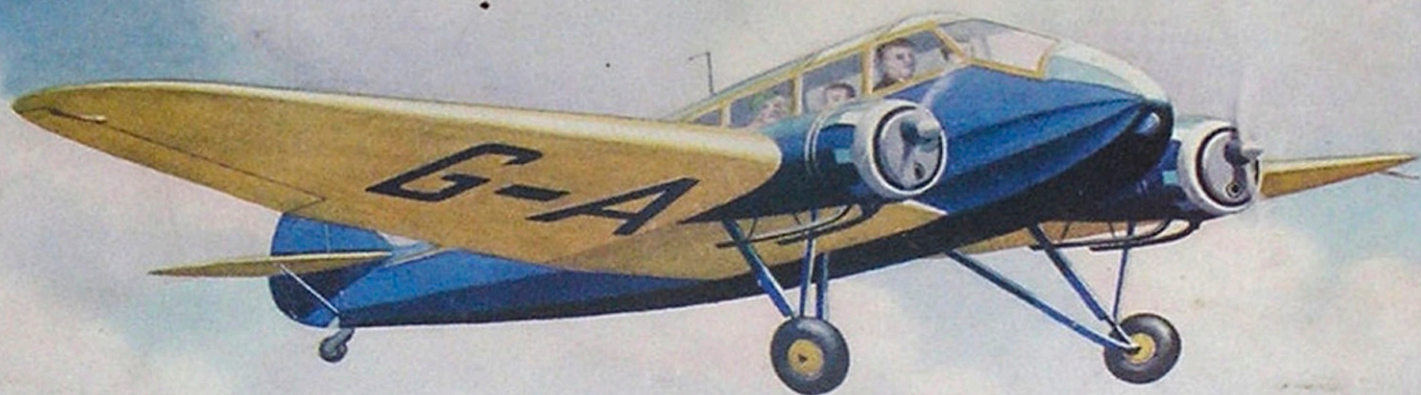


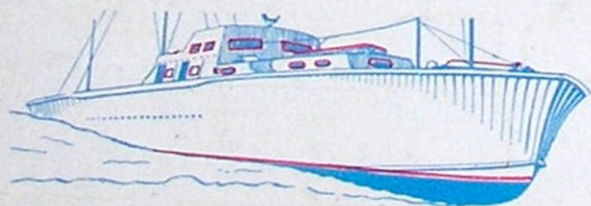
POPULAR FLYING 6^D

MARCH, 1936

THE NATIONAL AVIATION PAPER



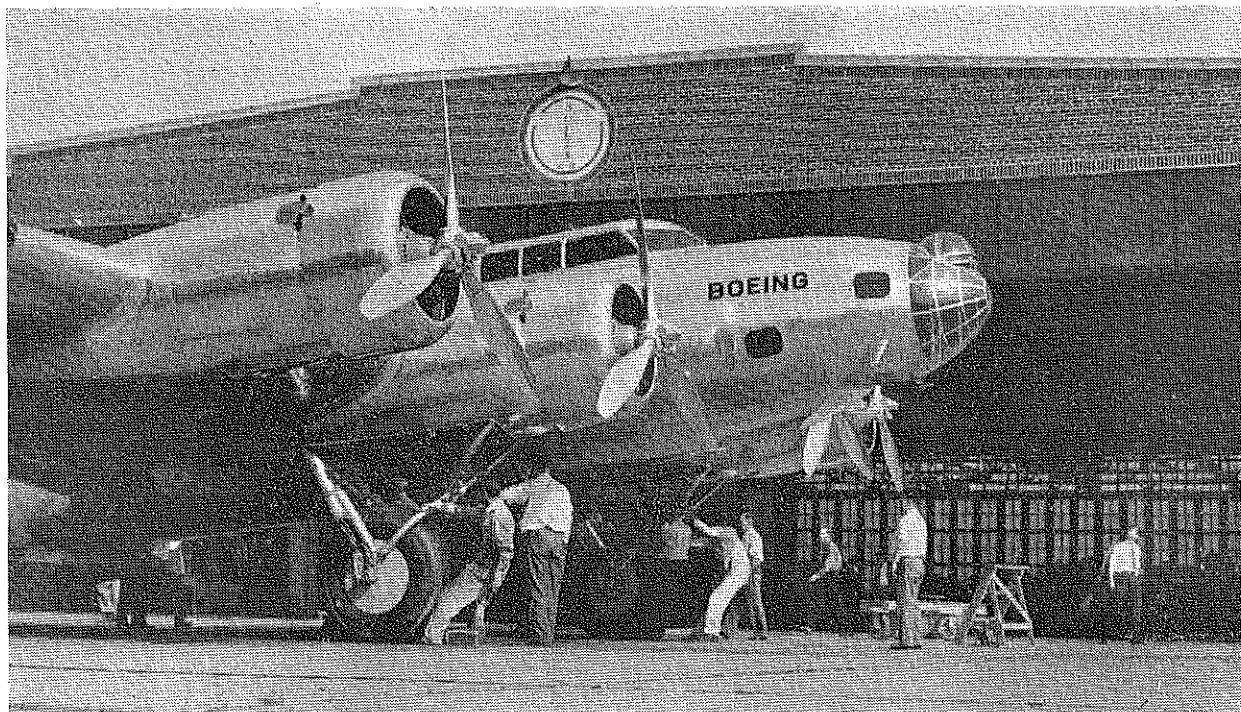
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Asserted to be the World's Fastest and Longest Range Bomber. The Boeing 299 bomber, America's largest landplane, which has been undergoing test flights at Seattle before being submitted to the United States Air Corps in open competition with other types at Dayton, Ohio. Here is a close-up, showing its four 700 h.p. "Hornet" engines. Completed after more than a year of secret work, the 299 is of the all-metal mid-wing type with air brakes, two-way radio telephone, a radio homing device, an automatic pilot and new armament installations.

