Royal Australian Air Force

Communications Centre Canberra

1959 - 1992

Incorporating
Nr.13 and 77
Communications Centres

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FOREWORD

This history of Royal Australian Air Force Communications Centre (ASAFCOMMCEN) Canberra came about as a result of the "Rationalisation of Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Communications Centres (Commcens) Study". ASAFCOMMCEN Canberra faced imminent closure and amalgamation with Royal Australian Navy Communications Centre (ASNCOMMCEN) Canberra as a result of this study and I felt that the closure should be recorded somewhere. Originally intending to write a short article for the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) News, the project was blown out of proportion when I found it difficult to find the answer to the most basic question; when did ASAFCOMMCEN Canberra open?

Tracing back our present day files to files long closed and now languishing in Archives I found the answer, but I also found much more. The old files contained the colourful history of 77 Commcen and also Nr 13 Commcen (which was its original designation). It was one of the very few Commcens still recognised by its old designation (77 Commcen), despite a name change in OCT 1976 to ASAFCOMMCEN Canberra.

I felt that, in the face of a changing Air Force that this history should be documented.

Thanks must go to the staff at the Archives Information Section at Queanbeyan, for their diligence and patience, to Flight Sergeant (FSGT) Kay Sharp for the use of her computer and to Mr Dave Wilson and staff at the RAAF Historical Section at Air Force Office.

Special thanks goes to the ex members of 77 Commcen who stirred old memories to pass on information that the files did not contain; their eagerness to help was inspiring.

SERGEANT PETER JORDAN
RAAF SCHOOL OF TECHNICAL TRAINING
January 1994

GENESIS

On Thursday 28 April 1955, Colonel (Col) D. Vincents Directorate of Signals (DSIGS) Army, Commander (Cdr) R.W. Briggs Director of Naval Communications (DNC) and Wing Commander (WGCDR) A.C.A. McBride Acting Director of Telecommunications and Radar (A/DTELS and RADAR) of the Joint Communications Committee (JCC) detailed some aspects for the Transfer of Defence Departments to Canberra.

Two alternatives were considered possible for the Defence Communications requirements:

1.	A single signal centre serving all services, or
2.	Individual signal centres serving each of the Defence Services. The committee agreed that;

> "In view of the numerous objections to integration which have been discussed at great length in the past and, in particular, the Defence Signals Branch requirement, diverse cryptographic requirements, staff control problems, procedural difficulties, and the subsequent admixture of civilian and service personnel, the Committee agreed unanimously that individual signal centres serving each of the Defence Services were desirable. However, space allocations permitting, it is considered that these signal centres should be adjacent so as to permit alternative traffic routing in the event of a line failure ".

The Committee decided that the minimum essential communications requirements for the initial transfer for the RAAF was:

1.	One new circuit (cct) Department of Air (DEPAIR) Canberra - Melbourne Telecommunications Unit (MTU) Frognall,
2.	A Commcen area of 1700 square feet, and
3.	A staff of 21 personnel.

An initial estimate of costing was (in pounds):

1.	Communications equipment	- 3,700
2.	Cryptographic equipment	- 8,500
3.	Landlines	- 4,300
4.	Contingencies (10 percent)	- 1,650

This gave a total of 18,150 pounds, not including any recurring expenditure.

At a later Committee meeting dated 12APR57, the Secretary of Defence instructed the JCC to reconsider its' 1955 report in light of the present Governments' intentions. The Committee review made some minor changes. The question of communications integration was foremost in the minds of the Committee, although, the plan for single service Commcens was still the preferred option. This did not, however, rule out the possibility of any future integration as the following quote shows:

> "Because of its present system of message handling, which it was not prepared to alter, and its many staffing problems, the Navy could not see its way clear to accept integration at this stage. The Army and Air Force, whilst agreeing that integration is possible, felt that, because of the large field of common agreement necessary beforehand, the application of integration to the initial move to Canberra was not feasible.
>
> Integration in the Canberra signal centre might be considered in the future in view of developments in cryptographic machinery, automatic message handling facilities and digital computer types of communications systems, the common standards of which have not yet been embraced by communications agencies but which may have a strong bearing on Service Communications."

