

Sardinia; and Littorio Field in Rome, Italy. After the fighting ended, ZP-14 continued its minesweeping from Cuers, France; Lido, Italy; the island of Malta; and Pisa, Italy. ZP-14 continued minesweeping during October 1945.

On October 17, Commander R.B. Bretland relieved Cdr. Rixey as commanding officer of ZP-14, at a time when the disposition of ZP-14 was still in question. The CNO had previously issued a directive authorizing continued operations into January 1946, when the squadron was to be disestablished. In November 1945, Commander Naval Forces North African Waters, Mediterranean Zone Mine Clearance Board and Commander in Chief Mediterranean (a British command) strongly recommended that ZP-14

continue its minesweeping operations. On November 15, the CNO ordered ZP-14 to go on with preparations for disestablishment because of personnel and material cutbacks resulting from general demobilization. The advance bases continued to fly operational missions until the last airship was ready for deflation. On December 15, 1945, ZP-14's airship K-114 was the last to be deflated. The majority of the squadrons' personnel departed from Marseilles on December 22, on board USS *Monticello* and arrived in New York on January 1, 1946.

ZP-14 had made a significant contribution to the war effort in Europe. The squadron was officially disestablished at NAS Lakehurst on January 22.

ZP-12 Operations

LTA's role during WW II was an active one right up to the cessation of hostilities. ZP-12, the first airship squadron to be established after the war began, discharged LTA's mission to the very end. Two of her airships, K-16 and 58, departed NAS Lakehurst on May 6, 1945, on a special MAD patrol. They were in search of an enemy submarine believed to be in an area east of Long Island, N.Y. By 0540, K-16 was in the area where SS *Black Point* had been torpedoed 12 hours earlier. The destroyer USS *Ericsson* directed the airship to make a MAD search of the area where several naval ships had made attacks on a submarine.

Strong MAD signals were received by



the K-16 and marked with dye markers. The third signal was also marked with a smoke float. K-16 informed *Ericsson* that the target was stationary. A few minutes later USS *Atherton* (DE-169) made a depth charge attack on the target.

For the next 20 minutes a total of four attacks were made on the target by the naval ships in the area. K-16 was then asked to reestablish contact with the target. She again conducted MAD sweeps and the target was once again marked and determined to be stationary. Another attack was delivered, this one from *Ericsson*. Following this, K-16 sighted small patches of oil and air bubbles coming to the surface a few hundred yards from the estimated position of the contact. She dropped a sonobuoy on the bubbles and heard

rhythmic hammering on a metal surface which was interrupted periodically. K-16 and 58, which was also on the scene, were listening to the sonobuoy. As the approaching surface ship's noise began to drown out the transmissions, a long shriek was heard. K-16 then made a bombing run at 150 feet on the area of rising bubbles, and dropped four rocket bombs. They exploded approximately three seconds after entering the water, bringing debris to the surface.

K-58 then made five MAD passes over the target and marked the contacts with dyes and smoke floats. She followed up with a bombing run, dropping two rocket bombs with contact fuses. More irregular shaped pieces of cork came to the surface following this attack. K-16 again established contact and the naval ships

made their final attack on the target. K-16 directed the boats to the debris and items recovered included a German officer's cap, an abandon ship kit, two German mumsong lungs, one Captain's life float, five other life floats and a piece of chart table.

When the MAD operators on the K-16 and 58 indicated that the large metal object was on the bottom and stationary, the airships were directed to make no further attacks. ZP-12's airships and the surface vessels, operating jointly, had successfully carried out their mission and sank a German U-boat, later identified as U-853. The K-58 returned to NAS Lakehurst and the K-16 proceeded on another patrol. This was one of the last German U-boats sunk by American forces before the war ended.



