

Age of the Sky Giants: The Rise and Fall of Airships

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This thesis tells the story of airships' meteoric rise in popularity after World War I and their equally swift fall from grace shortly after the end of World War II. I argue that this shift occurred due to changing economic priorities, political factors, and a rapid loss in public support for the vessels brought on by a series of disasters. Taken together, these events caused the airship to fall out of favor within the civilian and military spheres. This was a dramatic shift, for at the time airships were the premiere flying vessels in service and considered the future of flight. Massive technological and monetary investments were tied up in airship production and use, and from their inception they only grew in size and complexity along with their popularity. However, several airships disasters, the Hindenburg among them, severely undercut the popularity and support airships once enjoyed. Due to these incidents and the massive loss of life and materials, interest shifted to fixed-wing aircraft as an alternative. As a result, within a short span of time airships all but disappeared from the civilian use, and what vessels remained in the military were radically altered to fit their new, diminished roles.