

FROM WHERE I SIT

By A. E. CAHLAN

You hear much about Las Vegas being a focal point for subversive activities. The community is supposed to have more than its share of Fifth Columnists. Popular belief is that Boulder Dam is of sufficient strategic value to attract important alien agents here to plan its destruction.

I'm not so sure I haven't subscribed to that viewpoint on occasion. For the premise is substantially based, when you consider the fact that most of the nation's larger aviation factories are located in Southern California and are powered with electrical energy from Boulder Dam.

It would be the power houses, of course, toward which any subversive attack would be directed. This, on the theory, that by putting them out of commission, the great southern California industrial area would be severely crippled, and vital airplane production impeded if not halted entirely.

The more you analyze this situation, however, the more fantastic it becomes. True, Boulder Dam is pouring millions of kilowatts into southern California factories daily. It is the chief source of cheap power for the entire metropolitan district. But—the output is matched in standby steam plants scattered over a wide area, ready with very little delay, to swing onto the line and pick up the load.

More than that, the southern power distributing concerns are interconnected with northern California utilities which, in an emergency could feed surplus power to the factories and, finally, there is enough electricity being used in Los Angeles unnecessarily to power all the vital war industries, which is to say, Los Angeles could get along without a considerable portion of its present consumption without seriously affecting production.

SO—the popular theory that by destroying, or crippling the Boulder Dam power plant, foreign agents could seriously cripple Uncle Sam's war industries, may not be so tenable after all.

As for blasting holes in the dam itself, sufficiently large to drain the lake—that has long since been reasoned out of the picture. In the first place, concrete structures are not easily destroyed. And in the second, there's no way any sufficient charge of explosives could be set off on or in the structure. Detection is too simple.

Attack from the air is next to impossible. The terrain is such as to preclude low flying, and from 10,000 feet the dam presents only a pin-point target. Even from low altitudes, bombs would be ineffective because of the design of the structure.

"Enemy airplanes might chip off a few chunks of concrete, but could do no real damage to the dam itself," is the way Frank Crowe, who built the dam expressed it. He admits the power houses are vulnerable, to a direct hit, but points out that such would be a remote possibility from the air, rather fantastic to conceive from within.

And suppose a hole **COULD** be blasted in the dam sufficiently large to let impounded water thru. The Colorado River has carried sizeable floods in other years without serious damage and could probably carry any such load that could be conceivably forced upon its channel.

An even if the dam could be destroyed in two or three hour's time (which it couldn't) the damage done by rampaging waters thus loosed would **NOT** have a noticeable effect on national welfare in the least. Imperial Valley, of course, would be wiped out. But residents would have ample time to escape. The measure of the disaster would be entirely in dollars and nothing more.

All of which adds up to this: Boulder Dam as an object of saboteurs has been vastly over-estimated. It is a very welcome adjunct to industry and agriculture in the southern California area, but it is neither vital nor indispensable. Undoubtedly any Fifth Columnists can figure that out as well as we can. There's really nothing to worry about.