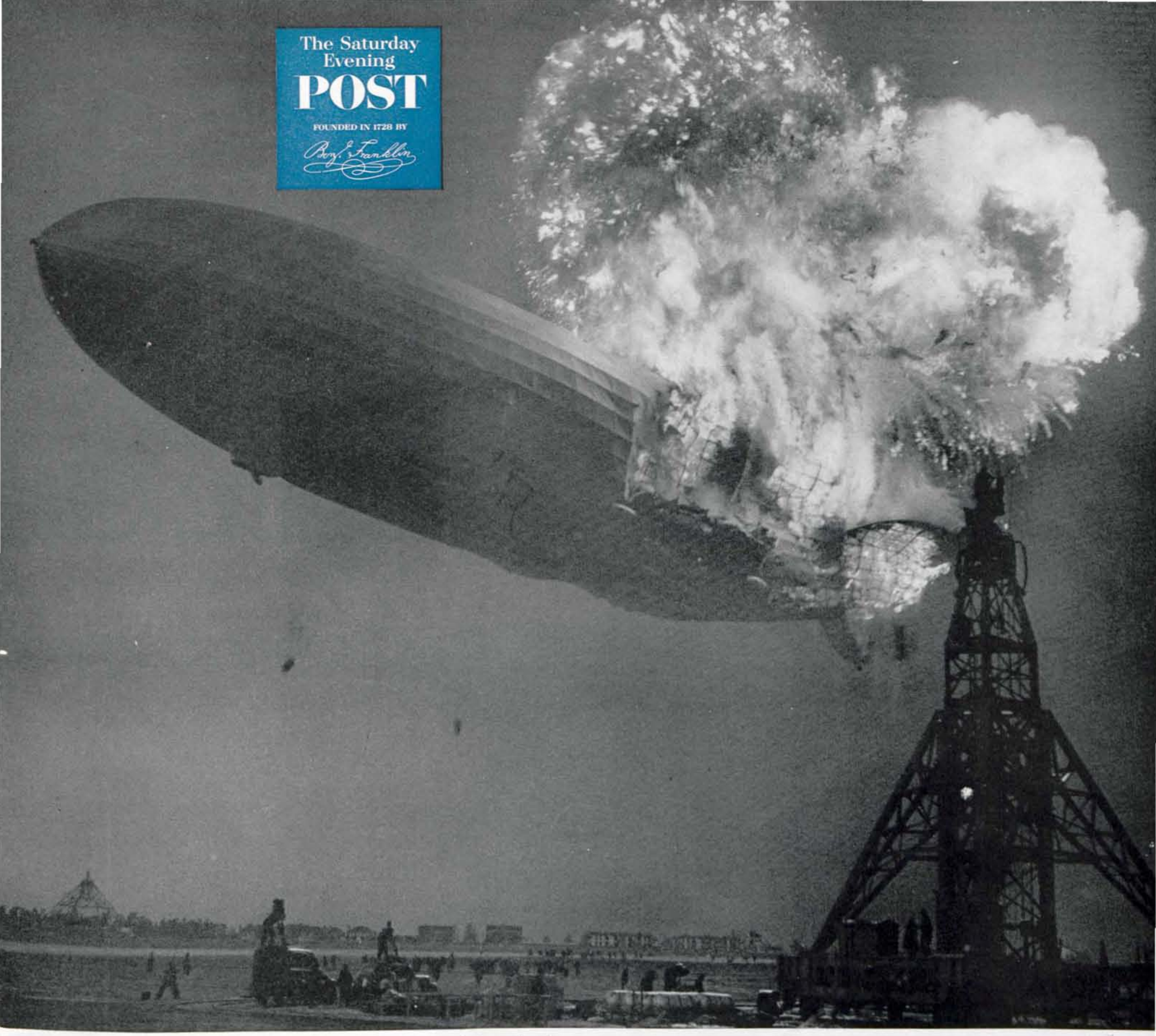
The Saturday Evening POST
FOUNDED IN 1728 BY
Benj. Franklin



Horror-struck eyewitnesses will never forget the great ball of blazing hydrogen bursting from the ship's after section on that tragic spring night at Lakehurst, N.J.

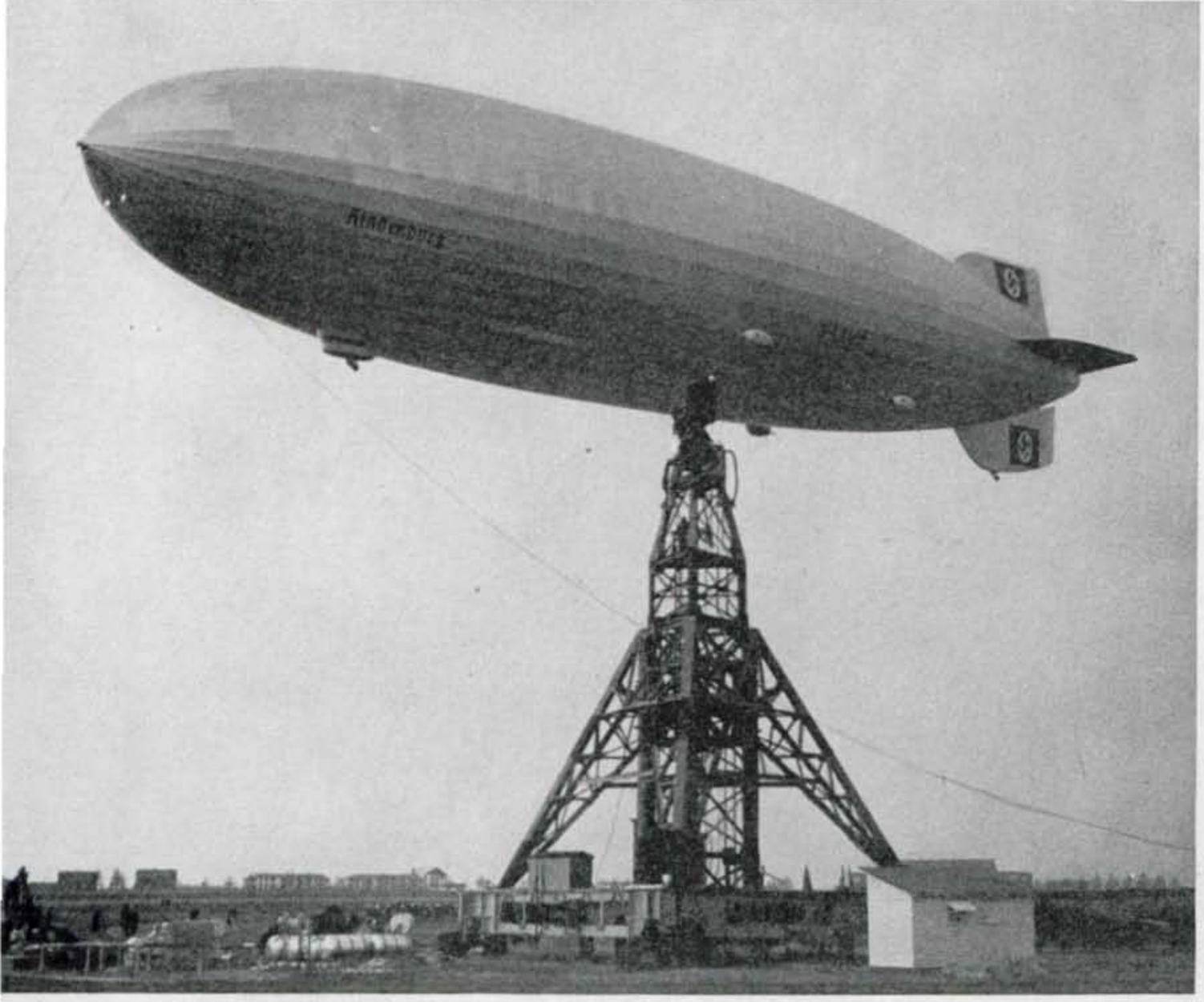
Terror in the Twilight

This is the story, reconstructed from survivors' reports, of the terrible holocaust of the airship Hindenburg two decades ago.