Above, ZP-14 K-ship began operations at Cuers, France, shortly after the Germans were forced from the base. In the foreground is a Spitfire. There were three Spitfire squadrons flying strafing missions from Cuers when the K-112 arrived. The hangars in the background were used by French LTA units in the early 1920s. Left, ZP-14's K-101 while conducting mining operations in the Ligurian Sea, operated out of Pisa, Italy.

XIII. Final LTA Operations in WW II and the Amazing Statistics They Compiled

During WW II, the LTA fleet evolved from a mere handful of airships to an inventory more than 15 times as large as that in 1941. The buildup of the airship fleet was supported by a massive increase in LTA personnel strength. Statistics during WW II are impressive. The records set by LTA during WW I continued into WWII. No convoy escorted by non-rigid airships was successfully attacked by an enemy submarine. Airship squadrons (blimp squadrons) escorted more than 80,000 ships. The statistical data was compiled from the squadrons and the operational commands. It covers the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets' operational commands, but does not include ZJ-1 since it was not part of the operational command system; nor does it include the 280,000 hours flown by the training airships assigned to NAS Moffett Field and Lakehurst. Dates representing when the blimp squadrons discontinued their wartime ASW operations are approximate. Statistics for the Atlantic Fleet are as of May 15, 1945, and for the Pacific Fleet, September 1.

The following is a summary of LTA activities during WW II:

Yearly Flight Totals

	1942	1943	1944	1945	Total
Atlantic	1,544	12,233	19,447	4,330	37,554
Pacific	1,073	5,313	8,112	5,658	20,156
Combined	2,617	17,546	27,559	9,988	57,710

Yearly Hour Totals

	1942	1943	1944	1945	Total
Atlantic	20,088	135,997	183,731	38,420	378,236
Pacific	6,763	43,991	69,089	47,446	167,289
Combined	26,851	179,988	252,821	85,867	545,527

Yearly Ship Escort Data

	1942	1943	1944	1945	Total
Atlantic	—	26,966	36,485	6,857	70,308*
Pacific	14	3,023	4,574	2,119	9,730*
Combined	14	29,989	41,059	8,976	80,038

*These totals include only those ships known to have received air ship escort. Figures for 1942 are not available although it is estimated that 8,000 vessels were escorted by blimps during that year in the Atlantic and 1,500 vessels in the Pacific.

ZP-12 and 21 were the most active Atlantic Fleet airship squadrons. ZP-21 operated every day from its establishment on November 1, 1942, the termination of statistical collection. The squadron flew 926 consecutive day and 454 consecutive night operations. Its night operations were interrupted briefly by a tropical hurricane from October 17 to 19, 1944. The squadron resumed night flying totaling 661 nights out of 664. In June 1943, each of ZP-12's eight airships was flying an average of 12.8 hours daily.

In the Pacific Fleet, ZP-32 was the most active squadron, reaching its peak operating period in May 1943 when it was flying an average of 11.8 hours per day. LTA had grown from one operational squadron on January 2, 1942, to 14 and one utility squadron at the pinnacle of LTA operations during WW II. Details from this war shows the greatest expansion and operational involvement of LTA in the history of the world. This massive fleet of airships and their records have not been duplicated since the war.

The close of WW II resulted in a change of mission requirements for the LTA stations and airship squadrons. Many of the bases were made available for use by HTA, and others were placed in a caretaker status. The primary mission

requirements for many of the airship squadrons changed from ASW and escort to search and rescue and to minesweeping. Some were disestablished before the close of the war, while others continued operating for a short

time after to assist in various utility missions.

