Thursday, 6 May, 1937: It is early evening at a remote airport in central New Jersey. It’s starting to rain again. Suddenly, much to the surprise of the dozens of spectators gathered below, a gigantic diesel powered balloon blows up as it tries to land after crossing the ocean from Germany. In less time than it takes to read this summary, this proud machine, the quintessence of aerostatic technology, is re-forged forever into a twisted, smoking metaphor.

Eighty years have passed since that unsettled Spring evening. In the interval, several investigators have painstakingly reviewed the facts, introduced new evidence, rearranged the lines of reasoning, and (in some instances) employed artistic license to shed new light on the source of the ‘elusive spark’ that brought the ship down. Despite these efforts, the conclusions drawn by the original 1937 commission remain essentially intact to this day.

The full official report of the 1937 U.S. Department of Commerce accident investigation is presented here for the first time in audio format.