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## WHY AN AIR MUSEUM?

At the recent opening of Brisbane's new Domestic Airport, Queensland's eminent contribution to Australia's aviation heritage was acknowledged by no less a person than Prime Minister Bob Hawke who said:

"QUEENSLAND INDEED HAS A VERY PROUD HISTORY IN THE INVOLVEMENT  
OF AUSTRALIAN AVIATION."

[THE HON R.J.L. HAWKE A.C., M.P.]

Doubtless, Mr. Hawke had in mind famous Australians such as Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, Bert Hinkler, Air Vice-Marshal Don Bennett, Sidney Cotton, Qantas and the Royal Flying Doctor Service, all of whom are Queenslanders! That there was a need for recognising the contributions of these famous Queenslanders was acknowledged almost 14 years ago with the establishment of the fledgling Queensland Air Museum.

Faced with an almost total lack of Government policy for the preservation of Australia's aviation heritage, a small group of enthusiasts resolved to do something about it. One might imagine that such a courageous step might be rewarded by the Federal Government if not in cash at least in kind. Sadly, it is an indictment of Federal Governments past and present, that QAM was to be faced with negative thinking and obstruction at every turn. While the British Government managed to recognise the efforts of QAM with the presentation of a fully serviceable Meteor jet fighter, our own Government failed to match the gesture and continued to demand payment for obsolete aircraft which were otherwise suitable only for scrap. One aeroplane which presently takes pride of place in the QAM collection was actually allocated to a scrap merchant but only through the intervention of a heritage minded military was the aeroplane saved for future generations. For the want of a paltry \$200.00 [representing the difference between the tenders of the scrap merchant and QAM] the bureaucrats would have condemned a piece of Australian aviation history to total destruction!

QAM's birth was by no means an easy one. By all rights, the organisation should have folded years ago, such was the lack of support from Canberra. Over a period of twelve years, QAM moved its collection of aircraft from no fewer than three temporary sites. The latter of these was on the old Brisbane Airport where exorbitant rental demands effectively amounted to eviction. In the face of having to wind up the organisation and sell the

aircraft collection, QAM was saved by the Queensland Government and the Caloundra City Council who provided land and a building at Caloundra Aerodrome. Since relocating to this progressive environment in 1986, QAM has never looked back. A modern building housing five aircraft and a comprehensive collection of engines together with three aircraft on outdoor display is staffed by volunteer workers three days a week. Admission to the Museum is by voluntary donation and thus nobody has ever been turned away from the Museum because he couldn't afford to come in. Nothing in the collection belongs to a private individual. QAM considers that everything is held in trust for all Australians. Upon the payment of a modest membership fee, anyone can participate in the running of the Museum. For an investment of approximately \$60 000.00, Queensland has a growing aviation museum of which it can be proud. No-one would seriously suggest that it should be compared with a multi-million dollar national aviation museum but it stands as a tribute to what can be achieved by typical "Aussie battlers".

During 1987 it became apparent that QAM were at last to receive some recognition from Canberra. The endorsement of QAM as an official Bicentennial Project gave promise of better things ahead. While QAM was still situated on Brisbane Airport, several applications for Bicentennial funding were lodged but unfortunately these were rejected on the grounds that QAM did not have a permanent site. Despite this initial disappointment, QAM never challenged the decision and resolved to play its part in the "Celebration of a Nation" as a self-funded Bicentennial Project. As an alternative to funding QAM, it was suggested that the Federal Government might care to demonstrate that it does support endorsed Bicentennial Projects by donating a surplus aircraft to QAM. It was argued that such a gesture would cost the nation practically nothing.

#### **THE MIRAGE SAGA**

As early as January 1987, a succession of Federal Members and Ministers were asked to recognise QAM's efforts with the presentation of a Mirage aircraft as a Bicentennial gift. These requests culminated in an approach to the Prime Minister in February 1988. Responding on behalf of the Prime Minister, Mr. Peter Morris M.P. advised that QAM could expect no special treatment and would merely be given an opportunity to tender for the limited number of Mirages that would be made available for display purposes. Despite assurances that only "qualified groups" will be given the opportunity to tender, QAM argues that the tender system is unfair in that the successful bidder is almost invariably the one with the most money. It is the belief of QAM that there should be sufficient Mirage aircraft suitable for display purposes for the Federal Government to DONATE one to every ESTABLISHED aviation museum in Australia. The Government claims that "well over half" the Mirages are suitable for continued operations and will be offered for sale on a "Government-to-Government" basis to "an acceptable overseas country". Recent reports attributed to the RAAF indicate that there are 40 Mirages still operational while a further 31 are non-operational. It would therefore follow that at least some 20 odd Mirages will not be sold to an overseas air force. This conservative estimate exceeds the number of established aviation museums in Australia. While the Government has demonstrated its inability to sell the infinitely more utilitarian fleet of C-130A Hercules aircraft currently corroding at Laverton, it apparently supposes that it will succeed in finding "an acceptable overseas country"

to purchase front-line combat aircraft. More likely, the Mirages will be allowed to fall into disrepair at their Woomera storage site where they will be effectively out of reach of museums and readily available for use as bombing targets! [A recent plan to use historic DC-3 aircraft as targets prompted such an outcry that officials had to substitute a number of Canberra bombers. Significantly, although QAM does have a Canberra in its collection, it had to pay a lot of money for it.]

