

HERE IS AN AIR FORCE . . .

# GOING CHEAP!

## Production For War Becomes Peacetime Headache For Disposals Commission

**I**T'S a funny, topsy turvy world . . . You remember it, of course. War . . . air power . . . shadow factories . . . "the first of the few" . . . the production race . . . "Keep 'em Rolling" . . . frantic research . . . fantastic programmes . . . mountainous expenditure . . . the steady flow becoming a torrent . . . thousand bomber raids . . . incredible, dramatic, wonderful aircraft . . . identification charts that grew and grew and grew . . . new types, faster types, more manoeuvrable types, types to carry more a longer distance at a greater speed, to fly higher than ever before in history.

A glowing chapter. Yes, but it's all over now.

Like a city street on the morning after a night of care-to-the-winds celebration, the airfields of the world are covered with . . . litter!

Magnificent air forces that made history, wrung admiration from anxious hearts, and saved the world from another abyss of self-destruction, are for sale. Cheap!

America and Britain are facing vast problems of disposal. Scientific research committees are grappling with the testing question of economic utilisation of tremendous surpluses of aircraft and aircraft parts. Governments are trying to recover some of the immense expenditure of war. But everywhere there is realisation that most of the magnificent equipment of air warfare is inevitably bound for the junk heap.

Australia's problem in this regard is as nothing compared with that facing the major production countries, but it's a big one just the same, and the Commonwealth Disposals Commission will have many headaches before the task upon which it embarked a year ago is completed.

It is not made easier at the moment by the fact that the policy of the Government regarding the size of the post-war RAAF has not yet been determined, though it is being worked upon. The Commission knows already, however, that the inevitable size of the aircraft surplus and associated problems will make it one of the hardest aspects of the over-all disposals programme.

It knows, for instance, that the strength of the RAAF on V-P Day was 40 times greater than it was in September, 1939. And the flow of all types of aircraft—from elementary trainers to bombers—from Australian factories has totalled more than 3000 since the first flight of Wirraways from the CAC works on March 27, 1939.

That the RAAF will require far more planes for its post-war establishment than it did pre-war is obvious, but it will not require anywhere near as many as it now has, nor will it want to be loaded down with aircraft that are already obsolete, or are fast becoming so.

An air force equipped with present Australian types could look impressive on paper, but in any future conflict—or as a precaution against war—would be as useful as a modern



Only types offered in any quantity by the Disposals Commission comprise Wackett Trainers (full allotment of 124 now sold), Dragons (23 still available), Tiger Moths (200 to be offered this month).

army armed with muzzle-loaders. Aircraft development is moving too fast to give any practical value to suggestions for the creation of a large reserve of war planes.

And yet, what is to be done with them?

They can't all be sold, for, paradoxical as it may sound, the most expensive types, the fast fighters and magnificently equipped bombers—in fact, practically the complete range of tactical aircraft—are ruled out as useless for peacetime purposes, or far too expensive to convert and maintain for civil uses.

Even if some playboy had ideas of adding a fighter or a Fairey Battle to his fleet of cars and speed-boats he wouldn't be allowed to do so. The Department of Civil Aviation has ruled against it. It will not grant a Certificate of Airworthiness to such types for civilian use.

The NSW Police Department recently made inquiries from the Commonwealth Disposals Commission about the purchase of a surplus Avro Anson, and some other Government departments may be interested in certain types of light bomber, but they are not for private sale as aircraft. As junk? That's different. It is, in fact, the only answer.

Actually, the Commission has not yet had much to sell. Two DH86's—now on the Perth-Darwin run—Wackett Trainers, Dragons, a Gull or two, and various other types. All these, though type certificated, will need to be brought up, at varying cost, to Commonwealth C of A standards, which vary according to the type of plane, and its civilian purpose.

The CDC has had 400-600 inquiries from interested parties, and, at the

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middle of November, had definitely sold 160 aircraft of various light types.

Unconfirmed rumors were then in the wind that an influential group was in the field for 60 or 70 Wackett Trainers and all the spares and equipment available—for speculative purposes.

Even more interest is expected to be created by the release in mid-December of 200 Tiger Moths.

Wacketts have been selling at a ceiling of £300, depending upon condition. Some of them are in first-class order, with only a few hours of flying done since complete survey; others need a good deal of repair, and prices vary accordingly. In each case a spare motor has been included in the deal.

Because of their greater range of usefulness and lower maintenance cost, and the fact that a large organization is established in Australia to provide servicing and spares, light trainers of the Moth type will be sold at a higher figure—up to £500. This will probably be the most popular offering from the private owner point of view.

Those two price listings illustrate, to a degree, some of the "strange as it may seem" aspects of disposal selling. Wacketts cost from £4500-£5000 new; Tiger Moths cost under £2000. The measure of value now is their sphere of usefulness in the civilian field.

To demonstrate the uselessness of offering fighters for sale (apart from the fact that such planes will not be granted a C of A in Australia), it is sufficient to point out that Curtiss-Wright has estimated the cost of converting a Warhawk to civilian flight purposes at roughly £A8000, with £8000 added annually for maintenance and operation.

Similarly, the cost of converting a military DC-3 to civilian passenger service (in the U.S.A.) ranges from £A12,000 to £27,000, plus an "as is, where is" purchase price of £18,000. Pre-war DC-3's were priced new at £33,000-£37,500.

"The airlines undertook such costly conversions because of heavy wartime traffic volume and the absence of new planes," states an American report. "It is doubtful that the airlines will attempt to convert many of the thousands of C-47's which will become surplus in the future."

There is a hint in that last sentence which should be noted by the new RAAF Directorate of Disposals if they intend to offer any transport types for disposal. The United States has already "got crackin'" in this field, and we're among the countries to which they are turning their eyes.

