

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

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

The *Hindenburg* disaster took place on Thursday, May 6, 1937, as the German passenger airship LZ 129 *Hindenburg* caught fire and was destroyed during its attempt to dock with its mooring mast at Naval Air Station Lakehurst, which is located adjacent to the borough of Lakehurst, New Jersey, United States. Of the 97 people on board (36 passengers and 61 crewmen), there were 35 fatalities (13 passengers and 22 crewmen). One worker on the ground was also killed, making a total of 36 dead.

The disaster was the subject of spectacular newsreel coverage, photographs, and Herbert Morrison's recorded radio eyewitness reports^[1] from the landing field, which were broadcast the next day. A variety of hypotheses have been put forward for both the cause of ignition and the initial fuel for the ensuing fire. The incident shattered public confidence in the giant, passenger-carrying rigid airship and marked the end of the airship era.



In Herb Morrison's Words...

Herb Morrison, a reporter for Chicago's WLS radio, was on site for the disastrous event and his quick reaction and description of events are as identifiable as the infamous newsreel footage:

It's practically standing still now. They've dropped ropes out of the nose of the ship, and they've been taken a hold of down on the field by a number of men. It's starting to rain again; it's – the rain had slacked up a little bit. The back motors of the ship are just holding it just, just enough to keep it from – It burst into flames! It burst into flames, and it's falling, it's crashing! Watch it! Watch it, folks! Get out of the way! Get out of the way! Get this, Charlie! Get this, Charlie! It's fire – and it's crashing! It's crashing terrible! Oh, my, get out of the way, please! It's burning and bursting into flames, and the – and it's falling on the mooring-mast and all the folks agree that this is terrible, this is the worst of the worst catastrophes in the world. [Indecipherable word(s)] It's–it's–it's the flames, [indecipherable, possibly the word "climbing"] oh, four- or five-hundred feet into the sky and it ... it's a terrific crash, ladies and gentlemen. It's smoke, and it's flames now ... and the frame is crashing to the ground, not quite to the mooring-mast. Oh, the humanity and all the passengers screaming around here. I told you, I can't even talk to people whose friends are on there. Ah! It's – it's – it's – it's ... o–ohhh! I – I can't talk, ladies and gentlemen. Honest, it's just laying there, a mass of smoking wreckage. Ah! And everybody can hardly breathe and talk, and the screaming. Lady, I – I'm sorry. Honest: I – I can hardly breathe. I – I'm going to step inside where I cannot see it. Charlie, that's terrible. Ah, ah – I can't. I, listen, folks, I – I'm gonna have to stop for a minute because I've lost my voice. This is the worst thing I've ever witnessed.

REPORTER HERB MORRISON'S EMOTIONAL AUDIO ACCOUNT OF THE *HINDENBURG'S* EXPLOSION STILL RELAYS THE HORROR OF THE EVENT AFTER THREE-QUARTERS OF A CENTURY.