The changes from the 1957 Committee gave the RAAF an extra circuit from DEPAIR to Central Telegraphic Office (CTO) Canberra (Telex), and changed our allocation of 1700 square feet to 1600 square feet.

THE PLAN

By decision Nr 626 of the 5th of February 1957, Cabinet approved the scheme for the transfer from Melbourne to Canberra of certain elements of the Defence and Service Departments.

A draft outline plan dated 29JUL57, stated that a Major Tape Relay Communications Centre was to be established at Department of Air (DEPAIR) Canberra and manned on a 24 hourly basis.

The Communications transfer was to be effected in two moves. The first move involved limited communications requirements; one Duplex Teletype circuit DEPAIR Canberra - DEPAIR Melbourne, and one Simplex circuit DEPAIR Canberra - CTO Canberra (Telex). This was to take place in JAN 1959.

The second move was to take place in JUL 1959, and required direct communications between DEPAIR Canberra and the Commcens serving the following authorities:

Headquarters Home Command (HQHC),
Headquarters Training Command (HQTC),
MTU Frognall,
Navy and Army Canberra, and
DEPAIR Melbourne.

On 25JUN58, in a minute to HQHC, HQTC, MTU and Headquarters Maintenance Command (HQMC), Group Captain (GPCAPT) Pither, Acting Chief of Air Staff (A/CAS), advised of a new communications facility to be located in the Administration Buildings, Canberra (Note 1). The new Commcen would be known as 'Nr 13 Commcen', and would be controlled by Dept. of Air Canberra.

Note 1:   These buildings now house the Dept of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

PART TWO

NR 13 COMMCEN

NR 13 COMMCEN

At 200001Z JAN 1959, Nr 13 Commcen, Dept of Air Canberra transmitted its' first message to Nr 27 Commcen, Dept of Air Melbourne, beginning a new era in RAAF Communications in the Canberra area. Nr 13 Commcen was connected to CTO Canberra (Telex) on 02FEB59.

In addition to the planned circuits to be connected during phase 2 as previously listed, HQHC had directed that the RAAF Base Canberra (now RAAF Base Fairbairn) - HQHC circuit be cancelled and that RAAF Base Canberra now be connected to Nr 13 Commcen as a tributary station as part of the phase 2 stage. Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) May (TELS3) indicated that this would produce savings in the long term, as HQHC was already connected to Nr 13 Commcen

This proposal was disputed by the acting Air Officer Commanding (A/AOC) HQHC at that time Group Captain (GPCAPT) J.W. Reddrop who stated that the AOC should not lose direct communications with the bases under his control. In a minute dated 17JUN59, he stated that messages would be delayed if they had to pass through a relay station that was not under the control of that particular AOC. He stated that:

> "Even under existing conditions, an aircraft, such as a Dakota can generally travel from Canberra to Richmond in less time than it takes to originate, transmit and deliver an Operations immediate message between the Air Traffic Control offices at Canberra and Richmond, particularly when loadings are heavy".

The re-direction of the circuit never took place, it was an incompatibility between technical equipment at either end, not the displeasure of the AOC that put paid to the proposal.

On the 06JUL59, the second phase was completed and Nr 13 Commcen opened circuits to Nrs 1, 27, and 38 Commcens and Department of Army Commcen Canberra.

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) was approached on 10JUL59 with an offer to connect a duplex circuit from the RAN Primary Relay located at HMAS Harman to Nr 13 Commcen to permit the transfer of service traffic between the respective departments. The Navy agreed to the proposal on 25AUG59, but stated that because of increased commitments in Canberra, spare facilities were not available until at least APR60.

