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Our American

Correspondent Reports ...

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HE calculated "leak" of confidential information, care-
fully designed to embarrass an opponent in international
or domestic negotiation, is a potent weapon. As long
as such leaks remain within the U.S. domestic field (and that is quite often), it is not within the province of a foreign correspondent to enter the fray. But when British develop-ments are the subject of both attack and innuendo by such a method, comment is warranted. A recent article in the usually reliable Wall Street Journal raises such a case.
On Thursday, December nth, the newspaper had a front-page article by a staff reporter, date-lined from Washington, and headed "Warplane Snafu" and "British Engine Brings Woe." (It was doubly unfortunate that this first page had been chosen as the subject-matter for an advertisement that appeared in one of the big New York dailies, thereby, no doubt, adding thousands of readers.) After a bitter attack on the alleged production-lags for the U.S.A.F. generally, the article went on to suggest that these delays stemmed from "three main areas, the British-designed J-65 Sapphire engine . . . the Northrop F-89 . . . and the new Republic F-84F. Thunderstreak." The article continued :—

"The Sapphire is the No. 1 headache. Supposed to be about 50 per cent more powerful than the jets now used in first-line U.S. military planes, the engine was designed by Armstrong-Siddeley of England, who sold the American rights to Curtiss-Wright Corporation. Curtiss-Wright, in turn, licensed Buick Division of General Motors Corp. to produce it.
"Although Buick delivered the first prototype Sapphire to the Air Force last September 22, the power plant has yet to pass the 150-hour operational test required by the Air Force. The latest of a long series of bugs is a tendency of aluminium alloy blades used in the engine to 'curl up' at high speeds, it's been learned. "Despite this not-so-slight imperfection, Buick is now begin-ning to run out Sapphires in volume. Groans one production man : 'The Air Force has to accept them because planes coming off assembly lines are waiting for them.'
"But he adds : 'The engines are red-lined.' That's Air Force gobbledygook for limiting speed. 'The Sapphires can put out enough power to taxi the planes, and even get them off the ground,' he explains. 'But that's about all.'
"Eventually, when designers have evolved a suitable steel blade, all these engines will have to be modified. That will take time. Still more will be consumed while machines to make the new blades are installed on the assembly lines.
"This bug is just the latest in a long series of Sapphire troubles to plague the Air Force. The job of translating from English to U.S. specifications proved formidable; in fact, the American producers have had to do a lot of re-designing. 'The English aim,' grumbles one engineer, 'seems to be to design an engine that can't possibly be massproduced.'
"This raises the question in the minds of some critics—and some Air Force people, too—whether 'that blank-blank engine' is worth the trouble at all. Whatever the answer, the Air Force is now stuck with it."

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""TO English eyes the foregoing will appear incredibly irresponsible. Even allowing for the fact that the reporter
in question was apparently being fed slanted information (and he may have been too ignorant of aviation matters to realize it), he seems to have rushed into print rather than check the full facts of the case for himself. For instance, if he, or his paper, had contacted responsible officials in Government or industry about the Sapphire, he might have learnt the true position with regard to the steel-blade situa-tion. He could have been put straight on the actual trouble experienced and could have found out that, far from "when designers have evolved a suitable blade," a suitable steel

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blade had already been designed in England and had be

type-tested to over 8,000 lb thrust early in 1952. Furthermore, he would have been told that details were immediate

sent to the States and that such blades are now becomi

available here and, indeed, would probably have been introduced earlier if the mass-production methods employed ha

allowed.

It is always difficult to get behind the scenes in such a situation as this. One cannot know the true reasons; wheth the attack is against the engine or against the policy whic causes it to be built here; whether the main objective is th U.S.A.F. or some directive they are following; or whether it is part of a subterranean war between two Governmen

departments where the bystanders also get hurt. It is imposible to say for sure, but in all probability this article was
inspired from inside a Government agency, and may hav been designed to aid a recently propounded but failing policy aimed at reducing the types of engines and aircraf now in production in order to concentrate on a few chose fortunates, a policy which was rejected by the Air Force and Navy as limiting and impractical. Whatever the cause however, the harm has been done—not only to the Britis products which figured in the story, but to American interests as well.
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AS was to be expected, the U.S.A.F. reaction was imme " ^ diate, though it consisted of what seemed to be an onl mildly effective Press conference, during the course of which

the Air Force Under-Secretary denied some of the accusations and tried to put the others back into perspective. Hi
statements were fairly widely quoted, although the offending newspaper treated them with some disdain and, by it handling, implied that, although denials were being made they weren't supported by facts. The Curtiss-Wright Corporation also issued a statement, rather a mild one i the circumstances, in which they pointed out that the J-65 was already operational in the flight tests of the Republic Thunderstreak, and that such attempts to discredit aircra production here "could interfere seriously in the defence o the United States." Unfortunately, nobody, anyhow so far has thought fit to mention that the Sapphire is in production in the United Kingdom, that it has passed its type-tests a powers which may well be as great as those of any engin type-tested here in America, and that its overall running-time both on the bench and in the air must surely be in excess of 10,000 hours. [The figure at Christmas was 10,23 hours total, of which over 8,000 were bench running, some 1,500 in flight, and an additional 600 represented ground running and ground tests in airframes.—Ed.]

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TT is such inadequate defences as these that raise importa -*- questions of policy. For at the present time (or so it seems to this correspondent) it is very necessary both from commercia' and from military and political viewpoints to

ensure that British developments are presented to the Amercan public in proper perspective and with a reasonable
degree of accuracy. In the past there has been a school thought that has counselled silence when misrepresentation about British efforts have been written or spoken. In smal

things this is probably wise advice—but it seems questionable whether, under major attack, we should not reconside
the situation. Unfortunately, in any case of this kind, a denial or correction can seldom catch up with the origina damaging statement.

This being so, could not some action be taken to presen the British position with sufficient clarity on a day-to-day basis to prevent the accusation in the first place ? If so, wh is to do it ? And how ? As far as the writer knows there is no official body in the States looking after the reputation of the British aircraft industry. Presumably the British infor-mation services, both in New York and Washington, can and do take cognizance of matters such as that reported here but they are not technical bodies, and would find it hard to do much in the way of constant education of the Press an public. One or two of the larger British manufacturers have actual U.S. representatives here who would undoubtedl fight their firm's battle if the occasion arose, but they canno