The following is a list of the establishment and disestablishment dates for the various LTA organizations as of October 1, 1946:

LTA Unit Lineage for WW II

Fleet Airship Wings

Fleet Airships Atlantic:	Established as Fleet	
	Airship Wing 30	1 Dec 1942
	Redesignated FASL	15 Jul 1943
	Disestablished	16 Jan 1946
Fleet Airships Pacific:	Established as Fleet	
	Airship Wing 31	1 Oct 1942
	Redesignated FASP	15 Jul 1943
	Disestablished	23 Jan 1946
Fleet Airship Wing 1:	Established as Airship	
	Patrol Group 1	2 Jan 1942
	Redesignated FASW 1	15 Jul 1943
	Disestablished	16 Jan 1946
Fleet Airship Wing 2:	Established as Airship	
	Patrol Group 2	1 Mar 1943
	Redesignated FASW 2	15 Jul 1943
	Disestablished	16 Jun 1945
Fleet Airship Wing 3:	Established as Airship	
	Patrol Group 3	1 Oct 1942
	Redesignated FASW 3	15 Jul 1943
	Disestablished	23 Jan 1946

XIV. Post WW II Developments and Operations

By the spring of 1946, the LTA organization had been drastically reduced as a result of the all-out effort to demobilize. NAS Lakehurst continued to remain the center of LTA activities. The Chief of Naval Airship Training and Experimentation based at the NAS was the senior LTA command. Originally established in May 1943 as the Naval Airship Training Command, it was redesignated on October 6, as the Naval Airship Training and Experimental Command. Its mission covered airship training for officers, cadets and enlisted personnel as well as experimentation, flight testing and developing airships. This command continued to play an important role in LTA through the latter part of the 1940s and into the mid-1950s. In 1955, it ceased to exist as a separate command.

The reduction in LTA following the war left ZP-12 at NAS Lakehurst and ZP-31 at NAS Santa Ana as the only active squadrons. A detachment of ZP-31 continued at NAS Moffett Field.

On November 15, 1946, ZP-12 was redesignated ZP-2 and ZP-31 became ZP-1. In the summer of 1947, ZP-1 made a

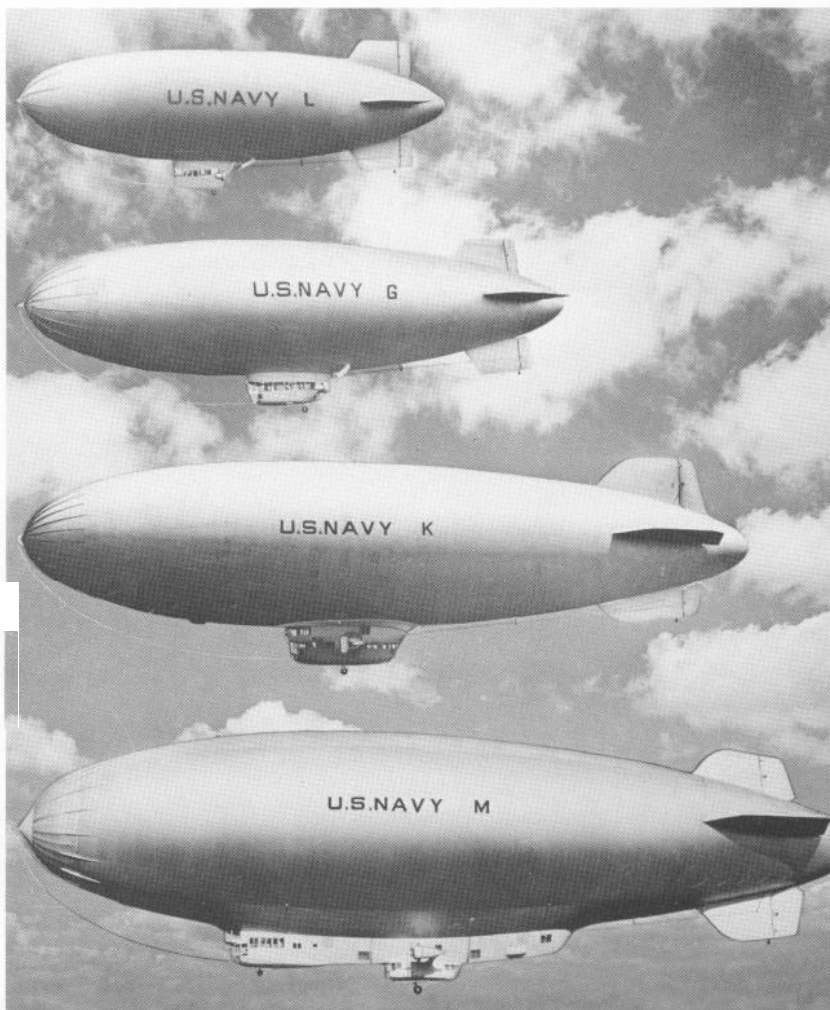
Operational Flights	Operational Flight Hours	Average Length of Operational Flights*
Atlantic: 22,155	Atlantic: 279,211	Atlantic: 12 hrs.
Pacific: 13,800	Pacific: 133,258	Pacific: 9 hrs.
Combined: 35,955	Combined: 412,469	Combined: 11 hrs.

