

Lowell Thomas Literary Digest Broadcast
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R-101

Well, this is one time when it is not necessary to look far for the news item of the day. For the past 48 hours it has covered the front page of every newspaper in the world, and the Press Associations are supplies hourly bulletins. I mean the tragedy of the R-101. The news of that disaster has flashed around the globe like a ball of fire in the night, - striking a note of pity and horror everywhere. I see that France, where the huge British dirigible fell and exploded, has proclaimed tomorrow a day of mourning for the 40-odd victims. A fine sympathetic gesture.

Last Saturday evening we were all here just where we are now. Most of you were at dinner, and I was standing at the microphone telling about this great liner of the air flying through the night over Europe--setting out on its 8,000-mile trip to India. It was a pleasant

thing to tell about--that magnificent Leviathan in its swift smooth flight over continents and seas on its way to romantic Hindustan.

But scarcely more than two hours after I was drawing that rosy picture of those aerial voyagers setting off on what promised to be another magnificently successful journey, grim tragedy stalked across the sky, and the rosy picture changed to one of horror.

All the papers today, have been full of the ghastly news of the R-101. Some of it has been confusing. I've been matching up the printed reports, together with the latest flashes by cable and wireless, trying to clear up doubtful points. First, as to the number of victims.--There is still some doubt. Certain it is that there are 7 survivors. The official list given out by London puts down the number of passengers and crew as 54. Seven from that would leave 47 victims.

French officials, however, state that they have recovered from the wreckage charred fragments of more than 47 bodies. A woman's shoe and a typewriter were found by a French soldier. No woman is down on the passenger list, but it may be that a woman, perhaps a scenographer, was taken along and not listed. Injured

survivors place the number aboard at 58, which is a higher figure than either the official British list or the estimate of the French. The confusion is not so strange. On an important trip like that, a few not down on the list are often aboard.

Next I have been putting the reports together in an endeavor to figure out the cause of this frightful disaster. There is some dispute about it. The pilot of the giant dirigible is among the survivors. He says the R-101 hadn't enough lift--that the storm forced her down--that she bumped the ground three times and then exploded. Some surmise that the ship got into a downward current of air. Others think that her elevator rudder broke, and she could not steer upward.

There was one difference between this ship and other lighter-than-air craft that have been built to date. The R-101 had a smoking room. Hitherto, smoking has been forbidden aboard airships. Some seem to think a lighted cigaret or a match may have set off the hydrogen. But most of those who ought to know, doubt that this could have happened.

At any rate, what is certain is that the

craft was heavily loaded for her long trip. She was in a rainstorm over France, near the city of Beauvais, midway between Paris and the English Channel. She moved down in the darkness and mist. There was a bump as her nose touched the earth. Then another. A harder one, as she hit again. Then a rending crash, as the sagging giant rammed her nose into a French peasant's field.

Instantly there was a hideous explosion, and an immense spread of flame as the millions of cubic feet of hydrogen burned with a raging fury.

The cabin of the R-101 was contained within the gas bag--in the envelope, as they call it. It was not suspended below in the old-style way. A second after the explosion, the cabin was enveloped in the flare of the blazing airship. Only the men operating the ship were astir. The passengers and part of the crew were asleep in their bunks. They never had a chance.

Pilot Harry Leach was in the smoking room. When the ship exploded, he tore up a chair that was fastened to the floor and with it smashed through the panels of the cabin and pounded his way out.

John Binks and Arthur Bell were tending a

Diesel engine in the engine gondola. The explosion burst a water tank above this. A deluge drenched them and saved their lives as they fought their way out through the flames.

Victor Savoy was thrown by the explosion against the wall of the midship car. He was half stunned. He remembers little more than that he crawled through burning fabric into the open.

Arthur Dickey, the radio operator, was resting on a bed in the wireless room. He crawled out with the fire raging around him. But he couldn't get through the fabric. He was trapped. The flames were racing his way. Then he felt wet grass. He had found a hole torn in the canvas, and was safe.

The survivors, as they struggled out into the dark, could hear the scream of doomed men inside this inferno. Dazed, and suffering the agony of burns, they crawled away from the immense torch that flamed above them. Just eight managed to get out, and one of these died.

