

Lords of the Rings



The Wright brothers' epochal 1903 Kitty Hawk flight produced a burst of aviation fever in Europe. One who succumbed was Marquis d'Ecqueville of France, a former Navy engineer who built one of the true oddities of early aviation. He is shown above, in a field in France in 1908, aboard a peculiar "multiplane." A four-wheel base supported two oval hoops, into which were fitted five pairs of half wings and one full wing. A seventh rested on top. Its 10-hp engine turned a propeller at 500 rpm. The pilot would hold on to wooden rings but had no flight controls, rudder, or brakes. The 17-foot tall, 308-pound aircraft never really flew. The same disappointing fate awaited the Geary Circular Triplane (right), a clear lineal descendant of d'Ecqueville's multiwing design. It was photographed on Long Island, N.Y., in August 1911.