The Navy connection did not eventuate, as the RAN and RAAF already had a link of primary relay stations in Melbourne and both services in Canberra were now connected to the Post Master General (PMG) telex net. As the Melbourne connection provided alternate routing on overseas circuits, and the telex connection in Canberra provided a local transfer, it was considered that there was no requirement for HMAS Harman and Nr 13 Commcen to be linked.

STAFF

The personnel requirements for the first phase of communications were:

1 x Flight Lieutenant (FLTLT)/Flying Officer (FLGOFF) Technical Radio,
1 x FSGT Telegraphist (Teleg) Supervisor,
1 x Sergeant (SGT) Teleg Supervisor,
2 x Corporal (CPL) Telecommunications Operators (Telsops), and
4 x Aircraftsman (AC) Telsops.

It was proposed that the above personnel be employed in the following shifts:

Dayshift - 0800-1700,
1 x FSGT Teleg - Communications Supervisor,
1 x SGT Teleg - Cryptographic,
1 x CPL Telsop, and
1 x AC Telsop.

Evening shift - 1600-2359
1 x CPL Telsop 1 x AC Telsop.

Nightshift - 2359-0800
1 x AC Telsop.

Relieving shift
1 x AC Telsop.

The 2 Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) worked permanent day shifts . The 2 CPLs alternated on day and evening shift to work a 5 day week. This left 1 AC per shift to cover weekends.

During phase 1 of the move to Canberra, the traffic loading on Nr 13 Commcen was not particularly heavy as not all of the full compliment of the future DEPAIR Canberra had arrived. As a result of this, the Commcen operated on an 'on call' basis until the 27JUL59. The roster had been amended to:

Day shift - 0830-1645,
Evening shift - 1645-2130, and
Night shift - 2130-0830.

After the successful completion of phase 2, the traffic statistics still showed that a continuous 24 hour service was still not warranted. The recommendation was to change the shifts to:

Dayshift - 0830-1645, and
Night shift - 1630-0830.

Normal service was to apply between 0600 and 2200, with an on call service between 2200 and 0600. This allowed the extra operator to be used on dayshift during heavy traffic periods. The proposal was approved and was implemented with effect 21SEP59.

EQUIPMENT

Nr 13 Commcen measured 60ft x 28ft. When phase 2 of the Defence move to Canberra was completed, 6 Duplex and 1 Simplex circuits were to be terminated into the Commcen. Limited space made it necessary to terminate the Duplex circuits on 'Console Multi-Circuit' equipment, (also known as a 'Package Set', it consisted of Model 14 transmit and receive reperforators built into a console).

Other equipment requirements included:

   6 x Tape Monitor machines,
   4 x Model 14 Keyboard Typing Reperforators (KTRs),
   3 x Transmitter Distributor (TD) heads, and
   3 x Model 15 Page Printer Send/Receive (PPSR).

ALMOST A PREMATURE END

On 05SEP60, an Army Signaller in the adjacent Army Commcen was using a white spirit to clean some of their communications equipment. Somehow the spirit ignited and exploded, injuring the Army Signaller and destroyed a large portion of the Army equipment in the subsequent fire.

Also destroyed was the connecting wall into Nr 13 Commcen. No RAAF equipment was damaged and Nr 13 Commcen took the guard for the Army Commcen until their refit.

On the 26SEP60, the Secretary for Dept of Army sent a letter to the Secretary for the Dept of Air thanking the RAAF for their immediate response in supplying the Army with communications facilities. As a result, Warrant Officer in Charge (WOFFIC) 13 Commcen (WOFF Max Beves) was awarded the Member of the British Empire (MBE), in recognition for his organising the evacuation of personnel from the Commcen and the storage of crypto material immediately after the explosion and for remaining on duty until such time as normal communications could be established.

PERSONNEL

Although an extensive search was conducted, no Commcen files in respect of personnel were ever found.

