

## Hindenburg Crash Site Tour



Hindenburg Crash Site – Lakehurst Naval Air Station, Lakehurst, NJ

Official Website – [Navy Lakehurst Historical Society \(nlhs.com\)](http://nlhs.com)

Tour information direct link – [Contact Us – Navy Lakehurst Historical Society \(nlhs.com\)](#)

Directions – Cathedral of the Air, 264 Hope Chapel Road, Lakehurst, NJ 08733  
(where all tours start, this is outside of the base)

The tour of the Hindenburg site was an incredible experience. The docents know the history better than anyone and they share it with all who visit. To set up a

tour you send a quick email to the above link with the days (share a few) that you can attend. When you schedule your tour there is a minimum of two-week lead time for tours.

I did my tour on a Saturday. The tours start at 930am and ended around 130pm at the hangar museum. Our tour had a unique thing happen that the tour director Lydia ensured was rectified. All who visit the crash site go through a background check and that information is sent to the guard crossing so that civilians can enter the base. Remember this is an active military base so the background checks will ask for ID and driver license information.

We met up at the Cathedral of the Air at 9:30am, which is just outside the base proper. Our docent was Pete Garvey. The chapel was built by the American Legion in the 1930's and construction finished in 1950. The tour starts by going through this chapel. What makes it unique are the beautiful stained-glass windows. While many churches have beautiful stained-glass windows, very few are aeronautically themed. The memorials navy airships, the USS Shenandoah (who's crash in 1925 was 5 times worse than the Hindenburg crash) and the USS Akron, that crashed during active duty are located in the front of church close to the main entrance. These stain glass windows were made by Willet's Studio in Philadelphia. Active military personnel can get married in the chapel.

Zeppelins (dirigibles) and blimps are two types of airships. Both are self-propelled with lighter-than-air gas and are steered by pilots. Zeppelins are rigid airships that use an internal framework to maintain their shape. Blimps are nonrigid airships that rely on internal air pressure to maintain their shape, just like a balloon.

The Hindenburg was a 245-metre- (804-foot-) long airship of conventional zeppelin design that was launched at Friedrichshafen, Germany, in March 1936. It had a maximum speed of 135 km (84 miles) per hour and a cruising speed of 126 km (78 miles) per hour. It had 16 gasbags inside the dirigible. These sky giants could only fit into the hangar located in Lakehurst. The Hindenburg crashed on

May 26, 1937 and it was 108 feet in diameter. American Airlines had the contract with Lakehurst for the Hindenburg during its flying lifetime. A prior sky giant the ZR0 which crashed, when it crashed, the steel structure was recycled and used in the Hindenburg. One could take a round trip on the Hindenburg for \$700 in 1937. That was approximately the same cost as a car back then. She had the ability to fly at 800 to 1200 feet at a speed of 75mph. This allowed its patrons to get from Europe to the USA in 3 days via airship. In 1936, the Hindenburg made 10 flights and in 1937, its maiden voyage she crashed at Lakehurst. If the Hindenburg had not crashed it was to pick up 72 VIP's to get them to King George's coronation by May 12. But the # gas bag was cut by a cable upon descent. There were over 200 people that were part of the landing crew to settle the air giants on their moor post.

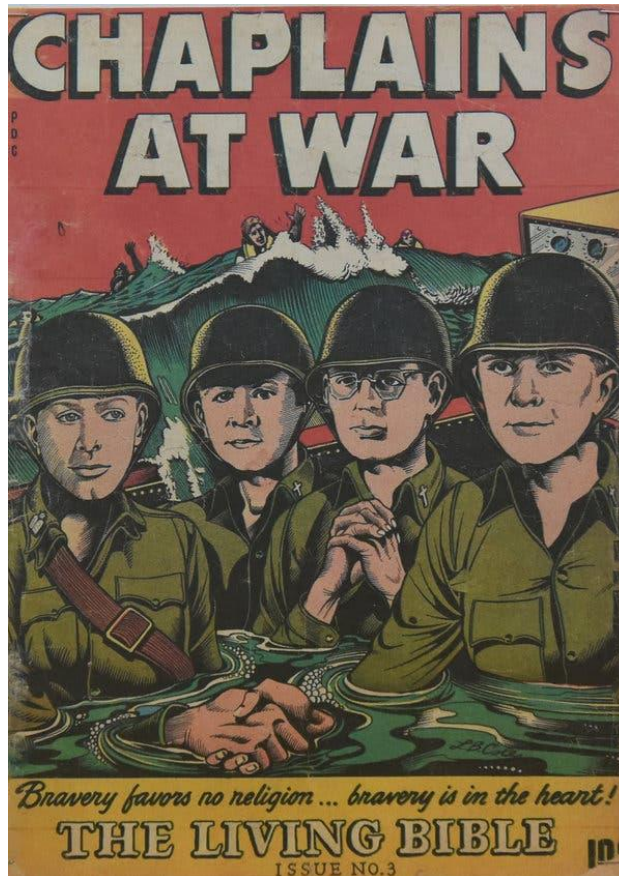
On the main altar of the church there are additional stained-glass windows along with a painting of the 4 chaplains and the SS Dorchester. Dorchester was torpedoed in 1942 in Greenland. On the first Sunday of February there is a ceremony for the 4 chaplains at the Chapel. Our guide told us this is something to see.

