

# AIR WAR AT NIGHT

**A**T NIGHT, the skies over Korea are occupied by aircraft not normally seen during daylight hours. The Communists take advantage of the darkness not only to launch nuisance raids against UN positions; they also launch night fighters to intercept and shoot down raiding UN bombers.

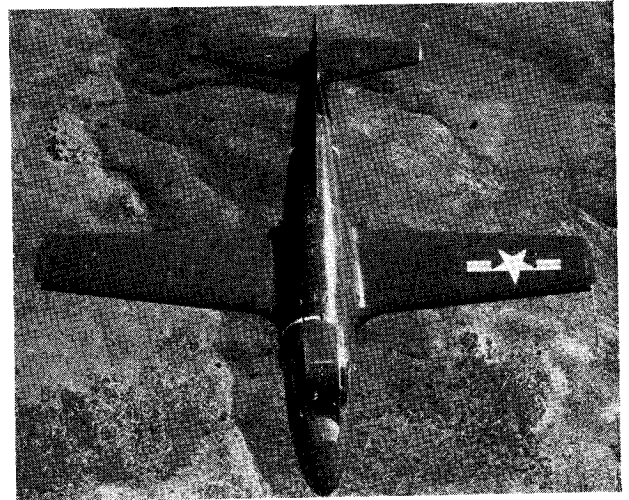
To counteract the enemy, UN jet night fighters take off every evening to patrol and fly escort for B-29 bombers on missions over North Korea. The most modern of these aircraft are Marine F3D *Skyknights* and Air Force F-94 *Starfires*. These aircraft have been specially designed to search out and destroy enemy aircraft with the aid of airborne radar.

Principle aircraft engaged by UN aircraft are the MIG-15, the YAK-9, the LA-9 or LA-11, and the PO-2. The jet-powered MIG-15 is of course the fastest and is seen most often during daylight hours. On the other hand, the remainder are slower propeller-driven types. All of these aircraft, with the exception of the PO-2, are classified as fighters.

The PO-2 and its employment has proved to be an anomaly in the Korean Theater. Although the PO-2 has been assigned an apparently insignificant role as a night heckler, it has proved to be a small but very irritating thorn in the side of the UN forces. In appearance, this small aircraft is very similar to the N3N *Yellow Peril*.

**More on the PO-2**—Like the N3N, the PO-2 (See NA BULLETIN for August 1952) is a two-place biplane and was originally intended for training and liaison. Four to six 55-pound bombs can be carried under the wings, not counting what can be thrown from the cockpit. The forward-firing 7.62-mm. guns are fixed and two rear-cockpit flexible 7.62-mm. machine guns are sometimes carried.

Although the PO-2 was designed as a trainer, during World War II it performed a variety of jobs, the night-nuisance bombing rôle proving the most annoying. The PO-2 was frequently used to



**SKYKNIGHTS** of the Marine Corps, equipped with airborne radar, are prime UN night fighters in Korea.

drop bombs during sneak raids on unsuspecting German positions.

Even though the aircraft was first flown back in 1927, it is still around to bother UN Forces in Korea. Any number of these so-called Bed Check Charlies have been engaged by UN night fighters and as a result, some of them have been destroyed.

The actual number of PO-2s destroyed as a result of night engagements by Navy and Marine aircraft is now five. A typical night operation by a Marine F3D traces the pattern of pursuit against one that got away. Here's a pilot's report:

"On the 26th of November 1952, while acting as Strip Alert at K-8, we received instructions to scramble at 1905. Flying at 20,000 feet, we were then directed to report to *Dutchboy*. CAP was vectored to 360 degrees for bandits at 25 miles. *Dutchboy* said that bandits were at 3,500 feet and immediately we began to descend from 20,000. At 2005, *Dutchboy* began giving vectors and distances. CAP was now closing on the bandit. We were about four miles over the water, directly west of prisoner-of-war camps 10 and 12. At this

point, we received another vector at 015 degrees, and, immediately over land, we received word that the bandit was in an orbit.