SABOTAGE IN THE BLUE?

Although some months have now elapsed since Pilot A. H. Skaer, Junr., disappeared into the blue whilst testing a new \$100,000 Northrop fighting aeroplane, nothing has been heard of either pilot or machine, so presumably the story will go down on the long list of air mysteries. We asked our American correspondent to get the facts for us, and the following is what he says—after explaining in a letter that everyone concerned with the affair has had orders to remain mum.

By **ALFRED CELLIER**

WITHIN the last few months a mysterious series of accidents have befallen new American experimental military aeroplanes. Commercial aircraft constructed by these same companies seem not to have been affected by similar occurrences and all investigations point strongly to sabotage. Whether the result of this may be the work of agents in the employment of foreign powers or the work of communists remains to be solved, for as yet the American Government has not made known its findings.

One well-known fact is that important aviation centres in the United States are virtually overrun by these agents who, in the most open manner, flock to witness test flights of such new machines; in fact they scarcely bother to hide their real intentions.

To offset this new menace the aircraft factories are well guarded, and it is an utter impossibility for other than workmen to enter such plants. Yet, in spite of all these precautions, when a new machine is rolled out on to the flying field for its test flight it becomes the focus of many prying eyes. That alone could never

wreck new aeroplanes, but it is very evident that these agents or communists have penetrated right into the factories so that they may be more able to accomplish their ghoulish work.

To those unacquainted with the vast technical achievements that American aviation has undergone during the past year, it may seem like a bogey story to speak of spy scares. Nevertheless, these agents have filtered into the country, some bearing imposing documents from their governments, others with plenty of money to spend for the information and still others in the guise of workmen. It is these latter that are extremely difficult to cope with.

Intelligence officers of the Navy recently upset one of the most brazen attempts of an Oriental power to steal information on the performance and construction of American military aircraft, in spite of the fact that members of this particular race are not allowed to be employed by those firms holding government contracts.

Others have come in many legitimate commercial guises and still others with their consular officials.

Where it has been necessary to escort these distinguished visitors through the various aircraft manufacturing plants, practically everything that they passed on their tours would be covered up with canvas.

The first blow struck by such agents occurred on August 1st. On that day Lieutenant Arthur H. Skaer, Jr., a most able and trustworthy reserve officer and who was test pilot for the Northrop Company, disappeared on a test flight. The machine which he was testing, constructed at the cost of \$100,000, was a new pursuit plane especially constructed for the Army and reputed to be the fastest ever made. It is known that this ship embodied many new features and it was zealously guarded prior to its take-off. It is generally said that Lieutenant Skaer's instructions were to stay within gliding distance of the airport, yet he and his craft vanished into the mist which prevailed that day without ever a trace to be found.

The Los Angeles Airport, which adjoins the Northrop plant, is located near the ocean. When it became evident that some disaster had befallen Lieutenant Skaer in this crack pursuit ship, the Army Air Corps immediately dispatched more than a dozen planes from outlying fields in an extensive effort to help locate the craft and to keep its new features a secret. Meanwhile the Northrop Company posted a large reward for any information as to its location.

