

MYSTERY 'PLANES

Seen Over Darwin.

DISAPPEAR IN SOUTH-WEST.

DARWIN, February 10.

Official inquiries to-day 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 last week.

At 6 p.m. on Thursday, P. Williams, an employee at the aerodrome, and P. Love, a wharf laborer, 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, Maurice Holtze, detected the sound of a high-powered engine, and saw a large machine disappearing in the South-west. The 'plane showed only one light, and this was orange-colored.

The reports caused great excitement in the town. They are too authentic to be ignored, and no registered Australian 'planes—Government or private—were within hundreds of miles at the time.

Mysterious visitors were observed about four months ago. Workmen engaged on the construction of a new water storage at Manton Gap, about 40 miles from Darwin, reported 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 to-day the subsequent inquiry resulted in a lengthy report being forwarded to the defence authorities. Manton Gap Reservoir will be an essential part of the defence base in course of construction at Darwin. Few people were out of bed, and the town was practically in darkness when Holtze observed the 'plane yesterday morning. It might easily have escaped notice, but for the fact its presence was betrayed in romantic fashion by the exhaust note of the Diesel engine used at the power house.

This engine develops about 1000 revolutions at normal speed, and Holtze

observed 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. At 4.30 a.m. yesterday, he was attending 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 about 5 a.m. on three mornings in the week, he at first paid little attention to the antics of his unofficial sound detector. Then he realised suddenly 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 Holtze this morning. "My engine tells no lies and I am positive 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 a multi-engined monoplane."

Officials are of the opinion it will be difficult to get a more reliable witness than Holtze. Williams, the aero-

drome employee who reported the presence of a strange 'plane on Thursday, said today he could secure a number of other witnesses, if necessary. It was colored silver grey and apparently was a high-powered machine. No mistake could have been

apparently was a high-powered machine. No mistake could have been made.

The authorities are at a loss to find an explanation for the visitors. It is difficult to imagine foreign planes would run the risk of detection by flying so close to the town, but inquiries revealed 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 so-called "Japanese fisheries training ship" Hakuyo Maru was in Darwin, several residents 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 Darwin to be well within the reach of foreign air powers. At least two nations have bases near enough to send aircraft to Australia and back without refuelling. Palau, the Japanese pearling base in the Mandated Territory, is only 1200 miles from Darwin.

In their endeavor to unravel the mystery, the authorities have been interested in a brief report received here of the big defence manoeuvres at Singapore. This report stated the forces would be divided, and one side would defend an "imaginary Continental State 1200 miles South of Malaya." It has been suggested R.A.F. machines taking part in the 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 electric power house Diesel engine, which Holtze claimed to have betrayed the presence of a strange plane yesterday. The Qantas plane left town on a somewhat similar course, and its presence could be plainly detected in the note of the Diesel engine's exhaust.

CANBERRA, February 9

Inquiries will be made by the Minister for the Interior (Mr. J. McEwen) on the reports that strange planes had been seen over Darwin. Mr. C. L. A. Abbott will also be asked for a report.

No official advice has been received by the Government.