

**FAMOUS EVENTS: What happened on ... ?**  
**Was ist am 6. Mai 1937 geschehen?**

**Explosion of the "Hindenburg" Luftschiff in Lakehurst, New Jersey**

***Hindenburg at 75***

**THIRTY-FOUR  
SECONDS TO  
END AN ERA –  
ZEPPELIN AND  
THE HINDENBURG**

**HINDENBURG IN FLAMES,  
MAY 6, 1937.**

**Thirty-four Seconds to  
End an Era – Zeppelin and  
The Hindenburg**  
 Remembering the event that  
brought down the proud German  
craft.

A few seconds over Lakehurst, New Jersey, were all that it took to bring an end to the bright hope of Germany's lighter than air crafts that captured the collective imagination of the world.

Just seventy-five years ago, on May 6, 1937, the dirigible *Hindenburg* burned and crashed while coming in for a landing at the Lakehurst, New Jersey, United States Navy Air Station. That brought to an end one of the notable chapters of aviation history, the zeppelin era.

It can be said that the era started during the American Civil War. Germany's Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin (1838 to 1917), then a young army officer, was sent to learn all he could about the manned balloons that were being used for the first time anywhere on a significant scale for wartime reconnaissance. Manned balloons had been around since the eighteenth century, but it had only just become possible for the balloonist to communicate by telegraph with the ground commanders.

Zeppelin saw that, useful as the balloon was for reconnaissance, it would be still better, for military and civilian purposes, if there was some way to steer it. However, this was no easy task. A motor did not exist that was light enough to be carried aloft, yet powerful enough to do the job. Another problem was finding a material from which to build the hull. Many stresses would be encountered as the ship was maneuvered, making necessary a material that was both light and strong.

Zeppelin, who had become a general, retired from the army in 1891 to devote his full energies to finding solutions. In 1895, he patented a dirigible (French for "steerable") with a Daimler gasoline engine, an aluminum alloy frame and an elongated gasbag for streamlining purposes.