

MYSTERY PLANES

INTRIGUING REPORTS

Twice during the last week a mysterious plane, flying in high and fast from the Timor Sea and disappearing in a south-westerly direction, is believed to have been seen and heard over Darwin.

On Thursday, at 6 p.m., Messrs. P. Williams, employed at the aerodrome, and P. Love, a waterside worker, were standing near the Victoria Hotel when they saw a silvery-grey machine pass high to the west of the town. Others heard the sound of the machine's engines.

At 4.30 on Tuesday morning the engineer of the electric power station (Mr. M. G. Holtze) detected the sound of a high-powered ma-

chine passing over the power station. He rushed outside in time to see the light of plane disappearing in the south-west. The plane showed only one light, and this was orange in colour.

The reports have caused one prominent citizen to declare that he will open an agitation for the immediate stationing of a R.A.A.F. squadron in Darwin.

The reports are too authentic to be ignored, and no registered Australian aircraft—Government, commercial or private—were within a hundred miles of Darwin at the time the mysterious air prowlers were observed.

About four months ago workmen engaged at the new water storage site at Manton Gap reported that a fast monoplane had passed overhead

fast monoplane had passed overhead shortly after sundown. The machine carried no lights or identification marks. At the time this report was discredited, but it was revealed on Wednesday that the subsequent inquiry had 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.

The presence of the mysterious visitor on Tuesday morning might easily have escaped notice but for the fact that it was betrayed by the exhaust note of the Diesel engines used at the power house. The engines develop 1000 revolutions at normal speed, and Mr. Holtze has observed that the presence of any

other machine developing more or less revolutions is reflected clearly in the exhaust beat of the power house engines. At 4.30 he was attending one of the engines when he noticed a distinct change in the note of the exhaust. Accustomed to the departure of mail planes at 5 o'clock on three morning of the week he at first ignored the antics of his "sound detector." Suddenly realising that no machines were scheduled to leave Darwin that morning, he rushed outside and saw the light of an aeroplane moving fast towards the south-west. Mr. Holtze is certain it was an aeroplane. He said it was too dark to see the outline of the plane, but from the sound it appeared to be a twin-engined machine.

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Officials are of the opinion that it would be difficult to get a more reliable witness than Mr. Holtze as it was unlikely he would be subjected to imagination.

But it is also pointed out that recent long-distance flights by various nations shows that Darwin is within range of several foreign air Powers. As an illustration it might be mentioned that Palaou, the big Japanese pearling base in the mandated islands is only 1200 miles away. Planes could fly as far as Darwin and return without refuelling.

In an endeavour to unravel the apparent mystery it has been suggested that a big Eastern opium ring may be smuggling dope into Australia by air. Weight is also attached to the brief report that

large scale manoeuvres are planned at Singapore and a point 1200 miles south of Malaya will be "attacked." It is thought that in preparing for the manoeuvres planes may have strayed as far as Darwin. However, these theories are considered hardly reasonable.

Acting Superintendent of Police (Inspector J. C. Lovegrove) has reported to the Administrator that at 4.30 on Tuesday morning he heard a sound which appeared to be that of a multi-engined aeroplane. The time is identical to that when Mr. Holtze noticed the change in the note of the power house engine's exhaust.

Other residents report having seen, on various occasions, a strange light moving in the sky. Having no other explanation for the phenomena

other explanation for the phenomenon its origin has previously been

attributed to a shooting star.

The authorities, however, will not give full credence to the reports until a "ghost" plane has been actually produced.

Hoping to see the air prowlers two adventurous youths stayed up all Wednesday night, filling in time by fishing on the jetty. But the only plane they saw was the R.A. A.F. Gannet leaving for Singapore.

Interest in the reports was shown by the Chief of the Air Staff (Air Vice-Marshal R. Williams) who arrived in Darwin at noon on Wednesday in the Australian-built and designed Gannet. He left for Singapore yesterday morning to repre-

sent Australia at the official opening of the Singapore base graving dock. He said he could not express an opinion until full evidence had been placed before him. During his absence the Air Board would attend to the matter.

The Administrator has received inquiries from the Air Board at Melbourne and other Government departments asking for full details. He has asked the Civil Aviation Officer (Mr. A. R. Collins) to furnish all particulars immediately so that they can be forwarded to the A. R. Board. Police officers are interviewing all persons who claimed to have seen or heard the mystery plane.

When the south-bound plane left here on Wednesday morning a test was made of the sound detecting

was made of the sound detecting capabilities of the power house engines. The Qantas plane left in a somewhat similar course to that of the mystery plane, and its presence could be plainly detected in the note of the power house engine's exhaust.

If the Air Board attempts to discredit the reports it will undoubtedly point out that the police officer on duty on Monday night and Tuesday morning did not report any unusual sound. His entry in the journal shows he returned from town patrol at 4.20 a.m.

Though it may achieve nothing else, the "scare" will at least precipitate defence work at Darwin. Although this is considered one of the most important and strategic defence positions in Australia, it cannot boast of a single anti-aircraft

gun. Emplacements for this type of armaments were completed several months ago and tenders for constructional work on the R.A.A.F. base and aerodrome were called early last year. But nothing further has been done.