The London Balloon Company

By Michael J Dunn

The first units of what is now the Royal Auxiliary Air Force were raised in 1925. However, 18 years previously, in 1908, a little known unit of the Royal Engineers (Territorial Force) was formed, becoming the first unit of the UK's reserve forces that was specifically tasked with an aviation-related role. The London Balloon Company (T) only existed for five years, but, during this brief period, its experiences mirrored those encountered by many of today's reserve units. The London Balloon Company (LBC) was the only Territorial Force balloon company ever formed. Prior to 1925, only one other reserve forces 'aviation' unit was ever created. The Hampshire Aircraft Parks RFC (T) was established during the Great War, from staff at the Royal Aircraft Factory, Farnborough and was disbanded in 1919. The purpose of this article is to describe the development of the LBC and the context in which it existed.

An Era of military reform

The formation of the LBC can be set against the background of two major factors in the evolution of the UK's armed forces: Haldane's Army Reforms and the evolving emergence of military aeronautics in Britain. In 1905, Richard Haldane became the Liberal Secretary of State for War, a post he held for seven years. During this time, he introduced a series of major reforms that helped prepare the British Army for the forthcoming war with Germany. The reforms included the formation of the Imperial General Staff, the setting up of the British Expeditionary Force, the creation of the Special Reserve and the Officer Training Corps, and the improvement of the Army's medical services. They also included the total re-organisation of the reserve forces (Volunteers and Yeomanry) into the Territorial Force (later to become the Territorial Army). The TF was set up as a properly structured Home Defence Force of

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14 infantry divisions and 14 cavalry brigades. The TF's establishment, which included 203 infantry battalions and 56 cavalry regiments, was set at a maximum strength of 302,000. The TF came into existence on 1 April 1908 — a date that marked an important step forward in the professionalism of Britain's reserve forces. Specialist support units such as the LBC were raised in order to give the TF a properly balanced force structure. This was a period of renewed public interest in Britain's reserve forces. This was a time when serious consideration was given to how best they should be organised and employed in support of the country's relatively small regular forces.

Military ballooning

In 1908, military aviation in the UK was still in its infancy and ballooning was very much the focus of British military aeronautics. The design and operation of military balloons by the British Army in the first decade of the 20th century was based very largely on the experience built up in South Africa. Balloon sections were mobile units, able to operate close to the front line. Units could follow the line of advance by towing their inflated balloon. A captive balloon was fixed to a steel cable attached to a manually-operated winch, mounted on a horse-drawn, GS wagon. The wagon also carried the deflated balloon, plus ancillary equipment. Hydrogen was stored in heavy, steel cylinders that were carried on specially modified wagons. In the field, hydrogen was manufactured by the zinc-acid process. However, this task was not the responsibility of the balloon sections. Military balloons varied in size but the 10,000cu ft balloon was typical. They operated at heights of 1,000-1,500, in winds up to 25mph. Their role was primarily observation, but it was soon extended to include spotting for artillery. Communication was initially by dropped messages. However, a telephone link was later incorporated with the balloon cable and communication became two-way and immediate. When conditions were right, two observers could be carried. Good map reading and drawing skills, plus powerful binoculars and a plentiful supply of coloured pencils, were essential tools for these aeronauts.

The early years of British military ballooning

Following the use of balloons by the US Army in the American Civil War, an interested group of British Army officers started to experiment with hydrogen-filled balloons. Over the next quarter century, British military aviation began to evolve. Although official interest was limited, in 1878, the Army Balloon Equipment Store was set up at Woolwich. The unit was part of the Corps of Royal Engineers and came under the control of the Director of Fortifications and Works. Captain J L B Templar, of the Middlesex Militia, was appointed as its instructor and over the next 25 years he became instrumental in the development of ballooning within the British Army. The British Army first used observation balloons operationally during the Bechuanaland (1884) and Sudan (1885) campaigns. In 1890, a permanent Balloon Section of the Royal Engineers was formed, together with the Balloon Depot and Factory and, in 1892, the *School of Ballooning* was established. The first successful, more general operational use of balloons was during the Second Boer War (1899-1902). Three balloon sections were deployed to South Africa and participated in many actions. No 1 Section took part in the Battle of Magersfontein, No 2 Section was besieged throughout the Siege of Ladysmith and No 3 Section formed part of the force that relieved Mafeking. Their successes lead to a wider acceptance of the view that balloons could make valuable a contribution to the conduct of modern warfare.

