

Source: *Navy Lakehurst Historical Society*

USS Akron Lost at Sea

On the evening of April 3, 1933, the Akron departed Lakehurst for a routine training flight. There was nothing in the weather forecast which would indicate trouble. It was with no sense of apprehension that the Akron cast off at 7:28 P.M. Yet within hours the ship had been enveloped in a severe cold front. McCord had the ship turned east to ride out the storm at sea off the New Jersey coast. Just after midnight the air became quite turbulent and the Akron was carried downward. Drooping of emergency ballast fore and full speed on all engines stopped the descent at seven hundred feet. The Akron soon returned to its cruising of sixteen hundred feet. Two to three minutes later the Akron was caught in another down draft. With the altimeter reading eight hundred feet the ship lurched sharply, as if a strong gust had hit it. The rudder man then reported no response from his wheel. The men in the control car braced for impact with the ocean. Wiley, the only survivor from the control car, saw the waves below him and was washed out of the control car moments later.

There had been no impact of the lower fin with the sea before the control car hit the ocean. The reason for this apparent anomaly was that the fin was already in the ocean. The lurch which all had assumed was a gust, and which the altimeter would seem to insist was just that, was actually the lower fin hitting the water. No one realized the severity of the low pressure system through which the Akron was flying. The low caused her barometric altimeter to read as much as several hundred feet higher than the actual altitude. The Akron had literally been flown into the sea.



Of the 76 men on board Akron on April 3, 1933, only three survived the wreck. (pictured left to right: Moody Erwin, Lt. Cmdr. Herbert Wiley and Richard Deal)

The Akron carried no life jackets and only one rubber raft. Most men never got out of the foundering ship, and of those who did only three survived exposure to the chilly north-Atlantic waters. Seventy three men perished. The tragedy was compounded the next day when the blimp J-3 crashed while looking for survivors, going down with two members of its crew. The navy had lost the finest airship in the world and seventy-five men. It was the beginning of the end for naval lighter-than-air.