Foo-Fighter, Nazis' Latest

Eerie 'Balls of Fire' Pace American Planes Over Reich

An U. S. Night Fighter Base, France, Jan. 1 (AP).—The Nazis have thrown something new into the night skies over Germany—the weird, mysterious "foo-fighter," balls of fire which race alongside the wings of American Beaufighters flying intruder missions over the Reich.

U. S. pilots have encountered the eerie "foo-fighter" for more than a month in night flights. No one seems to know exactly what this sky weapon is.

The balls of fire appear suddenly and accompany the planes for miles. Apparently radio-controlled from the ground, they keep up with planes flying 300 miles an hour, intelligence reports reveal.

"There are three kinds of these lights we call 'foo-fighters,'" said Lieut. Donald Meiers of Chicago. "One is red balls of fire which appear off our wing tips and fly along with us. The second is a vertical row of three balls of fire which fly in front of us and the third is a group of about 15 lights which appear off in the distance—like a Christmas tree up in the air—and flicker on and off."

The pilots of this night fighter squadron find these fiery balls the wierdest thing they have yet encountered. They are convinced that the "foo-fighter" is designed to be a psychological weapon as well as military, although it is not the nature of the fire balls to attack planes.

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See FIGHTER, Page 2, Col. 1

Springfield (Mo) Union
Jan 2, 1945

Washington Post
January 2, 1945

Nazi "Foo-Fighters," Balls of Fire, Race Alongside Allied Planes

By Robert Wilson

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"A 'foo-fighter' picked me up recently at 700 feet and chased me 20 miles down the Rhine valley," Meiers said. "I turned to starboard and two balls of fire turned with me. I turned to the port side and they turned with me. We were going 260 miles an hour and the balls were keeping right up with us."

"On another occasion when a 'foo-fighter' picked us up, I doved at 360 miles per hour. It kept right off our wing tips for awhile and then zoomed up into the sky.

"When I first saw the things off my wing tips I had the horrible thought that a German on the ground was ready to press a button and explode them. But they don't explode or attack us. They just seem to follow us like will-o'-the-wisps."

(An Associated Press report from Paris Dec. 13 said the Germans had thrown silvery balls into the air against day raiders. Pilots then reported they had seen these objects, both individually and in clusters, during forays over the Reich.)

FIGHTER

From Page 1

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Springfield (Ma)
Republican
Jan. 3, 1945

Nazi Foo-Balls Believed Experiment With Induction or Ball Lightning

Foe May Be Fooling With Idea of Stopping Ignitions in Mid-Air, but Hasn't Succeeded

New York, Jan. 2—(AP)—The descriptions of the new German foo-fighters, or balls of fire, fit into several well known electrical phenomena.

These are induction and ball lightning and have some, though not all the aspects of St Elmo's fire. If they are electrical, they are something created in the air close to the planes, rather than anything shot like artillery shells or anything floating in the air in wait for planes.

Induction is suggested by the reports that the foo-fires keep up with the plane, at fixed distances, regardless of plane speed, changes in speed or changes in direction.

Electrical induction of some sort would explain such marvelous synchronization. Nothing else that is well known would explain such perfect timing. Radio control from the ground does not explain the timing, unless radio control is meant to describe a beam which is part of the automatic induction.

Induction, however, fails completely to describe what happens when a fire-ball zooms upward leaving its plane. Apparently the balls fly paths of thousands of feet away from the planes.

The common experience that resembles this trick is ball lightning. How anybody could produce ball lightning is unknown. Exactly what ball lightning may be is also unknown. But it is a quite harmless thing, even as the German foo-balls are reported to be. A lightning ball can explode in your front yard, mak-

(Continued On Sixth Page)

Springfield (Ma)
Republican
Jan. 2, 1945

Eerie Nazi 'Foo-Fighters' Mystify Yank Night Fliers

Weird Balls of Fire Race Along Wings of U. S. Planes —Never Seem to Do Harm

A United States Night Fighters Base, France, Jan. 1 — (AP) — The Nazis have thrown something new into the night skies over Germany — the weird, mysterious "foo-fighter," balls of fire which race alongside the wings of American Beaufighters flying intruder missions over the Reich.

