

## Air Craft in the Great War

### Is the Composite Air Fleet Possible

It is often said that when the big German air raid on Britain takes place it will be by a composite fleet of airships and aeroplanes. The advantages of such a combination are, indeed, obvious, and need not be enlarged upon here. If only that the aeroplanes could protect their consorts against the enemy aeroplanes it would be a sufficient reason for the combination. One writer goes so far as to say that there will be no considerable raid save by a composite fleet. But none of those who express these views appear for a moment to have imagined that there may be practical obstacles; they have taken it for granted that the composite aircraft fleet is, in the present stage of aeronautical development, quite feasible.

It is, then, at least curious that no record exists of any operation, even of a comparatively short distance, of a composite squadron, and that on every occasion that the enemy's aircraft have visited this country the airships have operated quite separately from aeroplanes. The writer ventures to express the opinion that they will continue to operate independently until one division or the other has been brought to a far more advanced stage of development—either the airship must be given far greater speed or the aeroplane must have a greater range of speed down to a low minimum, combined with at least 100 per cent. increase in duration of flight capacity.

#### Opposite Interests

There is one essential difference between airship and aeroplane causing conflict of interests both from the navigation and the defence points of view. The airship seeks the cover of darkness, and must do so all the while it is so vulnerable to aeroplane attack. It seeks darkness because only then has it an aeroplane opponent at a disadvantage, the latter at night finding it difficult to keep the airship in view and to out-maneuvre it. If German airships approach England before nightfall they will always leave the Continent at a point as far north as possible, and traverse the sea at the least frequented part, arriving over our coasts well north of the Thames estuary.

On the other hand, the aeroplane, although doing an immense amount of night work where short distances only have to be covered, is essentially a daylight craft. This is because its fuel-carrying capacity is so limited, and because landings at night are impossible save in the familiar and properly illuminated aerodrome. Further, because its fuel-carrying capacity is so limited, an enemy aeroplane seeking to raid Britain is compelled to take the shortest route involving the small sea journey. It cannot accompany the airship in its more northerly and longer route, and would only do so if the airship could afford to be seen by daylight near the British base in Belgium, thence making a dash across the Straits. There is the slightest indication that the Germans have any intention of making so big a blunder, however, and it is extremely probable that the programme of the recent flight to Faversham by aeroplane and the airship's meanderings near Harwich, the one day by day and the other by night, will be adhered to.

#### Capacities in Discord

But even supposing that these conditions, which are dependent upon Britain's geographical situation, did not exist, there remains another obstacle to airship-aeroplane co-operation in long journeys, and that is the different speed qualities of the two divisions. Taking the later Zeppelin types, we have craft with a speed maximum of some 52 or 54 miles per hour, but capable of going as slow as

one mile per hour, or even of remaining stationary. But the maximum speed is only attained by excessive fuel consumption: the economical speed is about 34 miles per hour, and it is at this speed that the airship is driven when great distances have to be covered. In other words, if the Zeppelins are driven at top speed on the raid of Britain they will have to reduce their magazines, which at the best contain no more than 1-2 tons, and in that event would probably have to be sacrificed to the extent of one-half. Let us assume that they will do this if called upon, and in that event the raid loses half of the very little terror that it now has even for the nervous.

But aeroplanes are on quite a different basis. Taking average German craft for our example, they are machine capable of a maximum speed of about 70 miles per hour and a minimum speed of, say, 45 miles per hour. They cannot remain aloft unless their speed through the air is at least 45 miles per hour. At this low speed they are burning the least fuel, but continuous driving at the minimum speed is apt to try an engine severely.

Now, at what point are airships and aeroplanes to compromise for a long journey in which other things than mere aerial navigation are at issue—such matters, for example, as a defence against hostile aircraft and the carrying of a sufficient magazine of bombs to do real damage?

The aeroplanes simply travel at all at the airship's economical speed. But the airship can at its maximum speed which is uneconomical, just keep up with the aeroplane going at a fair working pace.

#### Mutual Hindrances

Further, the airship can travel for more than 20 hours or so, and then, even when her fuel is exhausted, can remain aloft. The aeroplane cannot with a fuel supply for more than eight or ten hours carrying either gun or bombs.

The aeroplane could, of course, make rings round the slow-going airship in order to get air speed whilst making the same forward net progress. But this is an obviously unsatisfactory solution, since it further aggravates the aeroplane's shortcomings as regards duration capacity.

And in addition to the difficulties enumerated, on such a raid as is, the writer believe, quite erroneously supposed to be contemplated by the Germans, the raiders would have difficulties and dangers to encounter incidental to war, and in the presence of an enemy admittedly skilful, daring and well equipped for aerial fighting.

