

L. T. SUNOCO, FROM ROME, ITALY. FRIDAY, MAY 7th, 1937.

GOOD EVENING EVERYBODY:

Last Tuesday evening in Paris I began by saying that the news in France was about the same as the news everywhere. The tidings that night were, romantic-- his ex-majesty the Duke of Windsor rejoining the lady of his famous phrase: "the woman I love." (Tonight I'm in Rome, and once more I can say that the most important item of news here is the same as everywhere. But this time it's tragic. The Zeppelin disaster. That calamitous event at Lakehurst, New Jersey.) What's the latest word? Perhaps you could tell me. Here in the city on the Tiber we hear that the casualty list is still undetermined, a melancholy indecision-- because of the grave condition of the injured.

Is there anything in the suspicion voiced by the nephew of Count Zeppelin, that German Count who created the giant type of lighter than air craft? He raises the surmise that perhaps

the explosion of the big ship was the work of sabotage, a plot. But what kind of evil devising could it have been? -- the immense craft about to land at Lakehurst in a storm, when suddenly the flames of death and devastation.

Here in Rome the GIORNALE d'ITALIA telephoned to Germany, to Doctor Hugo Eckener -- dean of Zeppelin experts. He replied that he could make no guess of the cause of the disaster. He added that the navigation of Zeppelins would go right on and that a substitute ship would be ready in the autumn. But he contributed one significant qualification -- that the new giant would not be inflated with explosive hydrogen, that perilous gas which blew up so frightfully last night, but -- with helium, the gas which is so expensive and has less lifting power than dangerous hydrogen.

To hear of the Hindenburg disaster here in Italy is all the more darkly dramatic, because this is the one important nation which never experimented with the Zeppelin type. Germany the pioneer! England tried building huge rigid airships -- and they came to grief. The same with France. And we all know of our own

unfortunate experience in the United States. Soviet Russia, during this period of decision, was in no condition to build great air ships. So that left Italy as the one major power which turned down the lighter than air giants. It was a deliberate decision. Arrived at by thorough discussion. This was told to me today by Charge d' Affairs Kirk of the American embassy.

The disaster has brought expressions of sympathy from everywhere. Today the newspapers of Rome feature the telegram of condolence sent by Prime Minister Mussolini to Berlin. The tragedy of the Hindenburg was the universal subject today with everybody in Italy with whom I had an audience. The calamity at Lakehurst competes with Rome's own great event of the moment -- the greatest of Roman carnivals.

For years I've been telling on the radio about a certain palace in Rome, a certain vast audience hall therein, a slippery marble floor, a desk in the far corner, and at that desk a "Man of Destiny." Today I took that long walk across that slippery marble floor.

Near the end of a long and strenuous day of revisiting places in Rome that I hadn't seen since World War days, I crossed the great square that you have seen so often on the screen, the square usually pictured by the newsreels as ~~either~~ jammed with a roaring mass of humanity looking up at Mussolini on that historic balcony.

As I drew up at the street entrance to the Palazzo Venetia the helmeted sentries on duty saluted, two uniformed functionaries just inside the doorway and a couple of plain clothesmen gave the Fascist salute; I was ushered into the palace to a door leading to an upper floor. Here another uniformed attendant raised his arm in the old Roman salute. I preceeded up a stone stairway, the walls hung with tapestries, and there was more saluting as we passed through three reception rooms.

Several central European diplomats were waiting for an audience. But my turn apparently was to come first. An attendant in a long blue tail-coat and a collar decorated with red and yellow embroidery, motioned me to follow. We passed through three rooms into a great council chamber. This was unoccupied except for Field Marshal Bagdolio and several of Mussolini's other advisors who were waiting to see him. At the far side of this council chamber a heavy door was flung open, and there I was in the vast room I had heard so much about. There before me was that wide expanse of slippery marble floor in passing over which I had heard that the average visitor's knees grew shaky. Far in the distance, in the half-light from the window which leads out to that familiar balcony, there at a flat topped desk sat Mussolini.

