

Regular Airship Traffic Begins between Friedrichshafen and Rio de Janeiro (April 18, 1932)

Abstract

In this 1932 clip, Hugo Eckener, director of the company that made zeppelins (the Deutsche Luftschiffahrts-Aktiengesellschaft, or DELAG), expounded on the comfort and speed of his airships, boasting that they could make the journey to South America in a mere three days, about a quarter of the time required by a passenger steamship. German radio listeners at the time would have recognized Eckener not only as a successful business executive, but also as the man who had commanded the *Graf Zeppelin* on its legendary 1929 round-the-world flight. That flight not only marked the first aerial circumnavigation by an airship, but also the fastest circumnavigation by any type of craft up to that point, having completed the journey in just 21 days. Eckener enjoyed such popularity in the early 1930s that the SPD had even tried to recruit him to run in the spring 1932 presidential elections. Eckener ultimately declined, however, and threw his support behind the incumbent, Paul von Hindenburg. Airing just eight days after Hindenburg's April 10 reelection, this presentation gave Eckener an opportunity to subtly promote a policy of international cooperation by touting the ability of airships to bring the world closer together. In addition to his many other passions and responsibilities, Eckener also actively promoted the scientific study of the Arctic by airship. He assumed the presidency in 1930 of AEROARCTIS, the international society for such endeavors, and he led the *Graf Zeppelin* in its 1931 expedition over the northernmost regions of Russia and vast stretches of the Arctic Sea, a trip done in conjunction with Soviet scientists and their seaborne icebreakers.

Source

Reporter: The propellers rush and the engines rattle among the romance and the floral poetry of Lake Constance. We are in the large airship hangar of Count Zeppelin in Friedrichshafen in Württemberg. Thanks to radio, which transcends space and time, you can now hear Dr. Eckener himself. Dr. Eckener was kind enough to say a few words on this day, as the airwaves connect the countries around Lake Constance in friendship.

Eckener: Yes, it is indeed the most modern form of transport that has developed on the historic shores of the Swabian Sea and is now in operation. A transatlantic service over a distance of about 5,000 miles starts from here. South America and Central Europe have been brought closer and are now only a three-day-trip apart.

The travel time required so far has been reduced to a third or a quarter by Zeppelin airships. Three test trips were already made last fall. They took about three days southbound and three and a half to four days northbound against the trade winds. Two more scheduled trips were made this spring.

The airship is currently being prepared to take off for a third trip four hours from now. I am sure that it will be possible to keep to the timetable just as precisely as modern ocean liners do. A more precise study of the air pressure distribution along the route in the different seasons should make it possible to make the return trip in three and a half days, just as safely as it takes three days for the outward trip.

This new connection is still far too little known and appreciated. Apparently, people still do not fully trust this modern means of transport. And not everyone is aware of how comfortable and convenient airship

travel is. But I am sure that we will overcome the resistance of this somewhat reserved world. In just a few years, the aircraft will be the transoceanic means of transport for urgent mail and for urgent passengers.

Speaker: In the same year, 1932, Hugo Eckener, the head of Zeppelin airship travel, was also considered a candidate for the office of Reich President. However, he then withdrew his candidacy in favor of Hindenburg.

Source: ARD Archivradio, accessed via ARD Audiothek,
<https://www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/archivradio-geschichte-im-original/suedamerika-und-zurueck-regelmaessiger-passagierverkehr-mit-dem-luftschiff/ard/66779224/>

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