Dr. Eckener, the great authority on dirigibles, was out over Germany with his king airship, the Graf Zeppelin, in the same storm that wrecked the R-101. The

Graf Zeppelin, by the way, stayed aloft all night, and in the morning came in, safely. Dr. Eckener said he could make little comment on the loss of the R-101, save that it did not indicate that airships were necessarily unsafe. However, one thing does come into mind--every nation has had disaster with its big rigid dirigibles since the war, except the Germans. The British previously lost the R-34. The French lost the Dixmude, which sailed away and was never heard from again. We lost the Shenandoah. The Japanese lost a Zeppelin which they took at the end of the war.

Sir Hubert Wilkins, the famous Arctic explorer, who has a wide knowledge of airships and was a passenger aboard the Graf Zeppelin, on her famous flight around the world, comments on the fact that the cabin of the R-101 was inside of the giant bag. A gondola suspended below would be less dangerous. Just the other day he told me an interesting story about the loss of the Japanese dirigible. She was disabled at sea. Nearby was an island, on which rose a high cliff. The captain steered the limping craft for the cliff. He brought his ship so that she skimmed just over it. That gave the crew a chance to jump, which

they all did--including the captain. Not a man was lost. The big bag drifted out to sea again--a wreck.

The most striking comment on the loss of the R-101 comes in a United Press Dispatch from Washington. Rear Admiral Moffett, chief of the United States Bureau of Aeronautics, says that the United States has the only large supply of helium in the world. This gas can be used in dirigibles instead of hydrogen. Helium will burn, but only slowly, while hydrogen is desperately explosive. But the United States will not permit other nations the use of helium. The time was when we had only enough for our own dirigibles, but now the supply is immense. Admiral Moffett calls upon our government to sell helium to the outside world for use in their dirigibles. According to Admiral Moffett we might possibly have an advantage in war by preventing other nations from inflating their dirigibles with helium. But this possibility, he thinks, seems too small for us to warrant our imposing a condition which indirectly results in death by fire as in the case of the R-101.

Germany

This was a bad week-end in the air. Germany had a serious airplane disaster this morning, when a Lufthansa plane from Berlin to Vienna crashed near the Dresden flying field. The Associated Press reports eight people, six of them passengers, were aboard. All were killed. But there have been remarkably few accidents in airplane travel over the commercial air lines of Europe.

Flash -- Shanghai -- Int. News

6,000 inhabitants of Zentang River towns in the Shekiang district were drowned and thousands rendered homeless after a five-day torrential rainfall.

Fosdick

Yesterday morning the most talked-of church in the country opened its doors for its first Sunday service. I mean the Riverside Baptist Church on the Hudson near Grant's tomb in New York City. - The one built largely with Rockefeller money by John D., Jr. The church of which Harry Emerson Fosdick is the pastor.

The church that was to cost \$4,000,000, but has cost six, because all of its immense scaffolding was gutted with flames a year after the construction was started.

This is no simple meeting house of old Baptist tradition. The Gothic tower which rears itself 400 feet above the Hudson River is in the highly ornate style of the French cathedrals of the 13th century. Four very modern elevators go racing up twenty stories. The tower contains the famous carillon of 72 bells, which is Mr. Rockefeller's memorial to his mother. The bells are played from a keyboard and this will be the first carillon in history with a span of more than five octaves.

Underneath the bell tower are twenty-two stories of church offices, Sunday school rooms, and other accommodations. For smaller services there is a chapel inspired by the mediaeval chapel at Carcassonne. A gymnasium, with baseball and handball courts, is in late 20th century American. Probably the most interesting thing about the new church is the elaborate entrance arch. Surrounding it are scores of carven images -- not only of the traditional angels

and apostles, but of many famous scientists and philosophers as well. Only one of these images is of a man who is still living. That man is Albert Einstein, the German scientist and propounder of the theory of relativity.

New ideas in church construction are outlined in an informative article in this week's Literary Digest, headed "Making Church Property Pay." You will find out what up-to-date congregations are doing to meet present-day economic conditions.

Leaving these pictures of Sabbath and religion calm, we jump to warlike scenes in coffee growing Brazil.