### **THE TENDER SYSTEM**

The Government always maintains that the fairest means of disposing of surplus military aircraft is the tender system. Even if tendering is restricted to "qualified groups", such a group is faced with striking a balance between what will be a successful tender and what it can afford. In the case of QAM, funds come from public donations and members' contributions. QAM members come from all walks of life but all have one thing in common apart from a love of aviation, none are even remotely wealthy! In order to tender for surplus aircraft the Museum must seek public contributions. Thus the position is something like this:

Dear Taxpayer,

May we please have some of your money so that we can hand it back to the Government to pay for an obsolete aeroplane [which you have already paid for once with your taxes] so that you will have the privilege of viewing it in a museum which belongs to the community? If you give us two dollars or more it is a tax deduction although you better hurry as the Government is planning to abolish even this minor concession to charities like QAM.

This is the abysmal situation thrust upon us by this so-called heritage minded government in our Bicentennial year!

### **VALUE FOR THE TAX-PAYER**

It may be argued that the tax-payer has a right to expect maximum return on his investment when surplus government property is disposed of. In the case of a Mirage aircraft, the initial outlay is so huge that the proceeds from selling them will be infinitesimal by comparison. This is particularly so if the Mirages are to be scrapped. Despite assurances from Canberra that this is not the case, QAM has first hand evidence that substantial Mirage airframe sections have been carted off to Newcastle scrapyards, apparently without having gone through normal tender channels. Thus, a piece of Australian aviation history is destroyed forever while someone profits from the destruction. Meanwhile, QAM is unable to obtain a Mirage. Perhaps there is money to be made by selling Mirages to a foreign power but it must be remembered that these aeroplanes were built by Australians, flown by Australians and paid for by Australians who have a right to view them as part of their heritage. If our heritage is not of value in our Bicentennial year, the outlook for the future is not encouraging.

## **A NATIONAL AVIATION MUSEUM**

For decades there has been much talk of a National Aviation Museum. To date it appears that the only progress is a decision that the museum should be sited in Victoria. While QAM maintains that Queensland has a rightful claim to the National Aviation Museum, it will support the establishment of the N.A.M. at any suitable site such is the urgency for positive action. However, it must be remembered that Australia is a big country and few Queensland families will be able to afford a trip to Victoria. Australia needs a National Aviation Museum but it also needs regional museums in other states. While it may not be possible for the Federal Government to fund these regional museums it should at least encourage and foster them. They will never hope to compete with a multi-million dollar national collection, so the Federal Government should have no fear of competition from regional aviation museums. If the Federal Government's treatment of QAM is typical, a cynic might argue that the Government is deliberately trying to eliminate small regional aviation museums so that a National Aviation Museum can snap up their collections. It must be remembered that the result of decades of official neglect is that there is no "instant aircraft collection" ready for display in a National Aviation Museum. Whether established museums are prepared to surrender their treasures remains to be seen. Certainly it is vital that there is maximum co-operation between a National Aviation Museum and established museums.

## **THE AUSSIE BATTLER**

It is ironic that the Federal Government has to employ high-powered "think tanks" to find out why their supporters are deserting them. Is it any wonder if all Australians who seek to put something worthwhile back into the community have to endure similar treatment to that received by QAM. In fourteen years QAM has not received so much as a word of encouragement from Canberra. It's an appalling situation which no Australian should have to endure. The Queensland Government has done its bit. The Caloundra City Council has done its bit. Even the British Government has done its bit. To date the only contribution from the Australian Government has been sustained opposition and negativity. WHY?

Written and authorised by:

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20th May 1988



The  
Australian  
Bicentenary  
1788-1988

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## A SUPERSONIC FIGHTER FOR 20 CENTS!

Recently the Australian Government sold a supersonic Mirage jet fighter to the Royal Malaysian Air Force Museum for twenty cents! This generous gesture marked the withdrawal of the Mirage from the Butterworth base and serves to commemorate the close ties between Australia and Malaysia.

Ironically it comes at a time when Queensland's only community owned aviation museum is battling with the Australian Government to secure a Mirage for the people of Queensland. Since January 1987 when Queensland Air Museum first requested that a Mirage be donated to the collection, the Federal Government has steadfastly refused to consider donating an aeroplane despite QAM's belief that there are sufficient Mirages available to donate one to every established aviation museum in the country. Given this refusal to consider donation, QAM proposed exactly one year ago today that the Mirages be sold to museums for a "fixed token price". This proposal was rejected outright.

In the light of this policy, the decision to sell a Mirage to Malaysia for 20 cents is seen as a major reversal in Federal Government thinking. Confident in the knowledge that the Australian Government will not wish to be seen to be discriminating against Australian museums, QAM has today forwarded to the Hon. Ros Kelly, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, the sum of twenty cents in full payment for one Mirage fighter to be displayed in the Queensland Air Museum. Copies of this letter have been forwarded to the Prime Minister, the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister and the Defence Minister. QAM is an endorsed, self-funded Bicentennial project. C'mon give us a hand!

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