United States pilots have been encountering the eerie "foo-fighter" for more than a month in their night flights. No one apparently knows exactly what this sky weapon is.

The balls of fire appear suddenly and accompany the planes for miles. They appear to be radio-controled from the ground and manage to keep up with planes flying 300 miles an hour, official intelligence reports reveal.

"There are three kinds of these lights we call 'foo-fighters,'" said Lieut Donald Meiers of Chicago. "One is red balls of fire which appear off our wing tips and fly along with us, the second is a vertical row of three balls of fire which fly in front of us and the third is a group of about 15 lights which appear off in the distance — like a Christmas tree up in the air — and flicker on and off."

The pilots of this night fighter squadron — in operation since September, 1943 — find these fiery balls the weirdest thing they have as yet encountered. They are convinced that the "foo-fighter" is designed to be a psychological weapon as well as military although it is not the nature of the fire balls to attack planes.

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(An Associated Press report from

(Continued on Sixth Page)

NAZI FOO-BALL TRICK BELIEVED EXPERIMENT WITH ELECTRIC POWER

(Continued From First Page)

ing a loud bang but doing little or no damage.

St Elmo's fire is a brush discharge of static electricity, which streams off some solid object with a brilliant intensity. Aviators are familiar with brush discharges and would recognize them, so that the foo-balls are probably not ordinary St Elmo's fire.

A reason for the foo-balls, again based on experience, is interference with radar, radio or perhaps with a plane's ignition. Ignition interference would stop a plane in the air. It was a real project in Italy before this war, and how to do it was well known in theory in the United States. All you needed then, to stop a plane five or more miles away, was a power plant equal to Niagara Falls.

A guess can be made that the foo-balls are evidence that German scientists have found some way to get around part of the power trouble in interference. The fact that they are using them, and so disclosing their secrets to the allies, would indicate that they do not hope to attain to ignition interference power.

EERIE 'FOO-FIGHTERS' MYSTIFY U. S. FLIERS

(Continued from First Page)

Paris December 13 said the Germans had thrown silvery balls into the air against day raiders. Pilots then reported they had seen these objects, both individually and in clusters, during forays over the Reich.)

Nazi New Secret Weapon Now Used

A U. S. NIGHT FIGHTER BASE, France, Jan. 2 (AP) — American fighter pilots engaged in flying night intruder missions over Germany report the Nazis have come up with a new "secret weapon"—mysterious "balls of fire" which race along beside their planes for miles like will o' the wisps.

Yank pilots have dubbed them "Foo Fighters," and at first thought they might explode, but so far there is no indication that any planes have been damaged by them.

Some pilots have expressed belief that the "Foo Fighters" was designed strictly as a psychological weapon. Intelligence reports seem to indicate it is radio-controlled from the ground and can keep pace with planes flying 300 miles per hour.

Lt. Donald Meiers of Chicago, Ill., said there are three types of "Foo fighters"—red balls of fire that fly along at wing tip; a vertical row of three balls of fire which fly in front of the planes, and a group of about 15 lights which follow the plane at a distance, flickering on and off.

* * *

Floating and plane-following balls in fire-like color, added to silver globes encountered over the German lines by American airmen, might not be as mysterious as would seem in cabled dispatches, C. E. Butterfield, AP radio editor, says.

This is just a guess, but on the little information available, the colored and glowing globes might well be added elements in attempts to interfere with radio signals and radar detection.

While dispatches hint that they are radio controlled, the fact that they travel along with a plane or stay a certain distance ahead would tend toward the belief that they instead are magnetic. Thus, the metal of a plane would attract them, at the same time holding them at a distance. Radio control from the ground or another plane would not permit such apparent accuracy in control.

The glow, coupled with the possible magnetic action, might come from the type of gas they contain to aid in their electrical qualities and to add to their buoyancy.

Milwaukee Journal - Jan 28, 1945 Browse this newspaper »

Juneau County Folks Agog at Mysterious 'Light' in Sky

Journal Special Correspondence

Mauston, Wis. -The Juneau county sheriff's office has been wishing mightily these last few nights that it had a master switch to control the celestial system.

Whether it's Venus doing a strip tease, some "fireballs" dazzling some "screwballs," or mass madness, Sheriff John Jones and his staff are not prepared to testify.