*This excludes training, experimental, utility, ferry and other non-military flights.

Airship Losses			
Type	No.	Causes	No. Lost
K	34	design	13
G	1	material	1
L	2	enemy action	1
		undetermined	1
		personnel failures	21

Lives lost as a result of airship losses. 72

A composite photo showing the types of airships used by the Navy during WW II.



Fleet Airship Wing 4:	Established	2 Aug 1943
	Disestablished	15 Jul 1945
Fleet Airship Wing 5:	Established	2 Aug 1943
	Disestablished	11 Dec 1944

Blimp Headquarters Squadrons BLIMPHEDRONS

BLPHRD 1	Established	15 Jul 1943
	Disestablished	13 Dec 1945
BLPHRD 2	Established	15 Jul 1943
	Disestablished	16 Jun 1945
ZP-41	Established as ZP-52	15 Jun 1943
	Redesignated ZP-41	15 Jul 1943
	Disestablished	31 Jan 1946
ZP-42	Established	1 Sep 1943
	Disestablished	9 Jun 1945
ZP-51	Established	10 Feb 1943
	Disestablished	20 Dec 1944
ZP-52	See ZP-41	

Blimp Utility Squadron BLIMPUTRON

ZJ-1	Established	1 Feb 1944
	Disestablished	9 Jun 1945

home port and fleet change from NAS Santa Ana in the Pacific Fleet to NAS Weeksville in the Atlantic. The change was due to the reduction of NAS Santa Ana to a maintenance status and the elimination of the ZP overhaul mission at NAS Moffett Field. Mission requirements for the two ZP squadrons in the post-WW II 1940s were similar to their duties in WW II. Their missions included general training, utility, search and rescue, ferry and test flights, observation and photography, radar calibration, gunnery and bombing practice, and ASW. The emphasis was on ASW and operations with the "Hunter-Killer Group" and VP units.

The evolution of the Hunter-Killer Group required airship squadrons to operate closely with the CVEs used in this ASW concept. Carrier qualifications for ZP pilots were routinely required in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Airship-carrier landings, refueling and replenishment from carriers and night

operations with carriers became commonplace for the airship squadrons.

