

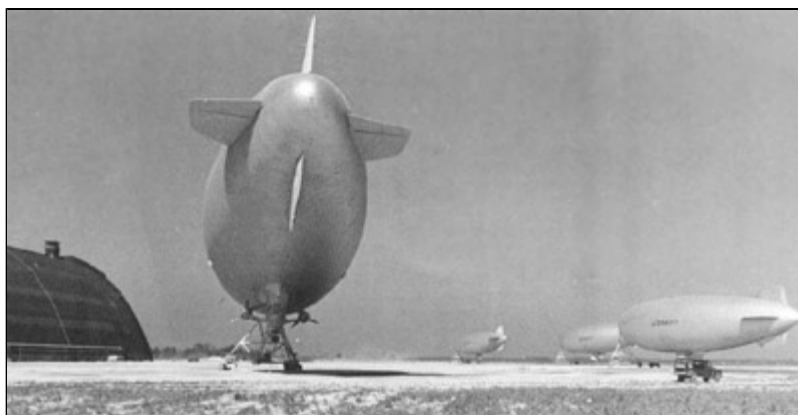
Blimps, Hangars, Weeksville

10/02/10 4:19 W, 4 I - + 10 - 11

[Also reported by WRAL](#) was a blimp collision yesterday in Weeksville, outside Elizabeth City. Originally cited as midair collision between two crafts, the actual details involved a single airship and a weather balloon. They collided during a heavy rainstorm, during which the mooring line snapped on a blimp. It collided with the balloon and crashed. One person was aboard the airship and was transported to Elizabeth City with injuries. Lt. Bill Ward of the Pasquotank County Sheriff's Office supplied the below photo to WRAL. Definitely something not encountered every day.



Did you know there's a blimp base up there? That's the old Weeksville Naval Air Station, built in 1941 on a 765-acre site as an antisubmarine blimp base. Paul Freeman's superb [Abandoned & Little-Known Airfields web site](#) has the history and photos of the facility, both past and present. When commissioned in 1942, the base was only the second one on the east coast. Two big honkin' hangars were built there. Airdock #1 was steel (1,058 feet long), Airdock #2 was wood (900 feet long). The mooring pad was 2,000-foot diameter, with six smaller circles. The base also had a 3,700-foot runway.



After the War, the base became a Naval Auxiliary Air Station. It stored fixed-wing aircraft from 1945 to 1948. Then the base became a blimp facility again in 1947. Ten years later, it was "disestablished" by the military and sold to "private interests." Westinghouse bought the place in

1966. They transferred their blimp operations to [TCOM](#) in 1989, and they are the current owners and operators. They have used the facility for building commercial airships. Local firefighters know the place well, as the massive wooden hangar there burned on August 3, 1995.



Google's News Archives finds a few details. The fire was reported just after midnight. The smoke could be seen for 40 miles. Several surveillance blimps were also destroyed. The fire was still burning eight hours later, though had been controlled. Wonder how long extinguishment took? Damages were expected to top \$100 million. Cause accidental.

The 300,000 square-foot (!) structure was lost, though the concrete supports were left standing. If memory serves, they're still standing today. Any ECFD members reading, who could dig up incident details? Below is an aerial photo from 1999 taken by Paul Freeman. [Read more](#) and see more great old and current photos. [See also this nifty American Heritage article](#) about "blimp barns." [See also a few photos](#) taken by Yours Truly last year. Scroll to the bottom of that page.



The story I was told was that a work crew repairing the doors was welding up top and sparks flew into the door shaft area. which smolder for awhile until the structure caught fire. The fire was spotted and reported around midnight. Took several days and firefighters from all around the northern coastal NC area. It was the largest wooden structure in the us and I believe the world until it burnt down. If you look at the last picture Mike has posted above the for outer columns are still standing. It is a massive sigh from the road let alone being inside it. It is impressive to drive on their property and see all the remanments of buildings that are no longer there. Also there are fire hydrants all throughout the property. I'll try and get a hold of a few people from Ecity and find out more details.

Blimp - 10/02/10 - 12:23

I believe you have the size of airdocks reversed. The wooden dock housed six blimps aligned in two's and airdock one (steel) housed six blimps aligned three by three. That's the memory I have as I was stationed there from 1952 until 1955, serving with Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron Three, housed in the wooden dock. Thanks

Arnold Gilbert ([Email](#)) - 03/25/11 - 21:37

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