

(2) In selecting the time for the disposal of the assets.

There were two matters of outstanding importance in this connection—

- (a) The evidence shows that many of the vehicles were badly corroded with heavy rust and that rapid deterioration of all parts of the vehicles could be expected in the winter. No suggestion was made during the proceedings that the Board should have reconditioned the vehicles or that it could have got them under cover for the winter.
- (b) The import outlook was such that immediate realization was desirable.

In addition, there was the matter of expense—the cost of guards alone being £50 per week.

The Board acted wisely and prudently.

(3) In relation to the ascertainment of the value of the assets for the purpose of disposal.

The evidence shows that an individual mechanical examination and valuation of the vehicles was impracticable.

Mr. Signal, assistant manager, Ford Motors, speaking of the Jeeps, said :—

I personally would not have given an opinion on the value of any of those vehicles unless I had pulled the cylinder heads off, dropped the sump, inspected the bearings and gear box and transmissions. They were in such a condition that that would have been necessary. This type of inspection could not have been carried out on the vehicles parked as they were.

Mr. Wright, sales manager of General Motors, said it was impossible to offer an opinion on the value of the G.M.C.s in the condition in which they were sold. That to make an individual examination would require a very large number of highly skilled mechanics and mobile gear and would take a very long time. If they had started early in January it would not have been finished at the time of the inquiry (August-September). Mr. Ingram said it was impossible with the help of experienced men to have made a trustworthy appraisal under six months. It is easier for a salesman to appraise the value of a car than it is for an engineer. He kicks the tires and stands back and estimates what some person will pay him for it, but that is not an appraisal of a motor-vehicle having to make some commercial contribution to transportation. Mr. Goosman said he had never heard of the necessity of taking down a vehicle to make a valuation. This is no doubt so in the case of ordinary second-hand vehicles, but these were not of this class, but vehicles which had undergone the rigours of the islands campaign and been submerged in salt water.

The first-hand knowledge of the above witnesses shows that it was a matter of mere guess work to say what was the mechanical condition without dismantling and examining the various parts. It was also shown that the matter of mileage was an unreliable guide.

There remains, then, the question whether a rough appraisal or valuation was feasible. Obviously any such valuation would have been of a most speculative nature. It is hardly necessary to again point out the difference between these vehicles and ordinary commercial ones. Such valuation would have to proceed on the basis of prospective demand and estimate of the number of worthwhile vehicles which could be rescued from the mass.

The General Manager had reports from the Munitions Controller from time to time as to the condition of the vehicles supplemented by his own observations, and stated :—

I say without any hesitation that in my opinion it would have been impossible to have made any worth-while valuation of the vehicles short of an individual examination of each vehicle, which would have meant a complete rearrangement of the park, a detailed examination of the motor, and generally the mechanical parts of the vehicle. That was impossible by virtue of the condition in which the vehicles were parked.

It must be asked what were the General Manager's qualifications for expressing such an opinion. He had been a member of the accountancy profession and had held managerial positions in motor firms, but there is nothing to show that he had qualifications which would justify him in setting up as a valuer or entitle him to say that valuations could not have been made, and he had made no detailed inspection of the vehicles.