



American Rhetoric

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Herbert Morrison

Herb Morrison WLS Radio (Chicago) Broadcast on the Hindenburg Disaster

delivered 6 May 1937, Lakehurst, NJ

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We both flew down from Chicago yesterday afternoon aboard one of the giant new 21-passenger flagships of American Airlines. It took us only 3 hours, 55 minutes to fly nonstop from Chicago to

New York. When we landed at Newark we found another flagship of American Airlines waiting to take us to Lakehurst with our equipment when we were ready to go.

And incidentally, American Airlines is the only airline in the -- the United States which makes connections with the Hindenburg. The Hindenburg left Frankfurt, Germany -- Tuesday evening, rather, at 7:30 their time and for better than two and a half days they've been speeding through the skies over miles and miles of water here to America. Now they're coming in to make a landing of the Zeppelin. I'm going to step out here and cover it from the outside. So as I move out, we'll just stand by a second.

Well, here it comes, ladies and gentlemen; we're out now, outside of the hangar. And what a great sight it is, a thrilling one, just a marvelous sight. It's coming down out of the sky, pointed directly towards us and toward the mooring mast. The mighty diesel motors just roared, the propellers biting into the air and throwing it back into a gale-like whirlpool. No wonder this great floating palace can travel through the air at such a speed, with these powerful motors behind it.

Now and then the propellers are caught in the rays of sun, their highly polished surfaces reflect. The sun is striking the windows of the observation deck on the eastward side and sparkling like glittering jewels on the background of black velvet.

Now the field that we thought active when we first arrived has turned into a moving mass of cooperative action. The landing crew is directed to their posts -- the posts and spots and orders are being passed along and last-minute preparations are being completed for the moment we've waited for so long.

The ship is riding majestically toward us like some great feather, riding as though it was mighty -- mighty proud of the place it's playing in the world's aviation. The ship is no doubt busting with activity, as we can see. Orders are shouted to the crew, the passengers probably lining the windows looking down at the field ahead of them, getting their glimpse of the mooring mast. *And these giant flagships standing here, the American Airline flagships, waiting to direct them to all points in the United States when they get the ship moored.

There are a number of important persons on board, and no doubt the new commander, Captain Max Pruss, is thrilled, too, for this is his great moment, the first time he's commanded the Hindenburg. On previous flights, he acted as Chief Officer under Captain Lehmann.*

It's practically standing still now; they've dropped ropes out of the nose of the ship, and it's been taken a hold of down on the field by a number of men. It's starting to rain again -- the rain had slacked up a little bit. The back motors of the ship are just holding it, just enough to keep it from --



-- It burst into flames! *Get out of the way! Get out of the way!*

Get this Charley! Get this Charley! It's burning and it's crashing! It's crashing terrible! Oh my, get out of the way please. It's burning, bursting into flames and it's -- and it's falling on the mooring mast and all the folks agree that this is terrible. This is one of the worst catastrophes in the world.

And oh, it's...burning, oh, four or five hundred feet into the sky. It's a terrific crash, ladies and gentlemen. The smoke and the flames now and the frame is crashing to the ground, not quite to the mooring mast. Oh, the humanity and all the passengers screaming around here. I told you. It's -- I can't even talk to people whose friends were on there. It -- It's....I -- I can't talk ladies and gentlemen.

Honest, it's completely a mass of smoking wreckage. And everybody can't hardly breathe. It's hard, it's crazy. Lady, I -- I -- I'm sorry. Honestly, I -- I can hardly breathe.

I -- I'm gonna step inside where I cannot see it. Charley, that's terrible. I -- I can't....Listen folks, I -- I'm gonna have to stop for a minute because I've lost my voice. This is the worst thing I've ever witnessed.

* * * * *

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I'm back again. I've...sort of recovered from the terrific explosion and the terrific crash that occurred just as it was being pulled down to the mooring mast.

The terrible amount of hydrogen gas in it just caused the -- the tail surface broke into flames first. Then there was a terrific explosion and that followed by the burning of the nose and the crashing nose into the ground. And everybody tearing back at break-neck speed to get out from underneath it because it was over the people at the time it burst into

flames. Now whether it fell on the people who were witnessing it we do not know. But as it exploded they raced back.

And now it's smoking a terrific black smoke floating up into the sky. The flames are still leaping maybe 30, 40 feet from the ground the entire 811 feet length of it. They're frantically calling for ambulances and things. The wires are being -- humming with activity.

And, I -- I've...lost my -- my breath several times during this exciting moment here. Will you pardon me just a moment? I'm not going to stop talking -- I'm just going to swallow several times until I can keep on.

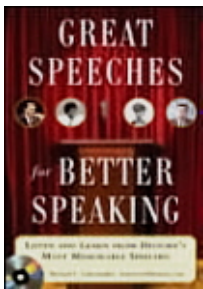
I should imagine that the nose is not more than 500 feet or maybe 700 feet from the mooring mast. They had dropped two ropes and whether or not some spark or something set it on fire we don't know, or whether something pulled loose on the inside of the ship causing a spark and causing it to explode in the tail surface. But everything crashed to the ground and there's not a possible chance of anybody being saved.

I wish I could stop in just a moment and see if I can get my breath again. And Charley if you'll save it out just a minute. I'll come back with more description, ladies and gentlemen.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I'm back again. I raced down to the burning tip and just as I walked up to the tip over -- climbed over those picket lines, I met a man coming out, a dazed, dazed -- He couldn't find his way. I grabbed a hold of him. It's Philip Mangone, Philip Mangone, that's [M]-A-N-G-O-N-E, of New York.

Philip Mangone, he's burned terribly in the hands, and he's burned terribly in the face. His eyebrows, all his hair is burned off but he's walking and talking plainly and distinctly. And he told me he jumped; he jumped with other passengers.

Now there's a Mr. Trey -- it sounds like "Trey" -- we're not sure of it and he also got out. Now it is our sincere hope that the majority of the passengers jumped when it came close to the ground, according to what Mr. Mangone told me. He said, "Thank God he jumped." And -- and we say thank God for him also.



[Book/CDs by Michael E. Eidenmuller, Published by McGraw-Hill \(2008\)](#)

* = Text within asterisks absent from this audio.

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[Audio Note:](#) This audio version has been treated with various digital filters. In addition, the pitch has been dropped by a little over one semitone with a corresponding drop in the rate of speech. A rationale for the latter

audio treatment is located [here](#) (along with a differently treated audio version). The National Archives has an audio copy designated "use at own risk." [Click here](#) for documentation (pdf file).

Video Note: This video version has been digitally modified from the master located at the Internet Archive. The moving images have been lock stabilized and hued slightly purple. Also, The audio track pitch has been lowered (see "Audio Note" link above for rationale).

See Also: [Entire recorded broadcast and additional discussion at OTR.](#)

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