

PLANES OVER DARWIN.

MYSTERIOUS VISITS REPORTED

Several Circumstantial Stories.

DARWIN, Feb. 9.—Official inquiries today established beyond reasonable doubt that two unidentified planes, flying in high and fast from the Timor Sea and disappearing in a south-westerly direction, were seen and heard over Darwin during the last week. At 6 p.m. on Thursday, Messrs. P. Williams, an employee at the aerodrome, and P. Love, a wharf labourer, were standing near a hotel in the centre of the town when they saw a silver-grey machine pass high to the west of the town. The sound of the engines of the machine was heard by others. At 4.30 a.m. yesterday the foreman of the Darwin electric power station, Mr. Maurice Holtze, detected the sound of a high-powered machine passing over the power station and rusing outside saw a large plane disappearing in the south-west. The plane showed only one light and this was orange coloured.

The reports have caused great excitement in the town and a prominent citizen said today that he intended to open agitation for the immediate stationing of a Royal Australian Air Force squadron at Darwin. The reports are too authentic to be ignored and no registered Australian planes, Government, commercial or private, were within hundreds of miles of Darwin at the time the mysterious visi-

of Darwin at the time the mysterious visitors were observed.

About four months ago workmen engaged on the construction of the new water storage system at Manton Gap, about 40 miles from Darwin, reported that a fast monoplane passed overhead shortly after sundown. The machine carried no lights or marks. At the time this report was discredited but it was revealed today that a subsequent inquiry resulted in a lengthy report being forwarded to the defence authorities. The Manton Gap reservoir will be an essential part of the defence base in the course of construction at Darwin.

Unusual Sound Detector.

Few people were out of bed and the town was practically in darkness when Mr. Holtze observed the plane yesterday morning. It might easily have escaped notice but for the fact that its presence was betrayed in an unusual fashion by the exhaust note of the Diesel engine used at the power house. This engine develops about 1,000 revolutions at normal

speed and Mr. Holtze has observed that the presence of any other machine in the vicinity developing more or less than 1,000 revolutions is reflected clearly in the exhaust beat of the power house engine.

Yesterday morning Mr. Holtze was attending to the engine when he noticed a distinct change in the note of the exhaust. Accustomed to the departure of air mail planes from the local aerodrome at about 5 a.m. on three mornings of the week he at first paid little attention to the antics of his unofficial "sound detector." Then he realised suddenly that no machines were scheduled to leave Darwin on Tuesday morning. He rushed outside and saw a machine in the air.

"Believe me, there was no doubt about it being an aeroplane," said Mr. Holtze in an interview this morning. "My engine

in an interview this morning. "My engine tells no lies and I am positive that what I saw was an aeroplane. Darkness and the fact that the object was moving at a high speed made it impossible for me to get a good view of the machine, but it seemed to be a multi-engined monoplane."

Officials are of the opinion that it would be difficult to get a more reliable witness than Mr. Holtze. He holds a position of authority in the town and is most unlikely to be subject to flights of imagination. Mr. P. Williams, the aerodrome employee, who reported the presence of a strange plane on Thursday, said that he could secure a number of other witnesses if necessary. Coloured silver-grey and apparently high-powered, the machine was unmistakable.

Authorities Puzzled.

The authorities are at a loss to find an explanation for the visitors. It is difficult to imagine that foreign planes would run the risk of detection by flying so close to the town, but inquiries have revealed that no registered machines were within range of Darwin at the times the mystery planes were reported.

During the last three months, and particularly at the time when the Japanese fisheries training ship, *Hakuyo Maru*, was in Darwin, several residents have claimed to have seen mysterious lights over and near the town at night. The reports have been dismissed as being unfeasible, however, and their origin attributed to shooting stars. Recent long-distance flights by defence machines of various nations have proved that Darwin would be well within reach of foreign air Powers. At least two nations have bases near enough to send aircraft to Australia and back without refuelling. Palao, the Japanese pearling base in the Japanese Mandated Territory in the Pacific, is only 1,200 miles from Darwin.

In their endeavour to unravel the mystery the authorities have been interested

tery the authorities have been interested in a brief report received here of big defence manoeuvres at Singapore. This report stated that the forces would be divided and one side would defend an "imaginary continental State 1,200 miles south of Malaya." It has been suggested that Royal Air Force machines taking part in preparations for this manoeuvre might have strayed as far south as Darwin.

When the incoming Qantas mail plane left Darwin for Brisbane this morning a test was made of the sound detection capabilities of the power house Diesel engine, which Mr. Holtze claimed to have betrayed the presence of a strange plane yesterday. The Qantas plane left town on a somewhat similar course to the visitor and its presence could be plainly detected in the note of the Diesel engine's exhaust.