It is really as certain as anything can be that the Germans will not attempt any composite operations of the kind, but have long since recognized that in the circumstances of the case and with aircraft of today airship and aeroplane had far better agree to differ, since for long journeys attempts at co-operation will only cause them to hinder and hamper each other.

#### When They Will Come

As to the time of the next raids—well, aeroplanes will come any fine day when there is little or no mist and when the wind does not exceed 12 or 16 miles per hour. They will come chiefly to the Country of Kent, and may possibly boldly venture as far as Woolwich, or even London. But this need not prevent any holiday-maker from a visit to Margaret or Ramsgate in search of ozone, the danger to any individual or building being so extremely minute as quite reasonably to be ignored.

Airships will come any fairly clear night when the wind is not more than 16 or 20 miles per hour at a

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## A CANDID LETTER

Leading American's View of the President.—No United States Mediation.

A correspondent has sent us a letter recently received from a distinguished American citizen, from which we venture to print the following extracts:

"The situation in this country is more complicated than you in Britain can possibly know. In the first place, still follow very largely the political methods and after the sinister fashion that held all over Europe (and in Brit-

tain as elsewhere) up to the time when the war aroused the bitter instincts of those nations now known as the Allies. We are still wedded to our materialistic regime. The money considerations, the scientific efficiency, the abnegation of ethical principles in public and commercial life, which are the mark not only of any one people, but of an epoch, and which are now at a focus in Prussia, and therefore the common enemy of the world, are still dominant here, and we as yet lack the finger touch of war to arouse us out of our lethargy and our commercial self-satisfaction.

"The President is in a difficult position. He is a man of idealistic temper, but surrounded by unfortunate official influences, particularly in his Cabinet. He suffers under that political partnership which is the curse of our whole political system. Congress long ago ceased to represent the best elements in the nation, and for a long time now it has been predominantly the voice of the more ignorant people expressed through the lips of an inferior and frequently unprincipled type of lawyer-politician. There are in the United States nearly

thirty millions of people who are either of German or Irish birth, or of German or of Irish parentage. You know, of course, that it is not necessary (from the standpoint of the German Government) for a subject to surrender his position as a German citizen if he takes up citizenship in another nation, and you probably know how devoted the German in America is to his "Fatherland."

"On the other hand, we have, of course, the great mass of American citizens who are heartily and enthusiastically on the side of the Allies. This means practically all those whose ancestors have been in this country for a hundred years or more, unless these have been poisoned by the canker of commercialism. These are not the loud-mouthed type of citizen. They are very quiet. They do not control the newspapers and they seldom express themselves in print or on the platform. They are also somewhat lethargic and prone to disbelieve any probability of serious danger. The baser sort referred to above are constantly talking, writing and working. There are certain papers such as those controlled by Hearst. The others have few organs,

through which to voice themselves, in spite of this fact, were by a vast majority in favour of the Allies. Certainly such representative journals as the New York "Times," the "Springfield Republican," and the "Boston Transcript," are a good evidence of the real underlying convictions of the people.

"After all, the President of the United States, however much I differ from it, is not an unrighteous person. He is trying to handle a difficult situation diplomatically. He is not succeeding wholly largely because his Cabinet contains some rather inexcusable people, but for one I am convinced that he will be able to hold the country back from any ghastly mistake, and that in doing this he will have the support of all the decent people in the country and the great numerical majority, I am confidently persuaded.

"Having said this, I can say further how wholly I agree with you as to the attitude we have taken. I object to it in every possible manner. We should have made a declaration with regard to Belgium. We should have let Germany and Austria see that even if we remained neutral, our

sympathies were with the Allies. We should be prepared, if necessary, to declare an embargo on the exportation of all supplies of any kind whatsoever to Germany and Austria-Hungary, leaving to them a declaration of war if they saw fit to make this on the basis of what would be, of course, an unfriendly act, and we should finally abandon all idea and all talk of American intervention or reconciliation.

"This last is the most poisonous thing in a way that has happened here, and it is doing a good deal of harm. That the United States should consider that it was in any position to act as mediator after the war or during the war is so preposterous a thing that I am appalled when I realize how many people seem to accept it as a possibility. The war can only be finished on the basis of unconditional surrender on the part of Germany and Austria-Hungary and the terms of peace must be determined, not only by the intervention of the United States, not by negotiations between the victorious and the defeated Powers, but by edicts issued by the Allies after Germany and Austria-Hungary have been beaten to their knees.—The London "Globe."

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