I had heard that it was his custom to sit busily at work until a visitor crossed the first half of the seemingly endless expanse of marble floor; and that he would then look up<sup>and</sup>/sternly eye his nervous guest as he proceeded the rest of the way. But nothing of the sort happened. As I entered he jumped up, saluted

with that striking Mussolini gesture, smiled and then stood there until I reached him. When he addressed me by name I told him that I had described him and the room so often that I somehow felt as though I had been there before.

He laughed, rolled his eyes, as you have seen him do, and replied in English: "You evidently have said much about me personally. But I am not important as a person. My person! that doesn't matter! It is the cause -- the movement of which I happen to be the leader. That is what is important!"

As for the cause and his leadership, I am in Rome at a spectacular time. For the Eternal City is right now in a state of vast preparation -- on the eve of the celebration of Empire Day. It's just a year ago that the Fascist Legions marched into Addis Ababa. Several days later the Duce in one of his dramatic speeches announced: "The New Roman Empire." The anniversary of that is being celebrated this Sunday.

( As we talked, Mussolini stepped from behind his desk, and we stood at a window. ) We were no more than a foot from each other, and I had a chance to study that familiar face at close

range. It gave me a heightened impression of strength and ruggedness, the ruggedness of people who for centuries have cultivated sloping fields on the hillsides.

The Duce asked me whether I could stay over for the Empire Day celebration, a spectacle that is expected to be the mightiest of Roman carnivals.

As I talked with the Duce, I was fresh with impressions of things I had just seen. The one thing that caught the eye were the vivid flashes of color, strange uniforms and black faces -- telltale signs of the conquest of Ethiopia. Everywhere in Rome you see native soldiers who took part in the East African war. This is the first time they have ever been seen in Rome. They stroll about the streets gaping with eyes of wonder, and gaped at with eyes of equal wonder. Askaris with brilliant red tarboushes on their heads, Dubats wearing turbans and tan-colored skirts, Lybians in flowing robes, Zapties, Savaris, Spahis and Meharisti Arab nomads of the Camel Corps.

With Mussolini I talked about the trip I had just made out to a vast encampment of the native troops. On the way we passed

columns of red-hatted Askaris and turbaned Dubats marching in formation. And always in the lead an Italian officer riding on a mule. At a sign marked aviation battalion I saw a large circle of red hats, a great crowd of Askaris watching a dance -- one of their African war dances. Aviation, most modern of the instruments of war -- and the aviation battalion having a primitive barbaric dance of Africa to the monotonous thumping of a drum, in Rome.

These Africans who fought in the Italian conquest of Ethiopia were having their reward -- their first glimpse of big town civilization, and the big town, Imperial Rome. Their regimental costume included sandals, although their native way is to go barefoot. Some that I saw in the streets and in the camp had reverted to type. They marched along barefoot, carrying their sandals -- barefoot down the Corso Umberto. Some had bandaged feet, quite a few. Their feet are as hard and tough as leather, but cities have broken glass and nails to step on. Civilization had done them in, and reduced them to bandaged feet. ~~But civilization had given them its compensations too. In one of the swagger streets of Rome two Askaris were staring into an ornate shop window. It~~

Thousands of those African troops have been brought to Rome for the triumphal parade on Sunday, the vast demonstration that Mussolini, the Black Shirt Duce told me about as we stood at

the window in the Palazzo Venezia.

Yes, we talked about his new Roman Empire -- and also of that other Roman Empire back in the dim past. I asked him about the vast work he is doing in uncovering and restoring the ruins of that other Roman Empire.

( "What do you consider your outstanding accomplishment in the restoration of Rome?" I asked him.

"The Via Impero," he replied. He displayed a manifest pride as he mentioned the cutting of that superb wide boulevard from the Palazzo Venezia to the Coliseum. )

The Via Impero is to be the scene of that outpouring of military pomp on Sunday -- Empire Day. From the Roman Coliseum tens of thousands of troops will march.

"The Via Impero," he repeated, "that and the restoration of the Roman ruins on both sides of it." Mussolini considers those relics ~~on both sides~~ of the splendors of two thousand years ago to be the most important job of all.

