

Sky Ship



He does not head back to wherever he came from. He runs after that typhoon! He wants it, he needs it.

By Betty Wallace

CAN you picture a dark night over the Sea of Japan? A moon hidden in clouds, and a silver dirigible sailing above black waters? Ahead of that beautiful ship a typhoon is racing across the sea.

Do you see it? From what you know of dirigibles, what do you suppose the skipper of the dirigible would do now?

You are 100 per cent wrong. He does not head back to wherever he came from. He runs after that typhoon! He wants it, he needs it. He knows that northerly winds prevailing along the rear side of this disturbance will speed his ship along its course. He's not afraid of a typhoon, for he has studied the weather maps, and he knows what his ship is capable of.

The dirigible that raced after a typhoon was the Graf Zeppelin. It happened on the famous "Trip Around the World" when Dr. Hugo Eckener piloted the airship from Germany to Japan.

Dr. Eckener said later, of this exploit: "We had to run for hours through thick fog and low clouds but we had the satisfaction of a wonderful north wind blowing at the rate of 50 and 60 miles an hour. This wind brought us in seven hours from the Okhotsk Sea to the northern cape of Hokeido, the main island of Japan. We had the airship safely under control in this turbulent atmosphere. She rode so smoothly that the passengers slept undisturbed, without even realizing what was going on."

The most experienced dirigible skipper in the United States today is Commander Charles E. Rosendahl, of the Navy. Thirteen years ago, in 1923, Commander Rosendahl was a student naval aviator (airship) at Lakehurst, N. J. He now commands that station.

Commander Rosendahl says that ever since he first rode the skies in an airship he has been a confirmed enthusiast. He has had over 4400 hours in the air. He was aboard the ill-fated U. S. S. Shenandoah when she broke up in the skies over Ohio during a storm. He had the incredible good luck to be in that part of the ship which continued to float through the air.

As skipper of the U. S. S. Los Angeles, he commanded her during the non-stop flight to Panama in 1928. Un-

der his direction the dirigible landed on the deck of the U. S. S. Saratoga a plane carrier. This was the first time a rigid airship ever landed on the deck of a surface vessel.

He was the naval observer on the Graf Zeppelin's first flight, and he was also aboard her when she made the round-the-world trip. In 1929 he was put in command of the Naval Rigid Airship Training and Experimental Squadron. When the airship Akron was commissioned, he was named commander.

In the face of the great hue and cry that went up after the loss of the Akron and the Macon, Commander Rosendahl maintained his faith. There were no dirigibles in commission but he moored the Los Angeles, completely equipped, to a mast on the field at Lakehurst and carried through a program of experimental work. In 1934 he won the Harmon National Trophy for dirigibles.

Today he says it is his hope that the interest aroused by the new Hindenburg will help to wake up the American public to the necessity for its own dirigibles.

In appearance, Commander Rosendahl fulfills the somewhat romantic picture of the flying man. He stands very straight in his naval air officer's khaki. His good looks are a little frosty.

When he speaks, you know that he is used to giving orders. It is hard to conceive of this reserved, disciplined officer's arguing passionately for a cause. And yet his belief in the airship is so profound that he has gone to bat against sensational headlines, against public apathy and ignorance, against every sort of obstacle in the way of better understanding of dirigibles.

Compared with the millions of automobiles the world has built, compared with the uncounted thousands of airplanes, with hundreds of submarines and similar craft, the dirigible is a very tiny baby. Commander Rosendahl points out. Nor has the baby had all the vitamins and cod liver oil, in the

Did you know that only 157 rigid airships ever have been built? That the first passenger has yet to be killed in one of them? Here are some cold, hard facts about dirigibles that will surprise you

form of good human minds working on its problems, which the airplane and the automobile and the others have enjoyed to aid their growth.

Spectacular headlines have screamed forth the fates of many of the world's airships. Dramatic, mysterious and compelling as it sails through the sky the Zeppelin has always been able to capture the imagination of the spectator. What caused these crashes? Let's look them over.

FIRST, an amazing statement. Not one passenger ever lost his life or was injured in an airship! Not one! Yet commercial airships have carried more than a quarter of a million passengers. This includes the passengers who have traveled, during more than five years of regularly scheduled trips across the ocean, in the Graf Zeppelin from Europe to Brazil and back, and the many who have crossed more recently on the Hindenburg.

Normally, in steamships, the round trip takes six to seven weeks. The dirigible has made it possible for business men to complete the same trip in about 10 days.

The disasters which resulted in the loss of life occurred entirely in military and naval airships. In the United States, three airships have been lost.

The Shenandoah, which was an attempt to copy a 1916-type Zeppelin, was battered by air currents in a storm over Ohio in 1925 and broke in the air. Fourteen men were lost.

The Akron, in 1933, lost altitude during a lightning storm off the Jersey coast, and flew into the sea. She hit the water with such an impact that the hulk was collapsed to one-third its original height as it sank to the ocean bottom. Seventy-three naval officers and men went to their deaths with the Akron.

The Macon, in 1935, failed structurally in the air off Point Sur, but most of her crew were saved by nearby naval vessels. Only two men were lost. The

weak spot in the girders which caused this crash had previously been discovered and repairs were to have been made but had been delayed several months.

There was no fire or explosion as these ships went down, because the United States used helium as a lifting gas instead of the hydrogen which European dirigibles used.

TO the casual observer, this seems like a depressing and conclusive little list. The shrill voices which have demanded that dirigible construction be stopped seem to have a pretty strong case here.

But wait. Let us set aside the drama of these disasters, and count the actual facts.

Commander Rosendahl is authority for the statement that, "In the entire world in major airship accidents since the World War there have been lost 282 lives." But he points out that in submarines alone since the World War, in the navies of the world there has been a loss of 771 lives in 69 accidents involving 80 submarines.

All of us know that the annual toll of lives snuffed out by that common carrier, the automobile, amounts to many thousands every year. So, while 282 lives are far too many to casually wave away as unimportant, still the stress must be laid on the fact that the dirigible still is in the infancy of its development and that no one of those 282 lives has been lightly thrown away.

The loss of life in dirigible accidents seems to be the chief reason why public sentiment has swung away from further building and added knowledge. Yet when an accident happens at sea—remember the Morro Castle, the far away Titanic—no hue and cry goes up to stop building steamships. When a passenger airliner crashes and the people on board lose their lives, which has happened more times than is entirely comfortable to remember, do we hear any demands that all airplane construction shall stop at once? When submarines are rammed and sink to the floor of the ocean, does any government at once cease building submarines?

Despite the disasters, the successful record of the passenger dirigibles, plus the removal of danger from explosion when helium is used, plus all the refinements of mobile mooring masts and hook-on planes which the United States pioneered with the three lost ships, seems to speak well for the future.