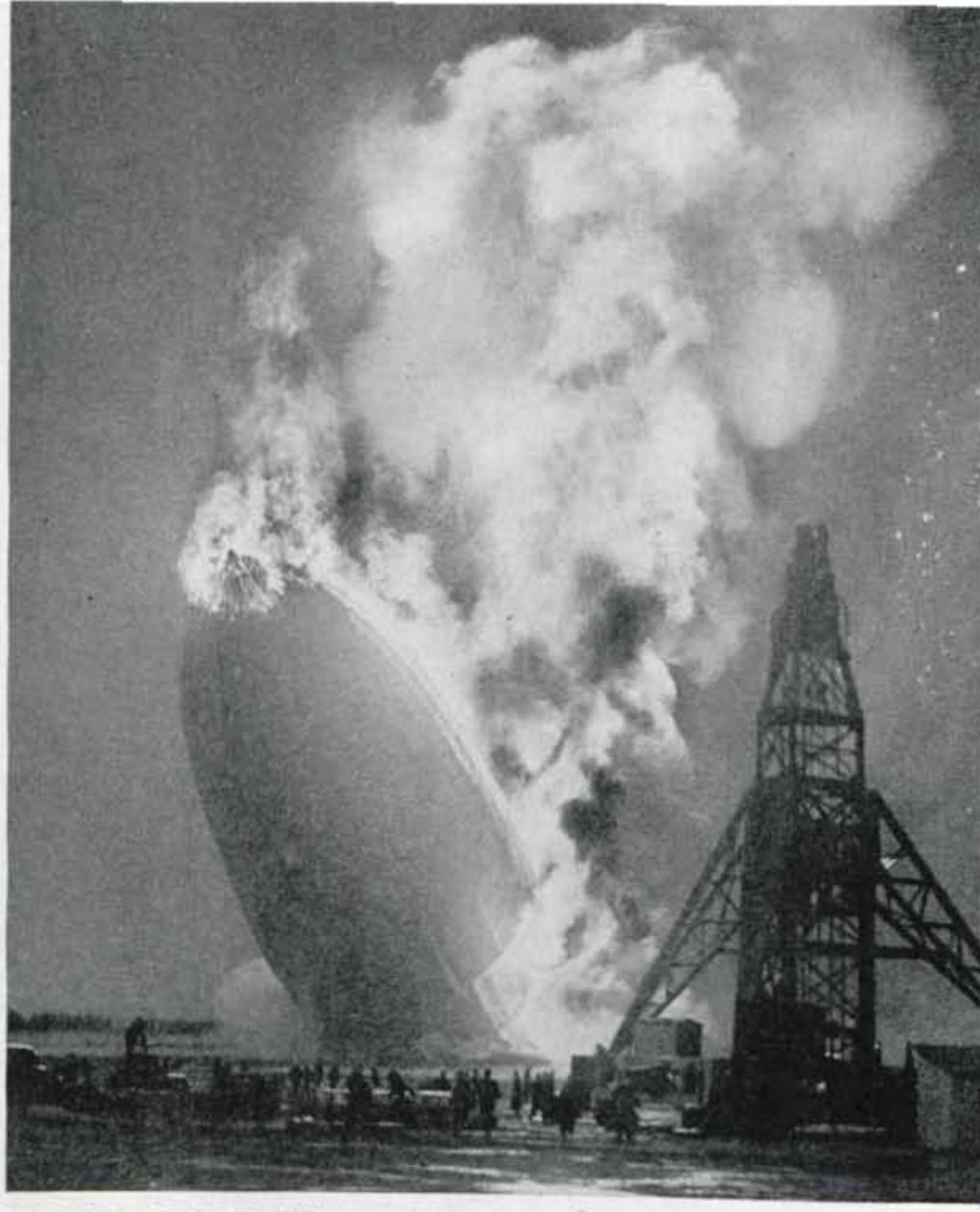
By John Toland

On Thursday afternoon, May 6, 1937, the seventh-place Brooklyn Dodgers were playing the leaders of the National League, the Pittsburgh Pirates, at Ebbets Field. And the Dodgers were winning. The Brooklyn fans were so busy cheering their pitcher, Van Lingle Mungo, that little attention was paid a giant airship that was floating lazily over Bedford Avenue. In fact, the following morning not a single sports writer mentioned that the airliner Hindenburg had been briefly a witness to the surprising 9–5 Dodger victory.

In less partisan sections of New York there was more interest. Along Broadway, automobiles, trucks and rattletrap trolley cars stopped; passengers craned their necks to get a look at the flying hotel—now nearing the end of its



7:22 P.M.: Three minutes before the catastrophe, the great Zeppelin maneuvers for a landing while passengers watch the operation from the windows.



7:25:22 P.M.: A mass of flames engulfs the bow of the dirigible as it settles to the ground tail first.

first transatlantic trip of the year. Taxis and buses honked their horns in greeting.

From the Battery to the Bronx, faces were turned up. New Yorkers had seen the dirigible on many of its ten round trips the year before, but the Hindenburg was still a sight of wonder and beauty. It was awesome to look up and see, high in the sky, an object 146 feet high and 803 feet long—ninety-three feet longer than the biggest battleship afloat.

At 3:32 P.M. just as the Hindenburg was turning gracefully over the Empire State Building, the sun peered through lowering clouds. Its rays glittered on the huge black Nazi swastikas painted on the fins of the ship. On the Hindenburg's promenade deck, two authors, Mr. and Mrs. Leonhard Adelt, were waving at the crowd on the observation platform of the Empire State Building. The ship was now so close to the tower that Adelt noticed sight-seers taking pictures.

Then the Hindenburg, with ninety-seven passengers and crewmen aboard, headed south for its destination—Lakehurst, New Jersey. Curious New Yorkers went back to work, believing they had seen the successful end of another routine passage of "the safest aircraft ever built"—a ship so safe that Lloyd's, of London, had insured it for £500,000 at the very low rate of 5 per cent.

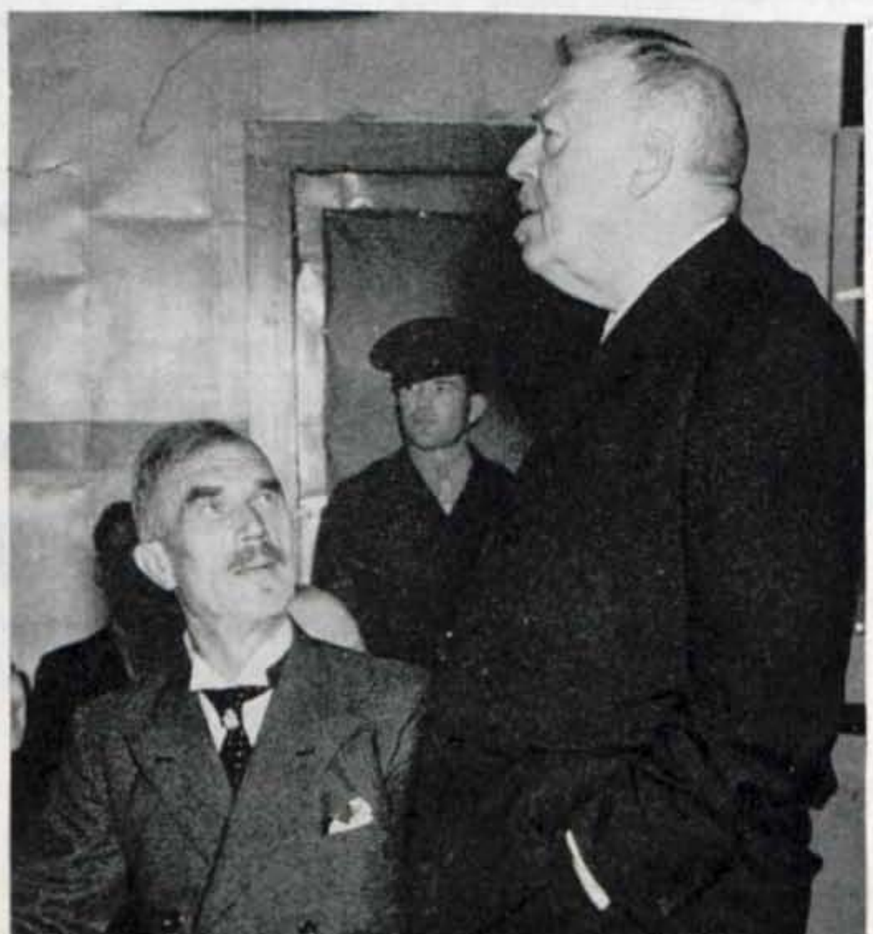
On the bridge of the ship's control car, 175 feet from the bow, Capt. Max Pruss, a blond, blue-eyed man, was giving quiet orders to the men at the two wheels. Kurt Schönherr, the rudder man, stared straight ahead, like the helmsman of any seagoing ship. Eduard Boetius, the elevator man, stood sideways with his right shoulder pointing ahead.

Watching Pruss was Capt. Ernst Lehmann, commander of the dirigible on its last dramatic trip of the 1936 season. During this voyage over hurricane-tossed New England, Lehmann had handled the great airship so skillfully that the passengers never realized they had gone through the worst storm of the year. Lehmann was a cordial, quietly forceful man. Now, as an observer, he still felt the weight of duty—so deeply was a sense of duty impressed on every officer and crewman of the German Zeppelin Transport Company.

Just aft of the control car, passengers lined the slanting observation windows of the fifty-foot promenades on each side of A deck. On the starboard side, just outboard of the main salon, manufacturer Philip Mangone was trying to find the building on Seventh Avenue which housed his showrooms. In the adjoining reading-writing room, Mrs. Hermann Doehner was crocheting while her three children—Irene, ten; Walter, eight; and Werner, six—played games.

On the port-side promenade, just outboard of the forty-six-foot-by-sixteen-foot dining

Pallbearers salute the casket of the Hindenburg's captain, Ernst Lehmann, at a Nazi-style mass funeral in New York for the German victims.



Dr. Hugo Eckener (right), designer of the Hindenburg, and Dr. L. Duerr, chief engineer, at the investigation into the cause of the tragedy.

7:27 P.M.: The rescuers, themselves almost in a state of shock, fight searing heat to pull survivors from the crumpled skeleton. Many passengers and crewmen plunged out of the falling ship's hatches and windows. Miraculously, sixty-two of the ninety-seven persons aboard somehow got out alive.

room, acrobat Joseph Spah, who made a good living taking comic falls under the stage name of Ben Dova, was trying to see his home town, Douglaston, Long Island.

He had just finished an engagement at Berlin's Wintergarten Theater and had flown on the Hindenburg so he could appear at Radio City Music Hall on May twelfth.

