

# Radio Report on the Crew of the Airship “Graf Zeppelin” Returning from Their Arctic Voyage (July 30, 1931)

## Abstract

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This recording captures some of the official remarks made during the welcome-home ceremony in Berlin on July 30, 1931, for the 46-member crew of the *Graf Zeppelin* airship, which had just completed a weeklong Arctic expedition in cooperation with Soviet researchers. For this media-filled occasion at Tempelhof Airport, three people delivered brief statements on the historic nature of this achievement —Heinrich Sahn, Berlin’s mayor; Hugo Eckener, who both commanded the airship and served as director of the company that manufactured it; and Rudolf Samoilowitsch, a leading Soviet polar researcher. Eckener had long championed the use of airships to study remote regions of the globe, particularly those above the Arctic Circle, and the company’s founder, Ferdinand von Zeppelin, had already thought about a polar expedition two decades earlier, only to put those plans on ice with the outbreak of the war. In order to finally realize that dream, Eckener brought together an international crew that included the veteran Arctic researcher Samoilowitsch, who had conducted trips to the Arctic since the 1910s and served as the scientific director of this 1931 expedition. Eckener worked closely with a number of Soviet authorities, too, and included a stopover in Leningrad en route to the Soviet Union’s northern coast. In addition to studying previously uncharted areas of the Arctic, the voyage also tested how the zeppelin handled and performed under the extreme weather conditions of the far north. The *Graf Zeppelin* safely covered a total of 10,000 kilometers on its journey from and back to its home base in Friedrichshafen, on Germany’s southern border with Switzerland, where it landed on July 31, 1931, the day after this recording was made.

## Source

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Reporter: Dr. Eckener, under the leadership of Lord Mayor Sahn, with all the guests of honor, now come to the microphone. Dr. Eckener has a bouquet of flowers in his hand, next to him Professor Samoilowitsch. And we will now hear the impressions that Dr. Eckener, the head of the expedition and the airship captain will describe to us.

Mayor Sahn: My dear Dr. Eckner, on behalf of the city of Berlin, I would like to warmly welcome you, your colleagues and the entire brave crew on your safe return home. The people of Berlin cheered as they watched the proud ship rise from here to the Arctic in a daring course.

We have followed every phase of your daring voyage with the greatest interest and, when the news was briefly delayed, also with anxious concern. And today, as you set foot on German soil again, you are greeted once more by the thunderous cheers of the people of Berlin. In a time of deepest need, the shiny silver airship appears to us as a symbol of the much longed-for ascent. We want to learn from you what strong will and firm trust can achieve. As a triumph of science and technology, you are returning crowned with new glory. Along with us, the whole world looks up to you with admiration for your work, through which you, in collaboration with the pioneers of Russian science, have opened up new knowledge for further research for the benefit of humanity.

I thank you for willingly complying with my request to make a stopover in Berlin on your return. And I ask you, in memory of your stay in Berlin, to accept the heraldic animal of the city of Berlin, the old bear, the sign of strength. And I ask all of you, ladies and gentlemen, to join me in the toast. Dr. Eckener, his staff

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and the entire brave crew, three cheers for them! [crowd cheers] And now let us sing the Song of the Germans.

[Crowd sings] Germany, Germany, above all,

Above all in the world,

When it always protects and defends

Brotherly together,

From the Maas to the Memel,

From the Etsch to the Belt -

Germany, Germany above all,

Above all in the world!

Eckener: Your Honor, I thank you on behalf of the crew for the kind words of welcome that you have just expressed. And I am particularly pleased about the satisfaction and joy that radiates from your words about the trip that we have now completed. I can say openly that we are also very pleased, because the airship, the old, brave airship, as I almost dare to say, was able to complete a very successful flight again with its good luck.

I do not want to comment on the scientific results that we brought home. I will leave that to more qualified people. We may not have fulfilled everything that was expected of us, but I am not quite sure whether what was written about our plans in the newspapers was really ever planned by us.

I am particularly pleased that the airship was once again able to demonstrate its capabilities in the face of new problems and tasks. The journey did not go at all in the way that was generally expected. It was believed that we would enter a region of freezing temperatures, ice, severe foehn winds, and so on, and a great deal of effort was made for the airship, as I know.

We were never in any doubt that the trip to the Arctic would be relatively easy and I can say that in the last eight days before the start of the trip, I never actually thought about the fact that we were about to make a trip to the Arctic. [...]

Samoilowitsch: Yes, this was my first time in an airship. Otherwise, I think this is my 18th expedition to the Arctic.

Reporter: Yes, Professor, one more question. Can we hear about your feelings on this trip, the tremendous impressions you have gained?

Samoilovich: I have not prepared to talk about feelings. I thought I was supposed to say a few words about the scientific results. And in this regard, I was amazed at what an excellent means the airship is for exploring the Arctic. I believe that it would take perhaps two or three years to complete the topographical work that we have done in the Arctic from the airship. And then various other scientific work, such as meteorological, aerological, with our special equipment, such as geophysical work, which, I am sure, will give excellent results.

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Source: Empfang für die Mitglieder des Luftschiffes „Graf Zeppelin“ nach ihrer Arktis-Reise auf dem Tempelhofer Flughafen in Berlin (Ausschnitt), July 30, 1931. Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv K000345968

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