ADF Alternate Aircraft Serial Numbers

Proposals Floated - June 1942 till early 1943

Apparently by mid-1942 the Aust Dept of Air was worried about a possible security leak with the RAAF serial numbers. The issue was that the Aust system indicated the aircraft type (by the A designation) as well as the strength for that aircraft type because the serial was numbered from 1. So an enemy could build a good picture on aircraft strength, production capacity and rates of delivery. So various alternative proposals were considered over the next 6 months or so.

Proposal 1	One was to just manipulate the serial numbers so that they weren't sequential. The easiest way was to just skip blocks of numbers, so the first 50 P-40s might be A29-1 to A29-19, A29-51 to A29-80. The idea was to make the skipped blocks as random as possible so that no pattern was obvious.
Proposal 2	A more complicated system was for a digits representing 100s and 10s to be replaced by letters. So say N replaced 200 and Y replaced 40, then A29-247 would be A29-NY7.
Proposal 3	Another stated that no serials be painted on the aircraft at all. Instead they be stamped on a small plate which was highly inflammable and located in the cockpit. An external marking in place of the serial numbers would be a coded system of at least one letter that identified the aircraft type for spares and parts.
Proposal 4	As the proposals were studied other suggestions were made based on previous submissions. Someone pointed out that for Proposal 2 it would take a long time

	to implement and for people to get used to it. So they proposed dropping the 'A' and the '-', so that A20-103 would be 20103. But this caused problems of its own because is '299' A29-9 (ie Kittyhawk 9) or A2-99 (Seagull 99)? Obviously enemy intelligence could work out such a system too.
Proposal 5	So a variation on proposal 4 became that a 2-digit number be used for the aircraft type followed by a 3-digit serial no and that those serial numbers be allocated in blocks of numbers a la proposal 1. So Anson A4-109 would be 04109. This would provide a secure system and alleviate the probs of proposal 4.
Proposal 6	This suggested 3 alpha characters, which would allow 15,600 combinations if no letter was repeated, be used as the serial. Essentially this was similar to the civil aircraft register. There would of course be confusion if the leters of a serial were transposed.

Postscript

By early 1943 it was being considered as too hard and too much effort to implement. The suggestion to use blocks of numbers rather than continous numbers was considered good practise, but that is all that was acceded.

In mid-1943 Security section raised the issue of the data plates found in all aircraft. These data plates listed dates and sources of manufacturer. RAAF HQ was quick to point out that they didn't want this practise to change as they (the Intelligence Section) received considerable information on Jap aircraft production rates etc. Any changes on the RAAF aircraft might draw a similar response from the Japs and deprive them of their info. Their recommendation was to avoid this change "at all costs".

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