

Zeppelinophobia: Airship Raids on British Urban Spaces during World War I

Assaf Mond

Zvi Yavetz School of Historical Studies, Tel Aviv University
assaf.mond@gmail.com

The Hindenburg Disaster of 1937 etched the image of the Zeppelin in modern collective memory, albeit as a rather farcical stage in the history of aviation. However, during World War I, Count Zeppelin's life-long project was not only considered an integral part of the present and the future of aerial transportation, but also a menacing weapon and a potent threat to Britain's home front. I demonstrate the complex and prevalent presence of the Zeppelin in the life of civilians in Britain during the war. By focusing on visual representations – pictures, illustrations and cartoons that were published in *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Mirror* and *Punch* – I analyze the fear and fascination that the Zeppelin raids produced, and demonstrate how the airship was perceived simultaneously as a technologically glorious machine, a sublime invention, and a dangerous weapon of terror. "The First Blitz" on Britain has not been examined in depth in the cultural history of the Great War, probably due to the overall ineffectiveness of Zeppelin attacks: 51 airship raids on Britain claimed 557 lives and caused injuries to 1,358 civilians, a relatively small figure compared to the bloodbath on the Western Front and to the forty thousand victims of "The Blitz" in the Second World War. However, as my paper will illustrate, these numbers hide the massive presence of the "Zeppelinophobia" in the day-to-day life of people in Britain during the war – and consequently, this story deserves to be reintegrated into the story of the Great War.