Aiding in the search, two coast-guard cutters combed the shoreline, when reports from Army amphibians stated that there were two large spots of oil lying on the water off Point San Vicente. A search of the ocean floor failed to give up any signs of the wreckage and the Army aircraft then turned their attention towards the Mexican border in the belief that somehow the machine might have been spirited across.

What caused this new aeroplane to so completely disappear into the blue without leaving any trace may for ever remain a mystery. The spy angle, though, was played up in the newspapers and the events which followed leave a lot to the imagination.

When the latest Northrop dive-bomber was recently

completed for the Navy and underwent and passed its trials successfully, an armed Navy fighting plane accompanied it on all its tests in order to prevent a recurrence of the other tragic act.

Second of the accidents took place on September 13th, and the investigation which followed bore out some startling facts. The Hughes pursuit plane was being test-hopped by Mr. Howard Hughes, well known as the movie producer of "Hell's Angels." He had taken it off from the Burbank Airport, which his factory adjoins, and had attained a speed of 365 miles an hour while over Santa Ana when the engine suddenly stopped.

A most experienced pilot, Mr. Hughes was faced with landing his craft at a hundred miles an hour. This he accomplished with the wheels retracted and the machine came to rest in a rough beet field with little damage.

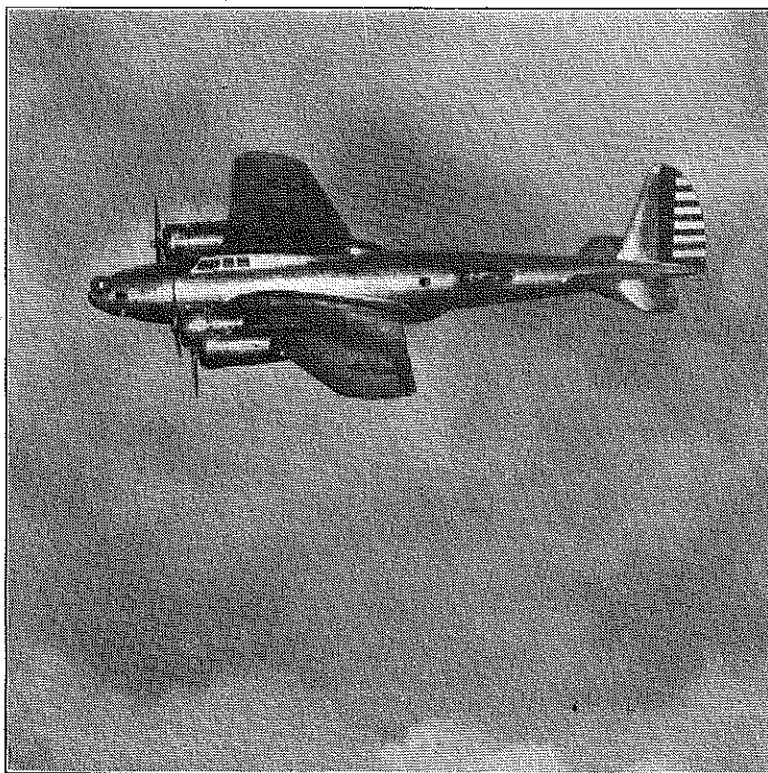
The investigation of the engine stoppage of the Hughes craft bore out the first of the most startling facts. Steel wool had been purposely placed between the valve and the valve core, stopping the petrol flow from the tanks to the motor. There were still thirty-four gallons of petrol in the tanks and later, when the steel wool was removed, the engine was started up again and ran like a top. This news exploded like a bombshell and immediately suggested what might have caused the disaster to the Northrop.

The strange part is how this act of sabotage was accomplished. The Hughes pursuit had been guarded day and night and as the factory is small, this being their first machine, Mr. Hughes could vouch for each of his workmen.

The third accident occurred with the new Vultee attack-bomber, a three-seater all-metal single-engine low-wing monoplane with a retractable landing gear. T. C. Van Stone, the test pilot, and Dugald L. Blue,

a project engineer, were the victims. The Vultee had just taken off from the Glendale Airport when the engine suddenly quit. Pilot Van Stone attempted to steer the ship to clear some high-tension wires, but the

(Continued on page 680)



Setting New Performance Standards for Large Capacity Aircraft.—A first flight photo of the Boeing 299, giant four-engined "flying fortress," which chalked up what was believed to be a new non-stop speed-distance record when it flew the 2,100 miles from Seattle to Dayton, Ohio, in nine hours and three minutes at an average speed of 232 miles an hour. Chief Test Pilot Leslie R. Tower was quoted as saying he used only sixty-three per cent. of the plane's approximately 3,000 horse-power, declaring the flight was of a routine nature without any attempt to set a speed mark. Subsequently the machine crashed in mysterious circumstances, killing the pilot, as described in this article.

