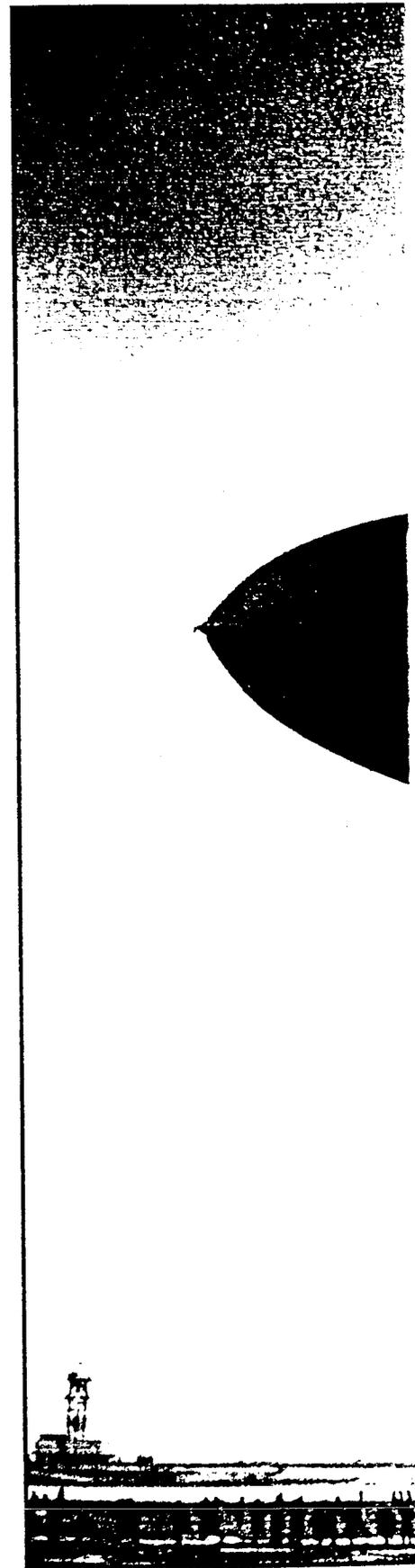

Flames in the Sky!

“Here it comes, ladies and gentlemen. And what a sight it is, a thrilling one, a **marvelous** sight.”

So began Herbert Morrison, an announcer for radio station WLS. He was calmly describing the **airship Hindenburg**. It was just about to land at Lakehurst, New Jersey, on May 6, 1937. Morrison was one of the reporters there to cover the story.

Suddenly, Morrison’s voice filled with fright. “It’s burst into flames! It is burning, bursting into flames and is falling! Oh! It’s a terrible sight! The flames are 500 feet into the sky!”



An Ordinary Trip

On May 3, 1937, the Hindenburg left Frankfurt, Germany. It carried 38 passengers and a crew of 59. The giant airship had already made ten trips across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States. This looked like another ordinary trip.

At first, the flight went smoothly. But as the Hindenburg neared Lakehurst, the weather turned bad. Black clouds gathered. Thunder rumbled. The wind began picking up. Captain Max Pruss didn't want to **risk** a landing. He would stay where he was and wait for better weather.

At last a message came from Lakehurst that all was clear and waiting. The Hindenburg headed for Lakehurst. It seemed that the three-day trip was safely over. Passengers gathered their belongings. They checked their passports. Some looked out the windows. Family and friends waved from the ground. Everyone was smiling.

At 7:21 P.M., landing ropes were lowered from the airship. Captain Pruss sent a message. The message read: "The Hindenburg has just made a safe landing." Nothing could have been further from the truth.

The Safest Aircraft

Until 7:25 P.M., May 6, 1937, no one doubted the Hindenburg's safety. The builders of the airship were proud of their perfect safety record. Not one of their airships had crashed. The Hindenburg was the safest yet. The huge **blimp** measured 146 feet high and 803 feet long. People looked up in wonder whenever it passed overhead. They believed that one day thousands of people would travel by airship.



The Hindenburg had only one weakness. It was filled with **hydrogen**, a gas that exploded easily. One spark could cause the whole airship to explode.