A slender, energetic, balding man joined Spah. He was Birger Brink, correspondent of the Stockholm Aftonbladet. Brink had never seen New York before, and Spah pointed out the big ocean-going ships tied up at the West Side piers.

As the Hindenburg glided across New Jersey, some of the thirty-eight passengers hurried to their cabins in the middle of A deck. Others, aware of the not-uncommon delays in landing, sauntered down the wide staircase that led to B deck. Because (Continued on Page 50)

7:28 P.M.: Sailors lead a badly burned victim from the wreckage. The death toll of 36 included 22 crew members, 13 passengers and one member of the ground crew.

Today, survivor Joseph Spah is an acrobat and clown working in an ice show under the name Ben Dova. Here he tells the girls of his troupe about the tragedy. He escaped with only a broken ankle.

Terror in the Twilight

(Continued from Page 25)

of the curve of the ship's hull, B deck was much narrower than A deck, and the observation windows were so deeply pitched that it was possible to look straight down.

On the starboard side, Rolf von Heidenstam, wealthy Swedish industrialist, stopped for a drink at the bar. Then he rang a bell on the outside of the adjoining smoking room. The ring alerted head steward Howard Kubis, ensconced in a kind of sentry box. Kubis pressed a release; the industrialist was admitted into a "lock" and the door behind him closed. There was a wait of a moment; then a second door leading directly to the smoking room opened. Von Heidenstam joined other passengers who were smoking and discussing the Spanish Civil War and the coming marriage of the Duke of Windsor and Wally.

Conversation later swung to the colorful murals depicting the history of airship travel on the washable-leather walls. A German passenger proudly told of the million-mile safety record of the Graf Zeppelin. But the ship they were riding in, he concluded, was even safer—the safest dirigible ever built. It had only one drawback: its sixteen gas cells were loaded with over 7,000,000 cubic feet of highly flammable hydrogen.

On leaving the smoking room, Ferdinand Lammot Belin, Jr., a recent graduate of Yale, chided Chief Steward Kubis for enforcing safety regulations so stringently.

"We Germans," replied Kubis humorlessly, "don't fool with hydrogen."

Indeed they didn't, and they were proud of their precautions. All matches and lighters had been confiscated when passengers boarded at Frankfort. As a further safety measure, the three catwalks, including the main one which ran along the very bottom of the ship from bow to stern, were covered with rubber. Those treading the narrow "sidewalks" wore sneakers or felt boots to prevent static or sparks. Crewmen who went topside between the billowing gas cells wore asbestos suits free of buttons or metal.

And the four 1100-horsepower Diesel engines that drove the ship at a dead air speed of 84 miles an hour required no ignition. They used a crude oil with a flash point so low that it wouldn't burn even if a flaming match was tossed into the tank.

Between these precautions and their self-confident enforcement of them, the Germans had absolute faith in the safety of the Hindenburg.

Acrobat Spah had seen the German confidence close-up on the second day of the trip. While walking along the main catwalk toward the tail to visit Ulla von Heidenstadt, the prize-winning Alsatian shepherd dog he was bringing home to his children, Spah had met Captain Lehmann.

"You know," the acrobat had said, "I'm a flying jinx." He explained that he had already been in three air crashes.

Lehmann had smiled confidently. "You don't need to worry, my friend. Zeppelins never have accidents."

The Literary Digest, in its issue of October 17, 1936, shared the German view. "Nor need voyagers on the Hindenburg fear fire within the ship," the magazine stated flatly.

Meanwhile at the Naval Air Station on the flat, sandy scrubland a mile from Lakehurst, New Jersey, weary newsmen, photographers and newsreel cameramen were lolling on the grass at the side of the airship hangar. Many of them had been pulled out of bed at five that morning to catch the ferry to New Jersey. For the Hindenburg had been scheduled originally to land at about eight A.M.

It was just another routine landing to these men. Although six newsreel companies were on hand, only two staff men from the metropolitan dailies had come down from New York to cover the story. Local correspondents, like Harry Kroh, of Brielle, who represented eight New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia papers, and Herb Rau, of the Lakewood Times, who was also correspondent for The New York Times, and the Standard News Association, were relied upon to file the simple story. The Associated Press had Ed Okim to tap out the landing details on their direct wire to Newark.

The landing was considered so routine that Lt. George F. Watson, in charge of public information for the Naval Air Station, had set up only one telephone in the improvised pressroom at the northwest end of the hangar.

It had been a long day, too, for the families and friends of the incoming passengers. Many of them, like the large party on hand to greet Philip Mangone, had driven the twenty miles to the famed boardwalk at Asbury Park to get a decent lunch and help while away the dull hours. Mrs. Joseph Spah, after attending mass at Douglaston to celebrate the Feast of the Ascension, had made the long drive with her three children in the family's brand-new blue sedan. After waiting since early morning, Gilbert, five, Marilyn, three, and Richard, two, were tired and cranky.

> Most fathers yearn for a son who will not only fill their shoes but also the gas tank.
>
> HENRY MCMAHON

At four P.M. a newsreel man, standing atop a car with his long-legged camera, shouted, "There she is!"

The newsmen got up from the grass, and the relatives edged closer to the restraining fence that ran west from the corner of the hangar. But sailors and civilian workers perched on the movable mooring mast in the center of the huge landing circle made no move. Neither did Comdr. Charles Rosendahl, commandant of the station, who was in charge of the landing operations. Even though the Hindenburg was coming in from the north, low and fast, Captain Pruss had already radioed Rosendahl that he didn't like the dark storm clouds that had been piling up. He was going to cruise around, Pruss said, until about six P.M.

Rosendahl wished Pruss would come in for an immediate landing. In his opinion, the weather was favorable enough. But he knew that Captain Pruss, like the other skippers of the German Zeppelin Transport Company, was a cautious operator. That was one reason the German airship men had won the confidence of the world—they never took chances.

The Hindenburg passed over the flat, sandy field and dropped a tiny parachute with a message confirming the six-o'clock landing. The ship passed over the hangar and headed south, its four Daimler-Benz engines roaring deeply.

There was a groan from the crowd as it became obvious that the landing would be delayed still longer. To make matters worse, a sudden shower came on, quickly making the sand field soggy.

An hour later, during a lull in the storm, the

(Continued on Page 55)

(*Continued from Page 50*) station siren blasted nine times. The big landing crew of 110 Navy men and 138 civilians marched onto the field. But before the men reached their positions near the mooring mast, a new shower drenched them.

Some of the enlisted men began complaining about being deprived of liberty just to moor a German ship. They were quieted down by the authoritative bellows of Chief Fred (Bull) Tobin, a burly veteran of the Shenandoah disaster.

At 6:12, the ceiling was 200 feet and visibility five miles. The wind was west-northwest at eight knots, and the thunderstorms had about blown themselves out. Rosendahl sent off another message: "All clear and waiting."

From his cubicle in the rear of the control car, Radio Officer Willy Speck relayed the message to Captain Pruss. The big ship, having cruised as far south as the mouth of the Delaware River, now headed back for Lakehurst.

The passengers were warned that a landing would be made soon. Those who hadn't packed hurried to do so. Others checked their passports and customs declarations. All felt the trip was safely over.

Captain Lehmann, who had been gossiping with the passengers in the lounge, came forward and climbed down into the control car. As he stood watching Pruss navigate the ship, he ran over in his mind the many things he and Rosendahl had to discuss about the 1937 season. Sixteen round-trip flights had been planned, and special arrangements had to be made. In addition, he hoped that he and Leonhard Adelt could talk over revisions in their new book, Zeppelin, with their publishers, Longmans, Green and Company. Probably there wouldn't be time: the ship was scheduled to leave that midnight to accommodate forty-five wealthy eastbound travelers—at that moment waiting at the Biltmore Hotel in New York—who wanted to attend the coronation of King George VI the next week. And Lehmann knew that if at all possible the departure would be on the minute: the German Zeppelin Transport Company prided itself on its punctual take-offs.

Among the passengers put out by the delay in landing was Birger Brink. He had been sent to America by his paper to write an article about the tercentennial celebration of the first landing of the Swedes in America. Brink was supposed to take a chartered plane to Harrisburg to interview Governor Earle. He had planned to fly back at once and be on board the Hindenburg for the take-off. Now it promised to be a frantic if not impossible trip.

A few seconds after seven P.M., Rosendahl sent another message, recommending immediate landing. The ship, its two front lights on, came across the fast-darkening skies from the south. As it passed the field at about 500 feet, Pruss looked over the landing crew deployed below.

The rain had slackened to a drizzle. There was a light, variable surface wind, southeast at two knots, and a six-knot west wind at an altitude of 200 feet. The ceiling was now about 2500 feet. Everyone prepared for what appeared to be an easy landing.

The newsreel men were at their cameras, most of them on tops of cars. Photographers squinted through their view finders and maneuvered for position. Jack Snyder, of the Philadelphia Record, shoved in a new plate. It was plate No. 13. *Thirteen*, he thought. *Something's bound to go wrong with this picture.*

Moving forward with Commander Rosendahl were his wife and reporter Harry Kroh, who had covered many airship landings for his newspapers. Kroh wanted to question Ernst Lehmann, hoping his answers would make the routine story more interesting. Also in the little party were Comdr. Jess Kenworthy, who had been executive officer of the Macon, and the former World War Zeppelin commander, Anton Heinen, now a lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve.

William Craig, on his first assignment for the Standard Oil Company (New Jersey) magazine, The Lamp, walked to the mast. From there he would have a fine view of the new hydrogen-loading method that was to be tried out. If the method proved successful, two hours would be saved.

