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CAPE TOWN SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 22 1979

Battle of Simonstown



Navy Says Alarm Real, Roaring Guns Over Simonstown, Identity of Aircraft Veiled in Mystery

CAPE TOWN. - Overshadowing a nation-wide maelstrom of rumors and conflicting reports, the South African Defense Force insisted that Simonstown early morning anti-aircraft action were the result of unidentified aircraft sighted heading over the town. In two official statements, the commander of Simonstown Naval Base, Commodore Dieter Gerhardt confirmed the presence of unidentified objects. Relayed by the Defense Force Headquarters in Pretoria, the second statement read: "The aircraft which caused the disruption this morning has not been identified."

stories of the episode. The spectacular anti-aircraft barrage came when strange craft were reported over the coastline. Powerful searchlights from the Naval base gun stations stabbed the sky with brilliant probing fingers while anti-aircraft batteries dotted the heavens with beautiful, if sinister, orange bursts of shrapnel. While the barrage lasted from approximately 3:00 this morning till around 3:20, no airplanes were shot down. Two persons were wounded by friendly shrapnel falling back on the town.

Panic in Simon's Town

Explosions stabbing the darkness like tiny bursting stars... Searchlight beams poking long crisscross fingers across the night sky. The brief on-and-off flick of lights, telephone calls, snatches of conversation: 'Get the

dirty...' That was Simonstown under the rumble of gunfire last night.

Residents awakened

Sleepy householders awoke to the dull thud of explosions... "Thunder? Can't be!" Then: "Air Raid! Come here quick! Look over there...those searchlights. They've got something... they are blasting in with anti-aircraft!" Father, mother, children all gathered on the front porch, congregated in small clusters in the blacked out streets -- against orders. Babies cried, dogs barked, doors slammed. But the object in the sky slowly moved on, caught in the center of the lights like the hub of a bicycle wheel surrounded by gleaming spokes.

Speculation rife

Speculation fell like rain. "It's a

whole squadron." "No, it's a blimp. It must be because it's moving so slowly." "I hear planes." "No you don't. That's a truck up the street." "Where are the planes then?" "Dunno. They must be up there though." "Wonder why they picked such a clear night for a raid?" "They're probably from a carrier." "Naw, I'll bet they are from a secret air base up north somewhere." Still the firing continued. Like lethal firecrackers, the anti-aircraft rounds blasted above, below, seemingly right on the target fixed in the tenacious beams. Other shots fell short, exploding halfway up the long climb. Tracers sparked upward like roman candles. Metal fell. It fell in chunks, large and small; not enemy metal, but the whistling fragments of bursting shells. The menacing thud and clank on streets and roof tops drove many spectators to shelter.

Watchers shiver

The fire seemed to burst in rings all around the target. But the eager watchers, shivering in the early morning cold, weren't rewarded by the sight of a falling plane. Nor were there any bombs dropped. "Maybe it's just a test," someone remarked. "Test, hell!" was the answer. "You don't throw that much metal in the air unless you're fixing on knocking something down." Still the firing continued, muttering angrily off behind the mountain like a distant thunderstorm. The targeted object inched along high, flanked by the cherry red explosions. And the householders shivered in their robes, their faces set, watching the awesome scene.

Report from the Navy: see page 3

Rhodie trial begins see p2
Barbarians may play behind closed doors see Sport

Koeberg dilemma

Cracks detected in French nuclear reactor materials

JOHANNESBURG. - Cracks have been discovered in nuclear reactor materials in France similar to those being used in South Africa's first nuclear power station at Koeberg in the Cape.

Dr J W L de Villiers, president of South Africa's Atomic Energy Board, refused to comment today on whether this would hold up the building of Koeberg. He said the board would seek information on the cracks from the French engineers building the Cape power station.

Nuclear industry union leaders in France say the cracks could lead to a disaster worse than the accident leak at Three Mile Island in America last March. They told a press conference in Paris yesterday they had found major defects in the steel alloy used in the construction of French nuclear reactors.

we get these reports we will certainly look at them carefully before making any decisions," he said.

Checks

The leaders have urged the French Government to stop three new nuclear power stations from going into operation until all necessary checks have been made.

They threatened a strike unless the authorities give them a satisfactory answer soon. Dr de Villiers said today, 'We get reports on all matters concerning nuclear reactors and when

we get these reports we will certainly look at them carefully before making any decisions,' he said.

Corrosion

The union officials told the Press the cracks were found during the construction of a pressurised water reactor at the Framatome works in the Creusot-Loire engineering company. (Framatome is one of the four French companies supplying South Africa with nuclear parts)

The cracks 5 mm to 6 mm wide and 6 mm deep were on the steam generating vessels and tubes of the reactor and had been caused by corrosion.

Dr de Villiers said regular inspections were done on steam generators in South Africa.

'These tubes and vessels are sometimes found to have cracks, caused by corrosion.

'These are normal operating defects, which is why we do the checks.

'If these cracks which have been found are of the nature we suspect, in the steam generators, then it is nonsense to say an accident like Three Mile Island can be caused by them.'

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