

the operational control of the Fourth Fighter Command. After about a month the Fourth Antiaircraft Command was activated with Maj. Gen. F. Q. C. Gardner in command. The four antiaircraft brigades were then assigned to Gen. Gardner's command. Antiaircraft troops in Alaska (then part of Fourth Army and WDC) and the fixed antiaircraft defenses of the harbor defenses remained under control of the Fourth Army and the latter was coordinated with the units of the new antiaircraft command.

During the early days of the war, nerves were on edge and numerous unidentified planes on the board caused many anxious moments. One such plane was flying at high altitude over a city on the West Coast. Air Force, Navy, Marine and civilian representatives all claimed it was not theirs. Finally an order was issued to "scare the pilot by bursting a round near the plane." When this order trickled down to the Lieutenant commanding a 3-inch battery, he sweated over the problem—finally an order to fire reached a gun commander who fired the round set at SAFE.

The Fourth Antiaircraft Command grew and grew until it was the largest antiaircraft command in the United States. At its peak it had a strength of about 45,000 troops. Problems were worked out the hard way. There was little if any guidance from battle experience. They had to learn by trial, error and theory that radars functioned best in a saucer-shaped depression. Central tracer control of machine-gun fire was discarded in favor of individual tracer control. Conditions of readiness were worked out that were later adopted by other organizations. Much of the original work on fighter-searchlight cooperation was done here. The first towers for 40mm guns and M-5 directors were set up by the Fourth AA Command. General Gardner personally visited and passed on the adequacy of every site before a tower was constructed. It was a rare spectacle to see the "Old Man" perched high up on a fire ladder or clinging to a homemade contrivance on the top of a truck—which many a younger man would have hesitated to mount.

Each battery spent many hours camouflaging its installations, and some of the finished products were ingenious. There were many innocent appearing haystacks or tourist camps which suddenly turned into machine guns or nineties when the alert sounded. As there was no enemy action, it was necessary to fire periodic target practices to keep the trained personnel in shape and for training new personnel. Units would be moved out of position—a battery at a time—and proceed to a firing range. Good firing sites were difficult to procure because of fog, air traffic and dense population.

One site surveyed was perfect. There was unlimited firing range, no fog and very sparse population. Our request for the site politely bounced back from Washington many times—each time for a trivial reason. Over three years later when the A-bomb was dropped on Hiroshima the real reason was deduced. One of the Manhattan Project sites was contiguous to our dream site!

Balloons—An Innovation

The introduction of barrage balloons and smoke generating companies brought new problems. The Air Forces objected to the balloons because of danger to aircraft aloft. Unfortunately many of the airfields were close to the vital targets being defended. Household dwellers were fearful that the balloons were a fire hazard. Several of the aircraft manufacturers and utility companies made many protests. Unexpected or violent winds would tear the balloons from their moorings. In soaring away over the cities, the trailing steel cable had a most unfortunate predilection for caressing high voltage power lines with the resultant short circuit causing shutdowns of plants and dark streets and homes. Some of the balloons in San Diego made journeys to Mexico, and the Seattle "runaways" had a penchant for visiting Canada. As the balloons were scarce and valuable, it was customary to make an effort to retrieve them. In those early days anyone who entered Mexico or Canada on official business was authorized to wear an American Theater Ribbon. Ribbons were not as abundant then as later. Of course it was pure coincidence, but it was surprising how many high-ranking officers volunteered to be members of the reconnaissance parties dispatched to Mexico and Canada to search for the lost balloons.

One time a prospector, who lived in a cabin high in the mountains of California, saw a balloon drift down near his cabin. Hidden in his cabin, glancing furtively out of the corner of a window, he thought he was seeing a Jap dirigible. When he saw the word "JAP" printed in big boxcar letters on the front of the balloon, he was certain that the enemy was approaching. After about an hour of anxious waiting, however, no Japs appeared and the only action was the tossing and swaying of the balloon. Finally, the prospector bolstered up his courage, sneaked out of his shack and crept up on the balloon, discovered no occupants and saw that beyond the word "JAP" was printed the word "CATCHER." Some barrage balloon crew had named their balloon "Jap Catcher."

L.A. "Attacked"

There were no enemy air attacks on the West Coast. There were two submarine attacks by gunfire—one on Ft. Stevens, Oregon, and one on some oil docks north of Los Angeles. However there were many alerts, many blackouts, many alarms, and the antiaircraft troops were always in a pertinent condition of readiness. Prior to the battle of Midway there was a distinct tenseness all along the West Coast. We believed the Jap would attack Midway, but we also knew he could change his plans and attack any of the important cities of the West Coast. AA troops during this period were ready for any action. They were always ready for action, albeit sometimes overready or maybe even gullible—as was shown by the famous "Battle of Los Angeles." On Feb 26, 1942, the author was on a Staff visit to the 37th Brigade. Sometime after midnight I was awakened by the sound of gunfire. A quick glance through the window was not productive of any enlightening information. A quick trip to the roof of the hotel brought reward for the upward toil. It was a beautiful moonlight night, but the moon's



40mm Gun of the 430th AAA AW Battalion at Heerlen, Holland, in November 1944.

magnificence was dwarfed by the brilliant glare of nineties and three-inchers spewing fire to the heavens, the glare and noise of the bursting shells, the delicate sky tracery of red and green forty-millimeters and fifty-calibers arching lazily through the skies, and the brilliant incandescence of the searchlights probing the heavens, hither and yon—up and down.

