

USS Macon (ZRS-5) was a rigid airship built and operated by the United States Navy for scouting. She served as a "flying aircraft carrier", launching Curtiss F9C Sparrowhawk biplane fighters.

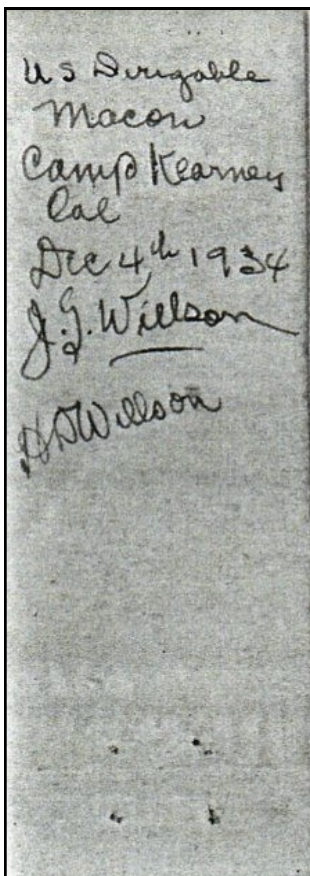
USS Macon was built at the Goodyear Airdock in Springfield Township, Ohio, by the Goodyear-Zeppelin Corporation. Because this was by far the biggest airship ever to be built in America, a team of experienced German airship engineers—led by Chief Designer Karl Arnstein—instructed and supported design and construction of both U.S. Navy airships Akron and Macon.(sister ships)

The airship was named after the city of Macon, GA. Macon was christened on March 11, 1933 by Jeanette Whitton Moffett, wife of Rear Admiral William A. Moffett, Chief of the U.S. Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics. The airship first flew one month later, shortly after the tragic loss of her sister ship Akron. Macon was commissioned on June 23, 1933 with Commander Alger H. Dresel in command. Designed to carry five F9C Sparrowhawk biplanes, Macon received her first aircraft on board July 6, 1933 during trial flights out of Lakehurst, NJ. The planes were stored in bays inside the hull and were launched and retrieved using a trapeze.

Departing the East Coast on October 12, Macon's homefield became Naval Air Station (NAS) Sunnyvale (now Moffett Federal Airfield) in Santa Clara County, CA. Macon had a far more productive career than her sister ship, Akron. Macon's commanders developed the doctrine and techniques of using her aircraft to do scouting while the airship remained out of sight of the opposing forces in exercises. Macon participated in several fleet exercises, though the men who framed and conducted the exercises lacked an understanding of the airship's capabilities and weaknesses. It became standard practice to remove Sparrowhawk's landing gear aboard the airship and replace it with a fuel tank, giving the aircraft 30% more range.

Later in 1934, Lieutenant Commander Herbert Wiley surprised President Franklin D. Roosevelt—and the Navy—when Macon searched for—and located—the heavy cruiser Houston, which was then carrying the President back from a trip to Hawaii. Newspapers were dropped to the President on the ship, and the following communications were sent back to the airship: "from Houston: 1519 The President compliments you and your planes on your fine performance and excellent navigation 1210 and 1519 Well Done and thank you for the papers the President 1245."

During a crossing of the continent, Macon was forced to fly up to 6,000 ft to clear mountains in Arizona. A large amount of helium was vented to reach this altitude without rupturing the gas cells. Following a severe drop, a diagonal girder in ring 17.5 failed. The repair to the girders on either side of the top fin were delayed until the next scheduled overhaul when the adjacent gas cells



Macon

could be deflated.

On February 12, 1935, the repair process was still incomplete when, returning to Sunnyvale from fleet maneuvers, Macon ran into a storm off Point Sur, California. During the storm, she was caught in a wind shear which caused structural failure of the unstrengthened ring to which the upper tailfin was attached. The fin failed to the side and was carried away. Pieces of structure punctured the rear gas cells and caused gas leakage. Settling gently into the sea, Macon sank off Monterey Bay. Only two crew members died from her complement of 76, thanks to the warm conditions and the introduction of life jackets and inflatable rafts after the Akron tragedy. Four Sparrowhawks carried aboard were lost with the airship.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute succeeded in locating and surveying the debris field of Macon in February 1991, and was able to recover artifacts from her. The wreckage of Macon was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on January 29, 2010. The wreck site remains secret, and is within a marine sanctuary, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and is not accessible to divers due to depth. It is also a U.S. Navy gravesite. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Macon_\(ZRS-5\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Macon_(ZRS-5))]

[Saratoga cover (previously unlisted) courtesy of James Willard]

Ed. How many more unlisted Navy Ship covers are out there, forlornly tucked away in some collector's dusty album? Six 'newly-discovered' such covers were just added to the Pre-War listing in January! Amazing to think that there may still be more of these almost-100-year-old covers that are currently unknown to the hobby at large.

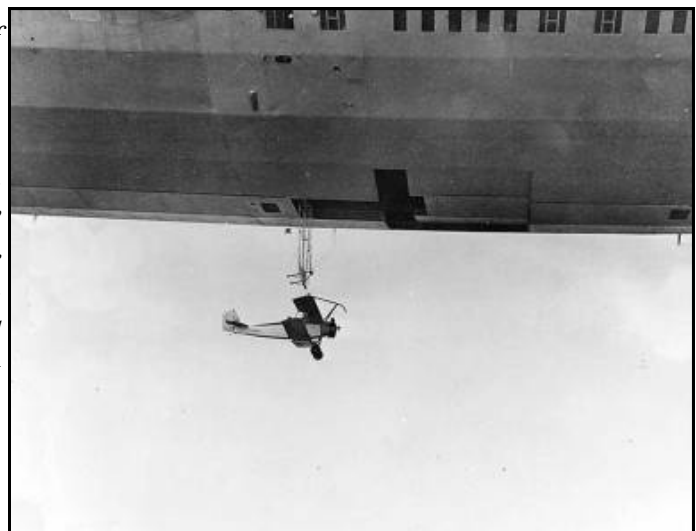
If you have any, or run across any, that you think qualify, please send me a clear scan of both sides.



USS Macon over New York City



USS Macon over Moffett Field, CA



Scouting plane being launched from airship