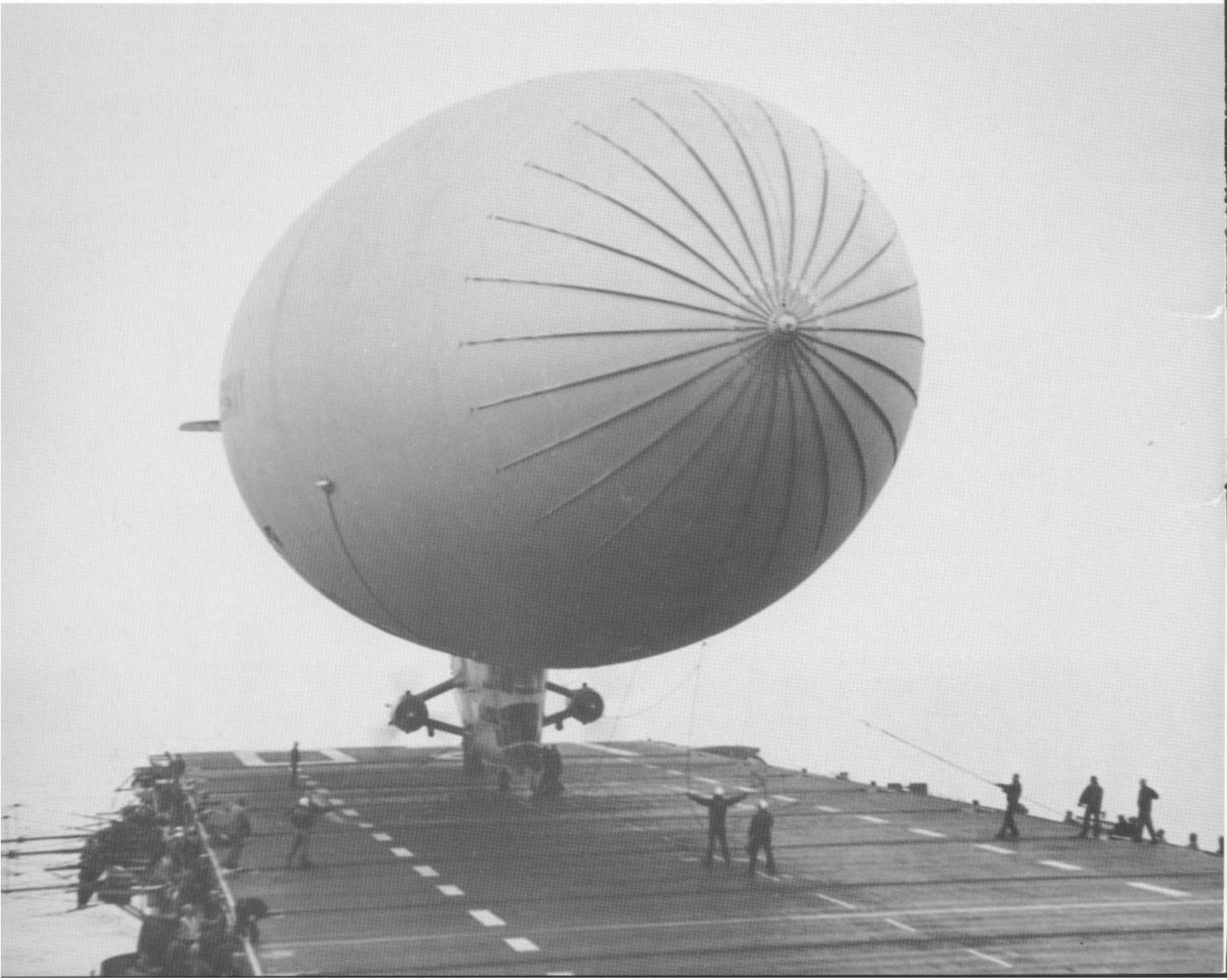
The airship squadrons deployed to various areas on the Atlantic coast for training and exercises. Many operations were conducted in the Caribbean. Airships flew from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, for training and exercises and also operated directly under Commander Air Force, Atlantic Fleet until January 21, 1949. On January 20, 1949, Fleet Airship Wing One was established at NAS Lakehurst, and the two operational airship squadrons reported directly to the airship wing.