"We began orbiting to the right until *Dutchboy* gave a vector of 090 degrees. Turning to this heading, we started overland at 3,000 feet. Then we were told to vector 360 degrees. Upon turning to this heading, we awaited further instructions but all *Dutchboy* gave was that they had the bandit approximately one mile ahead but no altitude information. Upon hearing this, we opened speed brakes and let down to 600 feet. While in descent at 190 knots for 10 seconds, I made a visual on a biplane of the PO-2 type as it passed over a small lake or swampy area. The plane was at 10 o'clock and slightly below.

"I immediately turned into the aircraft which was at 200 feet altitude flying at about 100 knots, and fired at it at the same time, with no results observed. We passed just over him in a left-hand turn. I then went into a port-orbit search, but with no success. The time was then 2015. On returning from this area, we attacked eight trucks. One truck was destroyed. *Dutchboy* advised return to base. Landed at K-8."

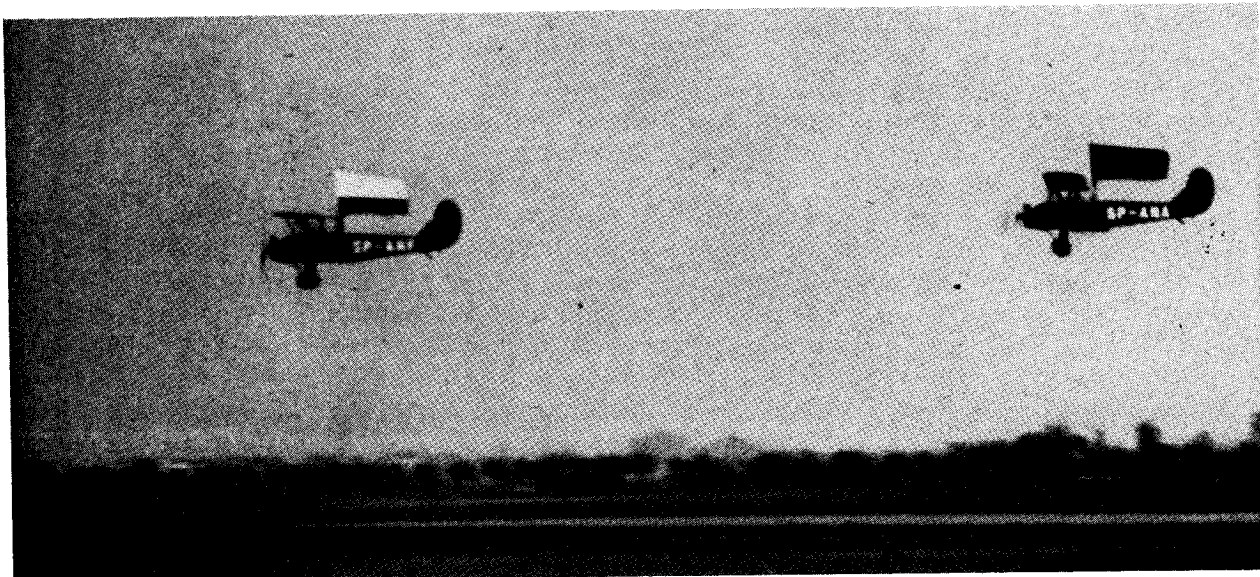
**Luck**—This was a busy night for the PO-2s. In another sector, six Red aircraft probably PO-2, dropped a total of five bombs on Chodo Island, in the fourth reported attack to date. Though no damage was reported, two F-94s and one F3D were

vectored into the area. While the F3D was promptly vectored onto a PO-2 and the pilot was able to establish contact, the PO-2s luck held and the F3D was unable to maneuver into firing position. The reason given was the low speed of the enemy aircraft.

