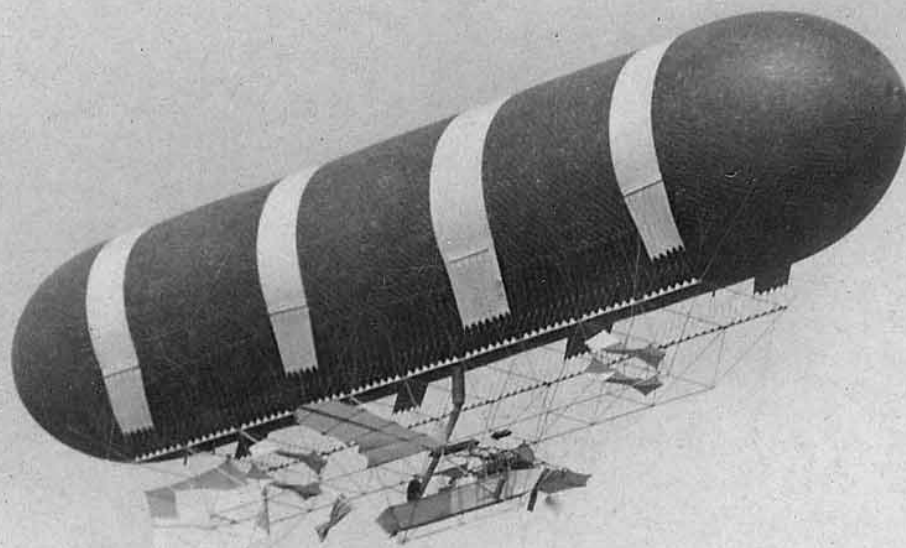


CLIVE MAITLAND WATERLOW

by Ray Sanger



On 20 July 1917, at the Royal Naval Air Service Training Establishment at Cranwell, it was a typical overcast summer's day with a light breeze of not more than four or five mph. A landing party was walking airship SS.39 back to its shed after an instructional flight. Although a routine operation, on this occasion they were being supervised by the Commanding Officer of the Airship Training Wing, Wing Commander Waterlow. He was confident that his men were well trained and would obey instructions to the letter. Suddenly the airship began to lift off. As instructed many times, the landing party let go of the ropes, all except, that is, Waterlow and two of the party, PO Mech Maurice George Collins and AMII Simon Lightstone. For some reason these three men sprang forward and grasped the fore starboard guy just as the airship leapt into the air and quickly gained height. The three men hung on as well as they could but as their grips weakened they fell one by one to their deaths.

The SS.39 later made a free balloon landing about one and half miles east of Cranwell village and was ripped but



otherwise it suffered little damage. The event was witnessed by FSL Bertram who wrote in his diary as follows;

'Whilst waiting to go up solo in a scout, I saw an airship piloted by a young pupil who came in to land and some men grabbed the mooring hawser. However the pupil did something which took the airship up with Col Waterlow, who commanded the airship Flight and 2 or 3 airmen hanging on the wire hawser. The pupil related afterwards how he leaned out over the edge of the control cabin and saw these men. Col Waterlow felt himself slipping down onto the man beneath on the wire and the wire was cutting his hands. Shouting to the others to hold on, he jumped or fell off and landed with a sickening thud from 800ft right in front of

our hangar. This so unnerved me that I couldn't face going solo on a new type at once, so I slid off the trestle where I sat awaiting being called and disappeared until flying for the day ceased.'

Thereby ended the distinguished career of the able and dedicated airshipman Clive Maitland Waterlow.

Lt Clive Waterlow was involved in this inaugural flight of the first British Army Airship, Nulli Secundus, at Farnborough on the morning of Tuesday 10 September 1907. After this flight the stabilising wings amidships were removed and never replaced. A small balloon released to check wind speed and direction is visible to the right of the airship.

Inset: Clive Maitland Waterlow in his Royal Engineers' uniform with pilot's wings.