The situation started last Tuesday night, when the sheriff's office got a number of telephone calls from excited residents of the Elroy vicinity, southwest of here. The callers told about a bright light low in the sky. Some said it moved, some said it flickered that it was a burning airplane, a plane with lights, a floating, lighted parachute.

There wasn't much the sheriff's office could do, for the reports did not indicate that anything had actually reached the earth. All callers reported seeing "the light" between 8:45 and 10 p. m.

Wednesday night the calls came in more frequently as additional persons gave their versions of what the mysterious light was. Some callers were considerably stirred up and insisted that the sheriff do something about catching the "spies" or "saboteurs" dropping on the county, Jones said.

It was getting to be too much, so the sheriff placed a call to the Yerkes observatory at Lake Geneva, Wis. Learned astronomers of the observatory would not go out on a limb on the basis of the reports made to the sheriff, but they suggested that the excited citizenry had been gazing at the planet Venus and letting go with their imagination. Or perhaps they had seen some "fireballs," which are shooting stars or meteors.

The star gazers also told the sheriff that if it were Venus, the light couldn't possibly be moving about, as the only moving Venus does is that of crossing the sky in leisurely fashion. Furthermore, if it were a fireball, the light eventually would burn out as the meteor plummeted earthward, they said. And it would be unusual if a fireball dropped every night in the same territory, as there are no meteoric showers expected at this time. That the light was peculiar to the Elroy vicinity was explainable in that meteors don't become visible until they come within the 50 or 60 miles of space directly over the earth and thus cannot be seen except in a restricted area of perhaps up to 100 miles, the astronomers added.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights the story was the same. The sheriff got more calls and had but one answer.

"Stand alongside a post or similar object," he advised. "Stand perfectly still and sight at the light along the post. If it moves, call us back."

This answer doesn't seem to be accepted with any enthusiasm, the sheriff's office admitted ruefully Saturday night.

"It doesn't satisfy them; they want to believe it's something else," said Deputy L. W. Foster. There even have been incidents, he said, where a stranger, attracted to a group watching the lights, was looked upon with suspicion as a parachutist dropped by the enemy.

Big Spring Tx
Daily Herald
January 21 1945

Melbourne Australia

The Argus, Wednesday 3 January 1945, page 1

GERMANS USING FIREBALLS AGAINST ALLIED PLANES

From Our Own Correspondent in New York

American pilots are encountering fireballs that race alongside the wings of the American fighter planes over the Reich, says American Associated Press correspondent at a US night fighter base.

Named "foo fighters," these balls keep pace with the planes.

There are three varieties—those which fly alongside, others which fly in front of the plane, and a third kind seen at a distance in groups of 15.

The Americans believe they are meant to have a psychological effect. They do not attack planes, but follow like will o' the wisps.

Brownsville Tx
Herald
January 2 1945

'Foo Fighters' Now Plaguing Allied Pilots

A U.S. NIGHT FIGHTER BASE, France —(AP)— American fighter pilots engaged in flying night intruder missions over Germany report the Nazis have come up with a new "secret weapon"—mysterious "balls of fire" which race along beside their plane for miles like Will O' the Wisps.

Yank pilots have dubbed them "Foo Fighters," and at first thought they might explode, but so far there is no indication that any planes have been damaged by them.

Some pilots have expressed belief that the "foo fighter" was designed strictly as a psychological weapon. Intelligence reports seem to indicate it is radio-controlled from the ground and can keep pace with planes flying 300 miles per hour.

Del Rio Tx
News Herald
January 3 1945

Foo Fighters Fit Several Phenomena

By Howard W. Blakeslee
Associated Press Science Editor

NEW YORK, Jan. 2—The descriptions of the new German foo-fighters, or balls of fire, fit into several well-known electrical phenomena.

These are induction, ball lightning and have some, though not all the aspects of St. Elmo's Fire. If they are electrical, they are something created in the air close to the planes, rather than anything shot like artillery shells or anything floating in the air in wait for planes.

Induction is suggested by the reports that the foo-fires kept up with the plane, at fixed distances, regardless of plane speed, changes in speed or changes in direction.

Electrical induction of some sort would explain such marvelous synchronization.

Induction, however, fails completely to describe what happens when a fire-ball zooms upward leaving its plane. Apparently the balls fly paths of thousands of feet away from the planes.