FINALE

On 25FEB60, Deputy Chief of Air Staff (DCAS) Air Vice Marshall (AVM) McLachlan issued "Air Staff Directive Nr 9 -Interim Communications Facilities Russell Buildings (Note 1). This directive covered the intention to:

> "..move Nr 13 Commcen from its present location in the Administrative Building to the space provided in Russell Building Nr 1".. (to be later known as Air Block 1, and then later as 'E' block).

In a message, Date time group 140015Z OCT 60, TELS3B (FLTLT B. Bernasconi) advised Nrs 1, 27 and 38 Commcens, and their respective commands, that Nr 13 Commcen was being moved to the new building site at approximately 170001Z OCT 60.

Nr 13 Commcen ceased transmitting at 190001Z OCT 1960.

Note 1: Interesting to note that these were plans for an interim Commcen. The plans for Joint Communications in Canberra had never been shelved. In fact, in 1958, a draft study had been completed in respect of Nr 13 Commcen, with a view to it taking over Army and Navy circuit responsibilities for the Canberra region. It was the uncertain timing for completion of the Russell Hill Defence Complex that put all Joint Communications ideas on hold.

PART 3

NR 77 COMMCEN 1960 - 1966

NR 77 COMMCEN

Nr 77 Commcen - Dept of Air Canberra, became operational after the closure of Nr 13 Commcen on 19OCT60. The new Commcen operated 4 Duplex and 1 Simplex circuit connected to

Nr 38 Commcen,
Nr 27 Commcen,
Nr 1 Commcen, and
Telex Canberra (Simplex).

According to the Air Staff Directive Nr 9, these circuits were to operate as an interim phase extending to 1962 (Note 1).

Note 1: Coincidence perhaps? After a Mid 1960 study on Communications integration in the Darwin area, the Joint Communications Committee recognised that the area in which the advantages, or otherwise, of communications integration could be quickly seen, and the feasibility of such be readily evaluated, was Canberra.

EQUIPMENT

The original draft of the engineering plan (dated 02MAY60) for 77 Commcen had recommended that 5 Automatic Send/Receive (ASR) 28 sets be installed in the new site. This equipment provided message reception with a torn tape back-up. As the sets were fitted with keyboards, preparation of outgoing messages was handled at the particular set from which the message was to be transmitted.

An extra table consisting of 1 TD head, 1 printer and 1 reperforator was to be installed to aid in tape preparation.

The proposal to install ASR-28 sets was revised in AUG60, when it was decided that the existing 'Package Set' equipment in Nr 13 Commcen would be transferred after the closure of that Commcen. Also to be installed were 2 'Tape Factories' consisting of:

    1 x Model 14 KTR,
    2 x receive only reperforators,
    1 x Model 14 TD head, and
    1 x Model 15 printer.

1 Model 14 TD and Model 15 printer were installed for local page copies when required. A new Siemens-Halske telex was also to be installed.

In SEP62 the Director of Telecommunications (DTELS) GPCAPT Reddrop, requested approval to connect the spare package set to Nr 80 Commcen Base Squadron (BSQN) Fairbairn. Approval was granted by the Director of Telecommunications Engineering (DTELENG) on 16OCT62. Nr 77 Commcen now had 4 Duplex circuits.

PERSONNEL

The staff for Nr 77 Commcen of course, consisted of personnel from the de-commissioned 13 Commcen. No actual figures for the cutover to 77 Commcen were found but, at 01JUN62 the establishment for 77 Commcen consisted of:

    1 x FLGOFF,
    1 x WOFF,
    1 x SGT,
    4 x CPL, and
    7 x AC.

The shift rosters were run as follows:

    3 x dayshift 0800-1700,
    3 x evening shift 1700-2400, and
    3 x nightshift 2400-0800.

This was followed by 3 days shift stand-down.

