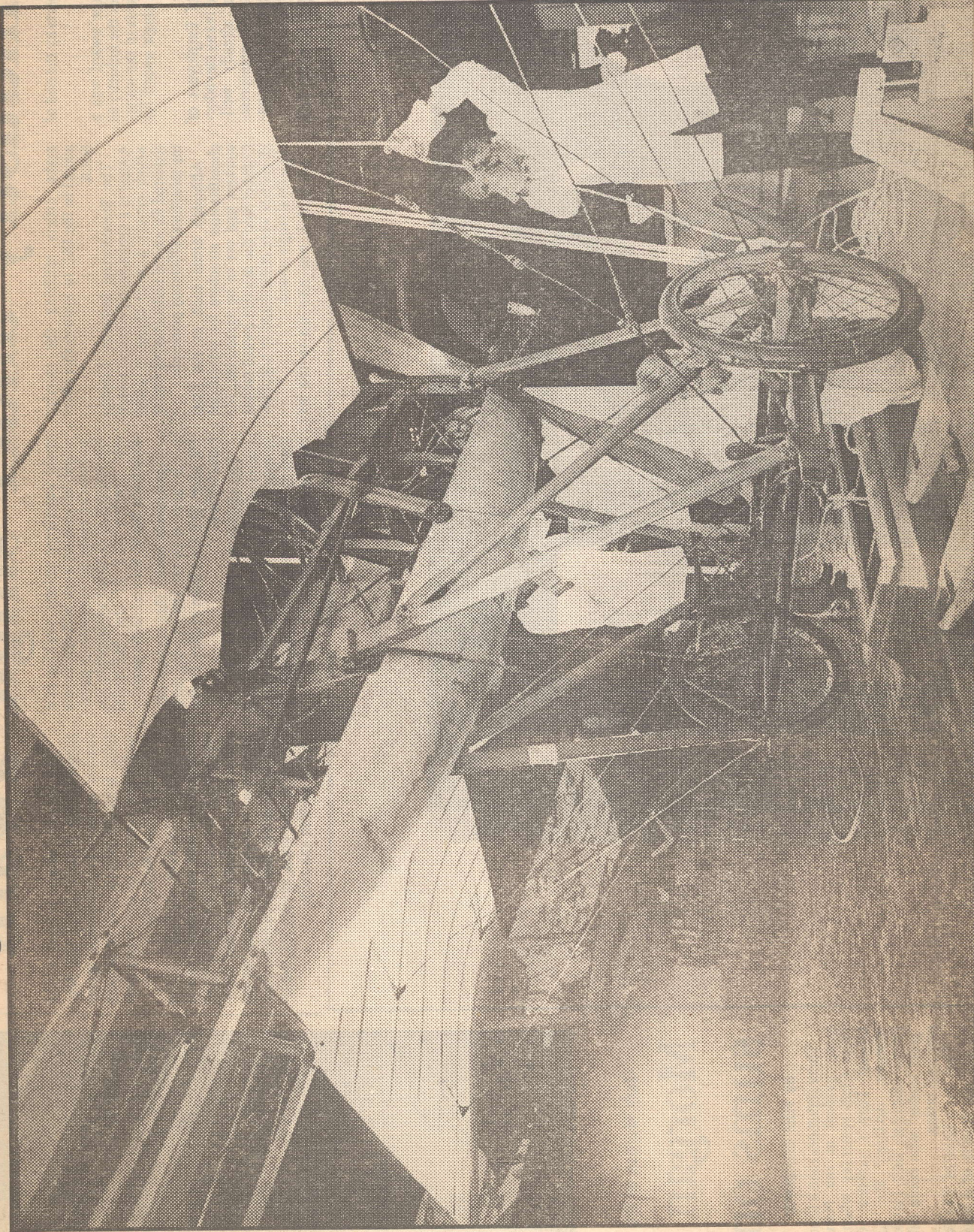


Soft landing for the oldest warrior



CHERIE MARRIOTT

What looked like a mammoth spring-cleaning operation began at the Australian War Memorial yesterday as a team of eight aeroplane fanatics gingerly lowered and dismantled the oldest aeroplane on display.

The Deperdussin monoplane, built in England in 1912, was lowered from its perch in preparation for the installation of an air-conditioning system.

This is the first time the aircraft has been disturbed for 10 years.

The Memorial's Aircraft Curator, John White, said the French-designed Deperdussin had been used for pilot training at the Central Flying School at Point Cook, Victoria.

Its light wooden frame and linen-covered wings, held together by wire braces, were capable only of fast taxiing or taking a long hop.

Mr White said the plane would be taken to the memorial's Mitchell annex where it would be inspected and cleaned and its condition evaluated.

"We can learn a lot from studying aircraft", he said.

The inspection will be overseen by a visiting curator from the National Air and Space Museum in the United States.

Other aircraft in the Hall have been partially dismantled or moved and covered in drapes to make room for scaffolding and workers.

"The air-conditioning system will create an atmosphere of controlled temperature and relative humidity for preservation of the aircraft," Mr White said.

The Aeroplane Hall will be closed to the public until mid-September.

#0 Deperdussin