

AIRSHIP AKRON BLOWN TO ATOMS; VANIMAN AND HIS CREW KILLED

Terrifying Spectacle 500 Feet in Air Witnessed by Thousands.
BODIES FALL INTO OCEAN

Craft Built to Withstand Storms, Goes to Doom in Calm Weather.

Atlantic City, N. J., July 3.—Sailing out over the Atlantic Ocean under perfect control and in view of several thousand interested persons the great airship Akron, in command of Melvin Vaniman, with a crew of four men, exploded while more than 500 feet in the air early today and shot down into the water a tangled mass, carrying to their death the daring navigator and his companions.

Death is believed to have come instantly to the five men.

In all the tragic history of disasters to airships or aeroplanes probably none was as sensational as that which brought to an end the greatest and most costly air craft ever constructed on the Western Hemisphere. Built to withstand the storms of the Atlantic and to carry at least a dozen men across the ocean to Europe, the Akron went to her doom in calm weather. Those who went down with the big dirigible beside the intrepid Vaniman, who already had had one thrilling experience in an airship on the ocean, were Calvin Vaniman, his young brother, Fred Elmer, George Bourillon, of Philadelphia; Water C. Gest, a friend of Vaniman's financial backer, Up to sundown two bodies, those of Calvin Vaniman and Bourillon, had been recovered from the wreckage, which lies submerged in about eighteen feet of water off Brigantine Beach.

The Akron, which had been inflated last February with gas manufactured by Vaniman in the big hangar at the airport, was taken out shortly after 6 A. M. for a test flight. One flight had already been made about a month ago and defects discovered at that time were remedied, and today's trial was to have been among the last prior to the attempt to cross the Atlantic.

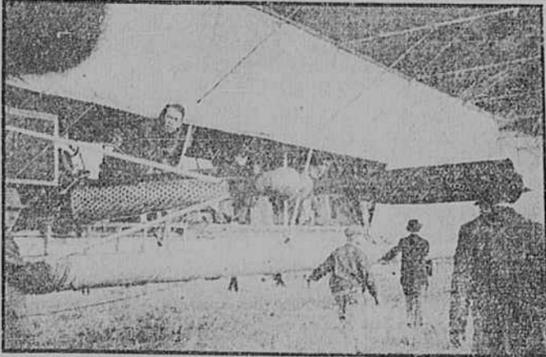
Mrs. Vaniman, having her husband good-bye at their little cottage near the hangar at 2 A. M., and waited for daybreak to see her husband sail away.

No Difficulty in Launching.
The launching of the air craft was accomplished without difficulty and she sailed gracefully away.

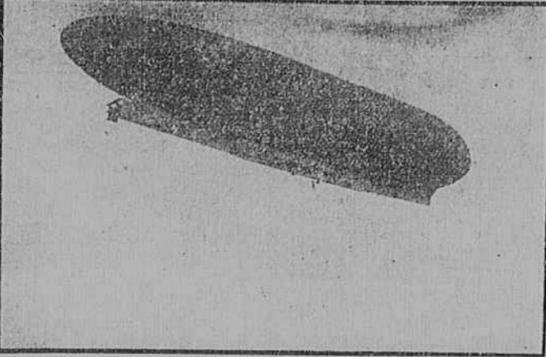
Over the waters of Absecon Inlet Vaniman manoeuvred her, and then sailed down over the city, and after completing a few other movements, shaped the ship's course out to sea. When a half-mile off Brigantine Beach, the thousands of spectators who had been watching the ship saw a burst of flames outlined against the morning sky.

In a few seconds they were horrified to see the car of the balloon detach itself from the bag and shoot downward into the water, followed by the collapsed gas bag.

By intuition everybody appeared to have realized what had occurred, and soon a hundred boats were beating their way out over the rough waters of the inlet bay. When the first boats reached the scene of the wreck the rescuers found only the collapsed bag. After a search a submerged body that



The car of Melvin Vaniman's airship Akron. The owner and inventor is shown sticking his head from the side of the car.



Melvin Vaniman's Airship Akron which was blown to pieces yesterday. (Copyright, American Press Ass'n.)

of the younger Vaniman, was recovered.

Among the first on the scene were United States life-savers. Divers went down to the wreck, but there was little that could be done until low tide, when Bourillon's body was disentangled from the wreckage and brought to shore.

Mrs. Vaniman saw the collapse of the balloon and its drop into the ocean, carrying with it her husband and brother-in-law. She fell up a faint and was unconscious for some time. After recovering consciousness she talked of her husband's bravery. The wives of Bourillon, Gest and Elmer, who lived near by, also saw the disaster from their homes. At the Vaniman cottage a most distressing scene followed.