Inside a little building attached to the west side of the dirigible hangar, Herbert Morrison, an announcer from Station WLS, Chicago, checked over last-minute adjustments with his engineer, Charlie Nehlsen. They were to make a recording of the year's first transatlantic-flight landing for the Dinner Bell program. They had flown in from Chicago, and Nehlsen had just finished setting up his portable recorder.

As the Hindenburg floated over Bachelor Officers' Quarters, Morrison, a small, lantern-jawed man of about 120 pounds, called out, "Charlie, I'm going out for the recording." He left the building, which also housed the Navy's radio station, walked onto the field and began talking into his hand microphone. He tried to bring as much color as possible into an essentially dull assignment. Usually there were such famous passengers aboard as Douglas Fairbanks and his wife, Lady Ashley, Max Schmeling and Lady Grace Drummond Hay. Today's list was bare of celebrities.

Inside the radio building, Nehlsen was worrying about the cross talk he was getting from the naval signals. There was no time to change positions, and he was hurriedly trying to filter out the disturbances.

On the tower at the helium plant, over half a mile east of the mooring mast, four civilian employees stood on a platform eighty feet in the air, watching the big ship make what they thought was too sharp a turn.

Others thought the dirigible was coming in too fast. Mrs. Frank Peckham, wife of the veteran survivor of the Shenandoah, was standing outside the barracks for chief petty officers' families. She thought the Germans were being smart, trying "to show us up."

But Rosendahl thought Pruss had made a good, if slightly tight, turn, and was coming in handily.

In the control car, Pruss and his officers adjusted the trim and buoyancy of the ship. At 7:19 hydrogen was valved and water ballast dumped as the ship leveled off under perfect control. At an altitude of 200 feet, the Hindenburg headed into the wind. About 700 feet from the mooring mast, telegraphic orders were flashed by Pruss to all four engine gondolas. There was a sputter from the engines as the twenty-foot-long, four-bladed propellers reversed their direction. The ship's headway was quickly stopped.

The men on the helium tower shook their heads. "That's not the way old Hugo sets them down," said riveter John C. Wainwright. The others agreed that Doctor Eckener, the canny old airship man with the pouchy eyes, used to come in gently and land on a dime.

The reversing of the motors sounded to Mrs. Peckham like the screeching of boxcar wheels. From her vantage point north of Bachelor Officers' Quarters, the ship stopped so fast that it seemed to pivot as though attached to a mast.

But Rosendahl, who knew the surface winds were blowing southeast while those at ship level were driving west, thought Pruss had come in nicely under such conditions.

At 7:20, tiny figures appeared on the platform at the indented nose of the dirigible. At 7:21 the first landing rope, over 400 feet long and two inches in diameter, spun down, hitting the wet

The Perfect Squelch

The pompous young woman in Cabin 114 of the ocean liner obviously never had anyone at her beck and call before, and took delight in ringing for the steward at all hours for little or no reason. By the second day out, he was fatigued and fed up.

Then came boat drill. The lady complained that the drill interrupted her bridge game. She protested that it was ridiculous to put on a life jacket. She fussed and fumed so that it took the patient steward five minutes to tie her into the jacket. Finally, as he moved away, her eye lit on a little painted note on the jacket, "Good for twenty-four hours."

"Oh, steward," she called out, "what do I do after twenty-four hours?"

"Madame," he replied, "just ring for your steward."

Timothy Healy

sand inside the mooring circle. A moment later the second rope hit the ground. Sailors and civilians picked up the port line and pulled it toward one of the two little railway cars on the circular tracks. The starboard crew slowly pulled their line to the second car.

A light gust of wind moved the ship slowly to starboard, tightening the port rope. The old hands on the landing crew weren't worried. But Calvin Keck and William Brown, seniors at Lakewood High School, who were doing the job for the one-dollar fee and the excitement, became a little nervous at the strong tug.

In the control car, both Pruss and Lehmann were pleased with the landing. A little aft of them, Radio Officer Willy Speck was informing the Graf Zeppelin, then in passage over the South Atlantic, that the Hindenburg had just made a safe landing.

Back at the airship hangar, Herb Rau hadn't felt like walking the 2200 feet to the mast with the other reporters. As soon as he saw the ropes drop from the Hindenburg, he started for the one phone in the pressroom. He quickly got through to Tom Kelly, the night editor of the Standard News Association, and began giving him the exact time of landing.

At the edge of the field, Morrison was talking into his microphone, describing the scene. He had just announced that this was Captain Pruss' first command—though actually it was the tenth time Pruss had captained the Hindenburg on a transatlantic flight. "Passengers are looking out the windows, waving," Morrison went on. "The ship is standing still now."

Behind the fence restraining spectators, Gilbert and Marilyn Spah were jumping about excitedly, trying to spot their father in the hovering ship. In the hubbub two-year-old Richard began to fuss, and his mother tried to soothe him. Mr. and Mrs. Ferdinand Lammot Belin, Sr., on hand to greet their son, edged forward expectantly.

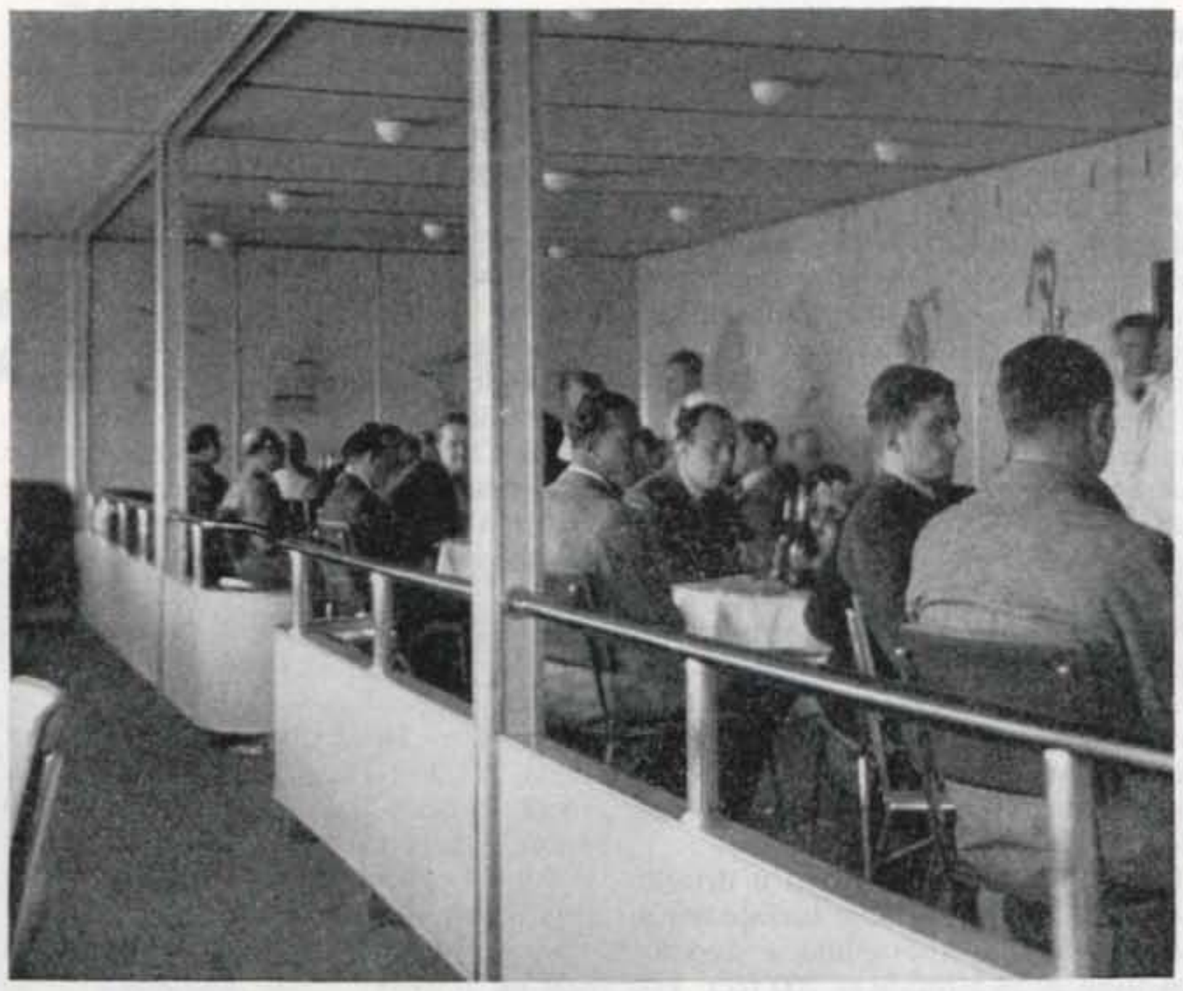
Most of the passengers were in the main lounge, on the starboard side, lining up for Customs inspection. But several, including Spah, were looking out the windows of the portside dining room. Spah thought he recognized his family and was focusing his movie camera to shoot his last few feet of film.

Pat Dowling, the small, wiry majordomo of the American Zeppelin Transport Company (United States representatives for the German line), stood directly under the ship, holding thirty-five pounds of Dry Ice for the perishable food kept in the all-electric kitchen on the portside of B deck.

Sixteen Customs men, led by A. Raymond Raff, Collector of the Port of Philadelphia, started from the mooring mast toward the motionless ship. They were followed by Immigration and Public Health officials.