Some estimates of the potential U.S. surplus of C-47's and other converted DC-3 types run as high as 8000—yet fewer than 360 passenger and cargo planes were needed to fill commercial transport liner needs in the U.S. pre-war, and the rest of the world had about 600!

The U.S. Army-Navy Liquidation Commission, charged now with the job of selling surplus aircraft "in foreign territory," has an agency in the Philippines—and it isn't slow moving.

There is an unconfirmed report already circulating that Australian airline agents have bought 25 Aircraft, December, 1945. Page Eighteen.

C-47's. That may or may not be true, but it is interesting to note that a number of representatives of Australian airlines were visiting Manila in mid November. They weren't there to buy hay!

It is not anticipated, however, that the RAAF will be disposing of many transports. Its fleet is fully in use at the moment, and it will have a substantial supply transport job to carry on even in the balmy days of peace.

Where Commonwealth disposal needs to "get down to cases" is in the field of research to find marketable uses for the large scrap-heap of tactical aircraft, spares and components.

America has already been exhaustively into this question, to determine what can be salvaged, what scrapped for the recovery of aluminium and other metals. Experts expect that the majority of combat planes will follow the latter disposal route.

Research men there have even invented a new word to cover this activity. They "cannibalise" planes—tear them apart for the valuable components and metal they contain. Wide uses have already been devised for salvaged and spare engines (with 100,000 new engines expected to be on hand when war assembly lines shut down).

## Aircraft Disposals

### GONE :

WACKETT TRAINERS, 124;  
RYANS, 23; MOTH MINORS, 21;  
AVRO TRAINERS, 17; De H 84's,  
15; GIPSY MOTHS, 5; FAIR-  
CHILDS, 3; MILES FALCONS,  
2; AVRO ANSONS, 2; De H 86's,  
2; DRAGONFLY, 1; DOUGLAS  
DOLPHIN, 1; CESSNA, 1; WACO,  
1; BEECHCRAFT, 1; TIGER  
MOTH, 1.

### GOING :

VEGA GULL, 1; HUDSON MK.  
1, 1; De H 84's, 28; assorted  
engines.

### COMING UP :

TIGER MOTHS, 200.  
Fairey Battles, Avro Ansons and  
Oxfords are expected to become  
available in the near future, but  
conversion costs necessary to ob-  
tain a C. of A. will be very high.

They visualise flooded areas being pumped dry by the powerful engines of a Fortress; the combating of frost in orchards by circulating warm currents of air with the aid of horse-power churned up by a Thunderbolt fighter, and Liberator engines providing stand-by power for a utility plant.

In the latter connection there is already a budget of information available to American disposals organisations. While experts have estimated that aeroplane engines in electric power generation would cost one-third more to operate than Diesels, they point, as compensating factors, to the estimate that a complete generating unit, built round a 1000-hp plane engine, can be sold for 3000 to 4000 dollars, that there will be savings in installation costs, and in space needed. Current experiments envisage the use of producer gas or some other substitute for high-octane aviation fuel. Westinghouse have already built a demonstration unit.

American disposal research men believe, according to one report, "that numerous post-war uses can be found for them, and a big market tapped in foreign countries too poor industrially to afford other power plants. Sales of engines abroad would avoid upsetting the domestic market."

We haven't been told so, yet, but Australia is probably on the mailing lists of these disposal experts.

Industrial representatives are optimistic about the sales possibilities of such items as compasses, clocks, fire extinguishers and thermos bottles.

They suggest the use of oxygen tanks as acetylene containers; the adaptation of radio equipment for two-way communication on passenger and freight railway trains, or for amateur experimental work, the use of pilot seats for bus-drivers, of hydraulic landing gear on dump-trucks, and of self-sealing tanks as fuel tanks on motor-boats.

And then there is the report from India.

"The large stocks of 'dural' tubes usually available in aircraft scrap have been found suitable for the manufacture of tubular furniture. Aero-scrap is being used for cast ware work, and a variety of utility articles can be produced from it — trays, plates, cutlery, mugs, ash-trays, picture and mirror frames, blotters, pen-holders, ink-pots, coat-hangers, hooks, paper weights, table lamps, window frames and fasteners, and a host of other things.

"Railways are already experimenting in the use of this alloy for the manufacture of carriage and wagon fittings."

The construction of pre-fabricated houses from aircraft scrap has also been suggested. Nothing has been done in Australia in this respect, as yet, and whether it will be practicable depends to a degree upon the available quantities. The sooner this is ascertained the better.

A lot will depend upon the success attained in developing "scrapping" techniques that are sufficiently cheap to make salvage an economic possibility. Methods being tried out in America range from cutting up the fuselage into manageable sections with huge metal saws, and drawing off the aluminium after furnace treatment, to the "dunking" of stripped planes, in one piece, into enormous caustic soda baths. The chemicals eat away the aluminium, and yields almost pure powdered alumina.

Although her problem is nowhere near as large as that of Britain and the United States, Australia will need to keep a keen eye on this type of experimentation in solving her disposal problem.

The immediate effect of the Disposal Commission's operations on the local field will be a considerable increase in the possibilities of private flying.

Sales already made indicate the presence of a fair-sized market for types that do not require extensive conversion, or cost too much to maintain—light private-owner types.

Aero clubs are buying some, so are some private organisations which intend to enter the training school field. Flying doctor services have bought several for aerial ambulance purposes, and several business organisations have acquired other planes.

One plane, equipped with a loud-speaker system, is intended to maintain a shark-patrol off Sydney's beaches!

The possibilities are endless when there is an air force . . . going cheap.