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In 1902, Arthur Lynch who commanded the Boer's 'Irish Commando', said that balloons, on many occasions, had "saved the British forces from disaster, or enabled them to discover ambuscades and stratagems of the Boer commanders". He added "The Boers took a dislike to the balloons . . . the balloons were a symbol of the scientific superiority of the English which seriously disquieted them".

Lessons from the South African War

The South African War clearly demonstrated the value of balloons in a military context. However, the limitations of balloons were also recognised. Their inability to manoeuvre 'at-will' restricted commanders to only the immediate tactical picture. Balloons were unable to operate in bad weather (they were limited to winds of up to 25mph) and restricted to altitudes of 1,500ft. The higher a balloon ascended, the more it was inclined to pitch violently across the sky, making observation difficult and life very uncomfortable for the unfortunate observer. Spherical balloons were prone to rotate on their vertical axis. This made continuous observation for a fixed location extremely difficult. In South Africa, major problems were encountered due to the height above sea level at which the balloons were flown. This affected their carrying capacity. The standard 10,000cu ft balloons were often only able to operate with one rather than two observers. To overcome this problem, larger capacity balloons were deployed. A further problem with the use of balloons concerned communication. The use of telephones lines allowed immediate, two-way communication between the balloon observers and their ground crew. However, it was difficult to control the indirect fire of guns that were several miles distant. During the war, the installation of wireless sets in balloons was seriously considered. However, this was eventually ruled as unsafe owing to the possible danger from a spark from the set's induction coil. By the end of the Boer War, captive, hydrogen-filled, spherical balloons had virtually reached the peak of their technological development and a practical alternative was needed.

Developments following the South African War

The years between the end of the Second Boer War and the outbreak of the Great War saw a revolution in British military aviation. Initially, efforts were concentrated on applying the lessons learned in South Africa. These lead to improvements in the design and operation of balloons, and in the organisation of ballooning, within the British Army. At the same time, Britain began the construction of its first, powered dirigible, and for a number of years, the airship seemed to be the future direction of manned flight within the UK. It was only after the first successful flights by the Wright brothers in 1903 that a growing realisation of the potential of heavier-than-air aircraft began to evolve.

In January 1904, the report of an Army committee, set up to enquire into the future of military aviation, was published. The committee investigated the role of ballooning in the South African War and the progress made in aviation by other nations. The committee recommended

