



ROTARY CLUB OF WYNBERG

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ROTARY MAGAZINE MONTH

British inventor 'solves' mystery of Hindenburg airship disaster

Submitted by Herbert Herrmann

A British inventor claims to have 'exploded' the myths around the Hindenburg disaster - and discovered what really caused the German airship to catch fire. Jem Stansfield, 37, says the airship was not destroyed by St Elmo's Fire, or by sabotage, instead a new waterproof coating lit the fatal spark.

The German Airship was landing in Lakehurst New Jersey on May 6, 1937 when it exploded - putting an end to an experiment touted as the future of trans-Atlantic flight.

Thirty-five out of the 100 passengers on board died.

"To test the theories, we built three 30-metre-long hydrogen airships and blew them up," says Jem Stansfield, 37, a British inventor and TV presenter, who created the models for a Channel 4 documentary. "We blew them up in ways that corresponded to theories about the Hindenburg disaster. We looked for explosions that looked most like the way the Hindenburg went down - as airships burn, their buoyancy changes, so it's quite distinctive."

Stansfield worked with aviation historian Dan Grossman. As well as their experiments, they also analysed crash reports from both Germany and America.

"When the airship docked, a new waterproof coating meant that there were pools of water on its skin, which picked up an electrical charge due to the weather," says Stansfield. "When the landing ropes attached, the charge within the framework caused sparking."

Stansfield says there must have been a pre-existing gas leak - and a spark lit a fire which went down into the airship's ventilation tubes. On its own, the leak would not have been disastrous - but combined with pools of water and a rushed landing, it was fatal.

"From the experiments, I have a reasonable amount of confidence - it was a perfect storm. They were not supposed to do a high landing under those conditions. They were supposed to land low where there was less of a voltage difference. There was known to be high atmospheric static that day," says Stansfield. "But they were under a lot of political pressure to land quickly."

The German engineers behind the Hindenburg had recently redesigned the skin after an incident in Brazil.

"The idea that it was sabotage, or burning rocket fuel, or St Elmo's fire just don't work. The idea of pools of water on the surface causing a fire which tracked back via ventilation tubes - that worked in burn tests, and was repeatable in our experiments."

Stansfield is keen to dispel the myth that the airship itself was badly designed. Hindenburg had flown for 250,000 miles before its fatal crash, and the company behind it had flown a shuttle service between Berlin and Brazil successfully before the disaster. "It's phenomenal how well they worked," says Stansfield. "Hindenburg had been struck by lightning before. It was not an unsafe vehicle."

"No one will ever know for certain," says Stansfield. "You can't rewind time. But this theory looks most likely - and it worked in all of our tests."



MEETING OF 11 APRIL 2013

Attendance

Membership	23
Present	11
Make ups	0
Apologies	10
Attendance	48%

Visitors: Alan Jackson, Sarah Yousuf, Guy Orsmond, Scott Gleave, Dr Rubin Richards, Ivan Kleintjies, Fasseeg Manie, Rhoda Manie, John Franz, Yvonne Franz.

Members like Pres Mike and Rob will note that we had the unusual situation of having as many guests as members. It was just a pity that it came about as a result of many members not being there, rather than an exceptionally large number of guests.

Attendance to Biffy 082 468 7504 or aecon.e@mweb.co.za.

SLOTS

Mr Manie thanked the club for inviting him and his wife to the meeting, and apologised that it was sadly not possible to meet at the school, but assured as that he was looking forward to showing all of the new facilities at the school when we meet there later in the year. He then presented President Mike with a gift from the school of 10 Virgin Active shirts.

The involvement of the club and particularly the members of the Lavender Hill committee since the 2008, when the fields were completed, has been deeply appreciated. He assured as that the investment in the school and the youth is definitely not wasted, and pointed to their 88% matric pass rate, as well as the increase in pupils completing school. There are now a number of after school activities, as well as a world class gym, a feeding scheme and new library.

June showed us the new tracking system which they have introduced for each pupil. They have found this very useful for analysing trends, and being able to take positive action where necessary.

Biffy had lots of good news to report. Stephen is recovering well from his hip operation, and was expected home the next day, Lina and Brian were getting married on the weekend, she was going to be attending the Rotaract District training, and her, Pres Mike and Karen were due to be walking to help Rotaract on Sunday.

Pam handed out Proms posters, for members to display in as many highly visible places as possible. Unlike the normal balck and white, this year they are in colour.

Karen asked if anyone knew about an invoice for replacing an inner tube, which a cyclist in the Argus was told they would be receiving from the club? She also mentioned that her firm are looking into a possible donation to one of our projects.

GUEST SPEAKER

Dr Ruben Richards gave an extremely thought provoking talk on his role in brokering a truce between the gangs in Lavender Hill.

He was first introduced to Rotary when he was in the Boy Scouts, where he went on to achieve the Sprinbok Scout award, and has since been very aware of the work which Rotary does in the community.

Commenting on the latest violence in Lavender Hill, he mentioned that gang retaliations are often exacerbated by police actions, and that the newspapers made no mention of the period of peace which had been enjoyed in the gang infested areas, and the ceasefire which had been in effect since last year. He feels that society needs to address the problems which cause conflict, and developed an approach which he refers to as "Community peace buiding through industrial consciousness".