Among others moving toward the Zeppelin was Einar Thulin, New York correspondent for the Stockholm Tidningen. Thulin was in a car bouncing across the wet sand toward the mooring circle. He had made arrangements for Brink's flight to Harrisburg. Already a plane was being warmed up on a runway west of the hangars. With Thulin were Dr. Amandus Johnson, head of the American-Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia, and "Duke" Krantz, chief pilot for the New York Daily News. Krantz, born in Sweden, wanted to say hello to his illustrious compatriot.

There was now a strange quiet. The Hindenburg's engines were turning over slowly, silently. The ship hung peacefully about seventy-five feet from the ground.



The Hindenburg's modernistic dining room shown during an Atlantic crossing.

"The vast motors," Morrison said, "are just holding it, just enough to keep it from ——" He stopped short. It was exactly 7:25 P.M.

Suddenly a mushroom of flame burst from the top of the ship aft, just forward of the point where the front edge of the upper fin sloped into the hull.

Morrison's voice filled with horror. He gasped, "It's broken into flames! It's flashing—flashing! It's flashing terrible!"

When Mrs. Spah first saw the flash of light in the growing darkness, she thought it was fireworks. She had never seen a landing before and figured the Germans were celebrating their long-delayed arrival.

Mrs. William Craig, wife of the writer for The Lamp, who was now standing against the fence, thought the sun had finally burst through the storm clouds. A few feet away, sixteen-year-old Mrs. Matilda Smeling Randolph wasn't watching the airship. When she heard her husband, Nathaniel, calmly say, "There she goes," she turned around, saw a brilliant streak of light, and screamed hysterically. Her husband slapped her face.

Chief Emil (Babe) Klaassen, a veteran of the Macon crash who had been assigned to the tail end of the ship, noticed the sky light up. Then he looked straight up and saw a burning mass. He had only one thought—to get away.

Civilian sheet-metal worker John Eitel had just helped attach the port landing line to one of the little railway cars. He was still holding onto the big line and looking up curiously at the portside of the dirigible. He saw flames race suddenly under the ship. He ran.

Electrician Leroy Comstock, a six-foot-four giant, was standing on a platform on the mooring mast, twelve feet from the ground, ready to plug an electric line into the Hindenburg. But when he saw the flash of light he dropped his line.

Below him, Rosendahl cried out, "My God, it's on fire!"

Chief David (Doc) Safford, another Macon survivor, had his back to the ship's stern. He was watching the mooring cable slowly unreel from the ship's snout and start toward the ground, when he felt a terrible blast of heat. He turned and saw the ship blazing above him.

Next to Safford was Monty Rowe, a shipmate on the Macon. He saw the fins light up strangely. Only that afternoon at early supper, when Rowe saw the approaching storm, he'd told his wife, "If that thing is hit right, she'll blow us right off the map." Now he thought, *Here it is.*

"Run!" shouted a man on top of the mast through a megaphone. It was Boatswain's Mate First Class Bruce Herrington. He repeated the warning half a dozen times. As for himself, he could only stay transfixed, watching the doomed men in the nose of the Hindenburg.

The explosion set off by the first burst of flame grew louder with distance. To Rosendahl, it was a muffled report. To fourteen-year-old Helen Disbrow, a sightseer who was in the parking area, it sounded like a big thump. To WLS engineer Charlie Nehlsen, it was a startling "overcut" on his sixteen-inch record. Flakes of whitewash dust, shaken from the ceiling by the concussion, covered the whirling disk. He desperately cleared the record and gave the O.K. signal through the open window to Morrison.

Mrs. Nellie Gregg, a secretary, who was just coming down the stairs from offices over the brick guardhouse behind the big hangar, heard a noise like blasting. The concussion shook the building. In the opposite direction, at the Petty Officers' Barracks, the first explosion reminded Mrs. Peckham of a shotgun blast. Then she felt a strange suction.

"What's that?" asked a friend.

"That's the end," said Mrs. Peckham. "Let's get over to the infirmary."

A mile and a half on the other side of the field, on the porch of her home in Lakehurst, Mrs. Margaret Runion, whose son, Everett, was in the ground crew, heard a rumble like thunder.

And ten miles away, in Toms River, startled townspeople saw the sky flash briefly. Then they heard a heavy dull thud.

Strangely, Herbert O'Laughlin, a businessman from Chicago, who was in his cabin in the forward section of A deck, heard nothing. He felt only a slight tremor of the ship. Then, suddenly aware of running footsteps in the corridors, he walked out to the promenade deck on the portside to see what was wrong.

Leonhard Adelt was standing beside his wife at an open window. He was looking for his two brothers in the crowd below—brothers he hadn't seen for thirty years—when he noticed the crowd stiffen. He couldn't account for this strange reaction. Then he recalled having heard, a few seconds before, a light, dull detonation—something like a beer bottle being opened. He looked toward the stern and saw a rose glow—"like a sunrise." It was beautiful, but he knew the ship was on fire.

In the stern of the airship, walking along the main keel, mechanic George Haupt saw a fire in gas cell No. 4. It spread to No. 3 and No. 5, making a loud pop like a gas range being lit too fast.

In the control car up forward, Captain Pruss felt a sudden shock. At first he thought one of the landing ropes had snapped. Then he heard a slight explosion, then the horrified cries of people on the field.

"What is it?" he asked. He looked out the gondola window, but saw nothing unusual.

"The ship's burning!" cried Radio Officer Speck.

Suddenly the tail dipped. The captain's first instinct was to drop rear ballast to keep the ship level. But he realized the ship would be a funeral pyre within a minute, and he made a quick decision that gave those in the stern at least a small chance for life. Instead of dropping the water ballast, he let the burning stern fall fast to the ground. The bow then shot up to a

(*Continued on Page 58*)

Horrified bystanders help a dazed and badly injured couple to an ambulance.

(*Continued from Page 56*) height of 500 feet, tumbling the passengers on both promenade decks like tenpins. Glassware, lined up with military precision in the pantry on the portside of B deck, was smashed to bits.

Underneath the flaming Zeppelin, the 248 men in the landing crew, the Customs men and Rosendahl's party were scattering wildly.

To announcer Morrison, it looked as though everyone on the ship and most of the ground crew would be killed instantly. "It's bursting into flames and falling on the mooring mast!" he shouted desperately.

Tiny figures seemed to be catapulted from the dirigible, and fell. "This is terrible!" Morrison cried. "This is one of the worst catastrophes in the world!" His agonized voice trailed off into incoherence. He turned desperately toward Nehlsen, who was watching him from the window.

The engineer gave the O.K. signal. "Keep going," he said in pantomime.

"Oh, the humanity and all the passengers!" Morrison broke into sobs. "I told you —— It's a mass of smoking wreckage! Honest, I can hardly breathe!" Again he looked at Nehlsen; again Nehlsen nodded encouragement.

"I'm going to step inside where I can't see it!" Morrison said. "It's terrible! I—I—folks, I'm going to have to stop for a moment because I've lost my voice! This is the worst thing I've ever witnessed!"

Those under the ship had trouble running in the wet sand. Pat Dowling, still clutching his thirty-five pounds of Dry Ice, turned and struggled away from the

hip. He stumbled, dropped the ice, ighted himself and kept running. The air on the back of his head had been burned off. He still doesn't know how he got out alive.

As John Eitel fled, he kept looking back over his shoulder. The dirigible appeared to be chasing him. His legs were leaden weights in the slippery sand. It was a nightmare. Babe Klaassen, near the tail of the Hindenburg, thought the ship was chasing him too. It chased him for a block. As the cells ignited, one by one, each explosion seemed to shoot the dirigible forward in pursuit of him.

Everyone ran. Harry Bruno, press-relations representative of the American Zeppelin Transport Company, was standing near Rosendahl. Both he and the commander, he says, turned and instinctively ran into the wind. The instinct saved their lives, for the airship eventually crashed where they'd been standing.

But Allen Hagaman, a civilian on the "dollar detail," stumbled on the circular track. The white-hot wreck fell directly on top of him. Although a reckless mate dragged him clear, Hagaman was to die a few hours later of third-degree burns.

Near him, Charles Exel, another civilian ground-crew member, found himself trapped by a falling circle of debris. He thought his number was up. But the heat-warped frame above him suddenly curved away at the center, and he jumped through an opening. Even so, he probably would have been burned to death except for a happenstance—his clothes had been soaked by the afternoon's showers.

In the press room, Herb Rau saw a flash of fire reflected on a windowpane and he felt the telephone booth shake. "Hold it a minute," he told night editor Kelly. He ran to the open doors of the hangar and looked out. He doesn't remember how long he stood watching. Then he rushed back, in a daze, to the open telephone. "My God!" he said. "The whole thing blew up!"

There was no reply at the other end of the phone. The shocking news had completely stunned Kelly. He thought, *I don't believe it.* At last he was able to talk. "Herb," he said shakily, "take another look and make sure."

Many were immobilized with horror. The Paramount newsreelman had been getting shots of the ground crew tugging on the ropes. With his camera still pointing at ground level, he was staring at the fire as if hypnotized.

"For God's sake!" shouted his crew chief. "Turn it up!"

The cameraman jerkily swung his camera up and began to take movies.

