David Schwarz Biography

David Schwarz

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Biography

In 1893 David Schwarz, an Austrian engineer, drew up plans for an airship which was constructed of an inside framework that was strong enough to support a gas envelope. By 1897, Schwarz, who was working in Berlin, Germany, had built the first practical airship with a metal envelope. The structure was sheathed in aluminum foil (a new metal at this time) and shaped like a cannon shell, with measurements of 135 ft (41 m) in length, 46 ft (14 m) in diameter, and a volume of 130,000 cubic ft (3,640 cu.m). It had a twelve horsepower engine turning three propellers. The craft was not tested until after Schwarz's death in 1897 (which is said to have been caused by a heart attack when the Prussian Ministry of War offered to buy his invention). The test, however, ended disastrously. The propeller belts broke, and the pilot valved gas too quickly, causing the ship to bounce to a crash landing which destroyed it.

One man who watched this crash was determined that no such failure would ever affect his plans. Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin became interested in the airship, bought the patent rights from Schwarz's widow, and went on to perfect the rigid airship.