

'THE LEAD BALLOON CLUB'

CONTRIVANCES AND THEIR REALIZATION IN THE NAVAL SERVICE

BY

COMMANDER J. E. G. MCKEE, R.N.

After two jobs, one right after the other, spent fabricating schemes for others to pick to pieces, the writer has become convinced that all those similarly engaged ought to band together and form an association for mutual support. The name of such a society seems to be important. Neither 'The Clay Pigeon Club' nor 'Aunt Sally Society' has the right association of ideas, while the 'Naval Icarian Thaumaturgical Society' is pretentious and has unfortunate initials. 'The Lead Balloon Club' has been coined before but until a better title can be found should be adopted.

This club would foster the construction and expedition of original ventures through every stage from inspiration to acclamation—from the bathroom to the boardroom. This naturally includes the development and selection of techniques appropriate to marketing the product, the means of identifying and exterminating any hostile elements and, not least, the rehabilitation and reinflation of Zeppelinists deflated in the pursuit of their ends.

The past offers many examples of both ascendant and foundered wheezes. The man who got Pharaoh to build the first Pyramid has hardly had an equal in the field of promotion since. The Horseless Carriage, the Iron Ship and P.A.Y.E. were mere terminological contradictions until some inspired exponent of this ethereal craft got busy. The Arts have not been neglected: Picasso, Joyce and the Beatles have all found fame in the fantastic. But, on the other hand, how many headstones are un-honoured and frontages un-plaques because no helping hand was available? Balloonists prefer status before statues, and this club must see that they get both.

At the start, membership must be free and open to all; men and women, civil or military, whatever the trade or profession. Anyone, in fact, who is prepared to have a bash at arriving in the twentieth century in the next forty years. Professional and academic qualifications are not looked for. Several grades of membership seem to be necessary:

- (a) Associate Membership is for anyone who has pressed through an original scheme, which two or more members underwrite as deserving this recognition.
- (b) Full Membership is for a person who has operated a full-time balloon factory (i.e. Fleet Work or Yard Method Study, or who has been instrumental in making a dent in such adamant problems such as Pay Codes, Command or Career Structures, or reorganizing dockyards, etc.). An Associate might be allowed to achieve promotion by sheer application, always provided this has not also earned him a slow handclap.
- (c) Fellowship is limited to a member who has contrived a skyhook, the scope, ingenuity and audacity of which deserves some special recognition. It is unlikely that there can ever be more than a triumvirate in the naval Service at the one time worthy of this accolade.
- (d) Honorary Membership has been introduced for those who, though not balloonwrights themselves, have thrown their lot on the side of members and not against them. It is hoped that incumbents of secretarial and

financial posts will have the courage of their convictions to accept this form of membership. It may be thought that this sort of vocation calls for its own separate and perhaps secret society. Though the United States (of America, Arab Republics and Soviet Russia) have adequate numbers of these stalwarts to form such a body, a random sample taken in the United Kingdom (of Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales) suggests that the numbers would not make a quorum, hence the need for affiliation with a larger association.

A President is needed to give standing and access to influential ears. This calls for a man in a privileged position with sympathetic feeling towards the cause rather than proved aptitude in the field. Nominations are called for. It is hoped that members will resist their predilection for backing lost causes (apparent as well as real) and not put in too many self-proposals.

The publication of a journal should be held in abeyance until the club has proved its worth. It could prove a useful organ for basin trials of schemes beyond the conceptual range of more lay-men; it could also act as an exchange for ploys and gambits currently proving effective in getting balloons airborne.

A club tie would provide a simple method of recognition between members; and so ensure that they will help and not hinder one another at meetings and on committees. This tie should be an ominous shade of dark blue (more like the sky before a thunderstorm than Stationery Office ink). Scattered over this there should be an asymmetrical pattern of up-ended balloons; red and white striped, of the Montgolfier design—which works on hot air—has been chosen. The discerning reader will observe that the one balloon that will appear to be ascending will be in the knotted part of the tie. Honorary members' ties will be defaced by diagonal carmine stripes interrupted only by the balloons, to symbolize the red tape that has been broken.

'Per Ardua Ad Astra' would have been a most appropriate tag for this club. It appears that this has already been adopted by another organization which has been elevating heavier-than-air mechanisms for quite a few years. A weak paraphrase, such as 'Per Frustrum Ad Apex' which has regrettably been put forward only risks a charge of plagiarism, and this is unthinkable. Therefore a motto must be found that is apt and will inspire. Suggestions are earnestly called for: Dr. Barnes-Wallace's 'Why Not? Why Not!' for instance.

The danger of factions which could turn this club in upon itself cannot be over-emphasized. In the past, some of the most diabolic anti-balloon missiles have been assembled and fired by well-known balloonists generally of long standing. This kind of mis-applied talent probably tainted by lingering departmental loyalty, could even stem from the out-moded 'not invented here' attitude. These blunt reactionary tools, signs of premature senility, must be ruthlessly exposed and membership withheld from those who use them.

Members must follow an acceptable code of behaviour. Whereas detectable use of another member's work must obviously be forbidden, we must equally ensure that good schemes are not rashly launched. Even in these early days it must never be said that any balloon sponsored by a member lacked a certificate of air-worthiness. Industrial espionage methods are only permitted when used as an opening to draw attention to a scheme which otherwise might be neglected. Where two balloons with the same destination are competing for altitude, nothing should be done which might bring the club into disrepute. While almost anything is permissible to help one's own balloon along, downright nobbling of the other must be frowned upon.

Initially, readers are asked to make comments and suggestions, state any wish to become a 'founder' member, propose a president and suggest a motto. Should you decide to leave this to moulder in your pending tray, you belong to the other side; but it will take more than this to stop us.