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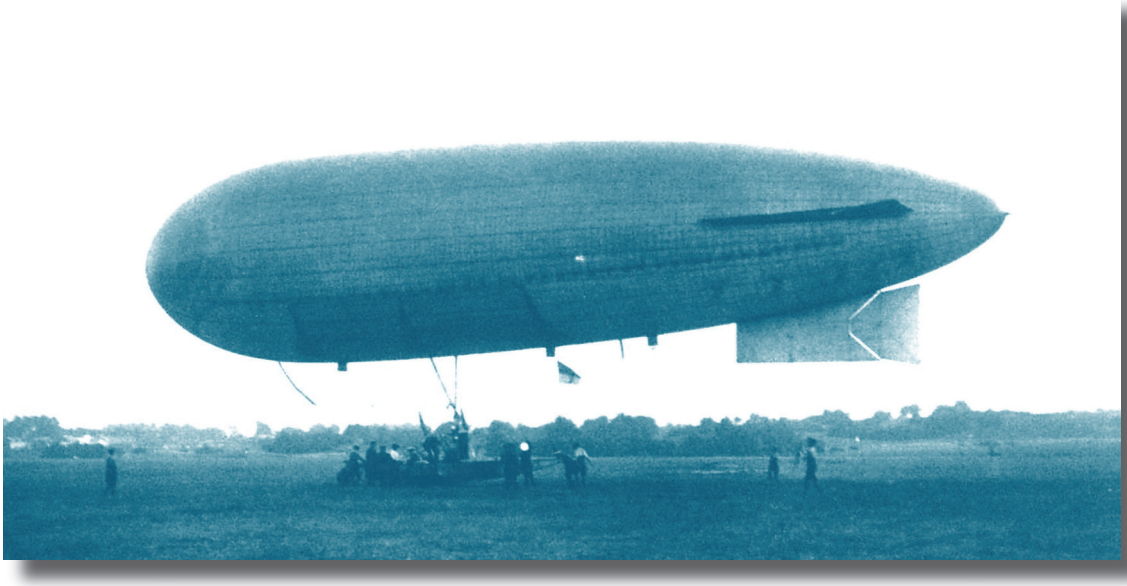
reform of the balloon sections, the deployment of an airship by the British Army and the movement of the Balloon Factory to a larger site. In 1905, six Balloon Sections (later Balloon Companies) were established, one for each army corps. In practice, there was only ever sufficient manpower and equipment to deploy two full time units. In 1905, the Army Balloon Factory and the Balloon School (which, by then, incorporated the field units) began moving from their restricted site in Aldershot to Farnborough. Between 1903-1910, the Commandant of the Balloon School was Colonel J E Capper RE. In 1906, he was also appointed as Superintendent of the Balloon Factory. He held this post until 1909, when he was replaced by a civilian, Mervyn O'Gorman. It was the enterprise and enthusiasm of Colonel Capper, and his early recognition of the potential of airships and, more importantly, of heavier-than-air aircraft, that helped drive British military aviation out of the ballooning era it first entered over 30 years earlier.

Ballooning

During the interwar years, experimental work was carried out at Farnborough in the handling properties of different shaped balloons (spherical and elongated), the use of mechanical winches to fly and to haul down balloons, the improvement of photography from balloons and the use of traction engines to haul the balloon wagons. A specially designed, limbered balloon wagon, which improved balloon handling and could transport balloons and kites, was introduced. Balloon handling drills were refined, balloon training systematically developed and co-operation with the artillery became a regular feature at their practice camps. Balloon sections also attended the annual divisional field days and army manoeuvres.

An important development that took place in 1904 was the introduction by the British Army of manned kites to supplement its captive balloons. The kite system that was adopted was designed by Samuel Cody. In October 1908, Cody made the first, officially-recognised flight in a heavier-than-air aircraft in the United Kingdom. Cody was made responsible for the design and manufacture of kites at the Balloon Factory and was appointed as kite instructor at the Balloon School. The kites were manned and operated by the Balloon Sections of the Regular Army. Cody's system was based on a series of pilot and lifter kites, attached to a steel cable, which were used to carry the cable aloft. When sufficient height and cable tension had been achieved, a carrier kite, to which was attached a manned basket, would ascend the cable. The passenger controlled ascent and descent by working a system of lines and brakes that effectively allowed the basket to climb up or down the cable, as required. Typically, a man-carrying kite could operate in winds of between 20 and 50mph, at a height of around 1,000ft. In May 1905, Lieutenant Broke-Smith set a new manned altitude record by reaching a height of 3,340ft. Much of the equipment needed to fly kites and balloons was common to both devices: winch, cable and basket, and similar drills were used for flying and for hauling down. Kites were cheaper and more easily transported than balloons. They required no additional transport, were less vulnerable to artillery fire and could be used when it was too early to send up a balloon. Balloons and kites were seen as being complementary and a set of kites was eventually carried by each balloon section. Kites were still available when the RFC was formed in 1912.



