

The Graf Zeppelin

The *Graf Zeppelin* was a German-built and -operated, passenger-carrying, hydrogen-filled, rigid airship which operated commercially from 1928 to 1937. It was named after the German pioneer of airships, Ferdinand von Zeppelin, who was a Graf or Count in the German nobility. During its operating life, the airship made 590 flights covering more than a million miles.

The Graf's operational career spanned almost nine years from its first flight in September 1928 until its last in June 1937. During that period, it was operated first by the Zeppelin Company's commercial flight arm, the Deutsche Luftschiffahrts-Aktiengesellschaft ("German Airship Travel Corporation") in conjunction with the Hamburg-American Line, and for its final two years by the Deutsche Zeppelin Reederei GmbH, a company established by Hermann Göring in March 1935 to increase Nazi party influence over Zeppelin operations.

From 1928 to 1932, the airship was used primarily for experimental and demonstration purposes to prepare the way for eventual regular commercial transatlantic passenger service. After making six domestic shake-down flights, the airship made its first long distance journey in mid October 1928 with a crossing of the Atlantic to the United States. Later demonstration flights included its round-the-world tour in 1929, the Europe-Pan American flight in 1930, a polar expedition in 1931, two round trips to the Middle East, and a variety of other flights around Europe. In 1932, however, the Graf began five years of providing regularly scheduled passenger, mail, and freight service between Germany and Brazil. It was abruptly withdrawn from active service on the day after the loss of the Hindenburg in May 1937 after having made a total of 64 trips to Brazil. During its return trip to Germany on its last South American flight for 1933 the Graf also stopped in Miami, Akron, and the "Century of Progress" world's fair in Chicago.



On June 18, the airship was ferried to Frankfurt am Main on what would prove to be its 590th and final flight. Upon arrival at its massive hangar at the Frankfurt airport, the airship was deflated and opened to the public as a museum. The ultimate fate of the Graf Zeppelin was formally sealed on March 4, 1940, when German Air Minister Göring issued a decree ordering it to be immediately scrapped for salvage and its duralumin airframe and other structures to be melted down for reuse by the German military aircraft industry.

