

Over 30 Killed When Dirigible Explodes in Air

Largest Airship in U. S. Bursts
Into Flame When It Hits
High Tension
Wires.

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known to have carried many officers and men as passengers, however, in addition to its operating crew. As she rose from the field, its commander leaned out to signal that he had 40 persons aboard. It is believed he did not include one civilian on the ship and that it actually carried 45.

Officers Withhold Comment Pending Definite Reports

Washington, Feb. 21.—Disaster today at the Hampton Roads army base to the army's Italian-built airship, Roma, largest craft of its type in the world, cast gloom over the War and Navy departments as the long list of officers and men who were burned to death in the ship came in. Pending full official reports, however, Secretary Weeks and air service officials had no comment to make.

Immediately on receipt of the news Major General Patrick, chief of the air service, left for the scene by airplane.

Unofficial reports indicated that failure of rudder controls had caused the Roma to become uncontrollable and plunge earthward, where she struck high tension electric wires.

Pending detailed accounts from survivors, officers here accepted this as the probable explanation of the disaster. With several officers of the ship and some of her skilled mechanics among the survivors, it was hoped that full information would be available.

Shortage of Helium.

When the navy rigid, British-built airship ZR-2 came to a tragic end through explosion in the air during a trial trip in England, evidence of the cause of the smash had to be sought in the wreckage for there were no survivors who could tell what happened. In that case, it has since been ascertained, the buckling of a portion of the framework resulted in destruction of the ship by explosion in air.

Navy officials laid emphasis, in talking of the Roma's destruction, on the point that had it been possible to develop a sufficient supply of helium, the new, noninflammable gas, first produced during the war, to fill her great bag, today's accident almost certainly would have been far less terrible. There would have been no fire after the crash at least, it was said, and it was the terrible heat of the blazing hydrogen which apparently brought death to more than 30 men. But so far, only sufficient helium has been produced to inflate the naval blimp C-7, a mere pigmy ship of the air beside the Roma.

Motors Were Replaced.

During the Roma's trip in December from Langley field to Washington to be christened, and formally commissioned in the army air fleet, she developed trouble with her original Italian motors, but otherwise functioned perfectly. The ship fought an increasing head wind all the way and reached Bolling field with only three of her six motors running. She had so little power as she approached the landing place, where scores of distinguished guests awaited her, that her commander was compelled to jockey his monster craft over the low hill that surround the field with utmost caution to bring her in at all.

Because of the motor troubles the scheduled initial flight of the Roma over Washington with Secretaries Weeks and Denby and the Italian ambassador in her cabins, as well as senators and members of the house, was postponed. The ship went back to Langley running before the wind and barely reaching the hangar before a coast gale broke. She remained in the shed for many weeks to have her motors replaced by Liberty engines of greater power and more certainty of performance. The flight, which proved her last, was one of those made to test her new propelling plant and it had been expected she would show greatly improved speed and maneuverability.

No Big Airships.

Destruction of the Roma leaves both the army and navy without air ships larger than the navy blimps. There is not now in the United States a rigid or semi-rigid craft even faintly resembling the German zeppelins that harried London time after time during the world war. The Z. R. I. is under construction by the navy, however, and recently arrangements were made with the co-operation of the allied governments that the zeppelin plant in Germany should build for the navy a zeppelin of the L type which proved successful during the war.

The Z. R. I. was described today as strictly a reproduction of the best German air ships, only slight modifications in plan having been made by the Navy department. The policy of the department in planning the ship is understood to have been to attempt no improvement until the tried and proven practices of the German airship builders had been duplicated successfully and then to advance in speed and size by slow strides and with emphasis laid in every succeeding design on safety and structure development.

Whatever may have been the cause of the wreck, either of the Z. R.-2 or the Roma, it is certain that flying officers of the army and navy do not regard these tragic accidents as offering any reasonable ground for the abandonment of the attempt to produce for the American military service ships of size and kind, particularly for employment in coast defense operations.

Purchased from Italy.

The airship Roma was an Italian built craft purchased by the United States government from Italy early in 1921 for \$200,000. She was, it is believed, the largest semi-rigid air craft in the world, the cost of which duplicated, it was said by War de-

partment officials at the time of its purchase, would probably be \$1,250,000.

The airship was of 1,200,000 cubic feet capacity, 410 feet long, 82 feet wide and 88½ feet high. It was originally equipped with six 12-cylinder engines of 400 horsepower, giving an estimated speed of 80 miles an hour and a cruising radius at full speed of 3,200 miles. These engines, however, were replaced with liberty motors after the airship was brought to the United States.

An American crew was sent to Rome to make tests of the Roma in Italy and after these had been completed the aircraft was dismantled and shipped to this country, reaching here last summer. She was taken in her dismantled shape to Langley field in Virginia and was assembled there during the fall and by November was ready for her trial flight which took place from Langley field on November 15. Late in December she made a flight to Washington during a storm and was then christened and put into commission. Recently she was being groomed for a flight intended to take in the whole of the United States.

Dahlman Names Omahans for National Rotary Congress

Washington, Feb. 21.—(Special Telegram.)—It was announced today that Senator Hitchcock, R. B. Howell, W. J. Coal and Congressman Jefferis had been named by Mayor Dahlman to represent Omaha at the national harbors and rivers congress which meets in this city March 1 and 2.

Ask Arrest of School Body

Springfield, Ill., Feb. 21.—A petition for a writ of mandamus directing Sheriff Peters of Cook county to arrest members of the Chicago school board, who were recently pardoned by Governor Small, was asked of the supreme court today by Attorney General Brundage.



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