Men turned away as the four widows wept on one another's shoulders. After the first excitement and shock had passed Mrs. Vaniman again collapsed, and later in the day was under the care of a physician. She was suffering with frequent fainting spells and her condition is serious.

Second Flight.
The flight this morning was the second that the inflated airship had taken this year. After tinkering all winter on the ship, Vaniman took the Akron out for a short flight on Saturday morning, June 1. At that time the balloon was nearly wrecked by some of

the mechanism going wrong, but it was safely landed at the hangar without serious mishap.

The longest flight the balloon made was last fall, when it spent the greater part of the day in the air in the vicinity of this city. At that time the gas in the bag was not sufficient to keep the big ship constantly in the air, and it had to make several landings. During the winter Vaniman improved the ship through lessons learned in that flight in appearance the Akron was not unlike the American in which Walter Wellman and Vaniman attempted to cross the Atlantic Ocean in October, 1910, but there were many differences in the construction of the airship which collapsed today. The gas bag was thirty feet longer than that of the American, but was smaller in diameter. The dimensions were: Length of bag, 238 feet; diameter, 47 feet. The bag was made of a composition of rubber and was constructed in Ohio.

Beneath this immense cigar-shaped bag was the so-called car, similar in shape to the American, but longer, perhaps 150 feet long. The bottom of the car was composed of a round steel tank about two feet in diameter and about 100 feet long. In this tank was stored the gasoline. The car was connected to the gas bag by steel tubing of light construction. On top of the tank was built a platform of two-inch boards and on this rested one 100-horsepower motor, two 50-horsepower motors, one 15-horsepower motor and a small dynamo. The 100-horsepower motor was used for the two forward vertical propellers and the other two large motors for the two pairs of orientable propellers. These propellers could be turned from the horizontal to the vertical and were to be used to raise or lower the height of the airship. The small motor and dynamo were used for electric lighting and to furnish power to the wireless outfit. Some of the supplies of the ship were also stored on this platform. In the forward end of the platform were the steering wheel and gear for controlling the rudder and the stabilizing planes fore and aft.

The sleeping accommodations for the crew consisted of hammocks strung up in the car.

Great Shock to People.

The disaster came as a shock to the people of Atlantic City who had come to know Vaniman very well. For a week past the intrepid navigator had been planning to make a short flight and only waited for favorable winds. His conditions appeared satisfactory, and he notified the city that he probably would make a flight at sunrise today. At daybreak the conditions were still favorable and the word was given to launch. The balloon and streamer were summoned and taken up to the inlet, to assist in getting the balloon out of the immense hangar. Their duty on the ropes was carefully warped out of the big shed.

Hundreds of persons who expected to see the Akron on her way out of the hangar for the last time. The operation was a simple one and the big bag was brought out without difficulty. Once clear of the shed Vaniman jumped into the car of the ship, where his other four men had already gone, and he gave the word to rise. Instantly the ship rose, slowly at first and swaying from end to end. Then she rose rapidly. Vaniman appeared to have complete control, and after circling about over the inlet one of the mainland the ship's nose was pointed out to sea. The manoeuvring of the great airship constantly attracted additional people and the upper end of the beach and boardwalk were crowded with people when the disaster occurred.

Story of Eyewitness.

An eye-witness of the disaster told this story of what he saw:
"When about 1500 feet in the air I saw a sudden puff of smoke from the forward end of the great gas bag. In a minute it exploded."

"To those who have witnessed the many flights of Vaniman this one seemed at the start more successful than any yet attempted. The crew seemed to have better control than ever before. Starting out from the hangar the ship rose slowly from the ground and passed easily out over the water of the inlet, grazing the masts of the fleet of yachts anchored there."

"Vaniman and his crew were cheered by a number of fishing parties at the inlet about to start out for a day's sport. The whistles of a fleet of motor boats sounded a 'God speed' to the airship and its crew."
"After getting up about 300 feet, the ship made a complete circle of the waters of Grassy Bay. Apparently Vaniman was making a test of the air currents."

TO-NIGHT

The Board of Aldermen is to meet to consider the pending franchise of the Richmond and Henrico Railway Company. That franchise deals solely with the use of the streets and alleys for furnishing electric light and power, and has nothing whatever to do with any extension of tracks or street railway service.

That franchise, as demanded by the Richmond and Henrico Company, DOES NOT SAFEGUARD THE CITY and does not specifically require that company to serve YOU or any other citizen of Richmond in any conceivable way.

That franchise is a "blanket" franchise, requiring nothing definite from the Richmond and Henrico Railway Company, but permitting that company to use such streets as it chooses at its own sweet will and in its own time. The city's legal adviser says he has "very grave doubts" of its validity.

