

Minister's Department in Wellington" he only inferred from the telephone conversation he heard Constable Phillips engaged in. I am anxious not to be unjust to Wall. It has been essential to inquire the source and extent of the knowledge he had before him when he sent his Press Association message. I thought his evidence in chief unsatisfactory, and it was not till cross-examined it appeared that a great part of the information he relied upon he attributed to conversation with Flight Lieutenant Jacobsen. Indeed, not till pressed could he remember who it was that gave him the information. I have already indicated that his statement that it was known to the authorities at 8.40 that the location of the plane was discovered was a mis-statement of fact. To questions put to Wall as to whether he considered certain criticism in the press warranted, he replied that that was comment and not his affair, but the plain implication of his own words is that authorities in Wellington had deliberately imposed a plan to delay, withhold, and obstruct information to the press. The press itself, as shown by subsequent criticism, treated the message as involving this implication. I set out the wording of the telegram which was subsequently published:—

System of almost wartime secrecy over reports from scene of air disaster was instituted to-day by Air Department Wellington on instructions it was stated from Prime Minister's Department (stop) Earlier in week when midst publicity was wanted to get information Air Force and police personnel were free to offer press fullest co-operation in way of information (stop) To-day when Press Association representative called at Karioi landing-ground he was informed that as from this morning instructions had been issued by Air Department Wellington that all press representatives were to be excluded from ground and no information given them (stop) Any information it was stated would be issued through Publicity Section, Prime Minister's Department (stop) Karioi landing-ground is public landing-ground used by Ruapehu Aero Club and taken over during war for Air Force use (stop) The missing plane was discovered to-day at 8.40 fact which was immediately known to Air Control but no information was given until after announcement by Nash in House at 10.30 a.m. (stop) At 11 a.m. National Broadcasting Service repeated announcement and added that ground party had left when in fact it did not leave until 2 p.m. this afternoon (stop) Similarly to-night broadcast of progress report made on ground party and establishment of second party at Blyth Hut which is miles from scene of crash and when in fact no party has left for Blyth Hut up to midnight (stop) Instructions were also issued to police personnel from Wellington to-night that no information relating to to-morrow's activities was to be given except direct to Prime Minister's Department Wellington. End.

Mr. Wall said that before sending the message he checked it. His checking, however, consisted, as far as could be ascertained, merely in rereading it. In my opinion, Mr. Wall was reckless in making the charges he did. The charges were grave and, in my opinion, on the evidence, entirely unwarranted.

I pass now to the individual complaints of pressmen that information was withheld from them, and they were prevented getting news after information that the plane had been located was made public through the Acting Prime Minister's statement in Parliament at about 10.45 a.m.

The so-called incidents that occurred in the course of ground operations were fortuitous and the significance and construction to be placed on them can only be properly estimated when they cease to be regarded as steps in a preconceived plan and as evidence consistent with the design of a plan conceived in Wellington. I think it true, as stated by counsel for the Crown, that the different outlook of a body of men whose object was to obtain news and the outlook of those men, consisting of Service personnel and volunteers, who organized and undertook the strenuous task of reaching the plane and bringing back the bodies of the victims of the disaster was likely to provoke a certain degree of friction and indeed unpleasantness. One reporter only volunteered to go with a search party to the plane and assist as a carrier in bringing back bodies. None of the reporters who were present when a call was made for those willing to go forward and provide relief for some of these tired men came forward as volunteers, and I think that if reporters had volunteered for this service they would have obtained all the material and atmosphere they required for their stories, and friction would not have arisen.