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Airships

By the beginning of the 20th century, both France and Germany had successfully flown airships powered by internal combustion engines. It was Santos-Dumont in France and, more particularly, Zeppelin in Germany who took these navigable balloons beyond the experimental stage. In 1901, Colonel Templer, superintendent of the Balloon Factory, persuaded the War Office, to authorise the development of Britain's first airship. Design work on the experimental Dirigible No. 1, 'Nulli Secundus', began at the Balloon Factory in 1902. Progress was slow and was hampered by lack of funds. Colonel Capper took eventually over from Colonel Templer responsibility for its design and completion. Delays were caused because of problems in finding a suitable engine and a 50hp engine was eventually purchased from France. The maiden flight of 'Nulli Secundus' took place in September 1907. It was piloted by Colonel Capper, with Samuel Cody in charge of its engine. 'Nulli Secundus' was a non-rigid type, 122ft long, 26ft in diameter, with a 55,000cu ft, cylindrical envelope. In 1909, 'Nulli Secundus' was followed by Dirigible No. 2, 'Baby'. 'Baby' was a small airship designed to test the pisceform shape of the balloon. It was soon re-designed, enlarged and re-named 'Beta'. In 1910, 'Beta' participated in the annual Army manoeuvres, flew more than 1,000 miles and made a notable night flight from Farnborough to London, and back. Later the same year, a third experimental airship, the 72,000cu ft 'Gamma', was also built at the Balloon Factory. Both airships were still in use when the Royal Flying Corps was formed in 1912.

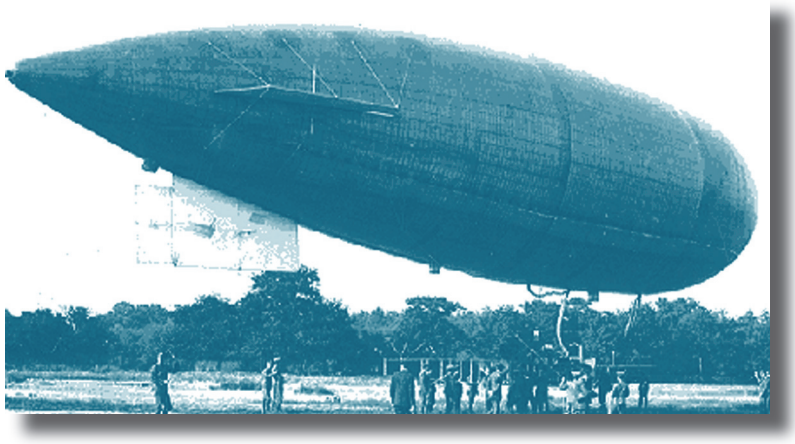
Whilst Britain made steady, but relatively slow progress, in airship development, Germany moved steadily ahead, developing the Zeppelin as a weapon of offence. By the start of the Great War, Germany possessed 10 of these giant, rigid airships, and the infrastructure to support them. An element within the British military establishment, also promoted the airship as future direction of British military aviation. Foremost amongst them was the War Minister, R B Haldane. He used his influence and authority to direct government resources towards airship, rather than aircraft, development and pursued a policy of promoting the Balloon Factory to a predominant

position over the fledgling British military aviation industry.

Aircraft
Following the success of the Wright Flyer in 1903, Colonel Capper visited the USA and met the Wright Brothers. He became an advocate in all forms of aviation, including manned aircraft. On his return, he reported enthusiastically on the potential of aircraft in the reconnaissance role. He then embarked on several years of negotiations, trying unsuccessfully to persuade the British government to purchase the Wright Flyer. By 1907, under Capper's direction, the Balloon Factory was authorised to begin experimental work on the design and construction of the British Army's first, manned aircraft. Progress, which was made by trial and error, was restricted by the lack of suitable engines and limited by a shortage of funding.

Lieutenant C W Dunne supervised the development of an aircraft based on his own, revolutionary design. Successful trials were eventually carried out, but not before the maiden flight of Army Aircraft Number 1 in May 1908. Piloted by its designer, Samuel Cody, this was the first officially recorded flight of an aircraft in the United Kingdom. Further trials of both aircraft continued until 1909, when the War Office forbade further expenditure on these experiments. A sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence that had inquired into the future of military aviation had concluded that expenditure on aircraft development to date did not justify the results. It recommended that it would be more practicable to purchase aircraft from outside sources, and adapt them for military purposes. Both Dunne's and Cody's contracts were terminated and, officially, the Balloon Factory stopped all work on aircraft development. They were required to focus on the repair and overhaul of existing Army aircraft.