From the instant that flames first appeared, exactly thirty-four seconds elapsed before the bow crashed to earth, with the ship almost completely enveloped in flames. The men in the landing crew were so overwhelmed by the danger that they couldn't think of anything but getting out of the way. But the reporters standing in safety behind the mooring mast and the relatives still farther back near the hangar shared one horrible thought—no one aboard could possibly live. Only a miracle could save a human being in that mass of flaming hydrogen.

Coat-and-suit manufacturer Philip Mangone's eighteen-year-old daughter, Katherine, kept saying over and over again, "Daddy died right away! Daddy died right away!"

Next to Katherine stood her sister, Mrs. Florence Balish—silently clutching the hand of her five-year-old daughter, Joan. Nat Cohen, a business associate of Mangone, fell to the sand at Katherine's feet in a dead faint.

Mrs. Joseph Spah, the acrobat's wife, screamed hysterically. Two-year-old Rich-

ard, frightened by his mother's screams, screamed too. Marilyn just stared, open-mouthed. Five-year-old Gilbert dropped to his knees and said, "Please, God, don't let my daddy die!"

To Ferdinand Lammot Belin, Sr., ex-ambassador to Poland, the sight of the dirigible bursting into flames was a numbing blow. Dazed into false calmness, neither he nor his wife realized for some time that the ship carrying their son had actually been destroyed. To Rosendahl it meant not only tragedy for many comrades but the probable deathblow to his life's work—the rigid dirigible.

The thirty-four seconds were a lifetime to many on board the Hindenburg. Philip Mangone felt the ship jar. Then it tipped, and he rolled on the dining-room promenade deck. He tried to open one of the slanting observation windows. It was locked. He picked up a chair and knocked out the isinglass. He crawled onto the window sill and grabbed hold of the ledge. It burned his hands, and he dropped about thirty-five feet into sand. Looking up, he saw the flaming airship falling all around him, like a giant cloak. A few seconds later, by a freak chance, he stood unharmed amidst molten wreckage. *How am I going to get out of here?* he thought.

Young Belin was standing near Mangone in the lounge, taking pictures. The first impact threw him to the deck. Two

---

The miracle drug that enables a new husband to survive his bride's cooking is love.

IMOGENE FEY

---

stewards opened a nearby window and jumped out. Belin started to follow, but the window slammed shut. He couldn't open it, so he broke the glass—probably with a chair, he thinks—and jumped. As soon as he hit the ground, he began running.

In the left forward gondola, a young mechanic named Theodor Ritter had just stopped the engines. Then there was a flash of flame, and his gondola seemed to be ripped from the ship. He lost consciousness. When he came to, the gondola was on the sand. His clothes were on fire, and he jumped out of the little cab and ran, scarcely realizing he'd been burned.

Eugene Schäuble, an assistant engineer who was in the stern port gondola, doesn't know to this day how he got out. He thinks he must have been blown out of the dirigible when a gas cell overhead exploded. He wasn't even bruised.

Herbert O'Laughlin, who hadn't heard the first explosion in his cabin, was climbing out a salon window on the port side when the sill buckled under his feet, catapulting him to the ground. Two sailors seized him and led him away.

Most of the passengers were in the main starboard salon. And the wind, unfortunately, was blowing to the starboard—so hard that blackened fragments of burned fabric were being scattered over many miles of scrubby pine and dwarf oak.

At first, when the ship dipped, John Pannes, the genial traffic manager of the Hamburg-American Line, was standing near a window. A moment before the first explosion, his wife had gone to their cabin for her coat. Otto Clemens, the German photographer, staggered past.

"Come on, Mr. Pannes!" said Clemens, climbing onto a window ledge. "Jump!"

Pannes shook his head. "Wait until I get my wife." He darted toward the cabins in the center of the dirigible. Clemens didn't wait. If he had paused even a few seconds, he would have been trapped. He jumped. As he fell, he heard a chorus of screaming voices behind him.

When the ship crashed on the edge of the mooring circle, Leonhard Adelt and his wife were thrown from the window to the staircase leading to B deck. The aluminum piano, on which Captain Lehmann had often played, together with tables and chairs from the main lounge, crashed around them, forming a barricade.

Adelt pulled his wife to her feet. "Through the windows!" he shouted. Neither knows how they got to the ground. But Adelt does remember his feet touching down. Enveloped in black oil clouds, they threaded their way through the molten wreckage. Several times Adelt pried open white-hot wires with his bare hands—and felt no pain.

Now they ran as if in a dream. Adelt suddenly realized his wife wasn't with him. Turning, he saw her stretched motionless on the sand. He went back, jerked her upright and gave her a push. She ran like a mechanical toy. Adelt stumbled and lay on the ground, too tired to care what happened to him. But then his wife came back, took him by the hand and led him away as if he were a child.

Mrs. Mathilde Doehner had been watching the landing operations from one of the starboard windows. Then there was a blinding flash and the ship seemed to vibrate all over. She screamed for her husband, Hermann, who had been at the next window, but she couldn't find him. Her three children—the only children on board the Hindenburg—clung to her and she quickly decided to throw them out the window.

She first tried to get ten-year-old Irene onto the ledge, but the girl was too heavy to handle with the lounge tilting so crazily. Irene scrambled away, calling for her father. Mrs. Doehner picked up Werner, the youngest, and flung him through the window. A moment later she pushed Walter through the opening. She looked around again for Irene, but she had disappeared. Mrs. Doehner jumped, and the next she knew, a sailor and a civilian were leading her to safety.

On the port side, Joseph Spah couldn't open a window. He smashed at the isinglass with his movie camera, loaded with films of the ocean crossing. The whole window fell out. As the ship tilted and rose, two men pushed against him.

"Get off!" shouted Spah above their screams of terror.

The two men climbed out the wide window and hung on. Spah followed them. The man on his right suddenly shouted something unintelligible and fell.

Spah, who was holding onto the window ledge with one arm, facing outward, saw the man spread out like a dummy in midair. A moment later the man hit the sand and bounced. The other man gasped. Spah turned and saw him slipping. The man grabbed at Spah's coat, ripping off the lapel as he dropped. Spah watched as this man fell over a hundred feet, kicking wildly all the way down.

The bow of the ship rose even higher. Spah hung on with his right arm, even though the ledge was hot. He thanked God that his best acrobatic trick was holding onto a teetering lamppost with one arm. Finally he felt the ship falling slowly. Then, after what seemed hours, when he couldn't hold on any longer, he dropped. It was a fall of about forty feet, and he knew he had to keep his feet under him. He remembers nothing of hitting the ground—just of crawling away from the terrible heat on all fours, like an animal.

No one in the control car jumped while the dirigible was in the air. It never occurred to Captain Pruss, Captain Lehmann, First Officer Sammt or the nine others to abandon their dying ship. The bow came down gently, even though the dirigible's envelope was by now almost consumed by fire. The big landing wheel under the control car hit the sand.

"Now!" Pruss said. "Now, jump!"

Seven men leaped out the windows. The rubber landing tire bounced the gondola back into the air. Five men were still in it: Pruss, Lehmann, Sammt, Herzog and Speck.

The control car hung lazily in the air and then slowly descended, this time settling in the sand. The five men flung themselves out of the gondola. Seconds later, red-hot girders crashed among them. Willy Speck sprawled out in front of Pruss, his head bleeding profusely. The captain, clothes and hair aflame, scooped up Speck and staggered through the twisted, glowing metal barrier. He put down Speck's limp, smoldering body,

and began beating out the flames in his own clothes. Just then a civilian and a sailor ran forward. Pruss recognized the civilian as his old friend Andy Wickham, mayor of Seaside Park.

Mumbling incoherently, Pruss took off his rings and gave them to Wickham. Then he handed over his watch and wallet. "The passengers!" he cried suddenly. Turning away, Pruss ran back into the sizzling ruins.

Above the control car, Assistant Radio Officer Herbert Dowe jumped out of his little radio room just as the gondola hit the sand a second time. The heat was so intense that he couldn't stand it. He fell to the ground, covering his face, hands and head with wet sand. There he waited until the envelope of the ship had completely burned off. Then he got to his knees. Now he could breathe. Cautiously he picked his way through the glowing skeleton of the dirigible. He suffered only minor burns.

Probably the most unbelievable escape was that of fourteen-year-old Werner Franz, the cabin boy. Werner was in the belly of the dirigible, aft of the passengers' quarters, walking on the narrow keel catwalk, when he felt a hot blast. Stunned, unable to move, he waited as gas cells astern of him caught fire in rapid succession. Then he stumbled to an open hatch in the bottom of the ship and jumped through it. But the flaming dirigible was descending about him, and he knew he was finished. But as he lost consciousness a water tank above him gave way—apparently exploded by the heat. Young Werner was soaked to the skin. The cold water revived him and he was able to scramble free of the falling debris. Then he worked his way through the tangled mass. The boy escaped, wringing wet, with only minor burns.

On the other side of the flaming ship, manufacturer Mangone found himself trapped by wreckage. Dropping to his knees, he dug a trench in the damp sand and burrowed his way out. When he emerged on the other side, all his hair, except one small lock on his forehead, had been burned off. And the back of his coat was on fire.

Mangone's daughter, Katherine, ran onto the field. A reporter grabbed her, begged for her name and the name of the one she was looking for. She tried to break free, but the reporter hung onto her.

"Go away!" she cried. "I have to find my father!"

"Tell me your father's name. If he's saved, I'll broadcast the name so your mother will know he's safe."

She gave the information and hurried toward the wreck.

