

Airship Advertising, Inc. / Laws Corporation - rigid airship

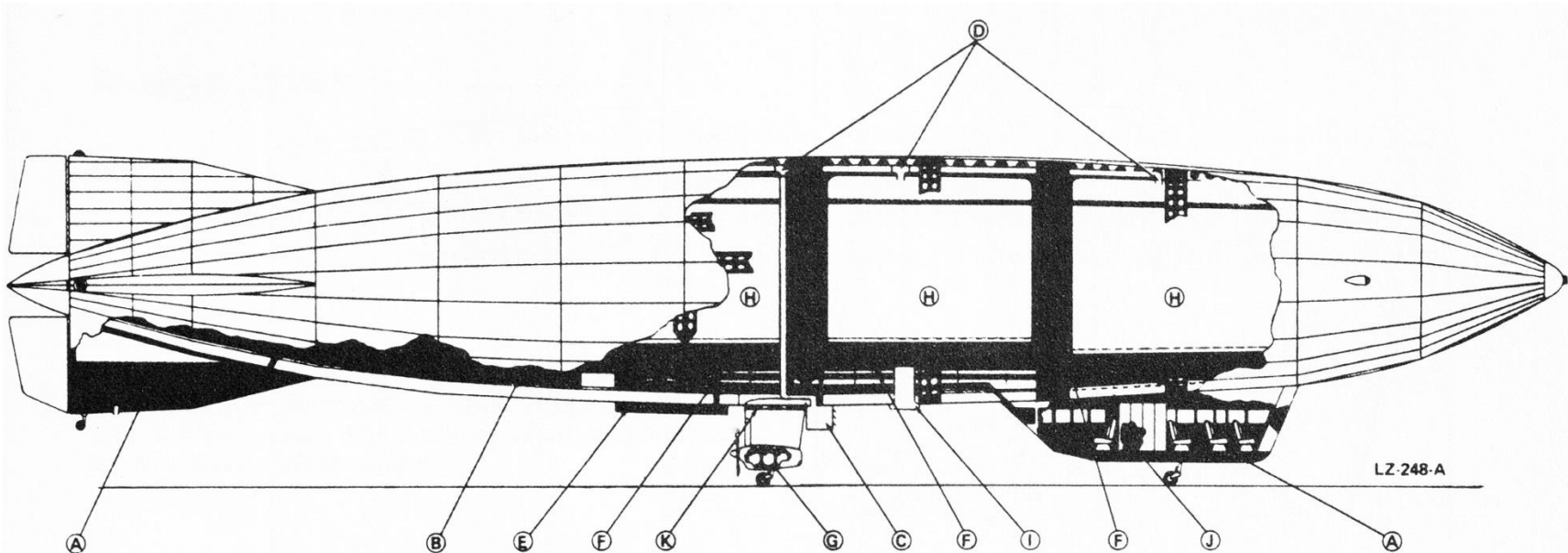
Peter Lobner, 24 August 2021

In 1967, printing and advertising executive Robert A. Laws was interested in using a blimp as an aerial three-dimensional advertising billboard. Goodyear refused his request to buy a Goodyear blimp for use as an advertising platform. This led Laws to examine other alternatives, including a custom-designed rigid airship. With six initial investors, the firm Airship Advertising, Inc. was formed and the new corporation leased 30 acres of land, with an option for 40 acres more, at Cape May County Airport in New Jersey.

What began as a project to build a modern advertising airship expanded to include other applications based on inquiries about using the airship for geophysical studies, mapping, freight, mail and passenger service.