As we talked I was thinking of what I had just seen. I had just come from those mementos of classical antiquity. To

me the most striking thing of all was the work they are doing on the Roman Forum. It is known that on one side of the Forum stood the Senate House of ancient Rome. Today on that site a medieval church stands. The Senate House beneath is covered by the accumulation of centuries. It only needs to be excavated and that's what they are doing, down to where Cicero declaimed his oration and where Caesar stabbed by Brutus fell at the foot of the statue of Pompei. When the job is done the Roman Senate will be there for all the world to see.

And so we talked amid imperial dreams of old Rome, and the new, the Roman Forum and the Roman Senate, the Askari with red hats and black faces, and columns of the turbaned Dubats. Other affairs seemed far away. Rome does have that effect on one.

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COUNT CIANO

(After talking about the Italian Empire with the Duce, I went for a chat about international problems with Foreign Minister, Count Ciano.) We usually think of Foreign Ministers as pompous gentlemen solemn with dignity, reserved, aloof; take the complete opposite and you will have Count Ciano - young, debonair, exceedingly good looking, smiling, affable, and full of good spirits. He talked with smiling frankness.

I talked to him about his war adventures in Ethiopia, when he flew and fought as Commander of the Desperate Squadron. He took me to a mantel-piece, and there showed me a model airplane spotted in many places with red dots; a replica of the plane he had flown in one adventure. Each of the numerous red dots showed where his plane had been hit by a machine gun bullet - once by a shell. And it looked simply perforated.

Sitting at his desk, he closed the subject war by saying "then, I was in the fighting and the bombing. Now, I sign treaties and negotiate diplomatic agreements. That will continue to be my task - working for peace."

(I asked him what he thought about the Spanish trouble,

how it would end, and when? His reply was not dogmatic - he is not the dogmatic kind of person. He merely referred to the day's latest Spanish news - the fighting between the left wing elements in Cataloniz. This, he thought might be the deciding factor in the struggle in Spain. He phrased it with an epigram: "A civil war within a civil war."

Well, the prognostication might turn out to be true. Latest news: street fighting still going on in Barcelona -savage. warfare between the communists and socialists on one side and the anarchists on the other.) The anarchists, reddest of the red, are said to be in control of the city. Prominent leaders of the communist-socialist group have been killed. The Valencia government is throwing its strength against the anarchists - as much strength as it can spare. The Valencia left wingers are in the middle between two perils. - the anarchists on one hand and on the other - Franco. "A Civil war within a Civil war" says Mussolini's son-in-law.

And, now so long until we hear from Upton Close on Monday .

One result of the most spectacular air tragedy since man began to fly is to leave the future of heavier than air transportation entirely in the hands of the United States of America. You ask: How is that? We have a larger record of dirigible disasters than the Germans.

It is because the ace builder of zeppelins, Dr. Hugo Von Eckener himself, after 'getting by' amazingly winter and summer with hydrogen filled bags -- his Von Hindenburg crossed the Atlantic 21 times -- states that he will operate no more passenger air liners unless bouyed up by the non-inflammable helium gas. And the United States government is the sole ~~own~~ owner of helium gas, which it reserves for military purposes.

Yesterday morning -- before dawn, I was with some Movietone men in New York who were expecting pictures of the Von Hindenburg. We were remarking on the amazing record of the Von Hindenburg, and how matter-of-fact the public had become over its crossings.

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In the early afternoon we saw the dirigible in all its glory sail and dip over Radio City. Not long afterward, a spring thunder shower bombarded and drenched the city -- then it cleared again. And a few minutes after I talked to you from this studio came the flash that the queen of the air was gone.

Horror piled upon horror as eye-witness accounts came of the ~~explosions~~ of the concussions that knocked stalwart men flat, of the flames that spread the withering heat over the grounds of the U.S. Navy's airport. Laymen have been taught to think that newspaper men are hard-boiled, cynical, sometimes callous. Actually, that's anything but true. The group I know here were probably more shocked and horrified than any layman could be. All of them had seen similar or parallel disasters and they really knew what it meant.