A hundred yards to the rear, Mrs. Spah was saying her rosary and trying to keep her hysterical children under control. Now she had a new fear: the field was a great snarl of cars, trucks and ambulances rushing to the wreckage; sirens were shrieking and people shouting. Mrs. Spah was afraid the children would be run over. She was now saying out loud, "He's too good to die like that!"

As she repeated these words like a chant, she herded the children to the west side of two small airplane hangars.

At first everyone near the mooring circle had run for his life. A moment later Navy and civilian workers automatically ran back to the wreckage to rescue survivors. Those near Chief Bull Tobin heard his bellowing voice a few seconds after the first blast.

"Stand fast!" he shouted.

One man, a junior officer, stopped—more afraid of Bull than of the fire.

There were many heroes. Heedless of their own safety, Navy men and civilians, with Rosendahl in command, carried rescue operations as close as they could to the sprawled wreck. Leroy Comstock, the huge electrician whose son Larry was somewhere in the landing crew, jumped from his perch on the mast and ran toward the flames. He saw acrobat Spah crawling slowly through the dense smoke as girders crashed nearby. Comstock put the acrobat under one arm and sprinted out of the searing heat. A moment later, he dumped Spah on the sand and ran back into the smoke for more survivors.

Most rescuers worked in twos. William Craig, of Standard Oil, teamed up with a sailor in dungarees who carried a bottle of carbon dioxide. They saw a man strolling nonchalantly out of the wreck, seemingly unharmed.

"I'm all right," said the survivor. They led him away from the furnacelike heat.

Next they found a girl lying in the sand. Her face and shoulders were untouched, but the rest of her body was badly burned. She was mumbling in German as, one on each side of her, they dug their arms under the sand to make a cradle. But the sand was too hot. Craig grasped the girl by the arm, and her flesh disintegrated to

... ...

Children's Recital

As I view the performance,
I'm chiefly
Concerned that the balance
is wrong—
My child's in the limelight
too briefly,
The rest of the program's
too long!

By May Richstone

... ...

the bone. The girl didn't know he'd touched her. They had to carry her to an ambulance in a blanket.

As Craig and the sailor hurried back to the wreck, they heard a man shouting repeatedly, "The fuel tanks are going to explode!"

No one paid any attention to the man at first. Then someone angrily cried, "Shut up, for God's sake!"

A man suddenly darted out of the wreck. It seemed impossible that a human being could live in that heat. A flame licked after the man, knocking him flat on his face. Rescuers couldn't advance because of the heat. Helplessly, they watched the man get up, toss his hands in the air, stagger a few feet and fall again. Again he tried, half rising in the blistering heat. Then he crawled desperately a few more feet, but finally wilted and lay still. Ten minutes later, two sailors shielding their faces dragged him out. He was as black as a burned stump.

Another man, his clothes and hair burned off, came marching through the flames in a sort of goose step. Harry Kroh, the local reporter, took his arm.

"An ambulance is coming," said the newsman.

The man kept talking away in German. He was put in a truck. Then he abruptly keeled over, dead.

Tom Sleek, another of the sixteen survivors of the Macon present, saw a flaming man jump from the ship and fall on his head on the curving railroad track. He and Monty Rowe ran forward, beat out the man's burning clothes and carried him toward safety. As they were leaving the glowing skeleton of the Hindenburg, Rowe saw something he wishes he could forget—a transparent hand stuck to a white-hot girder like an empty glove.

Chief Julius Malak, a survivor of the Shenandoah and Macon wrecks, found himself running to help. As he ran, he thought, *I owe somebody a chance to live. They gave me a chance when I was in the same fix.* He saw a woman jump out of the main lounge from a height of sixty feet. She landed on her face on the gravel inside the mooring circle. Seeing she was dead, Malak went to the bow of the dirigible. There in the nose stood the two German crewmen who had been lowering the landing lines. Both were grasping girders as if for dear life. They were burned to a crisp.

As though walking in her sleep, an elderly woman stepped out of the belly of the ship by the regular gangway. Two sailors pulled her free just as burning framework was about to crash on her.

Fifty feet from the burning fuel tanks, two other sailors found a man, his clothes aflame, sitting on the sand. In a doped, lazy way, he was idly slapping at the fire. The sailors threw sand on him and led him away.

Petty Officer First Class John Iannacone, a member of the landing party, had stared with horror as passengers dropped like ants from the dirigible. He saw one man, waxy white in the glare, walking toward him, wearing only shoes. With a mate, Iannacone got to the lee side of the Hindenburg. Three elderly passengers were still inside the port lounge, standing stunned. The sailors had to pull them out by force.

Riveter John C. Wainwright had climbed down from the helium tower at the first explosion to look for his seventeen-year-old son, who was in the landing crew. When the elder Wainwright arrived near the wreck he saw a German officer, the back of his uniform burned out, being chased by three American sailors. Though severely burned, the officer was trying to run back to the flames. He was finally caught and escorted to an ambulance. It was Max Pruss. He had already made several trips into the wreckage, looking for survivors.

At Paul Kimball Hospital, ten miles away on the outskirts of Lakewood, Night Superintendent Lillian Walshe was making her rounds when she was called to the phone.

A frantic voice shouted, "Get hold of all the doctors and nurses you can! Send them to Lakehurst Naval Station!"

Miss Walshe quickly notified Elizabeth Miller, the hospital's administrator. Together they went to the storeroom for bandages and supplies. Then they began transferring the few patients in the male ward to cots in another ward.

A second call came in a few minutes later. "Don't send the doctors!" said the same voice. "The Hindenburg exploded! But everybody's dead!"

"Guess we needn't bother any more," said Miss Walshe.

"We'll finish anyway," replied the administrator. Fortunately she remembered the frenzy that followed the burning of the steamer Morro Castle.

Mrs. Clifton Alice Rhodes, a nurse from the same hospital, was home, ironing. Boake Carter interrupted the radio program she was listening to. In his sepulchral voice he begged all nurses and doctors in the vicinity to rush to Lakehurst. In a minute Mrs. Rhodes and her husband were speeding in their car toward the naval station.

Recovered from his breakdown, announcer Herb Morrison was again out on the field, trying to find survivors to interview. He saw a man coming out of the flame and smoke with his hands raised high over his head as if in surrender. It was Mangone. Sailors were trying to lead the manufacturer to an ambulance.

"I won't go," said Mangone stolidly. "My daughters are here. They'll find me." He refused to budge.

At that moment Katherine Mangone was a few yards away, questioning another survivor. "A lot of us are alive," said the man in a dazed voice.

Then the lights of a car bouncing across the dark field lit up her father, and she ran to him. His burned face was saffron-colored and skin hung down from his hands in long strips. But he seemed unperturbed, even good-natured. Morrison helped father and daughter into an improvised ambulance. They were driven along Lansdowne Road to the infirmary.

"Go telephone the family," said Mangone. Katherine, knowing her father was a stubborn man, left to find a phone.

Mrs. Spah was standing inside one of the airplane hangars when a soldier-sightseer rushed in. He shouted, "Spah!"

"Over here!" she said, eager yet afraid.

The soldier said, "Your husband is alive."

Holding the baby tightly, she followed the soldier into the airship hangar. Her husband was sitting on a bench. Mrs. Spah, without saying a word, felt him all over. She couldn't believe he was really unhurt.

"Are you all right?" she finally asked. He nodded dazedly. She repeated the question a dozen times, and he kept nodding. He told her he'd seen a new blue car next to the hangar. It was filled with baby clothes, and though he had never seen it before, he knew from descriptions in her letter that this was their car.

The soldier returned a moment later with Mrs. Spah's sister, Arlyene, and the two other children. Gilbert and Marilyn leaped all over their father.

Gilbert's first words were, "Where's Ulla?"

Spah didn't have the heart to tell his children that the dog was somewhere in the tail of the burning ship.

Now Morrison was recording an interview with another survivor in the little building next to the plane hangars. Otto Clemens was explaining excitedly in German how he'd escaped. A man holding Clemens' arm—a friend who'd come to meet him—translated the photographer's story into English. "He was on his way to his cabin when the explosion came. He jumped out." Then the friend exclaimed with wonder, "He's not hurt a bit!"

A note was handed to Morrison. A look of relief came on his face. He spoke into the microphone, "I have good news for you. It's just been announced that twenty-five to thirty people have been saved!"

Farther out on the field, Harry Bruno, the press representative for the Hindenburg's owners, had gone toward the control car to look for his old friend, Lehmann. A man completely naked and burned white staggered toward Bruno. He fell dying at the publicist's feet.

Then a short, stocky figure walked out of the flames. It was Lehmann. His clothes were burning. A sailor and Bruno ran toward him. They beat out the flames with their hands.

"Hello again," said Lehmann. He was in shock, but remarkably self-controlled. "I can't believe it. How many of my passengers and crew are saved?"

He stumbled. Bruno took one arm, the sailor the other. Lehmann's back was burned as if by an acetylene torch, from his head to the base of his spine.

By this time those in the parking area were sure there would be no more survivors. The Belins were convinced that their son had been *(Continued on Page 62)*

(*Continued from Page 60*) killed. In a state of shock, they were led to their car. Just as the three were about to drive away, they heard a peculiar whistle—like their son's. They all turned, shocked anew. And there he was, coming toward them.