STAFF - NR 13 AND 77 COMMCENS 1959 - 1966

As previously mentioned, all personnel files belonging to DEPAIR Unit had not been located. The only way possible to obtain a staff list was to sift the memories of the past personnel. (Note 1)

As the staff from 13 Commcen had moved to 77 Commcen, the following list is a combined 13 and 77 Commcen staff list for the period 1959-1966.

FLTLT B. Bernasconi   OICCOMMS 13 Commcen
FLGOFF D.R. Street   OICCOMMS 77 Commcen
PLTOFF R. Thomas   OICCOMMS 77 Commcen
FLTLT J. Coomer   OICCOMMS 77 Commcen
WOFF C. Maloney   WOFFCOMMS 77 Commcen
WOFF M. Beves   WOFFCOMMS 13 Commcen
FSGT R. Morrison
SGT W. Clee
SGT R. Lohse
SGT L. Bray
SGT G. Drysdale
CPL W. Free
CPL L. Fitzpatrick
CPL 'RIP' Kirby
CPL L. Jay
CPL R. Wiles
CPL C. Shepherd
CPL W. Lehman
CPL J. O'Neil
LAC E. Lancaster
LAC M. Lynch
LAC R. Waters
LAC J. McAllister
LAC W. Shaw
LAC A. Essery
LAC G. Bauch
LAC C. Bailey
LAC J. Neave
LAC A. Gibbons
AC C. Mahoney

Note 1: Sincerest apologies to any who have been missed!

TOWARDS JOINT OPERATIONS

On the 26MAR62, DTELS (GPCAPT J.W. Reddrop) attended the meeting of the JCC. The aim of the meeting was to:

> "Examine and report on the practicability of one Communications Centre for the Defence group at Russell Hill". The meeting concluded that "...the proposed Joint Commcen...is feasible and should be adopted".

The Secretary of Defence advised DEPAIR by letter (dated 22JUN64) that the total number of RAAF personnel required for the Joint Commcen would be 1 Officer and 9 other ranks (consisting of 1 WOFF Telecommunications Operator - Cypher) (TELSOPC), 1 SGT TELSOPC, 3 CPL TELSOPC, 3 AC TELSOPC and 1 CPL Telecommunications Technician (TELSTECH) (Note 1).

The following personnel were selected to attend familiarisation training for the Joint Commcen during the period 15JUN - 21JUL65, and were to be transferred to the Joint Commcen when it became operational:

FSGT W. Clee,
SGT L. Bray,
CPL L. Fitzpatrick,
CPL R. Kirby,
CPL E. Lancaster,
LAC M. Lynch,
LAC R. Waters, and
LAC J. McAllister.

Nr 77 Commcen, Dept of Air Canberra, closed when the Joint Commcen became operational on 22JAN66.

Note 1: This number was increased by 5 in APR66: 1 x CPL TELSOPC 4 X AC TELSOPC 1 X CPL TELSTECH

PART 4

77 COMMCEN IN LIMBO

JOINT COMMCEN - BRIEFLY

When the Joint Commcen opened on 22JAN66, it operated the following RAAF circuits:

  2 x Duplex circuits - Nr 1 Commcen,
  1 x Duplex circuit - Nr 38 Commcen, and
  1 x Duplex circuit - Nr 80 Commcen.

Incoming message traffic for Dept of Air Canberra was passed from the Joint Commcen (via a pneumatic tube) to the Message Distribution Section (MDS) under the control of Directorate of Secretariate Administration (DSECADMIN), and hence to addressees through branch transit posts. Outgoing traffic was passed from the transit posts through MDS and via the pneumatic tube to the Joint Commcen.

SINGLE SERVICE REQUIREMENT REBORN

On the 03MAY66, the Joint Communications Electronic Committee (JCEC); formerly JCC, issued a draft statement addressing the communications requirements to serve the Defence group from 1970 and beyond.

The study in reply to the draft decided that a 'Joint Switching Centre' (Note 1) be installed in Russell Building 14 (later to be known as 'A' block).

