

The Mechanical Owl of the French Army

A night-roaming airplane with rockets and searchlights to throw light on a Zeppelin's intentions

NIGHT flying has become a military necessity for reconnoitering and bombing as well as for attacking Zeppelins, which always bomb at night. Extraordinary demands are made on the skill of the pilot. A landing at night can be safely made only if the ground is illuminated or guiding beacons are employed. Were it not for the fact that the average night sky is not pitch black and is even slightly luminous, night flying would be even more dangerous than it is. Yet on those nights when overhanging clouds cut off even this faint luminosity, when everything is wrapped in inky blackness, it may be necessary to send an aviator aloft.

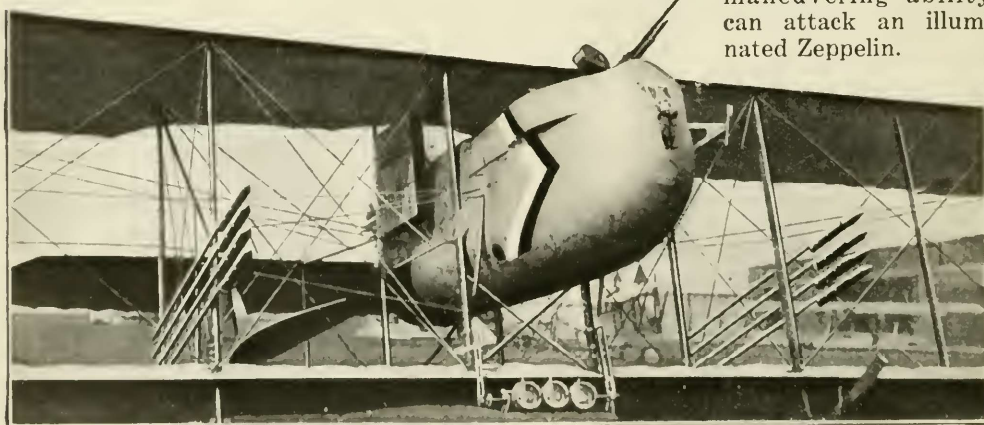
Recently the French had to convert the night plane into something like an owl, so that it can fly even on pitch dark nights. Like an owl, the machine, with which they have experimented, is very slow—an old-fashioned Farman "pusher" which would fall a ready prey to a fast enemy machine in daylight. But how does it find its way? By illuminating devices, of course. They may not be heavy because the machine cannot carry much additional weight. There are three luminous eyes in the form of searchlights mounted on the lower plane, as our photograph shows. As the owl swoops down on its prey, they

flare up and enable the pilot to single out the target.

But sometimes the searchlights are inadequate. Greater efficiency is often demanded. And so we find that the machine carries as well eight illuminating rockets, four to the side. They are mounted nearly horizontally between the wings and are no doubt discharged by electrical devices. The mere pushing of an electric button is enough. Rushing out with a hiss, far out in front of the machine, each emits a dazzling flare, which, suspended from a small parachute, lights up a large area through which a machine may pass. The flare lasts long enough to enable the aviator to make an emergency landing if need be; for the lights of an airdrome are difficult to pick up.

By means of rockets, it has become possible to sight a Zeppelin in an inky sky. At night a Zeppelin is detected only by its propellers. It is practically invisible. But, if the rockets be aimed in the direction of the betraying noise, by swinging the entire machine, there seems no reason why it should not throw real light on the Zeppelin's intentions.

These owl machines seem especially intended to mother small *avions de chasse*, which, because of their speed, climbing and maneuvering ability, can attack an illuminated Zeppelin.



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The rockets on this night machine are electrically discharged. They are for use when darkness confuses the aviator. Each rocket carries a flare at the end of a parachute