The common experience that resembles this trick is ball lightning. How anybody could produce ball lightning is unknown. Exactly what ball lightning may be is also unknown. But it is a quite harmless thing, even as the German foo-balls are reported to be.

A reason for the foo balls, again based on experience, is interference, with radar, radio or perhaps with a plane's ignition, but past tests have indicated you need a power plant equal to Niagara Falls to stop a plane's ignition four or five miles away.

New Nazi Secret Weapon Dubbed 'Foo Fighter'

Mysterious 'Balls Of Fire', Race Beside Planes for Miles

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Floating and plane-following balls in fire-like color, added to the silver globes encountered over the German lines by American airmen, might not be as mysterious as would seem in cabled dispatches, C. E. Butterfield, AP radio editor, says.

This is just a guess, but on the little information available, the colored and glowing globes might well be added elements in attempts to interfere with radio signals and radar detection.

While dispatches hint that they are radio controlled, the fact that they travel along with a plane or stay a certain distance ahead would tend toward the belief that they instead are magnetic. Thus, the metal of a plane would attract them, at the same time holding them at a distance. Radio control from the ground or another plane would not permit such apparent accuracy in control.

Nebraska State Journal Lincoln Ne January 14 1945

Astronomer gathering data on mysterious 'ball of fire'

Red pins denote persons who saw a fireball spurting thru the sky, and yellow pins denote those who heard a loud explosion at what might have been the end of a meteoric sky-ride, on a map of Nebraska being maintained by O. C. Collins, professor of astronomy at the University of Nebraska. Letters coming into his office almost daily are reporting on the phenomenon of the airlines, which was sighted over the state at about the same time an earth tremor was felt in Omaha and the area northeast of there, last Saturday afternoon about 5 p. m.

Seven letters have come to Collins to date, four reporting on the "ball of fire" and three telling of hearing explosions. If further evidence can be attained, the astronomer thinks that possibly enough data can be brought together to form a real picture of what was happening in the Nebraska skies about that hour.

The whole thing started when Walter Carlson, Holdrege, wrote Collins that Wilbur Baker had seen a large, turnip-shaped "ball of fire" from the Carlson farm Saturday at about the same time the explosion had been reported in Omaha and Council Bluffs. After newspapers had publicized the phenomenon, Professor Collins received letters from Mrs. Grace Fite, Logan, Ia., and F. J. Kulhanek, Omaha, confirming certain facts.

Four More Reports.

Saturday four more letters came to Collins—from Henry M. Peterson, St. Edward, Neb.; Bob Bergt, Wayne, Neb.; Julius Belew, Amelia, Neb., and Paul L. McKinney, Woodbine, Ia. All place the occurrence at about the same time.

Wrote Peterson: "I was in a field just west of St. Edward. I noticed a peculiar light to the east. Stopping the tractor I watched, thinking it to be the sun reflecting on an airplane. On closer observation it appeared to be a ball of light, very bright and about the size and brilliance of the sun when seen thru a thin mist. It had a tail which was very red and seemingly between 25 or 30 feet long. I watched it until it vanished in midair while still quite high in the sky. It was traveling from south toward the north at a very rapid pace."

Bergt's letter said: "Surveying the clouds, I suddenly was attracted by this 'ball of fire.' It appeared to be about 9 to 12 inches in diameter, or width, with a trailing tail of about 30 to 40 feet in length, seemingly headed in the general direction of Omaha. While its flight was visible, there seemed to be fragments breaking off of the larger portion of the fireball."

Headed Toward Omaha.

Belew testified: "I saw something coming out of the sky at a terrific speed about the same time of the day (as Baker), but to me it looked silvery color, and it glistened in the sun. It looked about three feet long and was shaped like a turnip with a tail. It was headed in the direction of Omaha from here. I live 13 miles south of Chambers."

McKinney wrote: "I was at the George Douglas farm five miles southeast of Woodbine at the time. We both heard the explosion—or rather the series of explosions — which seemed to come from the sky from the southeast. The later explosions in the series seemed to come from farther west. This I notice seems to contradict the man from Holdrege. We saw nothing out of the ordinary. However, the clouds were quite heavy. Several other people from this vicinity reported hearing the same."