In 1967, a Joint Chiefs of Staff committee further decided that the Navy be appointed the single service manager and the Director of Joint Services Communications (DJSC) be responsible for the coordination of the service requirements in the development and installation phases

Further to the Chiefs of Staff report the JCEC Report No 3/1968 described the concept as follows:

> *"It is envisaged....that each of the user Departments co-located within the Russell Offices complex will be electrically connected to the automatic switch, the connection being secured by special wiring provisions within the complex. As messages are received in the Switching Centre from remote points, they would be switched automatically to the appropriate user Departments".*

With regard to any single service needs the report stated that:

> *"...the requirements of each single service/Department peripheral message centre should be determined and provided by each Service Department".*

Furthermore, the report called for the RAAF to "establish an Air Message Centre, adjacent to the Air Registry, to be connected to the Joint Switching Centre".

Note 1: To be later known as Defence Communications Automatic Relay Station (DEFCOMMARS) Canberra

PART 5

77 COMMCEN - RECOMMISSIONED

RE-COMMISSIONED

In a minute to all Dept of Air branches located at Russell Offices (dated DEC71), AVM C.F. Reid (A/CAS) outlined the provision of a Tributary Message Centre and Associated Message Distribution Facilities for DEPAIR users. The new Commcen was to be located in Air Block 1, ground level, room 6.

The Dept of Air Project Directive 7-71/72 dated 27APR72 detailed all requirements for the installation. The concept for Nr 77 Commcen as detailed in this directive required the installation of the Commcen and 5 Local Delivery Points (LDPs).

The equipment for the Commcen was to comprise of:

    2 x Model 28 ASRs,
    1 x Model 28 Simple Format Terminals,
    1 x Visual Display Unit (VDU) Service position with high speed printer, and
    2 x Tape preparation facilities.

The 5 LDPs were to be installed remote from the Commcen for the Automatic distribution/input by individual user Directorates. These would be manned and used by clerical staff from the Directorate transit posts. It was estimated that by 1980, 20 LDP positions would be operating within DEPAIR Canberra. The planned target date for 77 Commcen to become operational was 12MAR73, the LDPs were not required until 01JUL73.
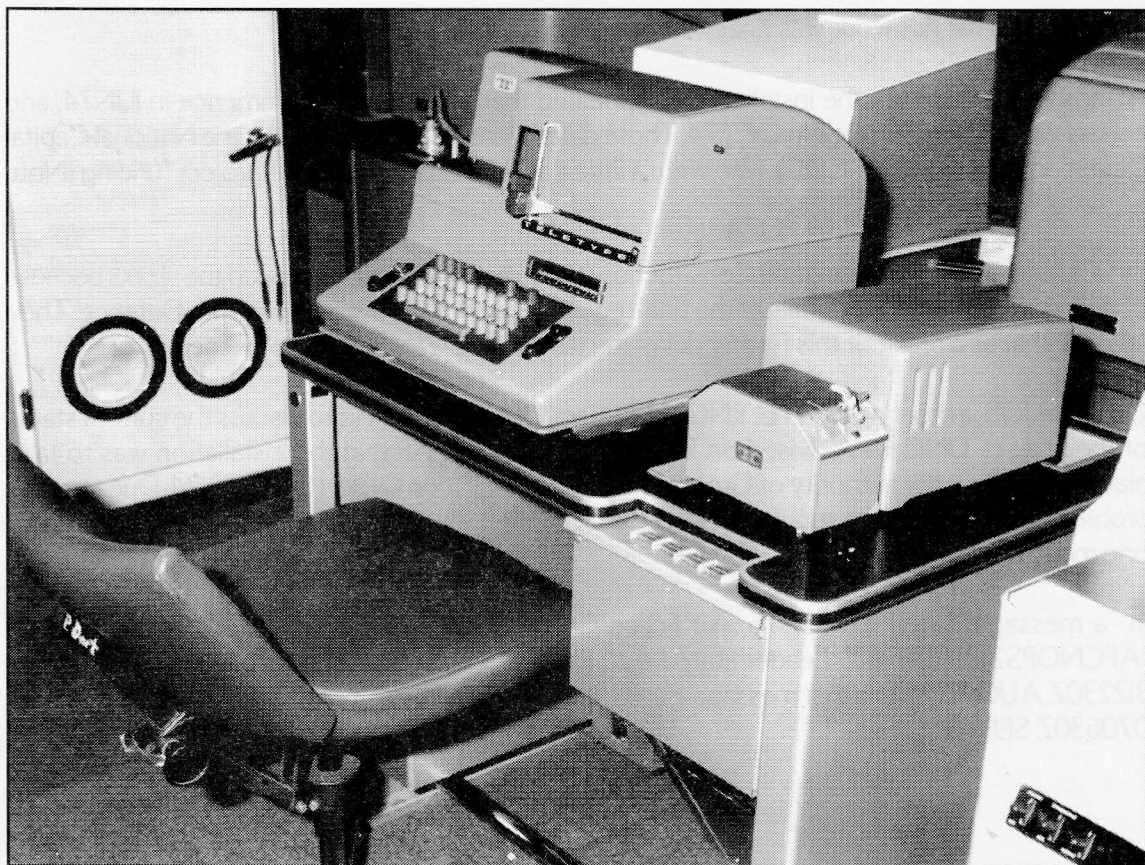
In OCT72, DTELS (GPCAPT R.A. Hargreaves) advised DSECADMIN that the room G-06 was inadequate for the functional and storage requirements of the new Commcen. He stated that unless a firm offer of alternate accommodation was made by 10NOV72, then G-06 would have to be developed in order to achieve the target date. The target date was specifically selected to coincide with the opening of the Navy DEFCOMMARS in Building 14. This, however, was not to happen, due to delays in equipment delivery and completion of works to the room, plus the possibility of obtaining a larger area, the 77 Commcen target date was slipped to AUG73.