But after all, no man can forget his occupation ~~and the details of its technique.~~ Towards the end of last evening,

What will come next? They asked themselves. Said one man who has been in his time head of United Press offices in various places: "What will you bet there's a charge of sabotage tomorrow?"

There were no takers to that bet. But today, surely enough, comes the expected dispatch from Europe: "The disaster to the HINDENBURG, the pride of Germany's aeronautical fleet, may not have been an accident. It may have been deliberately, cruelly, maliciously and criminally brought about."

In some cases, such a charge might be discounted as the natural reaction of people grieved, shocked, wounded to the core, wounded not only in their pride but in their sympathies in humanity. In this instance, however, the charge of sabotage cannot be lightly dismissed. One of its sources is a man whom all Americans have learned not only to like and admire but to respect profoundly. I mean Dr. Hugo Eckener, who designed and constructed the great hitherto brilliantly successful HINDENBURG. We know Dr. Eckener over here, we know him for a real man, not merely a clever man but one of brains, courage and poise. Incidentally, Dr. Eckener is on his way to America at this moment as the head of an official commission from Germany to investigate

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the tragedy.

It is well to note that Dr. Eckener does not say out and out that sabotage was responsible. What he says is: "This is one of the possibilities that we shall have to consider." And he adds: "I should hate to believe it; I should hate to find that it were true. I would infinitely prefer to discover that the ship to which I contributed a lifetime of study, work and love, was destroyed by natural causes."

But here's something else that must be considered. Several people who had intended to cross on the HINDENBURG, were

tipped off that they had better think twice about it.

Something ~~they learned~~, was going to happen just as the ship arrived. Of course rumors like that are not unusual in such cases. But in ~~the particular~~ those particular cases it isn't merely a rumor. One of the persons who received such a warning is a man well known to all newspaper men personally and known to the public through his writings and his book. Webb Miller, European correspondent for the United Press, vouches for the truth of this. "I was in Portland, Oregon, a few weeks ago," he said. "Something appeared in the local newspapers to the effect that I was going to Germany and coming back on the HINDENBURG. The following day somebody who ~~wasn't~~ wouldn't tell me his name, telephoned me at my hotel. And this is what the voice said: "You better not travel on the HINDENBURG. There is going to be an accident when she arrives in the United States."

50 As might be expected, there are a dozen theories.

(Some experts attribute it to lightning. Others lay it to electrical induction, a spark from static electricity. The ground for this is that the HINDENBURG had traveled through electrical storms before

she grounded and must have been fairly coated with electricity. Then there's a chance of a spark from a motor or from one of the exhausts.)

One of the ground crew who was helping to pull the HINDENBURG down at Lakehurst, was right under the ship's rear end. He could tell, he said, that there was something wrong with the rear engine on the port side. Smoke was pouring from it. And, said this man, who is no layman but a first class machinist's mate: "A flash of flame shot out of that engine while I was looking at it, ~~it was~~ a flash like a streak of lightning. It raced up the port side of the ship just before the first explosion. "

5/ Now here's still another notion. At first, when the HINDENBURG was brought to earth, it was done with a ground crew composed entirely of navy men, trained fellows. Last summer, this system was changed. Able-bodied helpers from the surrounding New Jersey towns were given jobs as helpers. That worked all right so long as the experienced sailors were mixed up with the untrained civilians. But last night all of the navy men were on one side of the dirigible, all the civilians on the other.

Incidentally, it takes two hundred able-bodied individuals to bring an airship of that size to the earth. Thus there was a crew of about a hundred trained men on one side last night, one hundred amateurs on the other. As the giant balloon neared the ground, two ropes were thrown overboard. The sailors grabbed one, the civilians seized the second. Just at that moment, a gust of wind swept over the airport and raised the HINDENBURG. Captain Lehmann roared an order through the radio phone in the control room: "Let go the ropes." The navy men obeyed the order, the civilians, flustered, did not. That tilted the craft and, it is suggested, may have been responsible for the disaster. Of course we must bear in mind that this is a theory and has no backing from any of the technical experts.

