

At this time, the Royal Flying Corps consisted of the Naval Wing and the Military Wing. The Naval Wing at Farnborough was concerned with airships and were assisted by No. 1 Squadron of the Military Wing. So far as I saw, most of the military personnel were ex-members of the old Kite and Balloon Section of the Royal Engineers, from which the Military Wing had been formed. They were the real pioneers of military aviation and we honoured them as such.

To get the old "Beta" into the air was an achievement, but believe me, to get her down again was an adventure. She certainly had a mind of her own!

Let us watch the ground party and crew at work.

The great doors of the airship shed stand ajar. The blunt nose of the ship begins to emerge. Slowly the huge, neat envelope comes into view. We read the name "H.M.A. BETA." Scores of ropes hang from the envelope, each one held by a member of the ground party. We glance at the gondola. It seems just a flimsy, railed-in platform, hardly strong enough to support the two engines mounted to port and starboard. A huge canvas windscreen has been spread to ensure safe handling, but the breeze is already making itself felt, judging by the slight tossing of the ship. Out she comes, on to the aerodrome, the movement controlled by a flight sergeant with a megaphone. (This instrument, I may say, he seldom used as his voice would have given a foghorn a red face). The ship is brought round, bow to wind. The crew and pilots, (about seven in all) take their places in the car. The ground party hang on to the ropes like grim death. Every now and again, a member is lifted off his feet. All eyes are on the flight-sergeant, whose temper is strained, not unlike the ropes, to breaking point. At last the propellers are made to rotate, then hold hard, everyone, for the running up of the engines. All's well. Engines throttled down once again. All now alert for the cast-off signal. But it doesn't come. What's the delay? The exasperated sergeant runs to the pilot. A few words and a mechanic is sent to the hangar. Back he comes. Behind him a chap with a camera under his arm. The/

photographer is not in a hurry, evidently he is out to make the most of the occasion! The sergeant, however, thinks otherwise. No sooner had our friend of the camera bent over to deposit his luggage in the car, in fact he is still leaning over the rail, when the whistle is blown. This is the appointed signal for all hands to let go and up shoots the gallant Beta into space. Luckily, our photographer friend hasn't time to step back, if he had, it would have been his last! A brawny hand comes from inside and grabs him on the part that is most fleshy and least sunburnt and hauls him inboard. An undignified ascent for the cameraman!

We watch the airship as she climbs to her element, until she finally disappears from view, off on a cross-country flight, with the cameraman doing his stuff! The landing party retire to the shed to perform various duties and then stand by for the landing.

After an hour or so, the Beta is sighted in the distance. The flight sergeant, noting the wind's direction, takes his party and any spare hands he can find, to the top of the aerodrome, so that the ship, in landing, can have the wind against her, acting as a brake. All the skill of the pilot is needed for the operation of landing. His job is to drive the ship as near to the ground as he dares, so that the guy ropes may be secured by the ground men. And this is where the fun starts!

Round comes the gasbag. Passes over the aerodrome at about 100 feet. Engines throttled down. Gradually, she nears terra firma, cruises along steadily at about twelve miles an hour, but still too high for the men to reach the ropes. Any slackening of forward speed would mean more height. By this time, the party ^{has} ~~has~~ chased her half way down the field! Still she shows no inclination to come lower. The pilot decides to increase speed a little and drive her down. In this he is successful, but a little speed to him is quite a lot to the breathless army beneath, and we have the comical spectacle of 100 men going full out, jumping and snatching at swinging guy ropes, cursing and swearing at airships and their antics. Well may they allude to airships as "she's". Femininity exemplified!

The farther extremity of the aerodrome is getting perilously near, half the army is temporarily "hors de combat" nothing for it

but to try again. The ship climbs into space and makes a wide detour to enable the men to return to the top again. The next attempt is a little bolder and, it seems, more strategic. Coming down to just a few feet over the sheds this time, the pilot drives her fast near the ground, ropes trailing, then cuts the engines right out when near the ground men. Risky, but effective. The ropes are quickly seized; A few hangers-on get a free joy-ride and minor aerial trips before their combined weight is brought to bear on their unruly mistress. Better that, than another cross-country sprint, they muse!

The flight sergeant assumes command. Under his bellowed instructions, the vessel is gradually enticed into her abode, not without sundry exhibitions of temper en route, each one calling for suitable reprimands from her overlord the sergeant, who controls her caprices wonder fully. What a pity his able influence is confined to terra firma, we conclude.

So much for lighter-than-air craft.

I approach now to an event of some note in my story. I had been about four weeks at the Depot by this time, and the eagerly awaited day arrived when I was told to report for my uniform. As we were the very first boys to be enlisted into the Royal Flying Corps, our uniforms had had to be specially made, those in stock being too big to fit us, hence the delay. I can still feel in retrospect, the thrill I experienced when, for the first time, I tried on my tunic with the magic words "ROYAL FLYING CORPS" on each shoulder! Here was something to make you forget kippers for breakfast and to inspire you to higher things, the latter in more senses than one!

Well, struggling along the main Farnborough road, with a full kit bag plus an overcoat and a spare pair of boots, I had halted for a brief rest, when Colonel Cody passed over me in his flying cathedral, very low, I watched him fly away until he disappeared over the trees in the distance. I had seen a passenger in the machine. Continuing on my way, I had hardly reached the barracks when the word went round that the gallant Cody had been killed, along with a passenger, Lieut.