

Hindenburg



**70 years ago the tragic fate
of the largest aircraft ever to fly.**

La Catastrofe dell' Hindenburg

Nel 1936 il gigantesco Zeppelin *Hindenburg* compì per dieci volte il viaggio d'andata e ritorno fra la Germania e gli Stati Uniti; viaggiando tranquillo a una velocità di quasi 125 chilometri l'ora esso offriva ai passeggeri, che pagavano l'equivalente di 720 dollari per l'andata e il ritorno, comodità e lusso. Le richieste di prenotazioni erano così numerose che per il 1937 erano previsti diciotto viaggi e si erano costruite altre cabine per poter accogliere un maggior numero di passeggeri. Il 3 maggio 1937, quando lo *Hindenburg* lasciò la Germania per il primo viaggio dell'anno, c'erano a bordo 97 persone. Venti contrari resero più lungo il viaggio, e temporali ritardarono l'atterraggio. Ma poco dopo le sette della sera del 6 maggio, lo Zeppelin si preparava ad atterrare a Lakehurst, New Jersey; furono calati i cavi, e l'immenso dirigibile (era lungo 240 metri) scese a meno di sessanta metri da terra. L'incendio scoppiò fra due scompartimenti di gas nella parte superiore della poppa, e nel giro di pochi secondi cortine di fuoco crepitante avvolgevano tutta la coda. Mentre gli spettatori guardavano ammutoliti dall'orrore e i passeggeri si lanciavano nel vuoto urlando, lo Zeppelin si abbatté al suolo. Trentatré persone morirono e molti dei superstiti riportarono ustioni spaventose. Le cause del disastro non sono mai state completamente chiarite; le diverse spiegazioni hanno in comune la congettura che l'involucro avesse lasciato sfuggire dell'idrogeno e questo avesse preso fuoco. Fu la fine dei grandi Zeppelin.

I resti della posta dell'Hindenburg

Dopo il disastro, gli addetti recuperarono 358 pezzi delle 17,609 buste contenute a bordo del dirigibile. Di queste, 147 erano dirette negli Stati Uniti. Le lettere parzialmente bruciate, dove era possibile risalire all'indirizzo, furono incluse in un contenitore di cellophane, sigillate con il talloncino di controllo del Post Office Department, siglate da due ufficiali postali e inviate al destinatario. Il valore di questa corrispondenza, secondo il grado di conservazione, varia da 10,000 a 20,000 dollari nelle recenti aste.

In alto: l'*Hindenburg* a Lakehurst

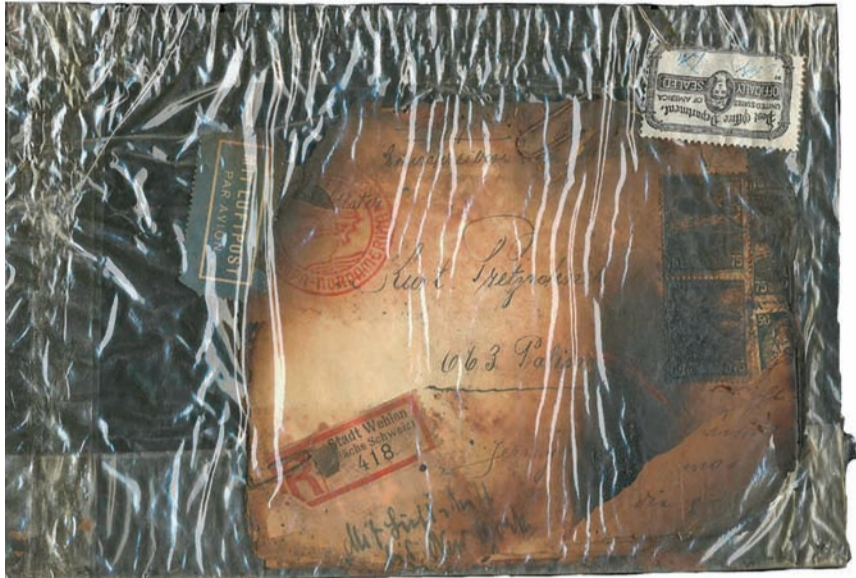


The Fate of the Hindenburg

Ten times during 1936, the giant Zeppelin *Hindenburg* made the round trip between Germany and the United States. Cruising quietly at 78 miles per hour, it gave its passengers, who paid \$720 apiece for the round trip, a voyage of the utmost smoothness and luxury. The demand for reservations aboard the hydrogen-inflated airship was so great that eighteen flights had been scheduled for the 1937 season, and extra cabins had been built to accommodate more passengers. There were ninety-seven persons aboard on May 3, 1937, when the *Hindenburg* left Germany for its first voyage of the year to North America. Head winds prolonged the flight, and thunderstorms delayed the landing. But shortly after seven o'clock on the evening of May 6, the 804-foot Zeppelin prepared to moor at Lakehurst, New Jersey. Cables were lowered and the *Hindenburg* came down to less than two hundred feet. Then, suddenly, disaster struck. Flames burst from between two cells of the upper stern, and within seconds, sheets of crackling fire enveloped the tail section. As spectators watched in dumb horror, and screaming passengers leaped from the ship, the Zeppelin fell to the ground in twisted, mangled wreckage. Thirty-six lives were lost in the holocaust, and many of those who survived were horribly burned. The cause of the disaster was never definitely established. There were many theories, but all that seemed certain was that free hydrogen had somehow escaped and had been ignited. The *Hindenburg* tragedy, which brought to an abrupt end the era of the great Zeppelins, remains an unsolved mystery.

Hindenburg Crash Mail

Postal officials salvaged approximately 358 pieces in burned conditions from the 17,609 estimated pieces of mail on the flight. 147 of these were addressed to person in USA. The market value of a *Hindenburg* crash cover is between \$10,000 up to \$20,000 in recent auctions.



Above: this postcard was part of the mail salvaged from the wreckage. The U.S. Post Office Department enclosed the fragile, charred remains in a cellophane envelope and officially sealed it before delivery to the addressee. This folded postcard, also known as an "economical folded business card", allowed the sender to type the address and message without turning the card over. After typing, the address portion was folded to become part of the card face and then glued into place. This card, addressed to John Schoonbrod in New York City, has a typed message on the reverse in which Ernst wrote that he was sending greetings by air, asked why he had not heard from Hans for awhile, and suggested a reply on an upcoming return flight of the Hindenburg.

In basso: i soccorritori cercano di spegnere le fiamme dopo l'esplosione dell'Hindenburg. Fra le persone che rimasero mortalmente ferite nella catastrofe dell'Hindenburg era Ernst Lehmann, che aveva comandato il dirigibile nel 1936 e che in quell'ultimo tragico volo era a bordo come osservatore.

Below: rescue squads are putting out the fire with extinguishers. Among the fatally injured was Ernst Lehmann, who had commanded the Hindenburg in 1936 and who was aboard as an observer during the last, tragic flight.

Remains of a cover contained in the original cellophane Officially Sealed wrapper. The enclosure is several pages thick and shows varying layers of the burning which obscures postmarks and leaves only a scarred trace of four 75pf and part of 50pf stamp. Sold by Siegel Auction Galleries on July 2006, for \$12,500.

Herbert Morrison reported one of radio's greatest moments, yelled **"It burst into flames!"**... **"Oh!... The Umanity!"**