Last One Charted in 1939.

Collins explained that the seeming discrepancy wouldn't necessarily indicate a variance of facts, in event the explosion did come from the meteorite. At the slow rate at which sound travels it would take longer for the sound of the first explosion to reach him than for the sound of the explosions which, altho later, were closer.

The professor is especially interested in hearing from anyone south of the reported points who might have spotted the fireball.

Altho there have probably been many fireballs over Nebraska which have not been noticed or publicized, according to Collins, the last one which the astronomy department was able to chart was in March, 1939. At that time reports came to him from Nebraska and Iowa, helping make up a rather complete report on its course. The current fireball marks one of the first times that a meteoric body and an explosion which might indicate the end of its course have been linked, he said.

Paris Tx News January 2 1945

'FOO-FIGHTERS'--EERIEST THINGS YANK PILOTS HAVE HAD TO FIGHT

BY ROBERT WILSON

A U. S. NIGHT FIGHTER BASE, France, Jan. 3—(AP)—The Nazis have thrown something new into the night skies over Germany—the weird, mysterious "foo-fighter."—balls of fire which race alongside the wings of American Beaufighters flying intruder missions over the Reich.

U. S. pilots have been encountering the eerie "foo-fighter" for more than a month in their night flights. No one apparently knows exactly what this sky weapon is.

The balls of fire appear suddenly and accompany the planes for miles. They appear to be radio-controlled from the ground and manage to keep up with planes flying 300 miles an hour, official intelligence reports reveal.

"There are three kinds of these lights we call 'foo-fighters,'" said Lieutenant Donald Meiers, of Chicago, Ill. "One is red balls of fire which appear off our wing tips and fly along with us, the second is a vertical row of three balls of fire which fly in front of us and the third is a group of about 15 lights which appear off in the distance—like a Christmas tree up in the air—and flicker on and off."

The pilots of this night fighter squadron—in operation since September, 1943 — find these fiery balls the weirdest thing they have as yet encountered. They are convinced that the "foo-fighter" is designed to be a psychological weapon as well as military although it is not the nature of the fire balls to attack planes.

"A 'foo-fighter' picked me up recently at 700 feet and chased me 20 miles down the Rhine valley," and two balls of fire turned with me. I turned to the port side and they turned with me. We were going 260 miles an hour and the balls were keeping right up with us."

"On another occasion when a 'foo-fighter' picked us up, I dove at 360 miles per hour. It kept right off our wing tips for awhile and then zoomed up into the sky.

"When I first saw the things off my wing tips I had the horrible thought that a German on the ground was ready to press a button and explode them. But they don't explode or attack us. They just seem to follow us like will-o-the-wisps."

(An Associated Press report from Paris December 13 said the Germans had thrown silvery balls into the air against day raiders. Pilots then reported they had seen these objects, both individually and in clusters, during forays over the Reich.)

Abilene Tx
Reporter-News
January 6 1945

San Antonio, Tx
Light
January 2, 1945

College Station, TX BC

Balls o' Fire, Snuffy, Here Comes Them

Germans Using 'Foo Fighters' in Air

A U. S. NIGHT FIGHTER BASE, France, Jan. 2.—(AP)—American fighter pilots engaged in flying night intruder missions over Germany report the Nazis have come up with a new "secret weapon"—mysterious "balls of fire" which race along beside their planes for miles like will o' the wisps.

Yank pilots have dubbed them "Foo Fighters," and at first thought they might explode, but so far there is no indication that any planes have been damaged by them.

Some pilots have expressed belief that the "Foo Fighter" was designed strictly as a psychological weapon. Intelligence reports seem to indicate it is radio-controlled from the ground and can keep pace with planes flying 300 miles per hour.

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This is just a guess, but on the little information available, the colored and glowing globes might well be added elements in attempts to interfere with radio signals and radar detection.

While dispatches hint that they are radio controlled, the fact that they travel along with a plane or stay a certain distance ahead would tend toward the belief that they instead are magnetic. Thus, the metal of a plane would attract them, at the same time holding them at a distance. Radio control from the ground or another plane would not permit such apparent accuracy in control.

The glow, coupled with the possible magnetic action, might come from the type of gas they contain to aid in their electrical qualities and to add to their buoyancy.

