

Mighty zeppelins once passed over our pasture

Germany began production in the late 1920s of an aircraft known as the zeppelin that was to be the answer to large-scale passenger service. The aircraft was named for Graf Ferdinand von Zeppelin and over the next 10 years 118 zeppelins were manufactured.

The "Graf Zeppelin" had 650 flights, made 144 trans-Atlantic crossings, logged one million miles, carried 18,000 passengers and millions of pieces of mail. The trip across the Atlantic took only two days and could cover 6,000 miles nonstop.



PICTURES
OF THE PAST

Jane Bouley

The successor to the "Graf" was the "Luftschiff Zeppelin," better known as the "Hindenburg." It made 10 successful trips to the United States during its first year of operation in 1936. The Hindenburg was the largest aircraft ever built — 811 feet long and 135 feet wide. It was much like a luxury cruise ship with its sleeping quarters, state rooms, dance hall and

dining rooms. Roundtrip tickets cost \$700.

The zeppelins were seen several times passing over Branford on their way to New York. The Graf Zeppelin passed over town on Aug. 19, 1936 and again in 1937. The school children were let out of class to see it go by. On that last fateful trip, the Hindenburg passed over Branford on May 6, 1937.

The Hindenburg left Europe on Tuesday, May 4, 1937 and took a course to Boston, flying along the Connecticut shoreline and over Manhattan at 3 p.m. on May 6 where hundreds lined the rooftops to see it pass.

It was expected to land at 6 p.m. in Lakehurst, New



Photo courtesy of Branford Historical Society

The Hindenburg flew over Branford on that fateful day May 6, 1937. This photo was given to the Historical Society by Stephanie Ammann.

Jersey. However, thunderstorms delayed the landing until about 7 p.m. During the landing a fire broke out at 7:21 p.m. and 34 seconds later an explosion rocked the nearby countryside. A total of 29 passengers were killed, but 36 survived by jumping from the aircraft.

Newsreels of the event, the cause of which has never fully been determined, played for several weeks at the Branford Theatre.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jane Peterson Bouley is town historian for the town of Branford.