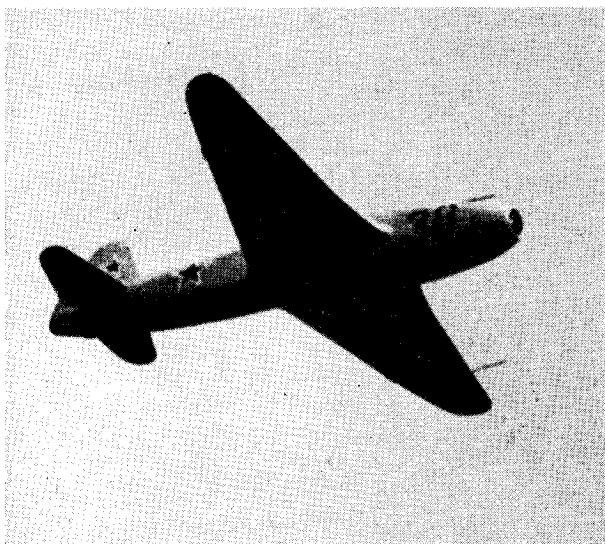
Better results were obtained the following month. An F3D *Skyknight* from VMF(N)513 cornered a PO-2 over the sea off the mouth of the Chongchon River and after one firing, the enemy aircraft was observed to be out of control. As a result of the night fighter's automatic radar-controlled gun fire, one of the PO-2s wings was shot off and the aircraft was last seen spinning into the water.

**Low and Slow**—Tail chases of these small biplanes are dangerous, and a number of mid-air collisions have been narrowly averted. In the PO-2, favorite roaming area around Chodo Island, F3Ds have been vectored onto PO-2s, overshot, re-vectored, and then have chased the elusive bats for more than 15 minutes without ever catching them.

During the period around the middle of December 1952, F-94 *Starfires* and F3D *Skyknights* roaming the northwest coast of Korea, made contact with ten Red aircraft, with one PO-2 claimed destroyed by an F3D. The low speed of the enemy in the other instances prevented efficient attacks. A new role for the PO-2 was the dropping of propaganda leaflets over the battle lines, and near Seoul



**LUMBERING** old PO-2 flies so low and slow on night raids in Korea that it's hard to find, hard to hit.



*YAK-15 jet fighter was hit in port wing, fuselage, and tailpipe by F3D before it spun down in flames.*

and Inchon on the western coast of Korea.

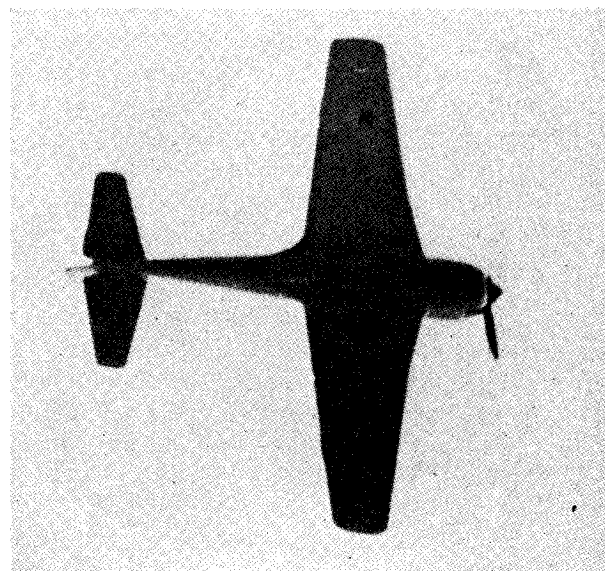
Another leaflet-dropping incident occurred when a US L-4 aircraft with white circles under each wing was reported to have dropped leaflets on elements of the US 3rd Division. After flying in from the north at an altitude of 1,000 feet, the aircraft was observed to bank sharply and make two drops.

The identification of this aircraft as an L-4 was not altogether surprising, because it developed that a second lieutenant from the South Korean Air Force had defected to North Korea in an L-19 aircraft on 3 December. A few days later, the Pyongyang Radio announced that the defecting pilot had surrendered and had been interviewed. Since he apparently made a good landing at an airfield near Haeju, it is probable that the plane was in good operational condition. During night operations, this aircraft could easily have been confused with the L-4. This was the second report of leaflet-dropping by the Reds. These leaflets were published in newspaper format and dealt with "Peace" and the troop-rotation policy of US frontline troops.

**Difficulties**—Ground return is a formidable obstacle in the tracking and shooting down of enemy aircraft, especially the small slow ones. A typical operation involved a F-94 *Starfire* on the night of the 6th of January 1953. The F-94 was vectored

to the enemy and made radar contact at 10,000 feet. Upon closing for the kill, the pilot lost contact because of ground return. After a brief search, the *Starfire* reestablished contact at a range of two and a half miles. The F-94 proceeded to close to a mile and a half, while descending to 5,000 feet, but ground return again prevented this pilot from maintaining contact.