The chaplains were **Reverend George L. Fox, Rabbi Alexander D. Goode, Father John P. Washington, and Reverend Clark V. Poling**. They remained calm during the panic following the attack, distributing life preservers and assisting others to abandon ship, then giving up their own life preservers and coming together in prayer as the ship disappeared beneath the surface. The Four Chaplains Day is celebrated on first Sunday in February every year in recognition of their heroic sacrifice and humanitarianism.



On Feb. 3, 1943, the U.S.A.T. Dorchester, a military transport ship carrying 902 American servicemen and civilian workers, was torpedoed by a German submarine about 100 miles off the coast of Greenland. In 18 minutes, the ship would be lost under the frigid sea.

Panic ensued. The sailors who were not killed in the explosion or trapped below rushed to the decks, where some of the lifeboats had frozen to the ship, survivors recounted. But four chaplains standing on the decks remained calm, distributing life jackets. When the supply ran out, the chaplains gave the sailors their own. Only 230 men survived the sinking of the Dorchester, making it one of the worst naval tragedies for the Americans in World War II. Witnesses recalled seeing the four chaplains standing with arms interlocked, each praying in his own way, as the ship sunk. They were Catholic, Jewish and Protestant: Rabbi Alexander D. Goode, the Rev. George L. Fox, a Methodist Minister, the Rev. Clark V. Poling of the Reformed Church in America, and the Rev. John P. Washington, a Roman Catholic priest.



In one of the stained glass windows is an image of Edward Vernon Rickenbacker with a seagull over his head (October 8, 1890 – July 23, 1973). He was an American fighter pilot in World War I and a Medal of Honor recipient. With 26 aerial victories, he was the most successful and most decorated United States flying ace of the war. He was also a race car driver, an automotive designer, and a long-time head of Eastern Air Lines. In 1942, he and several of his fellow airmen ended up adrift at sea for an extended period. There was a seagull that flew above their heads that they later consumed to keep themselves alive. In his later years, Rickenbacker would be seen outside of Eastern Airlines feeding the gulls, a way of giving back and thanking them for saving his life several years prior.

After touring the church, the tour heads onto the base itself for the main attraction – the Hindenburg Crash Site and the Hindenburg hangar.

Our tour director announced that unfortunately the list of approved civilians somehow did not make it properly through the system and we were not going to

be able to go to the base. Our tour guide contacted the Captain Howell, who is the Captain of the Navy at Joint Base. She shared what had happened and he then contacted his counterpart at McQuire Airforce base. This all occurred on a Saturday. We were all so grateful that the captains stepped up to help our tour guide to get all of us on the base. Lydia was amazing with her amazing positive persistence!

As we waited for these approvals the two tour guides did their presentations that they would have normally done at the crash site and the hangar outside of the chapel. These were detailed and fascinating talks about the history of the Hindenburg, as well as breakdown of her final flight.

We when proceeded to the base in a caravan of cars, with our tour guide leading us. Lydia ensured that we all got into the base, and we then entered the area of the crash site.

Halfway between the cell phone tower on the right and where the taller trees start on the left, you can see the nub of the mooring mast (which dominates most pictures of the crash). This is the same mast that the USS Los Angeles did a headstand on as well. Sadly, it was cut down back in the late '30s.

Next, we drove from the crash site to the Zeppelin hangar. Our guides shared with us that the last mustard gas weapon was destroyed in July of this year in the arsenal. The insides of the hangar are spectacular. The history, the photos, the items focused on the history of the Hindenburg, blimps, and the armed forces is something everyone should experience. We entered the Ready Room in the Hangar and the history lesson continued. On the second level there is a training area that simulates an aircraft carrier that is used for training. NAVAIR (Naval Air System Command) is on site on the base. They manufacture the Kevlar used on aircraft carriers used to stop the planes that are landing on the carriers, amongst other military items.

Bobbie Franzke was our docent for the blimps. The details he shared were fascinating. We explained how during the war the Germans feared the US blimps. We used them as a surveillance mechanism to identify the German subs that were in the waters of NY. It took 1.5 million cow bladders to make one blimp.

The last stop for the day was a small gift shop/museum that had books and other items for purchase. They have a great selection of zeppelin and airship themed books, posters, and such. The gift shop room is also dedicated to memorabilia and pictures of the Hindenburg and of the US airships. This must be one of the greatest collections of airship artifacts anywhere, because where else in the world would anyone go to see them than where the Hindenburg went down? Our guide spent a good amount of time (at least 30-40 minutes) going through explaining about the different airships.

AS one enters the Heritage Center, in one of the rooms a piece of the Hindenburg is there for you to see, the frame. The signal lights that were used to help guide the airships are also on display in the gift shop room entrance.

The hangar has four doors that sit on a rail system to open. Today, only one of the 4 doors can open. The massive door can take up to 7 hours to open. The entire hangar is enormous and was the only place in the world that could house the large zeppelins for service.

We have attached a link to a FB page that has the photos taken that day. This is an amazing tour that all need to put on their calendars to see. Take your kids to teach them the history of airships in the global world.

We learned so much on this tour and will be returning in the future!