Despite the War Office's apparent failure to recognise the military possibilities of manned aircraft, other countries, particularly France and Germany, had no such reservations. Civilian aviation pioneers, such as Thomas Sopwith, Alliot Verdon Roe and Frederick Handley Page, without



Beta 2

government support, began establishing a British aviation industry. They continued to experiment, design and construct, and to promote aircraft development. They helped popularise flying with the British public. Flying schools were set up and flying races and competitions held.

The attitude of the War Office began to change in 1910. C S Rolls had placed a Wright biplane at the disposal of the military authorities and Lieutenant R A Cammell loaned a Bleriot. In 1911, the War Office purchased its first aircraft from industry, a Henry Farman biplane. During the army manoeuvres of 1910, three aircraft took part for the first time. The British and Colonial Aeroplane Company loaned two Bristol biplanes, and Lieutenant L Gibbs piloted his own Faman biplane. The success of these aircraft helped change official attitudes towards the future use of aircraft. The Balloon Factory was re-organised under civilian control and re-named the Army Aircraft Factory. Aircraft development at Farnborough was officially resumed and moved onto a more scientific and orderly basis.

Formation of the Royal Flying Corps
The government further acknowledged the growing role of aircraft in military aviation when, in April 1911, the Air Battalion RE was formed under the command of Major Sir Alexander Bannerman. The Balloon School ceased to exist when the Air Battalion was formed and its personnel transferred to the new unit. The Air Battalion consisted of a headquarters at Farnborough and two companies: No. 1 Company (operating airships, balloons and kites) based at Farnborough and No. 2 Company (operating aircraft) based at Larkhill. A reserve was also formed. The role of the Air Battalion was to

create a cadre of skilled military aviators that could be used to form field units in times of war. On its formation the unit comprised 14 officers, 23 NCO's and 155 men and operated five aircraft and two airships (Beta and Gamma). The numbers of both aircraft and of trained pilots gradually increased over the next 12 months.

In 1911, the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith instructed the Committee of Imperial Defence to examine the questions of naval and military aviation in order to suggest measures to create an efficient air force. The Committee recommended the formation of a Royal Flying Corps (RFC) comprising a Military Wing, a Naval Wing, a Reserve, the Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough and the Central Flying School. The RFC was formed on 13 April 1912 and the Air Battalion was absorbed into it. The formation of the RFC can arguably be said to mark the point at which the pre-eminent role of heavier-than-air aircraft in British military aviation was firmly established.

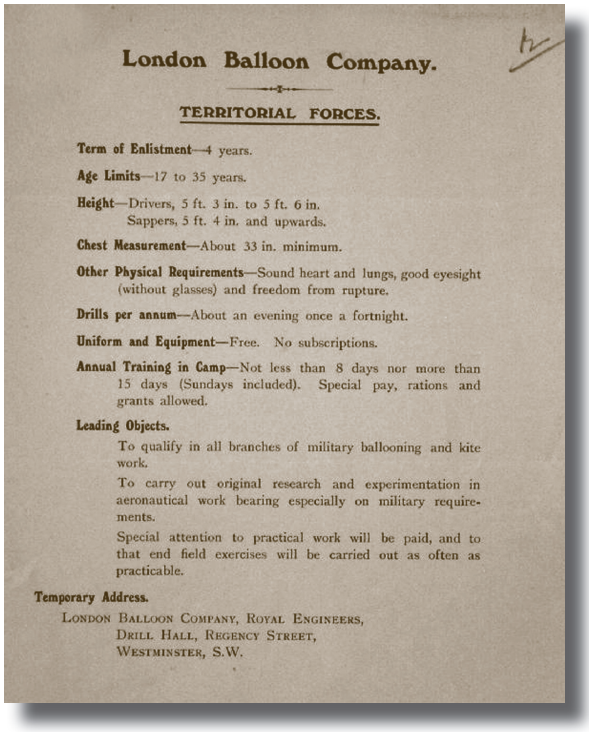
The London Balloon Company

The official date of the formation of the LBC was 1 April 1908, the date that Haldane's re-organisation of the UK's reserve forces took effect. For several years before this date, a case for the formation of a Volunteer Balloon Corps had been argued by a number of enthusiasts, most notably Frank Hedges Butler, a prominent proponent of ballooning and co-founder of the Royal Aero Club (RAeC). However, there was a general opposition within the British Army to the creation of such a unit. Colonel Capper, Commandant of the Balloon School (and, by now, Superintendent of the Army Balloon Factory), considered that a Volunteer Balloon Corps could, at best, perform only a limited role. This would require:

"a good deal of captive ballooning" and "somewhat uninteresting work". This led Capper to wonder *"who under such circumstances would be likely to take up such a scheme." "If volunteers were forthcoming,"* Capper continued, *"he could make special arrangements for training the officers. If they are men of sufficient leisure to give up some time to the work; however, he did not want, if he could avoid it, to get the professionals involved in such an organisation as this would only further confuse matters."*

In March 1907, the War Office half-heartedly approved instructions for the establishment of a Volunteer Balloon Corps Reserve. However, by then, there was a small but growing view that military ballooning would, before too long, be superceded by manned aircraft flight. A volunteer balloon unit would then become superfluous. Within four years of the LBC's formation in 1908, this proved to be true.

The immediate driving force behind the raising of the London Balloon Company was a number of ballooning enthusiasts with connections to the former Volunteer Force, principle amongst them was Mr Harold E Holtorp. Holtorp, a former member of the Volunteer Force with an interest in ballooning, had previously made a number of unsuccessful approaches to the War Office about setting up a Volunteer balloon unit. He became the first person to enlist in the LBC and



London Balloon Company.

TERRITORIAL FORCES.

Term of Enlistment—4 years.

Age Limits—17 to 35 years.

Height—Drivers, 5 ft. 3 in. to 5 ft. 6 in.
Sappers, 5 ft. 4 in. and upwards.

Chest Measurement—About 33 in. minimum.

Other Physical Requirements—Sound heart and lungs, good eyesight (without glasses) and freedom from rupture.

Drills per annum—About an evening once a fortnight.

Uniform and Equipment—Free. No subscriptions.

Annual Training in Camp—Not less than 8 days nor more than 15 days (Sundays included). Special pay, rations and grants allowed.

Leading Objects.

To qualify in all branches of military ballooning and kite work.

To carry out original research and experimentation in aeronautical work bearing especially on military requirements.

Special attention to practical work will be paid, and to that end field exercises will be carried out as often as practicable.

Temporary Address.

London Balloon Company, Royal Engineers,
Drill Hall, Regency Street,
Westminster, S.W.

immediately took on the tasks of recruiting, basic military training, and trying to obtain equipment and training facilities for the unit. Advertisements were placed in the Press, including in special interest journals such as *Automotor*. Letters were also written to members of the Aeronautical Societies. In a recruiting leaflet, Holtorp described the main objectives of the LBC thus:

"To qualify in all branches of military ballooning and kite work, To carry out original research and experimentation in aeronautical work bearing especially on military requirements, Special attention to practical work will be paid and to that end field exercises will be carried out as often as practicable".

Initially, until it was formally recognised, Holtorp acted as the Honorary Secretary of the new unit. He was particularly keen on enlisting recruits with previous ballooning experience, and well educated men with an interest in aviation. Openings were advertised for Sappers (responsible for maintaining and handling balloons and kites), and Drivers (responsible for the GS transport wagons and horses). Recruits were enlisted on four-year engagements and were required to complete an annual 8-15 days training camp, plus a drill night every fortnight. Recruitment of Sappers was the initial priority. The unusual role of the LBC, coupled with a general interest in the new Territorial Force, meant that recruitment was brisk and, within a few months, the requisite 30% of establishment had been reached. A temporary HQ was established at Regency Street, Westminster. It later moved to Palmer Street. Basic recruit training was carried out with the assistance of other units of the London Royal Engineer TF, despite the fact, at this stage that no officers had been appointed and no unit equipment had been issued. During this period, the administration of the LBC was carried out by HQ Army Troops Royal Engineers London District TF, to which the LBC belonged.

In a letter to Colonel J E Capper, Commandant of the Balloon School, Holtorp referred to the difficulties facing the newly-formed LBC: *"I trust that if you can see your way to make things a little easier for us you will be so kind as to do so, as we are not being warmly received in certain quarters up here"*.

