

HENSLEY URGES DEVELOPMENT OF RIGID AIRSHIPS

Colonel William C. Hensley of the Balloon and Airship Division of the Air Service has been in Europe for the last six months studying the construction and operation of the modern types of dirigibles, particularly the rigid dirigible. He has covered the ground thoroughly in England where he has taken a complete course of training in handling such ships. He is now in Germany and is at present mastering the intricate details relative to the construction and operation of the German rigid airships. In the ensuing description which is copied verbatim from his report, he gives a vivid account of his experience in a German rigid "Bodensee", a rigid airship of most improved design and construction and urges the development of this branch of aerial navigation in the United States.

"Airships are now possible in any kind or condition of weather'. No weather conditions, except a strong-cross hangar wind, prevent the "Bodensee", the commercial air-liner built since the Armistice by the Zeppelin Airship Corporation at Frederichshafen on Lake Constance, from making its daily flight between Frederichshafen and STAAKEN, which lies some thirteen miles from BERLIN. Of this fact, my last flight convinced me.

In a driving snow storm, October 25, 1919, at 9:30 A. M., we left FREDERICHSHAFEN in this "Bodensee". At 100 meters height, we lost sight of the ground, and had to steer by a dead reckoning and to locate by directional wireless from Frederichshafen and Staaken. Once only did we see the ground. That was when we turned a circle over the town of GERA to determine direction of wind. About 150 kilometers from Staaken we entered a fog, about 100 kilometers from Staaken, a driving rain.

In spite of all these navigational difficulties, we landed at STAAKEN only fifteen minutes late. Any other type of aircraft would have been wholly impossible under the violent weather conditions encountered.

Because she flies between BERLIN and the natural inlet and outlet to SWITZERLAND, the accommodations on the "Bodensee" are at a premium. Each time that I have been in BERLIN in the last two months, bookings have been made for trips on this ship four weeks in advance, and only the fact that I was undergoing a course in rigid airship piloting (and was thus allowed to ride in the pilot-house) got me aboard.

Many people will pay 475 marks or \$15.00 in fare to see the tremendous panorama spread below the air traveller. Unexcelled beauty is unfolded to the eye of the passenger, which leaves a feeling of regret that the journey is so quickly ended.

Sixteen times I have made this journey. Sixteen times I have regretted to have it end. Leaving STAAKEN, the route passes over POTSDAM, where not only the old palace of "Sans Souci", but the new palace of the former Emperor of Germany may be seen. These are surrounded by less pretentious but still beautiful type of buildings, situated in wooded areas which gleam with small lakes.

The ELBE is passed at WITTENBERG, then on to LEIPZIG. Directly over the so-called largest railroad terminal in the world we hover, and fly on again to BAYREUTH, the scene of Wagner's "PARSIFAL", where the theatre may be distinguished from above.

NURNBERG, the ancient walled city, is next pointed out on the way to NORDLINGEN and ULM, where the famous church spire, second in height only to St. Paul's in London, is almost touched by the airship itself. With a turn over LAKE CONSTANCE, we land at FREDERICHSHAFEN.

The voyage leaves a mental picture of an ever-changing series of beautiful scenes; of the ruins of ancient castles, of little country hamlets tucked away in ravines, - artistic, to a degree, they are with their civic centres combining playgrounds, swimming pools and tennis courts.

It leaves, also, a remembrance of stately monuments to Germanic heroes of a size and simplicity that over-awes, of church spires that reveal the touch of a master chisel, of industrial centres that made Germany a formidable rival for the commerce of the world, and the extensive cultivated areas, laden again with immense crops. Sharply defined in irregular shapes, one sees woods so dense that light never reaches the interior.

So from the white and gold of "San Souci" through the green of the country side, past the red and white of the farms, over the black of the woods, races the colour scheme below the ship, to the blue of LAKE CONSTANZE.

Each day the trip is made on way-- LAKE CONSTANZE to BERLIN, or vice-versa. Two days in each week, one up and one down journey, the route goes via MUNICH, where a landing is made to discharge and to take on passengers. It is approximately a distance of 390 miles, and the liner negotiates this in from four to six hours, depending upon the wind, direction, and speed. This is quite different from twenty-six hours in a present day German train with its attendant discomforts. The food to be had on the airship is the exception to the "ersatz" food served elsewhere in Germany. The steward probably obtains his supply for two days at FRIEDRICHSHAFEN, which is at the SWISS border.

Fifteen kilograms of baggage is transported with each ticket and excess baggage is charged for at the rate of five marks per kilogramme.

This commercial service is operated by what is known as the D E L A G Company, (which is a contraction for DEUTSCHEN-LUFTSCHIFFARTS-AKTIEN-GESELLSCHAFT) the HAMBURG-AMERICAN STEAMSHIP COMPANY in BERLIN acting as booking agents for the operating Company. The ZEPPELIN AIRSHIP CORPORATION has no connection with the above operating Company, although there may be interlocking directorates.

The design of this "Bodensee" is the latest in airships, being at the present date the only truly stream-lined rigid airship actually in commission. It is really so far advanced in every way over anything I have seen, that one is led to express the opinion that, in airship construction (and operation as well), all other countries are mere "Babes in the Woods" compared to the Germans.

This is not said with any idea of criticism of the efforts of other countries, but only with the desire to see our country realize that her future guidance in airship construction and operation should be patterned after the most efficient system. There is no doubt in my mind that that system lies in Germany.

Commercial air navigation is coming, and we must meet that issue very soon. Let us be prepared to choose our course so that we shall make as few mistakes as possible. The building up of the present small commercial enterprise in Germany has meant numerous heartbreaking experiences, - experiences that would have forbidden progress, had not one man with a fixed idea held to his opinions.

Millions of marks have been lost in the beginning, and lives of members of crews have been lost, but let it be said, to the eternal credit of the man with the fixed idea and of his subordinates, that not a single passenger carried on a Zeppelin airship has been injured or killed, - and to date the total carried has reached the sum of plus 140,000.

This statement does ~~not mean~~ that casualties will not occur. Irresponsible boys can take airships in the air and bring them down in flames in the heart of a large city, or careless officers and men may explode a dirigible on the ground and burn a number of spectators; but we can at least conduct our service along scientific, known principles, that can be obtained from an intimate study of the German methods, and thus minimize the number of disasters.

An instance which shows the remarkable speed obtainable by this ship of 700,000 cubic feet capacity occurred on one of the sixteen trips that I have enjoyed in this ship, is as follows:

On one trip from FREDRICHSHAFEN to BERLIN, in the vicinity of LEIPSIC, an aeroplane drew alongside of the "Bodensee". Dr. ECKNER, the dean of all airship men now living, was in command and the first to see the aeroplane. He immediately rang all four engines for "Allekraft" (full speed), one could feel the airship jump under the sudden impulse and the race was on. Try as it did for twenty-two minutes the aeroplane gained not an inch, and finally dived and circled for its home field. I checked the speed during this burst of speed and clocked 168 kilometers an hour. How strong the following wind was I was unable to find out, - probably about 33 kilometers per hour.

America is by nature, the chosen spot of all the world for commercial airship work; with her great expanse of territory within, with her far flung territories and insular possessions, with her commercial possibilities in Central and South America, with her centers of population disposed so as to require more rapid transport than yet in operation, with her push and energy that bids for supremacy in all things good, with her supply of helium gas unequalled in all the world, should bid strong for that which is, unquestionably, her way in the path of Progress.

WAKE UP AMERICA !!!!!!!!!