SABOTAGE IN THE BLUE?

(Continued from page 653)

monoplane crashed to the ground, a tangled mass of wreckage.

This particular aeroplane was built for the Chinese Government, but abided by Army Air Corps specifications in the hope that the American Government would also place orders for quantities of them.

The fourth accident, on October 30th, found death again riding with the occupants. The huge Boeing bomber, built at the cost of \$500,000, which had successfully made a record non-stop flight from the factory at Seattle to the Army test field at Dayton, Ohio, was the victim. This machine, powered with four Hornet engines and equipped to carry fifteen 1,000-pound bombs, was a veritable flying fortress. It attained the speed of 275 miles an hour, had five machine-gun turrets and was the largest land military craft to be built in America. This ship was also under constant guard previous to its tests.

As the Boeing bomber started to take off, onlookers were startled to see both left motors hesitate and at only two hundred feet off the ground both the right motors pulled the ship around in a 180-degree turn. The left wing then dipped and the machine crashed to earth and immediately was enveloped in flames.

Rescuers were shortly on hand and succeeded in pulling out the victims. Major P. P. Hill, chief of the flying section at Wright Field was dead, while Leslie Towers, the Boeing test pilot, was fatally injured. Three Lieutenants, Donald L. Tutt, John Cutting and Mark Googler, were badly injured.

An Army board of inquiry began investigation and recently announced that the accident "was not occasioned by the failure of any of the four engines." Yet it is definitely known that this accident did not result from any structural failure of the machine, and that the Air Corps highly prized it. This leaves the question open: Was steel wool also placed in the petrol valves of both left engines for the express purpose of crashing aeroplanes? If so, the Army Air Corps has not as yet made any further statements.

Now one or two engine failures might be a coincidence, but those occurring to four such experimental aeroplanes could only mean one thing—sabotage, an ugly word. It is true that no "official" confirmation of steel wool being the cause of each of these accidents can be obtained, as the aircraft manufacturers refer you to the Army and the Army is reluctant to give any information about the whole business.

Whether this series of tragic events was the work of "Reds" or "foreign agents," what is to prevent similar occurrences from happening in the British aircraft industry? With the whole world close to war again, and England right in the middle of the boiling pot, a warning of precaution has been sounded.

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UNDER THE WINDSTOCKING

(Continued from page 676)

"I'd think you'd gone mad!"

"No, there's a reason. I need some more films for my camera but I daren't put it in a letter that's going through the censor. The only time Mrs. Eyles has been to 'Boots' with me was to get films, so if I ask her to get 'Boots,' do you think she'll understand?"

So it was that Mick received real boots until, in desperation, he wrote to Eyles (as quoted in "King of Air Fighters"), "Mrs. E's parcel came to hand. Thank her for me, only tell her to send me anything but what I ask!"

McSCOTCH.

* * * * *

Readers' Notices.

An attempt to form a model aeroplane club in N. Wales. Information from J. A. Sanders, Pwll Glas Farm, Mold, N. Wales.

Christine O'Connell Hayes, 1, Temple Terrace, Colliemore Road, Dalkey, would like to exchange air labels and correspondence with girl readers overseas.

Wm. Griffiths, M.V. "Calgarolite," 56, Church Street, Toronto, Canada, would like to exchange airpost stamps, photos of airplanes and pilots, "Etiquettes," also jubilee stamps, with serious collectors everywhere.

* * * * *

Replies in Brief.

J. T. V. Yes, of course, the date of Capt. Ball's death was May, 1917. Sorry.

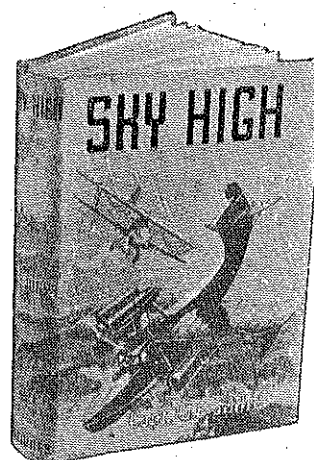
N. R. Re Warneford. No, we have never heard of any relationship.

SKY HIGH

Captain W. E. JOHNS

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