However, at this stage, a series of requests by Holtorp to Colonel Capper to allow the LBC to train at Farnborough were denied, as formal recognition of the unit had still not been granted.

Although official recognition of the London Balloon Company (T), by the Army Council, was not announced until August 1908, it was made retrospective to 1 April. The appointment of the first officers, Captain Frederick Tolley and 2nd Lieutenant Maurice Bidder, was announced shortly afterwards. The LBC's establishment was set at three officers and 65 other ranks, plus 50 horses: enough to work one balloon, or one flight of kites. In 1909, two Regular Army, permanent staff instructors were authorised. By the time of the unit's second annual camp, in 1909, three officers, three staff sergeants, five NCOs and 57 men were attached to the Regular balloon companies for training.

Officers of the London Balloon Company

Name	Rank	Joined	Left
Frederick Tolley	Capt	1 Apr 08	10 Jun 11
Maurice McClean Bidder	2nd Lt Capt	1 Apr 08 1 Nov 11	19 Nov 08 16 Jan 13
Oscar Leonard Bickford	2nd Lt	23 Oct 08	10 Jun 11
Theodore John Ridge	2nd Lt	1 Apr 10	18 Aug 11
Victor Annesley Barrington-Kennett	2nd Lt	1 Nov 11	14 Aug 13
Samuel Pepys Cockerell	2nd Lt	3 Feb 12	3 Jan 14

Despite the LBC's success in recruiting, and the general proficiency it achieved, the War Office refused to issue the equipment and horses for which the unit was scaled. It was not until June 1909 that the LBC was able to 'acquire' some equipment, on loan, from the Balloon School. The equipment, described as 'Drill Stores', included:

10,000cu ft balloon — qty 1

13,000cu ft balloon — qty 1

Nets for above balloons

Cars, balloon — qty 1

Kite, A Class — qty 1

Kite, B Class — qty 1

In a War Office minute, 'Drill Stores' were officially defined as "s*tores that are not fit for serious instruction*"; ie "*balloons that were rotten or leaked*". The training value of this equipment was distinctly limited. Drill nights could be spent practicing ballooning drills (as well as standard military skills such as weapon handling), but the only real opportunity the unit had of actually flying balloons was during their annual camps. Driver training was also restricted and could only be carried out using borrowed horses and wagons. Despite the high level enthusiasm and skills of its members, the LBC's lack of its own specialist equipment, transport and horses, and of a suitable training ground for operating balloons, limited the operational effectiveness that the unit was able to achieve. The reasons for the War Office's refusal to issue the LBC equipment and transport are not documented, but ballooning equipment for the regular balloon sections was in short supply and the limited funding that was available was increasingly directed towards airship, and later aircraft, development.

Despite his initial unwillingness to help the LBC before it gained official War Office recognition, Colonel Capper provided invaluable training support and advice, especially during their annual training at the Balloon School, Farnborough. In 1909, 62 members of the LBC trained at Farnborough. Both Colonel Capper and Samuel Cody gave lectures to the unit, ascents were carried out in captive balloons and kites (some members ascending to 1,500ft), and the unit assisted in the ground handling of the experimental, non-rigid airship 'Beta'. By 1911, unit training had progressed to the point where the LBC was able to make captive and free balloon and kite flights, give a demonstration of balloon observation work under field conditions during exercises at Basingstoke and assist the Air Battalion in the ground handling of the airship 'Gamma'. As a portent of things to come, members of the LBC were also given flights in a biplane flown by the Aircraft Factory's test pilot, Geoffrey de Havilland.

In November 1911, *The Times* reported that the LBC had been offered the use of two aeroplanes for the purposes of instructing members in aviation. 'The Times' concluded by saying:

"*By next camp, it is hoped that the company will posses a number of fully qualified pilots ready to undertake any work which the authorities may find them to do*".

