

# Hindenburg Disaster In '37 Wrote End To Dirigible Era

By SID MOODY

LAKEHURST, N.J. (AP)—In the darkening twilight, the dirigible age loomed above the pine barrens like a vast cloud.

It ghosted towards the strange tower majestically, serenely. But the witnesses of its doom, the judge and the jury, were close at hand. They would write and witness, its epitaph. Louis Lochner, who flew on the Hindenburg on its maiden Atlantic crossing, said travel on a dirigible was like being held aloft by the angels. But May 6, 1937, the angels lost their grip and the Hindenburg crashed in flames, a pyre for 36 persons and a romantic era of flight.

The disaster stunned a world not yet accustomed to the sight of a torn airliner crumpled in the streets of a great city, an oily seat cushion bobbing on an ocean swell.

Today's air travellers stifle such memories. Another airliner awaits. They fly on. But among the 36 persons who died on the Hindenburg were 13 paying passengers, the first to be killed on a commercial dirigible. They were also the last, a milestone and a tombstone.

More than 150 rigid dirigibles had been built before the Hindenburg. More than half had either crashed in spectacular peacetime disasters or been shot down in war. Hundreds of military crew members and observers aboard had been killed.

**ASTONISHING TRIPS**  
But the dirigibles also made astonishing trips of endurance—crossing the North Pole, flying around the world on only four stops, soaring aloft with planes tucked inside.

Proponents felt—and those yet alive still feel—the accidents were an inevitable consequence of an infant technology. Safety was improving all the time... with helium instead of hydrogen.

But the horror of the Hindenburg pictures seared the public memory with an indelible vision of dirigibles. And just two days after it smashed to earth, a German seaplane left the Azores to pioneer a commercial plane route across the North Atlantic, a harbinger of a new age.

Without the Hindenburg disaster, airships might still be commonplace. Thirty-six passengers boarded the Hindenburg at Frankfurt May 3, 1937. It was the first of 18 trips planned that year for the Hindenburg by her owners,

the Zeppelin Transport Company.

**LUXURIOUS VOYAGE**  
Since going into service a year before, the Hindenburg had made 37 crossings to North and South America, had carried 3,059 passengers in elegant comfort some 209,000 miles.

For their \$400 fare, the travellers were getting not only a luxurious two or three days aloft but a unique experience. Meals were cooked on board by a continental chef from a larder of lobsters, fowl and roasts. The wine list covered a page. There was a lounge and a bar and 70 staterooms.

On B deck there was a shower replenished by water distilled from the air.

As a precaution, the smoking room had a double door entrance and it was kept under slightly higher air pressure to prevent any stray wisps of hydrogen from seeping in. All matches and cigarette lighters were confiscated on boarding.

Even though hydrogen enabled the Hindenburg to lift 16½ more tons, the Germans would have preferred to use helium gas. Helium was a rare gas in that it didn't burn—rare still in that it was found in commercial amounts in but one country in the world, the United States.

Germany hadn't asked for helium, probably because it knew what the answer would be. Washington wasn't going to part with an asset that might give military advantage to a country led by Hitler.

**OMINOUS CLOUDS**  
The Hindenburg flew low over New York. The black clouds over Jersey made a regal backdrop for tourists who photographed the Hindenburg from the Empire State Building. But the clouds had fooled the weatherman. He had predicted partly cloudy for the day but these were thunder clouds.

There was a faint drizzle when the Hindenburg finally

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approached the field about 7 p.m. Waiting were 92 sailors and civilians of the 138-member ground crew.

Near the mooring tower, the ship's crew threw down the mooring lines. Suddenly there was a bright flash in No. 4 gas cell near the tail. Many in the ship heard nothing and one passenger taking pictures of the ground crew wondered why everyone was suddenly rushing.

The nose of the ship lurched upwards and the bust of Hindenburg tumbled from its pedestal in the lounge amid the falling passengers.

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The U.S. commerce department, after lengthy hearings, said most probably it was static electricity built up in the airship from the thunderstorms. The resultant spark could have ignited leaking hydrogen.

"I dread the sixth of May," says Charles Rosendahl, who was commander of the Lakehurst Naval Station. "Every year the newspapers drag out those pictures," the pictures of the end of 36 lives, the end of a dream.

**Red Beachhead Reasons Given**  
WASHINGTON (AP)—A special inter-American committee said here that lack of co-operation among nations of the Western Hemisphere is one reason communism established a beachhead in the area.

**Nasser Said Alive, Well**  
CAIRO (AP)—President Nasser is sound and well, an informed source says, and spent his day off Friday playing tennis.

Published reports that the head of United Arab Republic was wounded a week ago in an assassination attempt were denounced as lies.

The informant said Nasser's tennis game was interrupted briefly as the reports were given to him but that "false assassination reports did not disturb the president's usual daily life."

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**Harkness Denies Militia Charge**  
OTTAWA (CP)—Defence Minister Harkness has denied charges by Saskatchewan's deputy premier that members of the militia were used to hand out literature opposing the Saskatchewan medical care plan.

A letter which Mr. Harkness sent to J. H. Brockelbank, the deputy premier, was made public here. The defence minister

left Tuesday for a NATO meeting in Athens.

Mr. Brockelbank had complained that militia personnel were used to hand out literature and medical plan pamphlets at Grenfell, Sask., last week.

The incident was alleged to have taken place on the night of a mass meeting called at Grenfell to organize petitions opposing the medical care plan.

Mr. Harkness' letter said 15 militia members were assigned to traffic control in Grenfell that night at the request of town constable Harold Murray. The work involved some stopping of traffic for control purposes "and it is quite possible that during such periods literature was handed out... by others than soldiers."

**WANT SWEEPSTAKE**  
CALGARY (CP)—Requests for information about Operation

Sweepstake have come from as far away as Fredericton, Mrs. June Newman, chairman of the operation, said Thursday Mrs. Newman said 3,156 letters had been received from persons interested in government-controlled hospitals sweepstake in

Canada Mrs. Newman's group is waging a letter-writing campaign to further the cause

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