

subsequent investigation asked for and authorized. The allegation in the Press Association report that "the missing plane was discovered to-day at 8.40, a fact which was immediately known to Air Control, but no information was given until after the announcement by Mr. Nash in the House at 10.30 a.m." was incorrect, and the implication that the delay in releasing the information was part of "a system of almost wartime secrecy over reports from the scene of the air disaster was instituted to-day by the Air Department in Wellington" was misleading. Had the Press Association correspondent's telegram been checked, and his authority for his statement that Wellington was responsible on investigation been found to have been based on his interpretation of a telephone conversation with Flight Lieutenant Jacobsen, Officer in Charge, Karioi Airfield, I think it unlikely subsequent press comments alleging secrecy and misleading information would have been indulged in, and adverse comment, if any, been more restrained and temperate.

It is necessary, however, to inquire whether, from the Air Department or other authority in Wellington, instructions went up to the centres from which the ground operations were organized and conducted by the police and Army, to place restrictions on the activities of reporters in their efforts to obtain information for their papers. Although ground operations were not directed by the Air Department, aircraft could, and did, assist ground operations in many ways, and the part they played is again disclosed by log-book entries.

While I set out the entries I think relevant to this inquiry primarily to see whether they disclose instructions from Wellington designed to place restrictions on reporters in their endeavour to obtain news, I think they are also of some value in providing an aspect of some part of the activities in progress at the centres, which, in combination with police and Army activities, could readily create an atmosphere in which friction and misunderstanding might well develop between parties whose objectives were entirely different—that is, search workers engaged in difficult and somewhat harrowing work, and reporters who wanted a story from them. That such friction as arose was due to one set only is not suggested, and counsel for the Crown put it that it was likely that there was fault of manner on both sides, and this may be the case. The importance of such incidents as occurred may easily but not justifiably be magnified to an extent that would justify a statement that authority had thrown a blanket over all information coming from the scene of the disaster. They have therefore to be carefully weighed in the light of the circumstances and conditions under which they arose.

The log entries after the wreckage sighted on Ruapehu had been identified at 1010 are as follows:—

Hours.

- 1043 Karioi contacted by radio telephone. Requested actual details from pilot of Auster when aircraft lands. Requested estimated time of arrival and that other Austers be despatched to look for survivors. Radio telephone channel will be held open until Auster lands.
- 1048 Wing Commander Kean called from Karioi and was advised of all details to date.
- 1053 Established contact with Karioi again and advised them that we would keep the radio telephone channel open until there is no further news. Advised them the other two Austers may go to the scene of the crash.
- 1057 Palmerston North advised that C47 ZK-AQT will be leaving Palmerston at 1115 with official National Airways Corporation party.
- 1100 Information Section of Prime Minister's Department rang and were given all details to date.
- 1103 Dominic 524 airborne Ohakea for Ruapehu area.
- 1104 Mr. Rawnsley, Wellington Aero Club, rang. He wishes to proceed to position of crash with *Evening Post* photographer.
- 1104 Contacted Flying Officer Horton at Karioi by radio telephone. Requested details:—
 - (1) There is no sign of life.
 - (2) The aircraft is completely wrecked.
 - (3) The only recognizable portion of the aircraft is the compound tail unit.
 - (4) The aircraft is not burnt out.