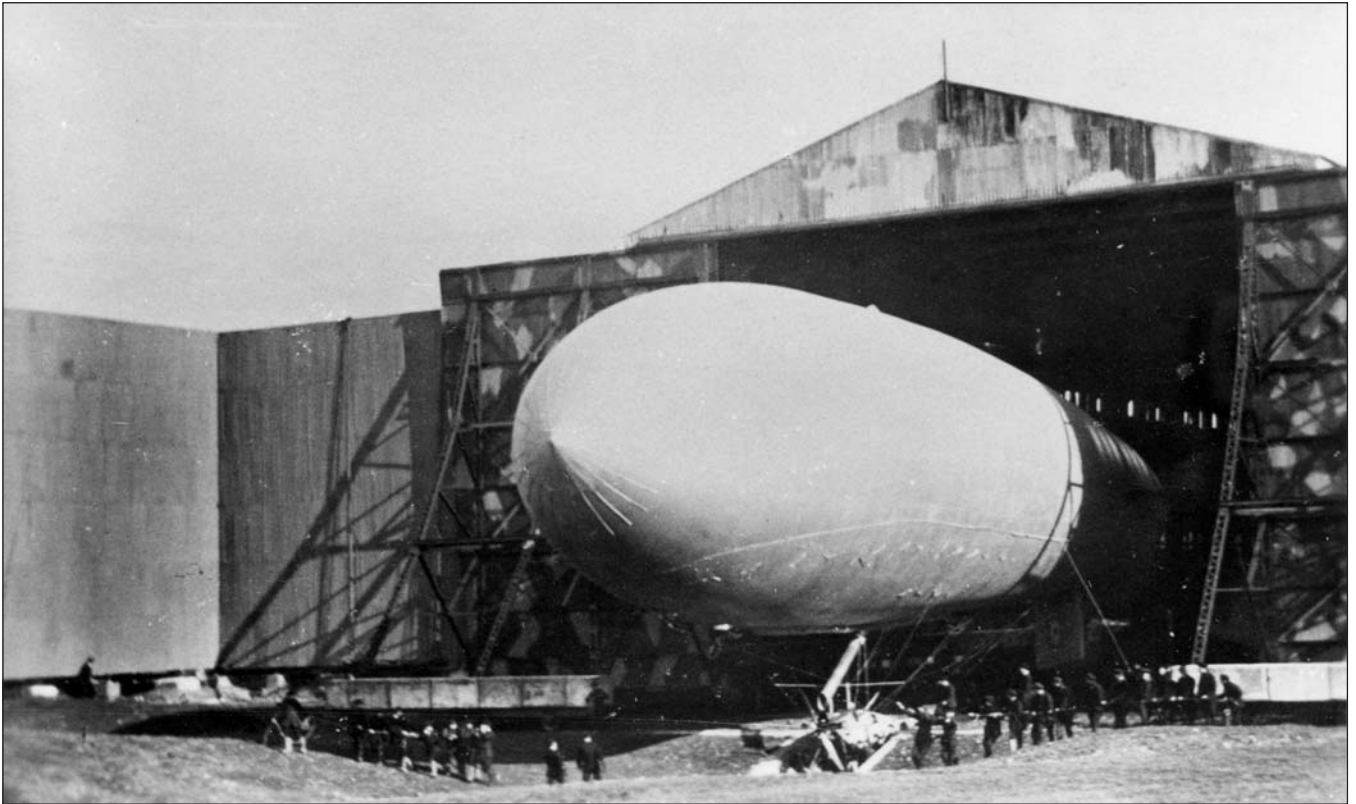


# THE RNAS AIRSHIP SERVICE & THE AIR CONSTRUCTION CORPS

## Part 2

by Peter Wright



No 1 Shed at Polegate with SS13 emerging on 26 February 1917. Her car is clearly shown in the floor recess that ran the length of the shed, from the exterior depression in the ground. :R C Ashworth via JMB/GSL

### POLEGATE Class 'C' Station

This operational patrol station in Sussex was allied to Capel in providing cross-channel cover to shipping plying between the UK and the French Continental ports and watching coastal waters over the stretch Dungeness to Portland Bill. Sited approximately four miles north west of Eastbourne, the station was commissioned on 6 July 1915, operating mainly SS and later SSZ types of airship. It had two sub-stations, at Slindon near Arundel (commissioned 28 April 1918, Commanding Officer Capt E.L. Bartley) and Upton near Poole (commissioned 23 April 1918, Commanding Officer Capt D. Knowles DSC).<sup>35</sup> At both these sites, the staff were housed under canvas. Polegate came under overall command of the Vice-Admiral Dover but in July 1917 passed to Portsmouth Command.

The station had a pair of SS type sheds, No 1 constructed by Sir William Arrol & Co Ltd, 322ft long by 70ft wide by 50ft high; the other, No 2, by Marshall Fox at 316ft long by 70ft wide by 50ft high, for a total cost of £16250. Being a Category 'C' Station, its complement was five SS type dirigibles with 21 officers and 271 other ranks. From January 1917 to March 1918 the Commanding Officer was Flt Cdr Ivor Fraser, then Maj J.B. Cole-Hamilton took over.

No 1 shed had a large hollowed outer pit at its southwest entrance, which led to its lower floor, thus facilitating containment of an airship car and giving increased headroom for the envelope below the roof trusses and gable end. The two adjacent sheds were laterally linked across the gap

between them, at both ends, by angle-iron and corrugated sheet wind-breaks erected by the Air Construction Corps. A silicol gas plant was installed, producing 5000 cubic ft per hour.

In July and August 1916, experimental parachuting trials were in hand, with the dropping of dummies from SS13. Finally a live drop was successfully carried out by Sir Bryan Leighton using a Calthrop 'Guardian Angel' chute. By January 1917, the ACC had on site two officers and 65 men