**Jet vs. Jet**—A high point of the year 1952 for UN night fighters was marked by the engagement between a Marine F3D *Skyknight* and an enemy jet fighter identified as a YAK-15. The engagement occurred on the morning of 3 November when the *Skyknight* was vectored into radar and visible contact with the *Yak* jet. In the ensuing pursuit at around 12,000 feet, the F3D scored hits on the *Yak's*



*LA-9's have been knocked down at night by F-94's.*

port wing, fuselage, and tailpipe before it was sent spinning earthward. Three explosions were observed as the *Yak* crashed in flames.

The destruction of the YAK-15 jet was the first confirmed jet kill by a UN night fighter. Use of jet fighter aircraft at night was on the increase, for a few nights later an F3D was involved in another jet action. This time a MIG-15 was the prey. The action took place during the early morning of 8 November when a *Skyknight* from VMF (N) 513 located a MIG-15 at 12,500 feet. After a burst of fire from the F3D's guns, the *Mig's* tailpipe exploded amid a cloud of dense black smoke. A

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second explosion occurred when the aircraft hit the deck.

This action represented the first confirmed kill of a sweptwing MIG-15 jet fighter during a night engagement. A third unidentified single-engine jet aircraft was encountered and destroyed by a F3D somewhere in the vicinity of Pyongyang during the night of 15 January 1953.

**Searchlights**—Around the middle of January, the F3D's found the enemy evasive. Eight night sightings during the period from 15 through 21 January produced no kills. A new danger to UN night fighters was well-illustrated by the experience of a Marine F3D pilot on the night of 17 January 1953. The incident occurred about 20 miles northeast of Sinanju where a F3D contacted an enemy aircraft. Immediately after commencing a run on the enemy aircraft, the F3D was bracketed by 12 to 15 searchlights with accompanying antiaircraft gunfire. Since the F3D had to take prompt evasive action, the pilot lost contact with the enemy airplane.

During the following month, more uncomfortable experiences with searchlights were reported by UN pilots. On 7 February, one F3D was bracketed by four of them and then became involved in a veritable hornet's nest. As the *Skyknight* dived to evade the lights, its radar revealed an enemy airplane on its tail. After carrying out evasive

turns, the F3D pilot managed to lose the enemy and on immediately returning to his original course he was able to pick up the original contact. When within 6 miles of the bandit, however, he lost contact. The first contact was followed by another warning from the tail radar at approximately three miles at 22,000 feet. The enemy began closing rapidly, causing the F3D to pull away and break off the action.

Several propeller-driven aircraft were destroyed during the month of November, including a couple of LA-type fighters. These LA-9 or 11 were knocked down by F-94. A third propeller type was destroyed later by an F-94, but it could not be identified. A number of hostile flights were tracked by radar in the area below Pyongyang just before daylight on 30 January, and after unsuccessful attempts at contact were made by F-94s, the night fighters were called off at daybreak. F-86 *Sabres* were immediately vectored into the area and two of them caught the TU-2 flying low over water about 30 miles northwest of Chodo and destroyed it. This was the first confirmed sighting of a conventional type of enemy light bomber in many months. The TU-2 was probably the same aircraft tracked to the area northwest at Haeju 14 minutes before the light bomber was picked up by radar just north of Anak.

## FLYING CAR

**H**ERE'S SOMETHING else the helicopter can haul—a 1,500-pound all-wheel-drive vehicle to be carried into combat by the choppers. The new airborne car can hit an obstruction six inches high at 50 miles an hour without faltering.

Powered by an air-cooled engine, the lightweight vehicle can ford deep streams, is capable of negotiating any terrain a tank can handle, is so designed that it will slide off a hillside before it rolls over, and can push larger vehicles out when they bog down in the mud.

Evaluation tests for the Marine Corps have been run, and other services are expected to make evaluation checks also.

In addition to being light enough to permit hauling by helicopters, the vehicle can, itself, haul rocket launchers and recoilless rifles, lay communications wire, and act as an ambulance.