A beautiful picture—a grand show! But at what were they firing? Imagination could have easily disclosed many shapes in the sky in the midst of that weird symphony of noise and color. But cold detachment disclosed no planes of any type in the sky—friendly or enemy. And suddenly all was quiet and only the light of the moon relieved the grim picture of a city in total blackout. I lingered on the roof, ruminated on what it was all about and was idly wondering if I could find my way to brigade headquarters through the blackout when all hell broke loose again. A cacophony of sound and a glaring brilliance again pervaded all! But soon it was over and quiet and darkness again descended on the awakened city. On my way to brigade headquarters next morning, screaming headlines in the morning papers told of the many Jap planes brought down in flames. At brigade headquarters there was much gloom. No one knew exactly what had happened. Maj. Gen. Jacob Fickel and Col. (later Maj. Gen.) Samuel Kepner flew down from San Francisco and with the writer constituted a board to investigate the firing. We interrogated approximately 60 witnesses—civilians, Army, Navy and Air commissioned and enlisted personnel.

Roughly about half the witnesses were sure they saw planes in the sky. One flier vividly described 10 planes in V formation. The other half saw nothing. The elevation operator of an antiaircraft director looking through his scope saw many planes. His azimuth operator looking through a parallel scope on the same instrument did not see any planes. Among the facts developed was that the firing had been ordered by the young Air Force controller on duty at the Fighter Command operations room. Someone reported a balloon in the sky. He of course visualized a German or Japanese zeppelin. Someone tried to explain it was not that kind of balloon, but he was adamant and ordered firing to start (which he had no authority to do). Once the firing started, imagination created all kinds of targets in the sky

and everyone joined in. Well after all these years, the true story can be told. One of the AA Regiments (we still had Regiments) sent up a meteorological balloon about 1:00 A.M. *That* was the balloon that started all the shooting! When quiet had settled down on the “embattled” City of the Angels, a different regiment, alert and energetic as always, decided some “met” data was needed. Felt it had not done so well in the “battle” and thought a few weather corrections might help. So *they* sent up a balloon, and hell broke loose again. (Note: Both balloons, as I remember, floated away majestically and safely.) But the inhabitants of Los Angeles felt very happy. They had visual and auricular assurance that they were well protected. And the AA gunners were happy! They had fired more rounds than they would have been authorized to fire in 10 peacetime years’ target practices.

Many changes in units and personnel occurred from Dec. 7, 1941 to September 1943 when the Fourth Army no longer had a part in the AA defense of the West Coast. Regiments and battalions were detached and sent on to the islands of the Pacific. New ones were sent in and took up positions vacated by the old outfits. Units were detached and sent to the Aleutians. We furnished the antiaircraft supporting units for the invasion of Attu (actual and bloody) and Kiska (where the cupboard was bare). Many changes occurred among brigade commanders. First to go was Brig. Gen. Le Roy Lutes of the 37th Brigade who went on to bigger and better things. He was followed by Brig. Gen. W. M. Goodman who soon left and acquired a second star. Brig. Gen. Dale Hinman followed and was succeeded by Brig. Gen. Francis Hardaway. Gen. Charles Curtis was transferred from the 33d Brigade and succeeded by Brig. Gen. Jack Colladay from Dutch Harbor. The 39th Brigade had 3 commanders, Brig. Gen. Oliver Spiller, Brig. Gen. Bryan Milburn and Brig. Gen. “Jimmy” Crawford in that order. Gen. Robinson retained command of the 101st Brigade all during this period.

Fourth Army—Now a Field Army

The separation of Fourth Army and Western Defense Command came in September of 1943 and certain personnel from the General and Special Staff Sections of Fourth Army and WDC were assigned as a nucleus of the Army Headquarters. The author, Major A. B. Droke, Chief Warrant Officer Jim Wilson, Sergeants Trumble, Bejesky, Sanucci, and Mitchell from Fourth Army and Lt. Col. (later Col.) Milan G. Weber, Operations Officer of Fourth AA Command were the nucleus of the new AA Section. The new Army CP was at San Jose, California. After a month of shakedown and organization the Fourth Army Hq. moved to Presidio of Monterey with the mission of training all Army Ground Forces units on the West Coast. The duty of the AA section was to coordinate the special training of some AA units that were awaiting shipment overseas.

In January 1944 the headquarters moved to Ft. Sam Houston, Texas, and took over the responsibilities of the Third Army which was preparing to move overseas. The Army had responsibility for the training of, and preparation for overseas movement of all Army Ground Forces units in the southern area. The AA Section concerned itself with the AA units. One of the Fourth Army responsibilities was control of the Louisiana Maneuver Area. To replace the