ZP-14

continue its minesweeping operations. On November 15, the CNO ordered ZP-14 to go on with preparations for disestablishment because of personnel and material cutbacks resulting from general demobilization. The advance bases continued to fly operational missions until the last airship was ready for deflation. On December 15, 1945, ZP-14's airship K-114 was the last to be deflated. The majority of the squadrons' personnel departed from Marseilles on December 22, on board USS *Monticello* and arrived in New York on January 1, 1946.

ZP-14 had made a significant contribution to the war effort in Europe. The squadron was officially disestablished at NAS Lakehurst on January 22.

## ZP-12 Operations

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LTA's role during WW II was an active one right up to the cessation of hostilities. ZP-12, the first airship squadron to be established after the war began, discharged LTA's mission to the very end. Two of her airships, K-16 and 58, departed NAS Lakehurst on May 6, 1945, on a special MAD patrol. They were in search of an enemy submarine believed to be in an area east of Long Island, N.Y. By 0540, K-16 was in the area where SS *Black Point* had been torpedoed 12 hours earlier. The destroyer USS *Ericsson* directed the airship to make a MAD search of the area where several naval ships had made attacks on a submarine.

Strong MAD signals were received by