Half a mile to the east, the dispensary was in a state of ordered chaos. At first there had been only one doctor and several corpsmen, but soon volunteers poured in. Navy wives and women civilian workers put gobs of petroleum jelly on gauze and helped shoot doses of morphine into the survivors. Nurses and doctors, alerted by Night Superintendent Lillian Walshe, came from Paul Kimball Hospital within half an hour of the crash. Then nurses arrived from Fitkin at Asbury Park.

Mrs. Doehner, the bun on her hair almost completely burned off, was brought in with her two little boys. Mrs. Nellie Gregg, a post secretary who had volunteered, was told to take them to the adjoining Family Hospital. Mrs. Gregg picked up the smaller boy, Werner. He was so frightened he couldn't speak. He didn't know his father was already dead and his sister Irene was dying.

Mrs. Peckham was another volunteer. She helped seat the glassy-eyed survivors on benches outside the infirmary while they waited for admittance. Hans Hugo Witt, a major in the *Luftwaffe*, asked in broken English if he could send a telegram to his wife.

"What do you want to say?" asked Mrs. Peckham, after writing down his wife's address.

"I well," said the major. "I well!"

Spah, accompanied by his wife, hobbled into the dispensary, where a doctor found his ankle was broken. He was taped up and told to go home. Just then a nurse called, "Who speaks German?"

Spah, who spoke the language fluently, followed the nurse into a small room on the first floor. A young crewman, Erich Spehl, wanted to send a cable to his bride. Spah copied down the man's address.

"*Ich lebe* (I live)," said Spehl through swollen lips.

Spah wrote down the simple message. As he left the room to send the telegram, the young German died.

In the next room, Captain Lehmann, bare from the waist up, was stretched out on a table on his stomach. Though he was so badly burned that he obviously couldn't survive, Lehmann was composed and thoughtful. Leonhard Adelt, passing by saw his friend and came into the room.

"What caused it?" asked Adelt.

"Lightning," answered Lehmann, his forehead wrinkling in a puzzled way. The two looked at each other a moment but said nothing more.

Down the hall, Mrs. Gregg was cutting the coat and shirt from a German. She couldn't tell whether he was a crewman, officer or passenger because his clothes were so badly burned. She tried to be as gentle as possible.

"*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*" asked the man.

"No," she said, leaning close to him.

He put a charred hand on her cheek and tried to smile. "Sweet," he said. Then he died.

The airship hangar was a madhouse. The first room on the east side had been set up as a temporary Customs office. Next to it was a Western Union station for the convenience of passengers, and beyond, the pressroom. The newsmen, their ranks swelled by reporters who had rushed in from New York and Philadelphia, were weary, high-strung, frantic: they were laboring through an incredibly dramatic story that was impossible to report adequately. Information came in bit by bit and was difficult to confirm. Nobody could interview the German-speaking survivors. Nobody from the Navy was available to give technical information on the probable cause of the disaster. Wild rumors, such as the death of Rosendahl, were passed. And to compound these difficulties, there was only one telephone, and it was in almost constant use for official business. But all the newsmen co-operated that night. No one tried to beat the others out of the story. All the information was pooled.

Meanwhile Einar Thulin had looked all over the field in vain for journalist Birger Brink, whom he knew only by his photograph. Then he hurried to the Western Union station in the hangar. He was the only foreign correspondent on the spot and he knew he could scoop Europe. His was a double responsibility. He wired the bare details of the tragedy to the Stockholm Aftonbladet and added a postscript: "Shall I stay on story or find Brink?"

Before long, an answer came to Thulin from Stockholm. It read: "Find Brink."

Since Thulin had already covered the infirmary, he drove quickly to the nearest hospital, Paul Kimball. In a corridor buzzing with action, he saw a man sitting down, his face black.

"Are you Birger Brink?" asked Thulin.

"Why, no. Don't you recognize me?"

To his amazement, Thulin realized it was his countryman, Rolf von Heidenstam, the industrialist.

"What happened to Brink?" asked Thulin.

"He and I were talking as the ship came in," said von Heidenstam. "We were looking out the main lounge window. 'That's a nice shot for me,' he said. Then he went into his cabin to get his camera."

Brink was never seen alive again.

Thousands of miles away in Germany, a ringing telephone had just awakened Dr. Hugo Eckener, director of the Zeppelin organization. It was the Berlin correspondent of The New York Times.

"Yes, what do you want?" asked Doctor Eckener, sleepy and annoyed.

"I thought it my duty to report to you some bad news we have just received from New York," said correspondent Weyer. "The airship Hindenburg exploded over Lakehurst and crashed in flames."

Eckener was stunned. "Yes—no—no, it isn't possible," he stammered.

"Is there a possibility of sabotage, do you think?" asked Weyer.

"If it was in the air," said Eckener, hardly able to move his lips, "then it might perhaps have been sabotage." Slowly he hung up the phone.

By midnight the wild excitement at Lakehurst Naval Air Station had abated. The last survivors had been taken in ambulances to Paul Kimball, Fitkin and Monmouth hospitals. Bodies had been carefully lined up inside the airship hangar. Funeral directors were beginning to set up an improvised morgue in the cavernous building.

And out on the edge of the mooring circle guards stood around the smoldering carcass of the Hindenburg with orders from Rosendahl not to let anybody touch anything.

Weary volunteers were now leaving the dispensary. Civilian members of the landing crew dragged across the sand to their cars. All of them went home, and took off their filthy clothes, which smelled of smoke, scorched hair and burned flesh.

Never had a disaster hit with the impact of the Hindenburg explosion. Never before had photographers and newsreel men been present to record a major tragedy, and within hours shocking pictures of the fire were wired all over the world. By noon the next day, newsreel extras of the catastrophe were being shown at theaters along Broadway. It was a rare showing which wasn't punctuated by screams from the audience.

At 4:30 that afternoon, NBC appalled its listeners with a fifteen-minute broadcast on the Blue Network of Herbert Morrison's harrowing recording. To this day, thousands swear they heard an actual on-the-spot broadcast of the tragedy.

The disaster evoked disbelief at first, then profound shock. For the world had been convinced of the safety of the commercial Zeppelins.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, fishing for tarpon from the yacht Potomac in the Gulf of Mexico, sent a message of condolence to Chancellor Hitler. Ex-heavyweight boxing champion Max Schmeling, who had been forced to cancel his reservations on the fatal trip, said, "I just can't understand it. Only yesterday I was telling some friends it was safer to travel on the Hindenburg than by boat."

In Germany there was some bitterness because the United States had refused to sell the German Zeppelin Transport Company nonflammable helium. But the *Führer* wired his thanks to Roosevelt for his thoughtful message. Reichsmarschall Goering went even further. In an emotion-charged cable to the Secretary of the Navy, Goering said, "The unreserved help of the American airmen coming to the rescue of their German comrades is a beautiful proof of the spirit which links the airmen of all nations." It was a spirit which was soon to come to a rude end.

The day after the tragedy, fatigued nurses and doctors were still on duty at Paul Kimball Hospital. Hans Luther, the ambassador from Germany, visited the survivors. The pudgy little man was so upset that, as he apologized to the American passengers, he cried because they had been injured on a German airship.

One American passenger couldn't see Luther. Philip Mangone's face had swollen so badly that his eyes were tiny slits. A fastidious man, he kept asking his daughter, Katherine, how he looked.

"Fine," she always said.

Mangone asked to "see" his five-year-old granddaughter, Joan. Katherine went out and briefed her niece. "Granddaddy looks a little funny," she explained, "but if he asks how he looks, tell him fine."

The little girl was brought into Mangone's private room on the first floor.

"How do I look, dear?"

Joan didn't hesitate. "You look awful, grandpa."

Mangone burst out laughing. "Thank God somebody'll tell me the truth," he said. He lost small parts of both ears and his burned-off black hair came in snow white, but Mangone suffered no permanent injuries.

Lehmann was also at Paul Kimball. Although he was in great pain, he never complained or lost his astounding composure. He knew he was going to die soon, and he was pleased to learn that his badly burned comrade, Max Pruss, would live.

Later in the day Lehmann was visited by Commander Rosendahl. The two friends went over each possible cause of the fire. But each possibility—from static electricity to a gas cell ruptured by a broken propeller blade—led into a blind alley.

"No, no," said Lehmann, slowly shaking his head. "It must have been an infernal machine." And then he added, with the eternal optimism of all airship men, "But of course, regardless of the cause, the next ship must have helium."

Lehmann died that afternoon, bringing the death toll to thirty-six—twenty-two crewmen, thirteen passengers and one member of the ground crew, Allen Hagaman.

On May eleventh, at Pier 86 at the foot of 46th Street, New York City, 10,000 people gathered to watch the Nazi rites for the twenty-eight European victims of the disaster. The swastika flew every few feet, and uniformed Storm Troopers stood at attention at the head of each coffin. Their right arms stiff and uplifted in the Nazi salute, children marched past the victims singing the Horst Wessel song. Then the coffins were placed aboard the S. S. Hamburg for the journey home. It was the end of the short but brilliant era of the giant dirigibles.

The inquiry board finally laid the disaster to St. Elmo's fire, but the true cause remains unknown—and has become unimportant. Although the thirteen passengers who died in the holocaust were the first passenger casualties in airship history, not a single rigid dirigible—not even the reliable old Graf Zeppelin—has carried another paying passenger since May 6, 1937.

Mr. Toland's story of the death of the Hindenburg is one section of his new book, Ships in the Sky, to be published by Henry Holt & Co. on February 4, 1957.—The Editors

"Be serious now. What do you want for Christmas besides a divorce?"

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST