

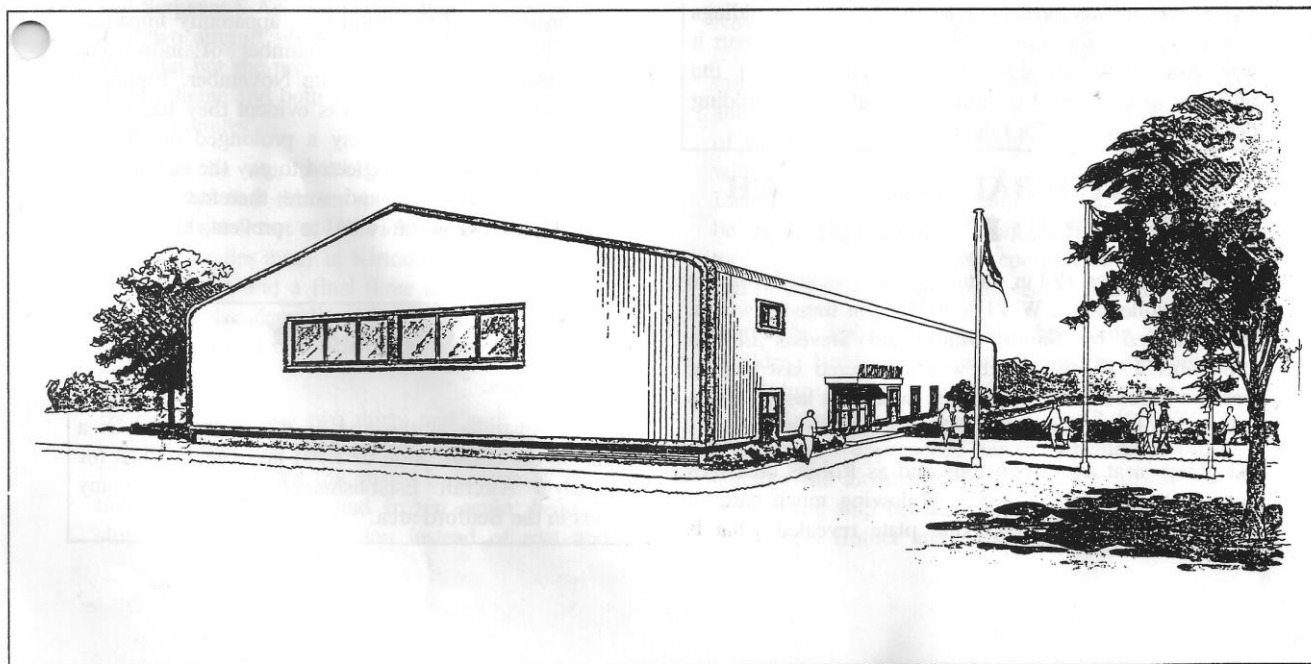
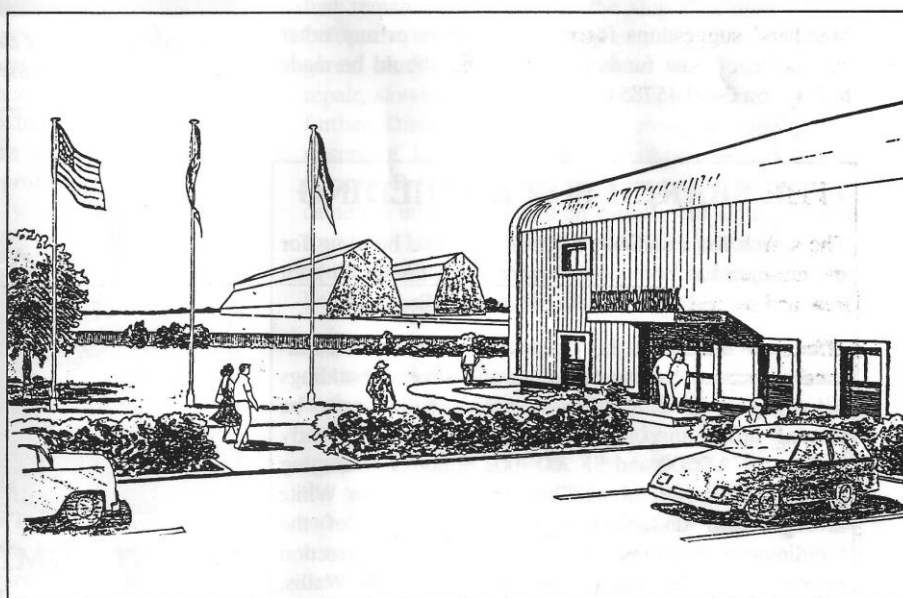
# DIRIGIBLE

THE JOURNAL OF THE AIRSHIP & BALLOON MUSEUM

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## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Illustrated on the cover are two artists impressions of the completed museum, commissioned for use in the fund raising brochure. The actual museum building will probably differ from the one depicted, but evident from the illustrations is the excellent location of the museum with its commanding views of the Cardington airfield and sheds.



## FUND RAISING DRIVE UNDER WAY

A major fund raising drive is now underway to raise the estimated £1.5 million required to build and equip the museum. Executive Secretary Peter Garth has coordinated the campaign preparations which have been ongoing following granting of outline planning permission last year.

The centrepiece of the campaign is an eight page brochure detailing the aims of FOCAS and our achievements so far, which will be sent to likely donors along with a letter of introduction. A number of factors have determined the launch date of the campaign, the main two being the receiving of planning permission and the ailing state of the economy.

Members' suggestions for possible donors or any other suggestion of how funds may be raised should be made to Peter on 0480 457851.

### THE SEARCH FOR A BUILDING

The search for a suitable and cost effective building for the museum has been going on for some time with both new and second hand buildings being studied.

Efforts to determine the practicality of using second-hand structures have centred around several buildings belonging to RAF Cardington which will shortly be coming up for disposal. One of the buildings currently houses the AD500 and SK500 -002 gondolas belonging to the museum. Members Chris Wallis and John White arranged and undertook a four day survey of the buildings to determine their suitability for re-erection on our site as the basis of the museum. Chris Wallis, who completed the actual survey, prepared an in-depth report which was presented to the FOCAS Buildings Sub Committee for consideration. Based on his report it was concluded that the unique requirements of the museum would almost certainly demand a new building designed specifically for this use.

### WWI KITE BALLOON WINCH SECURED BY MEMBER.

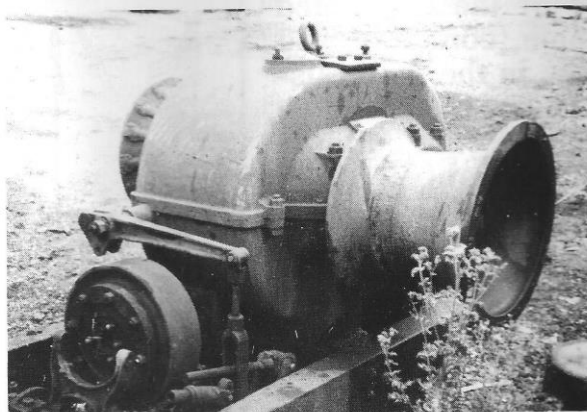
FOCAS member Robin Batchelar has secured for the museum collection a WW1 Kite Balloon transfer winch. Manufactured by Smith, Major and Stevens Ltd in September 1917, the winch was uncovered last year at Bosham harbour near Chichester where its last role was believed to have been pulling boats out of the water.

Wieghing in at about two tons and as Robins describes the winch as "built to last". Following much careful effort removal of an inspection plate revealed what is

possibly the original oil lubricating the perfectly preserved phosphorus-bronze worm gears. See photos below.



*Two photographs of the Kite Balloon winch secured by Robin Batchelor for the museum collection.*



### FIRST ADMITTANCES, NO FEE TAKEN

Certain members of the public are apparently impatient for the museum to open, a number of individuals entering the museum site in late November. Equipped with lorries and caravans it was evident they had every intention of making their stay a prolonged one. It was noted however they had neglected to pay the as yet to be determined entrance fee and were therefore asked to leave. Steps have been taken to prevent any further premature attendances!

### OBITUARY

Neville Holmes.

Died in Australia at the age of 83. He worked as a rigger on the construction of R101 and later worked for the Royal Aircraft Establishment. He leaves many friends in the Bedford area.

# ZEPPELIN FIELD

## PART TWO

WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY PAUL A ADAMS

In the thin air at 15,000 feet breathing became difficult for the crew and several members passed out despite the occasional use of oxygen bottles. Also starved of oxygen the engines began to give trouble. The starboard engine was shut down for repair with the forward engine running at reduced power and 'knocking' badly. The thin air was so bitterly cold ( the ISA for this altitude is -15 c ) the alcohol in the ships compass froze, adding further problems to the already unreliable navigation.

It was not until after one am. Eichler considered conditions suitable for an attack and had all five engines operational. By now it was much too late to reach London so Harwich was targeted. Crossing the coast south of Orfordness the engines were again shut down, probably in an attempt to hide the approach or possibly for further maintenance. If the intention had been to conceal the approach the ploy failed and the Zeppelin was heard by staff at the nearby RAC Experimental Station at 1:45. Within five minutes two aircraft had been sent up to intercept the raider. Second Lieutenant E D Clark was first away in a BE2c followed by Second Lieutenant F D Holder piloting, and Sergeant S Ashby manning the rear gun in a FE2b. The two aircraft set out climbing towards the drifting Zeppelin but she proved difficult to follow in her black paint scheme and both lost sight of the ship after about twenty minutes.

Believing he was over Harwich Naval base Eichler released his first thirteen bombs shortly after two am. The bombs fell not at Harwich but harmlessly in fields some five miles away at Kirton. Nine more bombs fell at Falkenham and a final three at Martlesham. During the attack the Zeppelin came under intense fire from the A A guns at Harwich but none of the shells found their mark.

By this time it was two thirty and with the raid over Eichler started his engines, and descending to 13000 FT, made a run for the coast. Unknown to the crew however the compass had frozen again, heading the ship in a northerly direction instead of east and the

shortest route to the sea ( there is some question as to whether the compass did freeze for a second time or had remained frozen since the ship was over the sea before the raid ). The forward engine had continuously given trouble and finally had to be shut down for repair, slowing the ship and prolonging her escape still further. Discovery of the frozen compass made Eichler unsure of his position and he radioed stations in the German Bright for bearings. Along with the bearings came the information that an easterly tail wind could be found at 11000 ft. Requiring all the groundspeed he could get Eichler descended the two thousand feet and knowingly within the ceiling of the British aircraft.

From the Zeppelin the first signs of the midsummer dawn could now be seen as a pale glow on the eastern horizon and from the ground the dark form of the ship was easily visible against the starlit sky. The Zeppelin appeared to be in some trouble. One observer reported the tails swinging from side to side with continual movements of the rudder necessary to keep a straight course. Another distinctly heard "knocking" noises coming from the ship, presumably mechanics working on the engines or the faltering engines themselves.

Now firmly in the sights of local observers frequent reports of the Zeppelins position were made to nearby military units. Four aircraft took off from Goldhanger and two from Rochford between 2 and 2:30 a.m. One of the aircraft from Goldhanger was forced to return with engine trouble and its place taken by Second Lieutenant L P Watkins flying a BE12. Watkins would be in at the kill. At 2:55 Captain R H M S Saundby took off from Orfordness, reportedly the first time he had flown at night. He would also be in at the kill.

Just after 3:00, with the sky beginning to brighten, Watkins, Holder, and Saundby caught up with L48. Just before the attack the ship may have begun to climb again, Saundby estimating she was still 1000 FT above him when he approached her from behind at 14000 ft. Circling the airship he fired an entire drum into the bow of the ship before being forced to veer away by return fire. Holder and Ashby in the BE2c estimated



the ship was just inland of Alderburgh as they closed on the huge craft in their tiny plane. Both men opened fire in the direction of the ship but Holder's gun jammed almost instantly, all efforts to free it failing. Holder brought his aircraft around to the rear of the Zeppelin and lined up to give Ashby a clear aim at the stern. At this point Holder states the Zeppelin was now descending. Ashby fired off three rounds into the hull as they closed to 300 yards before being forced to turn away by return fire from the rear gondola. As the aeroplane pulled around and away both men saw fire inside the hull at the point where they had concentrated their fire.

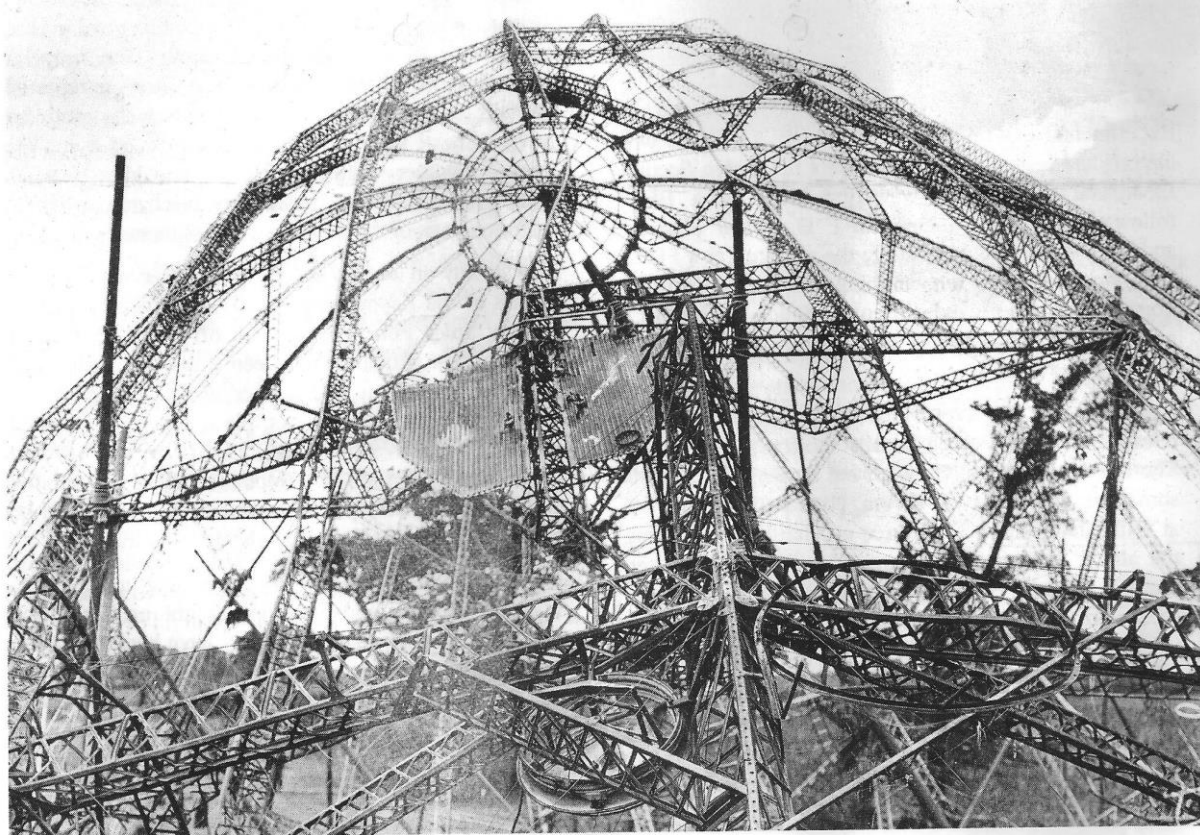
Watkins also attacked the stern of the ship, firing an entire drum of incendiary bullets with no effect. He twice briefly saw one of the other aircraft during the attack, the only pilot to do so. He fired another drum into the Zeppelin and watched her catch fire.

Saundby was flying close by the Zeppelin when she caught fire and could hear the roar of the flames in the open cockpit, even over the noise of his engine. He watched the ship break into a V as it slowly began to

fall and a great tower of flame shoot from the nose as it hit the ground.

Whenever the British defences brought down an attacking Zeppelin the chances of survival for the crew must have been almost zero. L48 would be different. Three of her crew would survive the twelve thousand foot fall in the fiery holocaust. Machinists Mate Heinrich Ellermann actually saw the fatal incendiary bullets ignite the gas cells and latter recounted his lucky escape...

"I thought we were over the sea on our way home. It was time to check the fuel supply for my motor - I had pumped petrol up to the gravity tanks above the gondola some hours before - and I told my helper to take over. There was a faint light of dawn in the east, and as I climbed up the ladder, suspended in space half way between the gondola and the hull, I heard a machine gun firing. There below us, dim in the light of dawn, was the English flier. I stepped onto the lateral gangway inside the hull; we were below pressure, and I could look aft. There was another burst of gunfire, and I could actually see flaming phosphorus bullets tearing



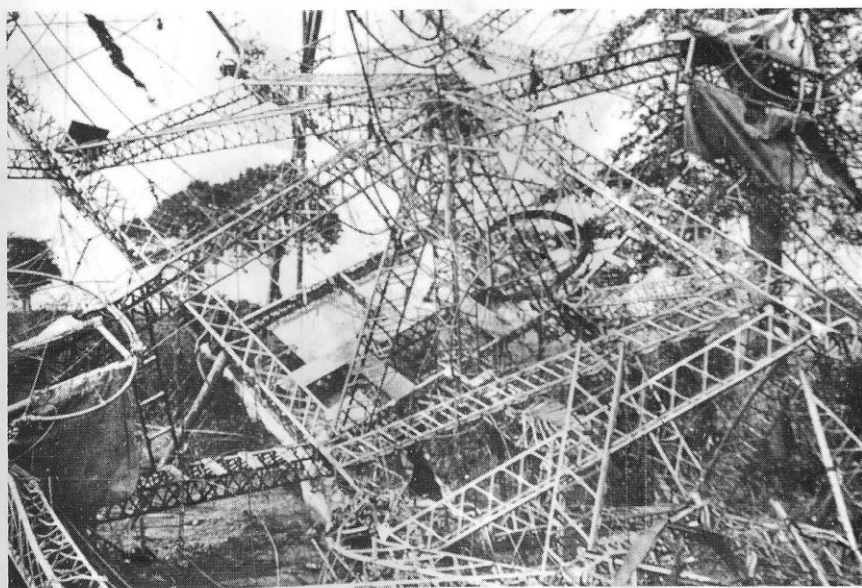
*A view of the wreckage looking forward. In the foreground is the machine gun post, with gun removed, and in front of that a gas valve.*

*Phot: ABM*

through the after cells. I watched with a horrified fascination. This I knew must be the end! Any one of those bullets could set our hydrogen on fire. There was an explosion - not loud, but a dull "woof!" as you light a gas stove. A burst of flame. Then another explosion. One gas cell after another was catching fire over my head. My first thought was not to be crushed under the wreckage in case we were over land, so I climbed farther up the girders. Flames were dancing everywhere, and the heat was overpowering. My fur collar caught fire; I tried to beat it out with my hands. The weight of the big two engined gondola aft was dragging down the stern,

the ship tipped vertically and down we plunged, a monstrous roaring banner of flame reaching hundreds of feet above my head, and the wind whistling through the bared framework. I noticed the draft was driving the flame away from me. But it was only a temporary respite. I thought of jumping, and remembered Korvettenkapitan Schutze, when he was our commander, saying "better to smash against the earth and perish at once than to burn to death trapped in blazing wreckage on the ground". No, it isn't true that we carried poison, or pistols to shoot ourselves when the ship caught fire. Hand guns were forbidden.

"I was still arguing with myself when a light appeared below-whether on land or sea I could not tell. Suddenly there was a terrible, continuous roaring smashing of metal as the stern struck the ground and the hull structure collapsed beneath me. I found myself on the ground with the breath half knocked out of me, the framework crashing down on top of me, fuel and oil tanks bursting on impact and their burning contents flowing towards me through the shattered wreckage. I was trapped in a tangle of red hot girders, the heat roasting me alive through my heavy flying coat. If I had lost consciousness I would have burned to death. But I could still think and move, and with all my strength I forced some girders apart-I never felt the pain of my burned hands until later-and burst out of my prison. I fell full length on cool, wet grass. In front of me frightened horses were galloping away across the



The bow mooring area at frame five. Hatches for the ropes are visible in the centre of the picture. Just discernable, running left and right from the 'bottom' of the hatches, are the wooden steps of the gangways. Note also the four water ballast bags.

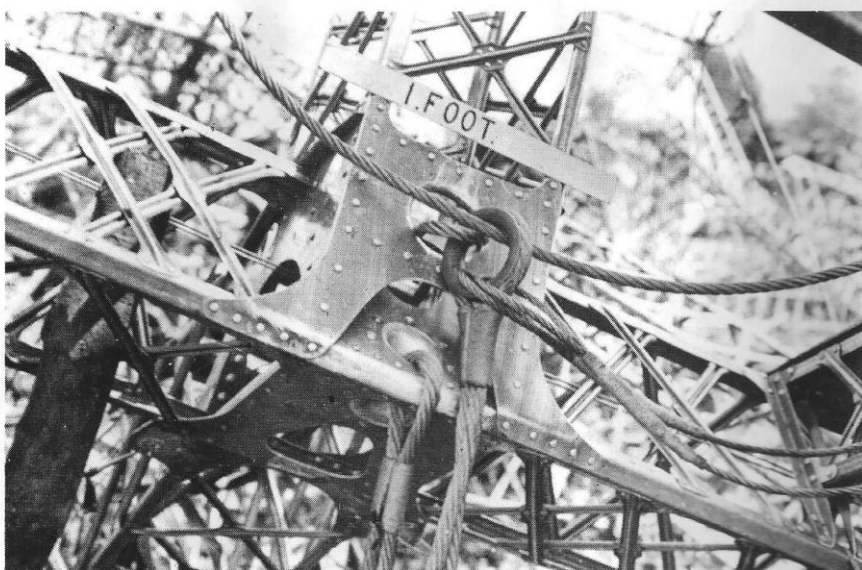
Photo: ABM

field, their tails high in the air. I heard the roar of an engine, and saw a British plane circling low over the wreckage, the pilot waving to me. Already it was almost full daylight.

"The fire was roaring at my back. Staggering to my feet, I turned back to the wreck. Korvettenkapitan Schutze had jumped, as he always said he would; he was dead, his legs buried up to the knee in the ground. English civilians helped me to drag Lieutenant zur See Mieth, still alive, out of the wreckage of the radio room in the control car. One of them took me to his home, where I collapsed unconscious. Later I asked to be taken to see Mieth, but it was forbidden.

"I can't explain how I survived. All I can say is that the gondola was 100 meters from the tail cone, and the tail structure broke the force of my fall, while the bow remained intact and did not collapse on me entirely".

Ironically Otto Mieth had just despatched a radio message to Germany reporting the success of the raid "when a bright light flooded our gondola, as if another searchlight had picked us up. Assuming we were over the sea, I imagined for a minute that it must come from an enemy war vessel, but when I glanced up from my position, six or eight feet below the body of the ship, I saw that she was on fire. Almost instantly our 600 feet of hydrogen was ablaze. Dancing, lambent flames licked ravenously at her quickly bared skeleton, which seemed to grin jeeringly at us from the sea of light. So



*Mooring line attachment points at frame five. Note the pressed metal construction of the girder and the one foot rule.*

*Photo: ABM*

it was all over. I could hardly credit it for an instant. I threw off my overcoat, and shouted to Captain Schutze to do the same, thinking that if we were over the sea we might save ourselves by swimming. It was a silly idea, of course, for we had no chance of surviving. Captain Schutze realized this. Standing calm and motionless, he fixed his eyes for a moment upon the flames above, staring death in the face. Then, as if bidding me farewell he turned and said "It's all over".

"After that, absolute silence reigned in the gondola. Only the roar of flames was audible. Not a man had left his post. Everyone stood waiting for the great experience - the end. This lasted several seconds. The vessel still kept on an even keel. We had time to think over our situation. The quickest death would be the best; to burn alive was horrible. So I sprang to one of the side windows of the gondola to jump out. Just at that moment a frightful shudder shot through the burning skeleton and the ship gave a convulsion like the bound of a horse when shot. The gondola struts broke with a snap, and the

skeleton collapsed with a series of crashes like the smashing of a huge window. As our gondola swung over we fell backwards and somewhat away from the flames. I found myself projected into a corner with others on top of me. The gondola was now grinding against the skeleton, which had assumed a vertical position and was falling like a projectile towards the earth. Flames and gas poured over us as we lay there in a heap. It grew fearfully hot. I felt flames against my face, and heard groans. I wrapped my arms about my head to protect it from the flames, hoping the end would come quickly. That was the last I

remember."

Machinist's Mate Wilhiem Uecker was the third and last survivor. He was pulled, terribly burned, from the starboard gondola and would die of internal injuries on Armistice Day.

The wreck had fallen in a field on Holly Tree Farm, near Theberton belonging to Mr H Staulkey. Falling



*Two emergency water ballast bags. Their position was not recorded. Note the metal funnels below, with lids, and the supporting ring below.*

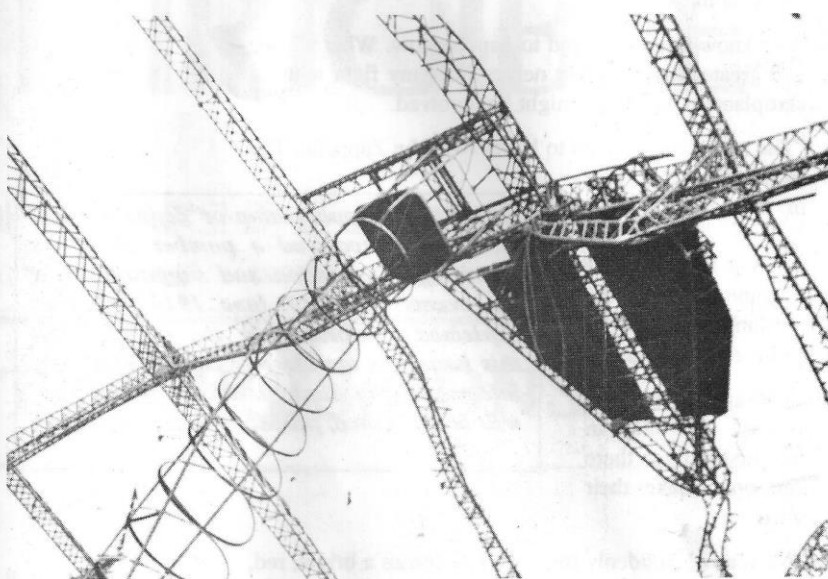
*Photo: ABM*



almost vertically the hull hit the ground at the bottom of the V, cushioning the impact and leaving the forward section of the framework intact. Petrol and oil burned for hours as more and more people arrived from nearby towns and villages. The military soon erected a cordon around the wreck to prevent civilians removing items and eventually non-vital personnel were prevented from entering the field altogether. Despite the restrictions a large amount of material had been removed and a healthy trade in souvenirs soon sprang up in the local area.

The crew were buried at St. Peters Church, Theberton in a well attended ceremony on 20 June. They were later moved to Cannock Chase to lie with the men from other German airships brought down on British soil.

The day following the crash Flight-Lieutenant Victor Goddard took charge of the wreck on behalf of the Admiralty. The nose section, towering forty feet into the air, was supported with wooden poles to prevent it from collapsing in the wind. Over the following weeks every detail was carefully recorded as the wreck was systematically dismantled. The site soon became known



*The forward machine gun position and access tunnel. The rope ladder inside the tunnel has burnt away.*

*Photo: ABM*

as 'Zeppelin Field' and locally is still known by that name today.

At 3.30 am. on that fateful morning L42, commanded by Dietrich, had narrowly escaped after raiding Dover and was heading home. "Now we were crossing the North Sea again. Dawn begins to break in the heaven. Suddenly we realize the enemy's swift aeroplanes are pursuing us; the machines keep pace with us and strew our course with incendiary bullets. We must get away from their target practice, and so we dive into a layer of mist. Slowly the English airmen fade out of our vision.

"Then we catch sight of a German airship to southward of us. It seems to be still travelling over the land, and its silhouette is sharply outlined against the clear sky. But suddenly an English aeroplane comes into view above the ship; we can see it quite plainly without our glasses. We hold our breath....

"We cannot shout across the void at them; we can do nothing to warn or save them. We can only look on and over there are



*The remains of the port amidships engine car. Looking aft.*

*Photo: ABM*

comrades who fifteen or eighteen hours ago were sitting at mess with us....

"We know what is bound to happen now. What we see is a greater strain on our nerves than any fight with an aeroplane in which we might be involved.

"The aeroplane appears to hover over the Zeppelin. The man inside it is sure of his prey as some lurking spider that stalks a fly. Then we imagine we can hear the long-drawn Rrrrrr of his machine-gun.

"The age of miracles is past. The men in the airship over there can only make their wills.

"Now!now! Suddenly the airship becomes a bright, red, glowing mass. the flames dart out of it's envelope. The first thin wisp of smoke curls in the air; then the stern dips, and the Zeppelin plunges vertically earthwards. It is a pillar of fire.... a meteor hissing down from the sky. It is all over with the men in that ship!

"We of the L42 are not exactly timid folk. But our faces are pale as death. The men at the controls have hard work to keep their hold on the wheel.

"Perhaps three minutes - perhaps five minutes is the duration of the airships death-dive. When she was about 1,000 meters off the ground, I thought I saw one or two comrades - little black specks in the sky - jump out of the blazing torch. Better to be broken to pieces than burnt to death.

"The ship was the L48. The comrades who manned her were on their thirteenth voyage to England.

"We had not much time to mourn the dead and shake the horror of their doom out of our limbs. We ourselves were not out of danger. No one spoke, except to give the necessary orders. but we came safely home that day.

"For eleven hours we travelled at a height of over 5000 meters. Ten minutes or a quarter of an hour we spent over the hell fire of Dover. But all that we experienced then was nothing compared with the horror of those short but endless moments when we saw our comrades crash to their doom. The vision remained with us as a fiery monument and a fearful warning that was always in our minds eye during our subsequent voyages to England."

*Following the publication of Zeppelin Field Pt.1 I have received a number of letters providing information and suggesting how the events of 16/17 June 1917 might be explained. Unfortunately the deadline for this issue was too close to correlate the new information in time, therefore an 'update' will be published, probably in issue 12.*

#### THE PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs used in Pt.2 are from a series taken of the wreckage by Royal Naval Air Service and are now part of the museum collection. The photos record the structure of the ship in great detail and would have been used by British intelligence to decipher information about the design of the Zeppelin.

DIRIGIBLE is the journal of the Airship and Balloon Museum and is published by Friends of Cardington Airship Station. It is published quarterly and distributed free to all members and associate members of FOCAS and, through our close associations, to the Friends of the British Balloon Museum and Library.

The objects of FOCAS are to foster and promote the study of the history of airships in every aspect, and to present the results of such study to the public, and to stimulate public interest in the role of Cardington as an airship base and in the conservation of the principle buildings thereof, and in particular to promote and assist in the formation and operation of a museum and study centre devoted to the airship.

Full membership of FOCAS is limited to persons who, having a particular interest in or knowledge of airships, are approved by the Governing Council, the Trustees, who are elected by members from among their number. There is also provision for Associate Membership, which is open to the public generally. Further information and application forms can be obtained from:

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