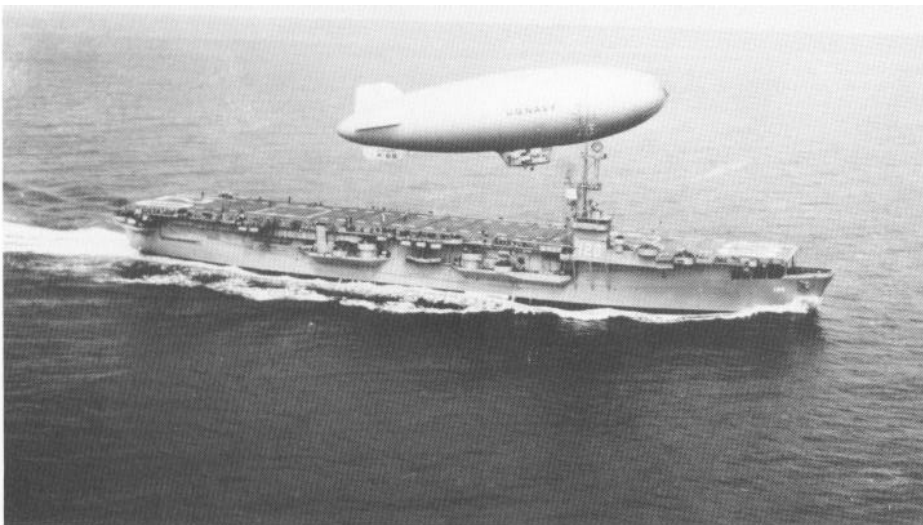
The mission of Fleet Airship Wing One was to provide administrative supervision of logistic support for ASW operations; ensure uniformity in operation, training and administration at the squadron level; and ensure the operational readiness of the airship squadrons. Initially, the wing was dual hatted, since the commander of FASW-1

was also commanding officer of Airship Squadron 2.

In March 1949, airship and combat aircrews assigned to the wing deployed to NAS Guantanamo Bay to participate in a fleet exercise. The exercise was designed to incorporate the LTA search and attack units in a coordinated operation with other units of the Second Fleet. LTA's main objectives were to conduct type training under a task force commander and to advance ASW combat readiness, as well as evaluate ASW operating techniques with the fleet. This operation was the first of its type undertaken by airships. Long-range and sustained flights were conducted during the exercise, using the carrier USS *Sicily* (CVE-118) as a mobile base for replenishment and crew changes.

In August 1949, FASW-1 was transferred from NAS Lakehurst to NAS Weeksville, and became a separate command. Its mission remained the same throughout the 1950s and into the





Left, a K-class, airship practices a landing aboard the escort carrier Mindoro (CVE-120). In the postwar period, coordinated operations between escort carriers, patrol units and LTA units were emphasized as part of the overall ASW approach. Top, the K-69 prepares for a landing on Mindoro. Above, a view of a U.S. submarine from the pilot's compartment of a K-class airship. The photo was taken during an ASW exercise in 1950.

1960s. FASW-1 continued to be homeported at NAF Weeksville until September 3, 1957, when it was transferred back to NAS Lakehurst, where it remained an active unit up to its disestablishment on October 31, 1961.

Airship Squadrons 1 and 2, the only two operational squadrons, were very active during the latter part of the 1940s. They kept LTA alive by meeting all operational commitments and demonstrating the airship's capabilities. The need for more airship squadrons was seen and two more units were established, ZP-3 on September 28, 1950, followed by ZP-4 in May 1951. These four squadrons were the primary operating units of the LTA fleet in the 1950s. Their mission was ASW. However, additional duties were assigned, particularly search and rescue, observation and various other utility functions.

LTA developed two new types of squadrons in the 1950s. Airship Development Squadron (ZX) 11 was established on May 10, 1950, at NAS Key West, and Airship Airborne Early Warning Squadron (ZW) 1 on January 3, 1956. Lieutenant Commander R. S. Kilcourse was the first commanding officer of ZX-11. Its mission was to operationally test and evaluate airship ASW equipment, weapons, systems and other areas that might be adaptable to airship operations. The squadron was also responsible for recommending methods for the most effective tactical employment of various airship equipment.