He says also that any franchise granted ought to require the naming of the particular streets to be occupied. He says further that under this franchise the Richmond and Henrico Company could FIGHT IN THE COURTS every attempt of the city to require it to serve any specific section of the city.

The manifold defects and "jokers" of this franchise can be eliminated NOW, before the ordinance is passed; but they can never be remedied after it is passed and made a contract binding on the city for fifteen years to come.

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Service Talk No. 38
July 3, 1912

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plainly seen plunging down through the air from the great height. Their bodies were seen to fall over again before they sank in the sea just off the outer bar and not far from a can buoy.

From the boardwalk, abreast of the life saving station, it looked as if the now limp gas bag and its metal framework covered their bodies.

Men on the boardwalk turned their eyes from the sickening sight and women screamed. One man who appeared to grasp the situation made a dash for the Royal Palace Hotel to telephone for help. A large launch on the way to the fishing ground started to blow a whistle to attract the attention of the other boats, and in a short time the inlet waters were black with boats rushing to the aid of the men.

Cause of Explosion.
One theory of the cause of the explosion is that gasoline used for operating the engines exploded and in turn communicated to the gas in the balloon.

Vaniman had recently been testing an entirely new material for the gas bag of his balloon. It is reinforced with wire, and Vaniman claimed that with it he could construct a balloon that would neither expand nor contract, thus producing a dirigible that would be absolutely under the control of engines and steering apparatus.

On his last two trips Vaniman dispensed with the services of his wireless telegraph operator and had removed the apparatus thus giving his crew additional room in the working quarters.

That somebody had let too much free gas into the engines and backed up the exhaust, was the theory of Chief Black, of the fire department, who was on hand with his men to help in launching the balloon.

Another theory for the cause of the disaster is that a dangling rope of the rigging dragged into the big propellers, whipped up against the stem end of the balloon and snapped off enough of the cone to free the gas, allowing the vapor to sweep into the engines and explode.

Three of the widows of men killed in the accident are Mrs. Vaniman, Mrs. Bourillon and Mrs. Elmer. They had gathered at the Vaniman cottage, across from the hangar, within an hour after the accident. Outside the little cottage was a crowd of probably 10,000 persons, women, children and men, all saddened, downcast and some in tears over the oppressive sorrow of it all.

Police were on guard around the Vaniman house to keep back the mob. Every one seemed to feel deeply the solemnity of the moment.

Despite the intensity, Mrs. Vaniman talked of her husband.

"He was so very brave," she said, "that I believe he never knew what fear was. I never presumed to urge him not to go up, for I knew it would spread that the ship was in the air, and thousands of people and visitors flocked to the boardwalk to witness the flight. Soon after the puff of smoke was seen the airship wore around the ground and passed easily out over the water of the inlet, grazing the masts of the fleet of yachts anchored there."

"The airship passed over the Royal Palace Hotel," he said, "and then flew over the southern section of the city. By this time the word had quickly spread that the ship was in the air, and thousands of people and visitors flocked to the boardwalk to witness the flight. Soon after the puff of smoke was seen the airship wore around the ground and passed easily out over the water of the inlet, grazing the masts of the fleet of yachts anchored there."

"I shall never forget the feeling in my heart when he left me at 2 o'clock this morning. I had a forewarning of trouble. I believe it now, as truly as I can believe anything, and I am not

a superstitious woman, either."
"Yes, I saw them fall. I saw one man jump—something tells me that it was my husband. I saw him spread out in the air, flat, as he fell, and then—oh, I can scarcely speak of it—all grew dark before me. They were so high in the air—it must have been a thousand feet."

"Before I fainted I now remember that the car turned with one end downward and it shot toward the sea like a cloth, all in a string. I can recall that picture all the rest of my days; it is photographed on my mind."

"All these years of my husband's struggle he and I have been as one. I planned with him, I shared his troubles and did what I could to encourage him."
"At times, in Europe, things were very depressing. But Mr. Seiberling, of Akron, has been a splendid friend. We have never heard from him one word except in praise."

"This Akron he was using for experiment only in a field that he believed already passed in the science of aeronautics."
"Was Testing Speed Device."
"His particular reason for going up today was to try out a contrivance he

had for estimating the speed an airship traveled, an invention of his own, based on measurements of the image on the ground glass of an inverted camera showing the earth or sea moving down below."

The first rescue boat to reach the scene of the disaster was in charge of Captain Parker, of the Atlantic City life-saving station. Two other life-savers were with him. Nothing but the remnants of the big gas bag was above the water, the machinery and heavy car having sunk out of sight. The men poked around with a boat hook, trying to find one or more of the bodies, but failed and decided to postpone their efforts until the tide falls this afternoon.

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