

Beyond the Sunset #4

By George Fuller

The MONTREAL DAILY STAR of 30 October 1913 published an interview with a Montrealer who had made an aerial voyage in a Zeppelin during a recent trip to Europe. Gerald Lomer and his daughter Clara had flown on a three hour, 175 km tour over the Black Forest from Oos, near Baden-Baden in southwestern Germany.

At the time the little resort city was welcoming more than 75,000 visitors per year. Its proximity to the Rhine River and the scenic Black Forest had attracted wealthy travellers since Romans came to enjoy its thermal baths. North Americans were able to make travel bookings to the area through the Hamburg-America shipping line (HAPAG).

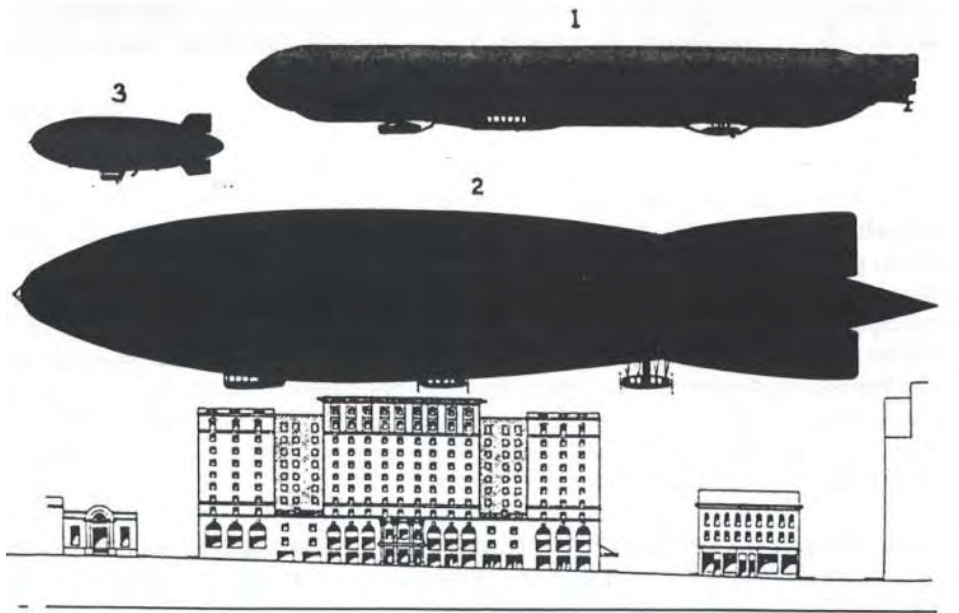
In late 1909, with partial backing from HAPAG, the inventor of the rigid airship, Count Zeppelin and associates had established the German Aerial Transportation Company (DELAG). The first hangar/sheds for German passenger-carrying airships were built at Baden-Baden and Dusseldorf and an inaugural flight by the Zeppelin airship "Deutschland" with 23 passengers was made in late June, 1910. By the summer of 1913 seven more German cities had airship sheds and three dirigibles were in regular service.

The Lomers travelled in the L.Z.17 "Sachsen" (Saxony) which had first flown in early May, 1913. It had three 165 hp Maybach gasoline engines. One of these, installed in the forward crew nacelle, drove two 2-bladed propellers on outriggers on either side of the hull. The other two engines were in a rear gondola, each driving an outrigger mounted 4-bladed propeller. The airship had a maximum speed of about 75 km/hr.

Passengers rode in a streetcar-like cabin in the mid under part of the metal, fabric-covered hull. Up to 24 were seated in wicker seats with tables. An excellent view was provided by large windows that could be opened in flight. There were toilet facilities with running water. A steward served fine wines, champagne and a select cold buffet. Guide books were sold describing the various scenic regions overflown.

In the period from March, 1912 to November, 1913 DELAG carried a total of 19,100 passengers on 881 flights that covered 65,000 miles. Despite the accidental loss of several of the company's airships no passenger was even injured. Not only were the Zeppelins the first commercial transport aircraft DELAG was the world's first airline.

The Lomers were probably not the only Montrealers to be its passengers. They demonstrate that citizens of today's world capital of civil aviation were participants in the earliest days of commercial flight.



Our illustration has been adapted from an advertisement for the Mount Royal Hotel from 1930. To a common scale are:

- silhouettes of the “Sachsen” (1)
- the Goodyear non-rigid airship “Mayflower II” (temporarily based at St-Hubert airport for the opening of EXPO’67) (3)
- Montreal’s most famous aerial visitor, the R-100 (2).

The view of the Peel Street side of the hotel (now Les Cours Mont-Royal) is not much changed today.

George Fuller

Sources:

American Aviation Historical Society JOURNAL, Vol.7 No.2 Summer, 1962 “Barnstorming with Champagne” by D.H. Robinson.

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