Brazil

The wires have been sizzling this afternoon with more revolutionary news flashes from down in Brazil. The United Press announces that seven states have joined the uprising. Martial law has been declared in Rio de Janeiro. The central government is mobilizing against the rebels with land, air, and sea forces. Federal troops are being sent overland

as fast as crack trains can carry them. Two cruisers of the Brazilian navy are steaming through the Atlantic bound for the coast of southern Brazil. And squadrons of military airplanes are scouting over the revolutionary states trying to spy out the latest movements of the advancing rebels.

The revolutionists have conscripted every man between 21 and 35. They have seized hundreds of railway cars and locomotives to carry their troops. Several clashes between rebel and federal troops have already taken place, with considerable loss of life. The Press correspondents tell us that unless the opposing parties can come to terms, everything points to bitter civil war in Brazil.

Talking about war and warriors -

American Legion

Did you hear that roar that went up from Eastern Massachusetts today? Well, that was the annual convention of the American Legion just getting under way.

75,000 of the boys have stormed Boston. And from Lexington and Concord to Bunker Hill the

city has capitulated to the Legionaires.

The big event of the day was President Hoover's speech. He addressed the Legion as an apostle of peace. And the former soldiers cheered him to the echo. Ex-president Coolidge and General Pershing were on the platform with President Hoover.

The Associated Press wires that there is a larger crowd at the convention this year than ever before. According to National Commander Bodenhamer, the Legion has grown tremendously this year. In the past twelve months 100,000 new members have been added to the roll. This means that there are now approximately 900,000 Legionaires.

A little comedy was thrown into the convention by the arrival of rancher Hal Grimshaw from Arizona. The International News carries the story. Legionaire Hal Grimshaw lives in a suburb of Phoenix, Arizona, -- oh, just a matter of a hundred miles or so from the city limits.

Hal arrived in the vicinity of Bunker Hill accompanied by more than a hundred of his friends-- including lizards, Gila monsters, a monkey-faced owl,

6 lguanas, 40 horned toads, several boxes of ants to feed to the toads, 16 chameleons, two bull snakes, 4 rattlers, 2 ring-tailed wild cats, and a burro.

The New York Herald Tribune says that Hal didn't bring his collection merely for the sake of sociability. Hal regards his pets as pretty powerful propaganda for Arizona--the most beautiful spot and the healthiest. If anybody doubts his word, he can point to the Gila monsters and the ring tailed wild cats which ooze health and vitality.

Hal intends to hand his Arizona menagerie over to the Boston Board of Education--rattle snakes, wild cats, and all.

The biggest man, in size, at the convention is Carl Sandell, a Denver traffic cop, who stands 7 ft. 5 in. in his stockings. His particular pal is the shortest delegate, Harold Abbott, of Hartford, Wisconsin, who is 4 ft. 8.

By the way, a flash has just come in from the United Press to the effect that President Hoover appeared in Boston today wearing a brown suit and a

brown hat. The news report however, gave no indication as to whether or not it was a brown derby. I assume that it was not.

Flash

An international News Service dispatch put into my hand states that there was no woman aboard the R-101. The woman's shoe found in the wreckage is accounted for by the fact that one of the male passengers was taking a pair of shoes to a woman in India.

Vizetelly

Meals were once sold in Merrie England not by the plate but by the yard. Our authority for this is Dr. Frank H. Vizetelly, famous editor of the new Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary. The current edition of the Literary Digest, by the way, carries an illuminating article by Dr. Vizetelly. It reveals the remarkably interesting origin of some of the common, seemingly unromantic words you and I use every day. You should hear Dr. Vizetelly pronouncing some of the

jaw-breakers that you and I never use, and couldn't twist around our tongues if we wanted to.

Conclusion

A headline in this afternoon's New York Evening Post caught my eye. It read:- "Best Missouri Minds agree Cards Have Good Chance to Capture World Crown." Well, those best Missouri minds must be disturbed by that home run Jimmy Fox hit. It was a thrilling pitchers battle. The score was Nothing-to-Nothing in the 9th, with one man on base, and Foxx belted the ball right over the fence! - That home run beat the Cards.

Like the Best Missouri Minds, I haven't a thing to say after that, except good-night.