So the crew made sure there were no sparks. No passenger could carry matches or lighters. There was a special room for smoking. It was sealed with two locked doors. Passengers wore sneakers or felt boots to **prevent** sparks. Crew members who worked near the gas cells wore no buttons or metal because of the danger of sparks. They left nothing to chance.

The Accident

The Hindenburg was ready to land. It hung quietly in the air about 75 feet above the ground. At 7:25 p.m., W.W. Groves, an engineer on the ground, noticed

something strange. There was a small spark dancing near the stern. "It looked like static electricity," he later said.

Suddenly, a huge flame burst from the top of the airship. One of the gas cells in the tail exploded. Within seconds, another cell did the same. People on the ground ran for their lives.

"The whole tail section burst into flames," Groves remembered. "I began to run. It was exploding above my head. Burning fabric began to fall."

Meanwhile, in the control car, Captain Pruss felt the airship jerk. He wasn't sure what it was. Perhaps a landing rope snapped, he thought. Then he heard



a loud bang and people screaming on the field below.

“What is it?” he asked, looking out the window.

“The ship’s burning!” cried the radio officer.

On the ground, Herbert Morrison, the radio announcer, couldn’t believe his eyes. “This is the worst thing I’ve ever witnessed,” he said.

Run for Your Life

It looked like no one could live through the fire. But somehow 62 people did. It took 34 seconds for the burning wreck to crash to the ground. This gave some people time to jump to safety. Passenger Philip Mangone tried to open a window. It was stuck. So he took a chair and broke the glass. Then he jumped 35 feet to the ground. The fire burned his face and hands. But he had no other **injuries**.

Werner Franz, a fourteen-year-old cabin boy, made the most unlikely escape. The fire was all around him. Franz thought he was finished. Just then, the heat caused a water tank to burst over his head, and it soaked him. The water saved him. He managed to escape without being badly burned.

But others did not make it. In all, 36 people died. That included 22 crew members, 13 passengers, and one member of the ground crew.

What caused the crash? It may have been static electricity. It may have been lightning. Some people even think that the fire was set on purpose. No one knows for sure.

Today, airships use **helium**. Helium does not explode as easily as hydrogen. One thing, however, is certain. Because of the crash of the Hindenburg, airships were never again used for passenger travel.

Do You Remember?

■ In the blank, write the letter of the best ending for each sentence.

- _____ 1. The Hindenburg was filled with
a. hydrogen. b. oil. c. water.
- _____ 2. Passengers were not allowed to carry
a. sneakers. b. combs. c. matches.
- _____ 3. Captain Pruss did not want the Hindenburg to land in
a. New Jersey. b. May. c. bad weather.
- _____ 4. The radio announcer was
a. shocked. b. calm. c. hurt.
- _____ 5. People escaped by
a. jumping to safety. b. screaming. c. standing still.
-

Express Yourself

■ Pretend that you are Werner Franz. Write a journal entry telling what happened to you the day the Hindenburg crashed.

Exploring Words

■ Read each sentence. Fill in the circle next to the best meaning for the word in dark print. If you need help, use the Glossary.

1. At first, people thought airships were **marvelous**.
 a. silly b. great c. dangerous
2. The Hindenburg was a German **airship**.
 a. ship that floats in the air
 b. ship that runs underwater
 c. car
3. **Hydrogen** made the Hindenburg lighter than air.
 a. wind b. wax c. gas
4. The crew wanted to **prevent** a fire.
 a. avoid b. build c. watch
5. People did not expect the **blimp** to blow up.
 a. airship b. gas c. boat
6. **Static electricity** might have started the fire.
 a. lightning b. magnet c. an electric charge
7. Crew members wore suits made of special **fabric**.
 a. cloth b. oil c. color
8. Captain Pruss didn't want to **risk** landing in bad weather.
 a. reward b. take the chance of c. tell about
9. Some people were left with **injuries**.
 a. burns b. children c. pictures
10. Today, airships use **helium**.
 a. liquid b. a safe gas c. water