January 6, 1945 (Medit)

THE STARS AND STRIPES

U. S. Fighter Pilots Can't Be Surprised

WITH THE AAF IN BELGIUM, Jan. 5 — American fighter pilots over the Western Front are not surprised at anything anymore, whether it be mysterious balls of fire chasing them through the night or an anachronistic dogfight with tommy guns as weapons in the manner of World War I.

Pilots of night intruder missions over Germany recently reported encountering mysterious "balls of fire" which race along beside their plane like will-o'-wisps. The Yanks have dubbed them "Foo Fighters."

Authorities have expressed the belief that the Foo Fighter was designed strictly as a psychological weapon. Intelligence reports indicate it is radio-controlled from the ground, and can keep pace with the fastest night fighters. Pilots at first expected the "fire balls" to explode near them, but so far there is no indication of any planes being damaged.

Lt. Donald Meirs, Chicago, said there are three types of Foo Fighters: red balls of fire that fly along at the wing tip; a vertical row of three balls, which fly in front of the planes; and groups of about fifteen lights which follow the plane at a distance, flickering on and off.

It began to look as though aviation progress had turned back a generation yesterday when an American attempted to stage a dogfight with a tommy gun. A small enemy observation plane came over, trying to spot Allied positions for German artillery.

An American artillery spotter grabbed his tommy gun, pumped in his Cub and took off. Before he could close for a shot at the enemy, the German butterfly turned tail and got away.

Another trick of the enemy has backfired. According to Lt. Paul C. Harold, a Thunderbolt pilot, the Germans will have to either lengthen their tunnels or shorten their trains.

Lt. Harold found a train trying to hide in a tunnel, but with head and tail sticking out. Harold chopped off the tail and sealed the south end with a 500-pounder, then moved around to the north end to strafe and explode the engine. He couldn't do much about the cars inside the tunnel," an operations officer commented.

Waukesha Wi
Freeman
January 31, 1945

German Gun Caused the 'Fireballs'

It won't be necessary for the police or sheriff department to make further investigations to determine what caused balls of fire to float over the southern limits of the city Saturday and Sunday. The mystery was solved Monday night when it was learned by a Freeman reporter that they were flares from a German gun, fired by Kenneth Clark, 23, radioman second class, who returned to Waukesha early Saturday after seeing action in France and Italy.

Clark hadn't been in town very long before he unintentially got a good many people all worked up over seeing what they called fireballs in the sky. For the benefit of his uncle, James H. Clark, and the Clark family, who live on S. Grand ave., Kenneth said he shot off one of the flares early Saturday morning and followed these Saturday and Sunday nights by two more.

Believed Airplane

Some mistook the flares for a burning airplane while others believed they were small flaming parachutes dropped from an airplane. Still others were quite plainly dumbfounded and had no explanation for what they had seen.

The Clarks explained Monday night, after readng accounts of the fireball mystery, that they did not realize what a commotion the flare gun had caused. The gun shoots flares to a height of 150 feet and they travel about 300 feet before returning to the ground. The cartridges are about twice the size of a shotgun shell while the gun looks much like a large pistol.

(Editor's Note: This explains the local fireballs, but are not attempring to solve Mauston's mystery.)

Kenneth is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Clark, Newhall ave. and Scott st., and is a radio man on an LST. He took part in the invasion of southern France and Italy and in one of these campaigns picked up the flare gun and several cartridges along with other enemy equipment which he brought back with him.

He was inducted into the service in January, 1943, and had been overseas since last May. He is in Waukesha on a 30-day furlough.

Abilene Tx
Reporter-News
January 4, 1945

BALLS OF FIRE CHASE YANKS

WASHINGTON, Jan. 3—(UP)—The War Department wasn't talking, but amateur psysicists hereabouts wondered today if that ancient bugaboo, "St. Elmo's Fire," hadn't put in an appearance on the Western Front.

Dispatches from the European theater have told of strange "balls of fire" which follow Allied airplanes around on night missions over Germany. Maybe they were some kind of secret weapon, the reports suggested, possibly radio-controlled. They didn't explode, however; they just tagged along.

War Department authorities just looked mysteriously when questioned about the balls of fire. They said they couldn't talk about them. Security, you know.

