

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

Explosion of the “Hindenburg” Luftschiff in Lakehurst, New Jersey

LZ 129 Hindenburg

round trip to Rio. The disaster occurred on its first trip of the season to the United States.

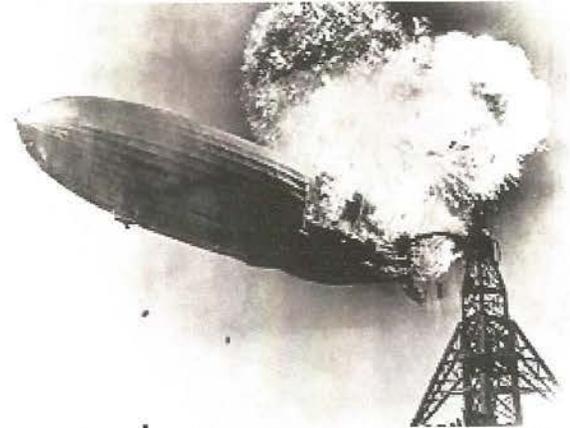
Herb Morrison’s description was not live at all, and did not get broadcast until the following day, by which time the media was full of news of the disaster. Morrison, of Chicago radio station WLN, was making a recording that would have been good publicity for American Airlines, which was sponsoring his junket. Before the crash he told how American’s DC-3s were waiting to take *Hindenburg* passengers further on their journeys, and the plan was for him to interview some Chicago-bound passengers. Then came the crash.

He said: “The back motors of the ship are just holding it just, just enough to keep it from – It burst into flames!” At this point he completely lost his composure and practically sobbed: “It’s crashing, it’s crashing terrible! . . . Get out of the way, please! It’s burning and bursting into flames, and the – and it’s falling on the mooring-mast! . . . Oh, all that humanity! All those lives!” The account has been wed to newsreel footage that others had made and the result is certainly one of the most dramatic eye-witness accounts ever. Check it at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YY0xw5r1ro.

Of the ninety-seven people on board the *Hindenburg*, thirty-five died, either immediately or later because of their injuries. A remarkable sixty-two survived. The ship quickly settled to the ground and those open-able promenade windows made escape relatively easy. One member of the ground crew was also killed. The cause of the disaster has never been determined with certainty. The most logical explanation is leaking hydrogen gas touched off by static electricity. Eckener and the ship’s captain, Max Pruss, suspected it was sabotage, but an FBI investigation found no evidence of this.

The crash was, effectively, the end of the thirty-seven year zeppelin era. The *Graf Zeppelin* happened to be in the air at the time, on its way back to Germany from Rio. The passengers were not told anything until it had landed safely at Friedrichshafen. The *Graf Zeppelin* only flew once more after that, to Frankfurt, where it was put on public display. It was scrapped in 1940 to supply aluminum for the Nazi war machine.

There are museums at each of the former zeppelin bases; at Friedrichshafen and near the Frankfurt Airport. The one on the lakeside at Friedrichshafen is by far the most elaborate, with a full-sized reproduction of part of the *Hindenburg*, including the lounge and some passenger rooms. It also shows a movie of the zeppelin’s history, and displays pieces of the *Graf Zeppelin* and salvaged parts of



Hindenburg begins to fall seconds after catching fire

Occurrence summary

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Date | May 6, 1937 |
| Summary | Airship fire |
| Site | Naval Air Station Lakehurst in Manchester Township, New Jersey, United States |
| Passengers | 36 |
| Crew | 61 |
| Injuries (non-fatal) | unknown |
| Fatalities | 36 (13 passengers, 22 aircrewmembers, one ground crewman) |
| Survivors | 62 |
| Aircraft type | <i>Hindenburg</i> -class airship |
| Aircraft name | <i>Hindenburg</i> |
| Operator | Deutsche Zeppelin-Reederei |
| Registration | D-LZ129 |
| Flight origin | Frankfurt am Main, Germany |
| Destination | Naval Air Station Lakehurst in Lakehurst Borough, New Jersey, United States |