*Rendering of an Airship Advertising Inc. / Laws Corporation rigid airship conducting a geophysical survey.
Source: Airships for the Future (1976)*



- A. Water Ballast
- B. Water Ballast Transfer System
- C. Air Conditioning Unit
- D. Air Conditioning Transfer Units
- E. Heating Unit
- F. Heating Transfer Units

- G. 6-cylinder, 300-horsepower Engines
- H. Gas Container
- I. Helium Pressure Release Valve
- J. 100 Amp. Generator System
- K. Wing Assembly Dampening Unit

*Cut-away view of the Airship Advertising Inc. / Laws Corporation rigid airship
Source: Airships for the Future (1976)*

The firm committed its first airship to advertising and the second one to geophysical work in Canada and Florida. The Canadian Defense Ministry was interested in using the airship to determine the ice thickness in the Northwest Passage, which at the time was being considered as a route for transporting oil by tankers through the Arctic to refineries on the US East Coast.

General characteristics of the Airship Advertising Inc. rigid airship

Parameter	Airship Advertising Inc. rigid airship
Type	Rigid, conventional
Length	248 ft (75.6 m)
Diameter	About 40.6 ft (12.4 m)
Lift gas	Helium in 6 lift gas cells
Envelope volume	360,000 ft ³ (10,194 m ³)
Ballast control	Water ballast for fore-aft trim control; Lift gas heating / cooling for direct lift control.
Accommodations	Gondola for 3 crew and 5 passengers
Propulsion system	Two 6-cylinder Lycoming piston engines @ 300 hp (223.7 kW) each, mounted amidships on stub wing / landing gear assemblies.
Speed, cruise	63 knots (117 kph)
Useful load	Almost 8 tons (16,000 lb / 7,257 kg)

In 1970, the firm hired Ed Klotz as chief pilot and director of operations. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) certification was expected to take about 200 hours of flying time with both Klotz and Laws flying. This was likely a very low estimate of the flying time that would actually be required for the FAA to certify the first new rigid airship since the late 1930s.

The rigid airship was expected to offer stable flight, “like a DC-3.” The airship would be equipped with radar to enable it to detect and fly around storms. However, it would be able to fly through storms. With modern ground handling equipment, the rigid airships could operate with a small ground crew of only two people, in sharp contrast to the large ground crews, about 15 people, required for previous large rigid airships.

Initial work on the rigid airship and the headquarters in Cape May was interrupted by a shortage of funds in 1971 or 1972. In November 1972, the New York Times reported that the firm formerly known as Airship Advertising was now re-branded as the Laws Corporation, with Robert A. Laws as Chairman. The new firm announced that it planned to spend about \$1-million to build a large hangar, measuring 550 feet long, 90 feet wide and 70 feet high (167.6 x 27.4 x 21.3 meters), at the Cape May County Airport, to be constructed by Southern Industrial Corporation of Pleasantville, NJ. Then the airship firm planned to build three of its 248-foot (75.6-meter) long rigid airships.

Isadore Strauss, the Laws Corporation Secretary – Treasurer, reportedly said “it would take about \$5-million to get the hangar project moving and build the first two airships. He declined to disclose the exact amount that had been spent thus far, but he said it was more than \$1-million. Mr. Strauss added that outsiders were investing in the company and that it had a \$5-million credit from a bank...” Laws offered a higher estimate, saying, “You have no idea how much money all this engineering and redesign costs. It's estimated the initial research, engineering, testing and construction will cost \$10-million. There are now only six people in the corporation, but we're going international, getting the name registered in Japan and Germany.”

Based on work by Grumman engineers, Laws expected that there would be a need for 300 airships in the near future.

In spite of the favorable business projections in late 1972, the new hangar was not built at the Cape May Airport and no rigid airships were produced.

For more information

- Gary Shenfield, “Rigid-Airship Plan Advances,” The New York Times, 26 November 1972:
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- William J. White, "Airships for the Future," p. 131, Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., New York, ISBN 0-8069-0090-3, 1976
- Paul Freeman, "Abandoned and Little-Known Airfields: New Jersey: Cape May area," revised 18 November 2020:
http://www.airfields-freeman.com/NJ/Airfields_NJ_CapeMay.htm