The offer was made by Francis McClean, a pioneer aviator and businessman. Previously, he had made a similar offer to the Admiralty, and four Royal Navy officers began training on Short Sommer biplanes, owned by Mr McClean, at the Royal Aero Club's (RAeC) airfield at Eastchurch, Kent. LBC personnel began training in December, under the instruction of James Lindsay Travers who was, at that time, designer and assistant to Short Brothers at Eastchurch. Over the next three months, members of the LBC were trained to fly by Mr Travers and, in March 1912, three of them (Sergeant H D Cutler, 2nd Lieutenant V A Barrington-Kennett and Sapper C W Meredith) were awarded RAeC pilots certificates. A number of other members, who began their training at Eastchurch, qualified later at other flying schools.

On 27 February 1912, *Aeroplane* reported that that officers and men of the LBC had spent their own time and money (including rail fares and lodgings) to learn to fly, but the Army had "declined to approve the training as normal drill and refused to issue special travel vouchers". Despite the generosity of Francis McClean, and the success of the training, the War Office stated in a special order that, "owing to a scheme for military aviation now being in hand at the War Office, no further flying is to be done by the London Balloon Company". For all practical purposes, this announcement signalled the beginning of the end for the LBC, leading to its final disbandment a year later.

LBC Personnel who qualified as pilots

Name	RAeC Certificate	Date Awarded	Flying School	Aircraft
2nd Lt Theodore John Ridge	119	17 Aug 11	B&C Larkhill	Bristol
Sapper Samuel Pepys Cockerell	132	12 Sep 11	Salisbury Plain	Bristol
Sgt Herbert Dennis Cutler	189	5 Mar 12	Eastchurch	Short
2nd Lt Victor Annesley Barringto Kennett	190	5 Mar 12	Eastchurch	Short
Sapper Cyril Wright Meredith	193	9 Mar 12	Eastchurch	Short
Sgt Thomas O'Brien Hubbard	222	4 Jun 12	Hendon	Howard-Wright
Sgt William Snowdon Hedley	274	13 Aug 12	Brooklands	Henri Farman

At the end of 1911, the War Office committee was considering raising a Territorial Force Air Battalion into which the LBC would be merged. The unit would operate both aircraft and balloons. The proposed establishment would be 13 officers (9 of whom would be in the aeroplane company), 136 other ranks and 8 aircraft. Hendon was considered as a possible location for the unit, particularly if Mr Claude Grahame-White could be persuaded to offer the War Office concessions over its use. However, at the same time, preparations were in hand for the creation of the Royal Flying Corps. In March 1912, a separate committee decided that "no separate military air organisation for the Territorial Force should be formed" and in April, the Army Council approved the disbandment of the LBC. However, disbandment was delayed until an RFC Special Reserve, to which LBC personnel would be able to transfer, had been established. A number of them did so, most notably those who had qualified as pilots following the training at Eastchurch. The LBC was formally disbanded on 31 March 1913, under Army Order 224/1913.

Conclusion

Like any unit, the LBC's greatest asset was its personnel. The unit's special role attracted well-educated, intelligent men able to assimilate the technical knowledge that aviation in the early 20th century demanded. Although never mobilised to fulfil its war role, the LBC provided the early military training for a number of men who went on to distinguish themselves during the Great War, and beyond. During the War, former LBC members gained at least 2 DSO's, 1 MC, 1 AFC, 5 Mentions in Dispatches and 1 Italian award (Cavalier of the Order of St Maurice and St Lazarus). Two former members became RFC squadron commanders (Victor Barrington-Kennet and Thomas Hubbard) and one an airship pilot with the RNAS (Dudley Barton). William Hedley served as a combat pilot with the Bulgarian Army during the First Balkan War of 1913. In 1914, a former LBC NCO (Herbert Cutler), who had learned to fly at Eastchurch, discovered the jungle hideout of the German cruiser K_nigsberg in the Rufiji River, German East Africa. Perhaps arguably the most successful of all former LBC members was George Ambrose Lloyd. After a spell as High Commissioner to Egypt and the Sudan, he was created Baron Lloyd of Dolobran and, in 1940, became Secretary of State for the Colonies in Winston Churchill's wartime government

The subsequent military careers of these men demonstrate the success and wisdom of Holtorp's original criteria for selecting recruits for the LBC: *'well educated men with a keen interest in aviation'.*