52 → Our colleague, Webb Miller, isn't the only one to report grounds for suspicion of sabotage. Numerous threatening letters had been received. Dr. Eckener's first idea was, in his own words, that the chances of sabotage were forty-seven per cent, accident fifty-three per cent. Later, in a broadcast from Berlin,

he said upon second thought he had decided that the probability of sabotage was slight, and hardly reasonable. Probably it was a static spark. But he added: "This makes one thing certain. From now on we must use nothing but Helium gas." That means that Germany will delay the construction and operation of any future dirigible until she can manufacture or obtain this non-inflammable gas. At present the entire world's supply is controlled by the United States government, which keeps it reserved entirely for military purposes. The only way that sabotage could have been accomplished, said Dr. Eckener, would have been by the firing of an explosive bullet into the gas bags of the dirigible. Dr. Eckener dismissed as most improbable the suggestion that an infernal machine could have been slipped in with the cargo. "The ship is always carefully searched before she sails," said the HINDENBURG's creator. In place of that he advanced another possibility. "When the ship is coming to ground, the men at the controls always release some of the gas. That is essential to the lowering of any dirigible. If somebody on board had lit a cigarette or a cigar that could have set fire to the gas and caused the explosion."

As usual, there will be investigations, not one, but several. To the non-political layman it is difficult to understand why these inquiries could not be combined and concentrated into one. With Dr. Eckener on the German investigation board will be Professor Bock of the German Institute of Aeronautical Research. Dr. Ludwig Duerr who helped in the designing and construction of the HINDENBURG, Colonel Joachim Breithaupt of the German Air Ministry, and other experts. Then, of course, Uncle Sam's Department of Commerce is officially obliged to examine what happened.

Senator Copeland of New York has sent an investigator to Lahurst to look into the accusation of sabotage. Mr. Copeland is Chairman of the Senate's Commerce Committee. And probably the Committee on Military Affairs of the House of Representatives may conduct its investigation.

A naval board of inquiry has already begun its part of the investigation. Dr. Hans Luther, Hitler's Ambassador to Washington, is at Lahurst, sitting by at the inquiry started today by the executives of the American Zeppelin Transport Company.

## HINDENBURG

There's just one thing to be said about that tragedy, which is comparatively less gloomy. It's not quite as ghastly as we thought last night. The death list isn't as large. To be sure, it's large enough. Thirty-two of the passengers, of the HINDENBURG'S crew, of the ground crew, in addition to one spectator.

## FLASH

A flash just received states that Commander Lehmann has died of his burns. His wife will come to his funeral.

## NEWS

Of course the HINDENBURG tragedy comes first today, but let's take a quick glance at what's been going on elsewhere.

Twenty-three hundred odd waifs landed at La Pallice, on the French coast today. They're the pathetic, in many cases orphaned, refugees from beleaguered Bilbao. With them aboard the Spanish liner HABANA were a hundred and ten old men and women. Most of those homesick, hungry, fighting little Spanish youngsters couldn't speak a word of French. Some of them were so weak, famished, that they couldn't walk. They had to be carried over the gangplank.

The next contingent of homeless little boys and girls will probably be taken to England. Downing Street announces that plans are being made to take care of perhaps 4,000 more of them.

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Back to the United States. The strike of the London bus workers seems to have flung a contagion all the way across the Atlantic. It has planted ideas in the employees of the Interborough Rapid Transit Company of New York, the system that operates miles upon miles of elevated roads and subways in the five boroughs and Greater New York. The union insists upon a vote, a referendum, to be held not later than next Thursday.

Otherwise, there will be a strike.

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And here's something that has a union labor angle to it. An important union official is to become a member of the Senate. ~~ex~~ Governor Brown of Tennessee has appointed Major George L. Berry to take the seat of the late Senator Nathan L. Bachman. Major Berry, as we all know, is President Roosevelt's Federal Industrial Coordinator. But he's also president of the powerful union of the printing pressmen and assistants. Quite incidentally, he owns a lot of land in east Tennessee. He has been one of the President's principal advisors on labor matters. And his appointment by the Tennessee Governor means another vote in the Senate for the President's plan for reorganizing the federal courts. Senator Berry will hold his seat until the next regular election in Tennessee, which will take place in November, Nineteen Thirty-Eight.