

## **George Washington Kenley**

September 2, 1921 – April 21, 2005

George Washington Kenley was born in Murray, the son of Charlie Kenley and Alice Belcher Kenley. He was a soldier in the Balloon Barrage Battalion. Kenley enlisted in Evansville, Indiana, on August 22, 1942. His enlistment took place a few months before the balloon battalion was created and developed at Camp Tyson, TN, on June 5, 1942, with African American personnel.

Camp Tyson was built in 1941 specifically for the training of the balloon barrage battalion and was the only one in the U.S. during WWII. The balloons were to be used to protect against coastal attacks. There were 37 officers and 648 enlisted men at Camp Tyson. The trainees were taught to fly, build, and repair the barrage balloons that measured 35 feet in diameter and 85 feet in length.

During WWI, the balloons had hovered over important buildings, such as steel mills and factories, and the balloons were tethered in place by steel cables. The balloons flew as low as 4,000 feet and as high as 10,000 feet. Three men were tasked with anchoring each balloon, though it was recommended that five men do the job.

The 320th Antiaircraft Artillery Balloon Barrage Battalion landed on the Normandy Beaches on D-Day, June 6, 1944. The 320th was an all-African American unit. The men secured the balloons along the coastline to obscure the view of German gunners. As the war continued, the balloons proved to be effective, but less so than they had been during WWI.

The Balloon Barrage Battalions were officially disbanded in December 1945. George W. Kenley was discharged on January 17, 1946, and returned home to Murray.

Danny Hudspeth

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**Sources:**

U.S. Social Security Applications and Claims Index (Ancestry); R. Parkinson, "Camp Tyson" in the online version of Tennessee Encyclopedia; The U.S. Army Barrage Balloon Program by James R. Shock; Ethnic and Racial Minorities in the U.S. Military: An Encyclopedia edited by A. M. Bielakowski; Images of America, Camp Tyson by S. McFarlin; Democracy's Negroes: a book of facts concerning the activities of Negroes in World War II by A. Furr; D-Day and the VLA barrage balloon battalion, an African American Registry website; and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File.

WWII Draft Registration Card, and WWII Enlistment Record (Ancestry)