

ABSTRACTS

AIRSHIPS AS HARBINGERS OF SALVATION?

A historical report on the Zeppelin flights into the Sudetenland 1938/39

Rudolf Jaworski

The history of Zeppelin airships has always been fraught with political implications and intentions, and the National Socialist era was no exception. The Nazis recognised the potential of these giant airships for mass propaganda and skilfully exploited the Zeppelin cult to popularise and justify their political aims. This study provides a detailed analysis of two propaganda flights into the Sudetenland only a few weeks after it was incorporated into the Greater German Reich (Großdeutsches Reich) and shortly before the start of the Second World War.

Despite their brief and episodic nature, the temporal and geographic context of these two Zeppelin flights lends them relevance and significance in contemporary history, an aspect explored for the first time in this publication. The first of the flights, the so-called ‘Sudeten German Liberation Flight’ (Sudetendeutsche Befreiungsfahrt), took place on 2 and 3 December 1938 and was closely connected to the by-elections to the Greater German Parliament, the Großdeutsche Reichstag. The second marked the only time a Zeppelin landed in the newly created Sudetengau, namely on 13 August 1939 in the city of Eger/Cheb. Both events drew considerable attention from the population – as evidenced, among other things, by numerous private photographs. When the war began, the era of the Zeppelin ended, and German propaganda began to rely on much smaller and faster airborne vehicles.