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## Pilot escapes uninjured from blimp caught in trees



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MANCHESTER-BY-THE-SEA, Mass. --A Hood blimp that regularly flies above Fenway Park crashed into a wooded area Tuesday when the pilot lost rudder control shortly after takeoff and tried to make an emergency landing on a nearby beach, authorities said.

Instead, the 90-foot-long blimp was blown inland and became stuck atop trees near an elementary school in this town about 25 miles north of Boston. It took two hours to rescue pilot Leigh Bradbury, who was not injured, from his perch about 30 feet above the ground, authorities said.

Robert Mezzetti, manager of Beverly Municipal Airport, said the blimp left there around 12:15 p.m. and lost rudder control minutes later.

Bradbury was doing "exposure flying" -- or recreational flying -- and was not on a business run, said Mickey Wittman, director of client services for Lightship Group of Orlando, Fla., which owns the aircraft.

Bradbury was the only person aboard.

Michael Kenny, 51, of Peabody, noticed the blimp while in Beverly to get lunch. The 51-year-old carpenter said he had taken a ride in the same blimp one month ago.

"It was moving up and down like a whale in the water," as if fighting the wind, Kenny said. "He was only turning in one direction."

The white blimp emblazoned with the red Hood logo has become a fixture in the skies above Red Sox games since Chelsea-based Hood started renting advertising space from Lightship Group eight years ago. Lynne Bohan, a spokeswoman for the dairy food company, said the blimp had been scheduled to fly above the Red Sox game at Fenway Park on Tuesday night.

The A-60 Airship was manufactured by American Blimp Corp., the parent company of Lightship Group, Wittman said.

Wittman said blimp accidents sometimes happen, but "I've never known anyone to be hurt."

The wooded area was inaccessible to rescue vehicles. Manchester firefighters carried a ladder to the crash site to get Bradbury a harness, which was attached to a rescue rope. The pilot put on the harness and rappelled to the ground, State Police Lt. Dermot Quinn said.

The Federal Aviation Administration and the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission are investigating. ■