



An early flight of LZ-7, the first Deutschland, before the name was painted on. This first commercial zeppelin had a short, nine-day life. Open cars or gondolas were for the crew, and the enclosed passenger cabin was amidships.

Yesterday's Wings **Early ZEPPELIN Cruises**

by PETER M. BOWERS / AOPA 54408

From 1910 until the outbreak of World War I, German zeppelins were the only consistently successful, commercial passenger-carrying aircraft in the world. While there were no scheduled airline operations, regular sight-seeing and other pleasure flights were set up by an organization that owned and operated zeppelins commercially. This was DELAG, an acronym for the German name of the German Airship Transportation Co., founded in November 1909.

In June 1910, DELAG acquired its first zeppelin, appropriately named Deutschland. This ship was also known by its factory number, LZ-7, that indicated it was the seventh zeppelin airship built since 1900. While it had two open cars—one fore and one aft for the eight-man crew, and the three Daimler engines that drove the four outrigger propellers—the 24 passengers rode in plush style in an enclosed central cabin.

DELAG undertook some shakedown and familiarization flights before starting paid passenger service and transferred its ship from the factory at Friedrichshafen to its new base at Dussel-

dorf. The first flight from that city, on June 28, was a press flight with 23 invited aboard for what was planned to be a representative three-hour pleasure flight, complete with an in-flight champagne breakfast.

Unforeseen troubles developed, however. Because of poor planning, Deutschland got caught a long way downwind of its base and encountered a violent storm because no one had checked the weather in that area. Finally, it lost one of its engines. The short pleasure flight had turned into a nine-hour ordeal that ended with a crash landing in the trees of the Teutobura Forest. There was no fire, fortunately, and only one minor injury. Nevertheless, Deutschland was a total loss.

In a remarkable demonstration of the extremely high popularity of zeppelins in Germany at the time, DELAG was not only able to finance an immediate replacement, LZ-8—the Ersatz (substitute) Deutschland, sometimes referred to as E-Deutschland, or in recent histories, Deutschland II—but four additional ships as well.

The replacement fared only slightly better than the original. Delivered on March 11, 1911, it was wrecked on May



The inside of the 24-passenger cabin of Deutschland shows the lightweight wicker chairs and ornate woodwork. Hot meals could be served in flight.

EARLY COMMERCIAL ZEPPELINS

Specifications and Performance

	LZ-7 Deutschland (1910)	LZ-17 Sachsen (1913)
--	----------------------------	-------------------------

Length	486 ft	466 ft
Diameter	46 ft	48 ft 6 in
Gas volume	683,000 cu ft	690,000 cu ft
Powerplant(s)	3 120-hp Daimler	3 170-hp Maybach
High speed	37 mph	48.9 mph

16 when a crosswind caught the ship as it was being walked out of its hangar.

Number three was on the way, however: LZ-10, Schwaben, was delivered on June 26; followed by LZ-11, Viktoria Luise (named for the Kaiser's daughter), on Feb. 2, 1912; LZ-13, Hansa, on July 30; and LZ-17 Sachsen on May 3, 1913. Schwaben was lost on the ground to a fire believed to have been caused by static electricity in the rubberized-silk gas cells. No one was hurt, and the

remaining three zeppelins continued their passenger-hopping until the day after war broke out. Then they were drafted by the army and served as trainers until dismantled as obsolete.

In its four years of operations, DELAG carried 10,197 paying passengers on 1,588 commercial flights without a single passenger injury other than the broken leg suffered by the reporter on the first Deutschland when he jumped out of the cabin.

An earlier zeppelin accident is worth mentioning. Count Zeppelin had built his fifth ship, LZ-5, for the German Army, but wanted to make a spectacular public demonstration of its performance before delivery. He planned a 36-hour endurance flight, a long cruise from the floating factory on the shores of Lake Constance.

The flight started at 9:30 p.m. on May 20, 1909, and the first leg covered 264 miles against the wind in 14 hours 25 minutes for a ground speed of 17 mph. After more cruising and with fuel running low, LZ-5 headed back to base with a tailwind averaging 32 mph for a time. After flying through the night

of the 30th, LZ-5 was only 80 miles from home when Count Zeppelin recognized the completely fatigued condition of the crew (he was then 70 years old himself) and ordered a landing in a suitable field at Goppingen.

Because of fatigue from flying 37 hours and 39 minutes, the helmsman misjudged his landing, in an otherwise completely open field, and hit the only tree there, pushing in the nose almost back to the forward gondola. There was no fire; the ship was secured; and a repair crew was rushed up from the factory.

Within a day, the damaged girders, the forward gas cells, and the forward engine had been removed, and a nose cone of sorts had been jury-rigged on the bobbed nose. The LZ-5 was then flown back to its base. It was soon repaired and accepted by the army, but had a short life of only 16 subsequent flights. It was destroyed on Apr. 25, 1910, when a strong wind ripped it out of the hands of the ground crew and slammed the unmanned LZ-5 (now redesignated Z-11) against the side of a small hill. □