The US Navy Macon ZRS-5 Airship by Norman Wilkinson

Norman Wilkinson

£640



REF: 83914

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Height: 27.93 cm (11")

Width: 39.35 cm (15.5")

Description

A watercolour and gouache on board of the world's largest airship, the USS Macon ZRS-5 by Norman Wilkinson.

Although 20ft shorter than the Hindenburg, the rigid airship Macon, along with her sister airship Akron, holds the record for the largest helium filled airship. She was built by the Goodyear-Zeppelin Corporation in 1929 at a then cost close to 2.5 million dollars. She was capable of carrying 5 Curtiss F9C Sparrowhawk biplanes, which were used in her role of scouting enemy ships. She began service in June 1933 with her last flight on the 12th of February 1935. The Macon crashed off the California coast after running into a storm off Point Sur, north of Los Angeles. Two diagonal girders, damaged on the previous flight were not fully repaired and further damage was caused by the storm to the upper tail fin. Some of the gas cells were punctured and control was being lost. Lieutenant Commander Herbert Wiley, who had survived the crash of the USS Akron, managed to get the airship over water off Monterey Bay and gave the order to abandon ship. The cruisers Richmond, Concord and Cincinnati collected the 81 survivors.

The large paper label to the back of the board notes 'U.S. Navy 1935 Airship Aircraft Carrier. 'Macon' Z.R.S.5. C. Richmond. By N. Wilkinson L. Ill. New 1935, M. Fl . Cover Flow Airship Los Angeles. U.S.A. 1935.' It is probable that Wilkinson was commissioned by the London Illustrated News to produce this illustration in response to the crash. The London Illustrated News covered the crash on the 16th of February but used a photograph of the Macon above a warship. Whether this illustration was used for a separate story or not, isn't known.

Wilkinson has pictured the Macon in good detail off the coast with another rigid airship in the background. He has painted very little detail to the sky or coastline presumably because the work was done remotely and he had little information on the scenery. A good picture of a historic airship. Dated 1935.

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