

**Aviation Safety Investigation Report
199804070**

**American Blimp Group
Airship**

28 September 1998

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NOTE: All air safety occurrences reported to the ATSB are categorised and recorded. For a detailed explanation on Category definitions please refer to the ATSB website at www.atsb.gov.au.

Occurrence Number: 199804070 **Occurrence Type:** Incident
Location: Essendon, Aerodrome
State: VIC **Inv Category:** 4
Date: Monday 28 September 1998
Time: 2125 hours **Time Zone** EST
Highest Injury Level: None

Aircraft Manufacturer: American Blimp Group
Aircraft Model: A-60+
Aircraft Registration: VH-ZIC **Serial Number:**
Type of Operation: Charter Passenger
Damage to Aircraft: Nil
Departure Point: Essendon Vic.
Departure Time: 2105 EST
Destination: Essendon Vic.

Crew Details:

Role	Class of Licence	Hours on Type	Hours Total
Pilot-In-Command	Commercial	1000.0	2500

Approved for Release: Tuesday, October 20, 1998

The airship was tasked to fly at night over the city of Melbourne to broadcast a live link to a TV variety show. The pilot telephoned the Bureau of Meteorology aviation forecasters twice before 1830 for a briefing on weather conditions. He was advised by the forecasters that conditions would be windy.

The area forecast issued at 1415 indicated that winds at 2,000 ft would be from the north at 35kt. Moderate turbulence was forecast at all levels with occasional severe turbulence in the lee of the ranges, situated to the north of Melbourne.

At 1626 the Bureau issued an amended forecast for Essendon with winds from 350 degrees at 18 kt gusting to 35 kt with moderate turbulence below 5,000 ft.

The airship departed Essendon at 2105 and was cleared to operate in the Albert Park Lake area at 1,000 ft. At 2125 the air traffic controller in the Essendon tower noticed that the airship was operating below 1,000 ft. At the same time the controller and police began to receive telephone calls from the public reporting that the airship was flying very low and erratically. The pilot advised ATC that he was operating at a lower level due to winds, otherwise operations were normal and no emergency conditions existed.

When ATC observed a radar altitude of 400 ft AMSL an altitude alert was issued to the pilot.



Concerned members of the public alerted the police and emergency services, both of which followed the airship during its return to Essendon. After arrival at Essendon the airship landed and was secured without further incident.

Video recordings of the flight taken both on board and from the ground showed the airship pitching, rolling and yawing while being buffeted by the wind. The extent of the disruption to normal flight could not be accurately assessed because some of the images had been increased in speed when broadcast by television news outlets.