However, no security or censorship restrictions apply to "St. Elmo's Fire," which used to frighten uneasy sailors into repentence from time to time. The dictionary describes this phenomenon as follows:

"A flame-like appearance sometimes seen in stormy weather at prominent points of a ship, particularly at the masthead and the yardarm, and also on land, as at the tops of trees or steeples. . . . It is in the nature of a brush discharge of electricity, reddish when positive, bluish when negative."

Lowell Ma
Sun

Major Al Williams

It is very likely that the ingenious minds of this war will turn out some fantastic contraptions in an effort to mine the atmosphere with charges destructive to warplanes.

We have seen the age of captive balloons with trailing cables. Such defense against the bomber constitutes a mental hazard for the pilot rather than anything like an offsetting answer. It is now obvious, therefore, that irrespective of the type of "air mine" developed it will have to be a free floating affair designed to maintain a desired altitude. Such self-regulation can be effected with due allowances for the variation in the strength of the sun's rays during daytime and the absence of same at night.

NEED VAST NUMBERS

Great numbers of such air mines will have to be employed. Hence they must be of simple design, cheap and capable of being produced in vast numbers.

Before we go any farther with the Buck Rogers estimate of a fantasy which may be nearer accomplishment than we suspect, let us dispose of the fact that such free air floating mines naturally will travel with the wind. The Germans need have no concern about damage to themselves from such a contingency, because the prevailing wind on the European continent in a few hours will carry such air mines beyond their boundaries.

The most difficult factor in attempting to visualize an effective air mine is visibility. And it is on this point that we encounter an angle which may conclusively influence the air mine's design. If it is an air mine possessed of no self-propelling or attracting capacity, then it will have to be something difficult to see. And we know of no way to make an object invisible. Yet it would have to be most difficult to see or else pilots would easily avoid it.

From what I have been able to gather, there seems to be a lot of thought given to the use of transparent material containing gases lighter than air, hence supplying flotation which explode on contact with the air as they are freed by rupture consequent to collision with a plane. Such gases are known and are invisible and have terrific explosive power.

The bits of informative details we snatch these days from our bomber pilots over Germany regarding "fireballs" that sail along with their planes makes weird reading. To all intents and purposes, these fireballs represent the Nazis' efforts to mine the air. Their purpose admits little controversy.

ANOTHER METHOD

Another method of mining the air, which has attracted scientific interest during the past 10 years and which fulfills the requirements of invisibility, permanence of position, and complete effectiveness is the "ray" which jams the ignition system of the internal combusion gasoline engine.

Such a ray is known and has been known for many years. Motor cars have been stopped from distances of 20 feet because of this "ray."

A friend and associate of Marconi's in Italy told me that Marconi was positive the range of such a ray would be extended. This development, of course, will be one of the wonders of the world when it comes into practical use against aircraft powered by engines as we know them today. Whether or not the ignition systems could be shielded against such a ray as the ignition systems are today shielded against interference with radio sets is problematical.

However, if and when such an anti-ignition ray is developed, we will turn to Diesel aircraft engines (not dependent upon ignition systems) and then bombing will continue. The only answer to the bomber is a gadget which will render bombing so impossibly expensive in men and planes its employment will be prohibitive.

Port Arthur Tx
News
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St. Elmo's Fire Latest 'Weapon' Of Nazi Forces?

WASHINGTON, Jan. 4 (UP).—The War department isn't talking, but amateur physicists hereabouts are wondering today if that ancient bugaboo, St. Elmo's fire, hasn't put in an appearance on the western front.

Dispatches from the European theater have told of strange "balls of fire" which follow Allied airplanes around on night missions over Germany. Maybe they were some kind of secret weapon, the reports suggested, possibly radio-controlled. They didn't explode, however; they just tagged along.

War department authorities just looked mysterious when questioned about the balls of fire. They said they couldn't talk about them. Security, you know.

However, no security or censorship restrictions apply to St. Elmo's fire, which used to frighten uneasy sailors into repentance from time to time. The dictionary describes this phenomenon as follows:

"A flame-like appearance sometimes seen in stormy weather at prominent points of a ship, particularly at the masthead and the yardarm, and also on land, as at the tops of trees or steeples . . . It is in the nature of a brush discharge of electricity, reddish when positive, blueish when negative."