ZX-11 was under the administrative control of FASW-1, and had a variety of airships assigned, as well as several fixed-wing aircraft. During the squadron's existence, its inventory included modified K-types: ZP2K and 3K, the new ZP4K (later redesignated ZSG-4); M-type: ZPM; and ZPG class airships: ZPG-1, 2 and 2W. ZX-11 was an active unit for seven and a half years. It was disestablished on December 1, 1957, the beginning of the end of LTA in the Navy. The squadron's personnel and aircraft were transferred to VX-1.

The establishment of ZW-1 represented a completely new mission concept for LTA. The squadron came into being at NAS Lakehurst with Commander L. J. Mack as its first commanding officer. The initial mission of the squadron was to train personnel, evaluate airborne early warning (AEW) equipment and formulate tactics in preparation for manning a station in the contiguous AEW barrier system.

A month after the squadron was organized, project flights were begun to test and evaluate the ZPG-2W airship as an AEW vehicle and to determine the effectiveness of her equipment for use in

continental and fleet air defense. These evaluation flights lasted until September 1956, and were followed by an intensive crew training period to prepare the squadron for AEW duty.

On March 19, 1957, Commander William Hartman assumed command of the squadron, whose mission was changed to providing all-weather airborne early warning services to fleet forces and shore warning nets. After AEW exercises and further training in May and June, the squadron was ready for full scale operations as part of the AEW barrier system. On July 1, ZW-1 was on station as part of the system using the ZPG-2W. From November through March 1958, ZW-1 maintained its barrier commitment with only two operational airships out of the four normally required to be available. Each airship operated over 225 hours monthly during this period, which was considerably more than the approximate 110 hours per month for WW II airships.

The squadron's AEW capability was increased with the arrival of its first ZPG-3W *Reliance* airship on December 18, 1959. The ZPG-3W flew her first operational mission on the radar barrier on February 20, 1960, and more than doubled the on station time of the smaller ZPG-2W. ZW-1 continued to provide AEW services to the North American Defense Command (NORAD) and its system, until AEW services were no longer required on a continuous basis. On June 1, operational control reverted back to Naval Air Force, Atlantic. Only "special call" AEW services were provided to NORAD after June 1,

After this change, the squadron concentrated on ASW training while still maintaining its AEW efficiency. ZW-1 also rendered special utility services as needed, and surface surveillance during rocket testing from NASA Wallops Island, Va., during the summer. It also conducted safety surveillance for the sea trials of the SSBN submarines.

On January 3, 1961, ZW-1 was redesignated Airship Squadron (Patrol) (ZP) 1. Increased capabilities and use of more modern equipment by the North American Air Defense Command had lessened the need for ZW-1's services, and its primary mission changed. ZP-1 continued to be available for AEW services but shifted its emphasis to ASW and utility missions. It remained an active squadron until it was disestablished on October 31.

The number of operational squadrons in the post-WW II period was small compared to WW II. The lineage for the post LTA units that existed after the war is as follows:



A close-up view of the K-125 control car on the deck of USS Sicily (CVE-118) during coordinated ASW exercises with a hunter-killer group.

LTA Unit Lineage for Post-WW II

Naval Airship Training Command	Established Redesignated Naval Airship & Experimental Command Disestablished	15 May 1943 6 Oct 1943 1955
Fleet Airship Wing 1	Established Disestablished	20 Jan 1949 31 Oct 1961
ZP-1	Established as ZP-31 Redesignated Disestablished	1 Oct 1942 15 Nov 1946 28 Jun 1957
ZP-2	Established as ZP-12 Redesignated Disestablished	2 Jan 1942 15 Nov 1946 30 Nov 1959
ZP-3	Established Disestablished	28 Sep 1950 31 Oct 1961
ZP-4	Established Disestablished	8 May 1951 28 Jun 1957
ZW-1	Established Redesignated Disestablished	3 Jan 1956 3 Jan 1961 31 Oct 1961
ZW-11	Established Disestablished	10 May 1950 1 Dec 1957