He was initially approached by community leaders to help create jobs, as an alternative to gangsterism. The idea was to install solar geysers, but before this could happen it was necessary to create trust and understanding. He achieved this by treating the gang bosses in the same way as other business leaders, as they run the gangs on a very businesslike basis. Between 150 000 and 200 000 people are members of gangs on the Cape Flats, which has created a situation where it is almost normalised and entrenched into the daily way of life. The criminal economy is delivering economic benefits and support for those coping with financial hardship, in a more effective way than either the government or the formal sector. As an example of the size of the business, R12 billion worth of drugs were seized by the police in 9 months on the Cape Flats.

In closing, he said that for it to be effective, peace and reconciliation needs to be more than just an alternative to war.

Dr Richards was introduced by June, who was most impressed by his concern for the future, and thanked by Pres Mike.

PROGRAMME

April 2013	Committee: Barnard, Bird, Hovstad, Michalowsky, Wetmore
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Thursday 18	Joint meeting with Rotaract at Palms: Speaker: Mike Roberts The role of the Agulhas Current in Climate Change and South Africa's scientific involvement
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Thursday 25	Normal meeting: visit by GSE team from Japan
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May 2013	Committee: Knight, Bredenkamp, Cleveland, Munday, Orsmond
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2 May	Business meeting
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9 May	Lindsey Houchin, Ambassadorial scholar from Kentucky & Lindsey Elkin from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania / Rotary Family Health Day
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11 & 12 May	Proms
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16 May	Allison Ballard, Ambassadorial scholar from Washington, USA
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17-19 May	Conference
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23 May	Board Meeting
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25 May **Interact/Rotaract/Rotary action sports day**

30 May **Social**

June 2013	Committee: James, Danckwerts, Schreiber, Smith, Williams, Lidgley
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6 June **Normal meeting**

13 June **Brett Glasby, SPCA Wildlife Unit: “Unusual catches” Also lots of visitors**

20 June **Induction Dinner**

27 June **Board meeting**

DUTY ROSTER

	18 April	25 April	2 May	9 May	16 May
Sergeant	Barnard	Overbosch	Todd	Smith	Cleveland
Attendance Officer	Danckwerts	Danckwerts	Danckwerts	Danckwerts	Danckwerts
Wynpress Editorial	Klotz-Gleave	Vivian	Michalowsky	Munday	Overbosch
Minutes for Wynpress	Cleveland	Danckwerts	Danckwerts	Knight	Cleveland
Compilation of Wynpress	Knight	Cleveland	Danckwerts	Danckwerts	Knight
Door Duty	Hovstad	Van Eeden	James	Bird	Michalowsky
Grace	Bird	James	Danckwerts	Gowdy	Hovstad
Loyal Toast	Danckwerts	Murphy	Gowdy	Hovstad	James
International Toast	James	Munday	Van Eeden	Knight	Michalowsky
Speaker Introduction	Overbosch	James	N/A	Murphy	Van Eeden
Speaker Thanks	Murphy	Barnard	N/A	Williams	Lidgley

IF YOU CANNOT MAKE YOUR ROSTERED DATE, PLEASE SWAP WITH ANOTHER ROTARIAN AND INFORM THE DUTY SERGEANT

JACKPOT

In Graham's absence, and with the jackpot a touch under R3000, Dennis decided to make his move again, but was thwarted when his luck deserted him and he couldn't find the elusive king. Now that the jackpot will be over R3000, and only 10 cards left, it can't be long until somebody will be going home with some spare cash!

PRESIDENT'S QUOTES

"Let us never **negotiate** out of fear. But let us never fear to **negotiate**." - **John F. Kennedy**

"**Negotiating** means getting the best of your opponent". **Marvin Gaye**

TAILPIECE

Tony and Yvonne were 85 years old and had been married for sixty years.

Though they were far from rich, they managed to get by because Tony watched their pennies.

Though not young, they were both in very good health, largely due to Yvonne's insistence on healthy foods and exercise for the last decade.

One day, their good health didn't help when they went on yet another holiday and their plane crashed, sending them off to Heaven.

They reached the pearly gates, and St. Peter escorted them inside.

He took them to a beautiful mansion, furnished in gold and fine silks, with a fully stocked kitchen and a waterfall in the master bath. A maid could be seen hanging their favourite clothes in the closet. They gasped in astonishment when he said, 'Welcome to Heaven. This will be your home now.'

Tony asked Peter how much all this was going to cost.

'Why, nothing,' Peter replied, 'remember, this is your reward in Heaven.'

Tony looked out the window and right there he saw a championship golf course, finer and more beautiful than any ever built on Earth..

'What are the greens fees?,' grumbled Tony..

'This is heaven,' St. Peter replied. 'You can play for free, every day.'

Next they went to the clubhouse and saw the lavish buffet lunch, with every imaginable cuisine laid out before them, from seafood to steaks to exotic deserts, free flowing beverages.

'Don't even ask,' said St. Peter to Tony. This is Heaven, it is all free for you to enjoy.'

Tony looked around and glanced nervously at Yvonne.

'Well, where are the low fat and low cholesterol foods and the decaffeinated tea?,' he asked.

That's the best part,' St. Peter replied. 'You can eat and drink as much as you like of whatever you like and you will never get fat or sick. This is Heaven!'

'No gym to work out at?' said Tony

'Not unless you want to,' was the answer.

'No testing my sugar or blood pressure or...'

'Never again. All you do here is enjoy yourself.'

Tony glared at Yvonne and said, 'You and your Bran Flakes!!!! We could have been here ten years ago!'