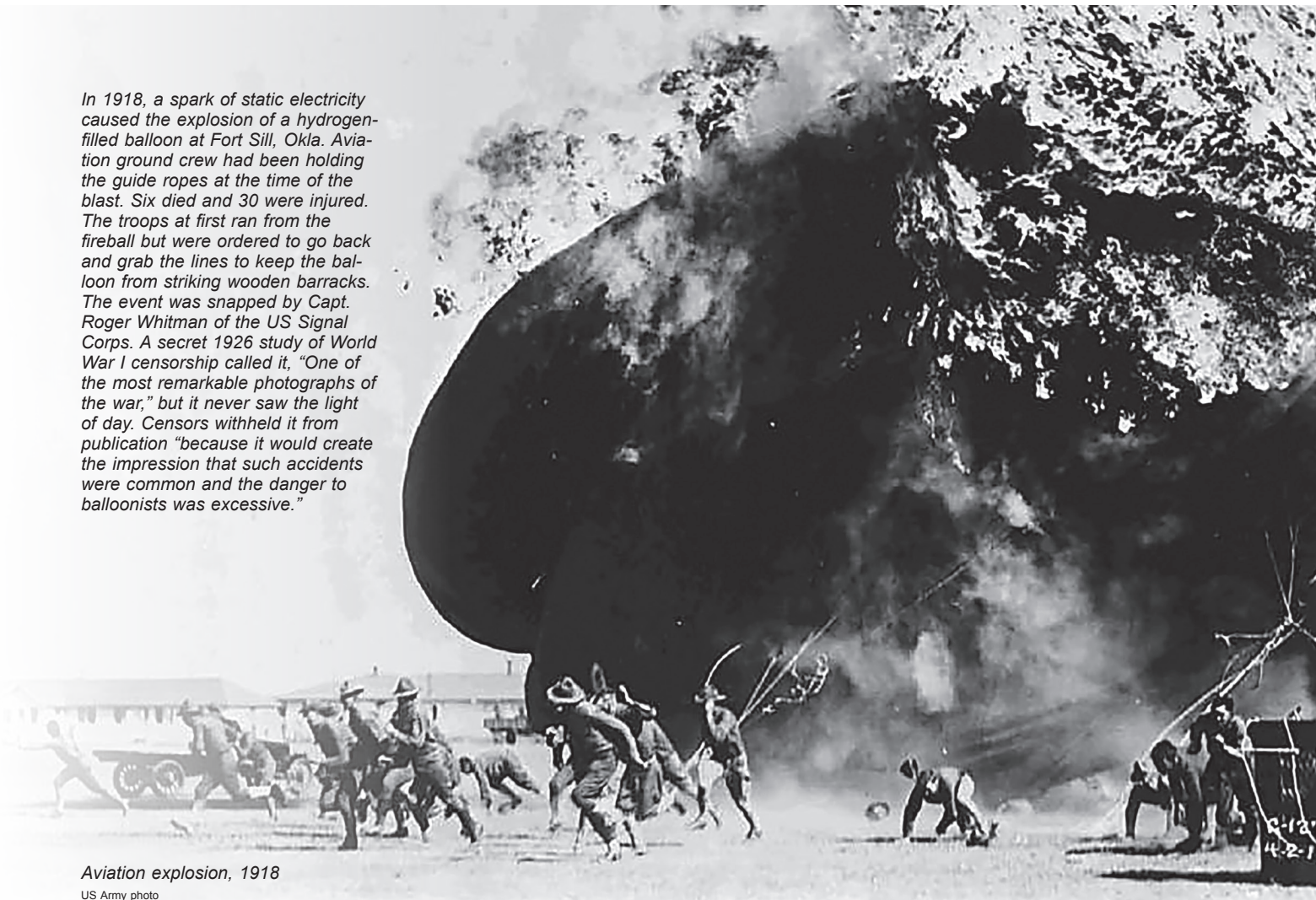


Kaboom!

In 1918, a spark of static electricity caused the explosion of a hydrogen-filled balloon at Fort Sill, Okla. Aviation ground crew had been holding the guide ropes at the time of the blast. Six died and 30 were injured. The troops at first ran from the fireball but were ordered to go back and grab the lines to keep the balloon from striking wooden barracks. The event was snapped by Capt. Roger Whitman of the US Signal Corps. A secret 1926 study of World War I censorship called it, "One of the most remarkable photographs of the war," but it never saw the light of day. Censors withheld it from publication "because it would create the impression that such accidents were common and the danger to balloonists was excessive."



Aviation explosion, 1918

US Army photo



Survivors regroup

US Army photo



Two balloons in a hangar at Fort Sill, May 1, 1918

National Archives photo