Army agreed that after the cutover to DEFCOMMARS, the Army Tributary Station could handle all DEPAIR traffic, provided that all RAAF personnel currently employed in the Joint Commcen remained.

On 1DEC72, DTELS advised Director of Joint Services Communications (DJSC) that a bid for an additional 250 square feet had been made, and that until a decision was forthcoming, the Commcen project could not progress any further.

Confirmation of additional accommodation came from DSECADMIN on 13MAR73. Planning was to proceed on the basis that 77 Commcen would now be located in Air Block 1, room G-05. The installation programme was re-activated, however, due to other projects taking place, and as the Commcen installation was not given a priority, the target date was slipped to MAR/APR 1974.

As a result of the changes and delays taking place, the requirement for LDP terminals was coming under scrutiny. In SEP73, DTELS (GPCAPT K.W. Fraser) questioned whether there was any requirement for this type of message delivery/input. He doubted whether it was more economical to maintain and operate the Commcen and LDP areas when the one (Commcen) area could do the job.

Message Preparation Position - shows the KTR (on the left) and the TD head used when preparing messages on tape prior to transmission. (JUN 1977)

As the LDP part of the project had been delayed, the Commcen was to be equipped and manned to handle all DEPAIR traffic on a 24 hour basis, and it was suggested that this could continue as a permanent arrangement. This was agreed to by DSECADMIN, and so the LDP concept was cancelled.

Due to planning and accommodation delays, a new target date for completion had still to be determined. Re-scheduling of the project was not yet possible until a quote and a works completion date was provided by Defence. These works included:

entirely refurbishing the area,
building the cryptocentre walls,
installation of air conditioning,
wiring electrical points and telephones, and
building the WOFFs office.

The estimate for this work was finally submitted in JAN74.

After various delays in the installation, it appeared that work was to commence in JUN74, and commissioning to take place in OCT74. These dates were to be confirmed by the National Capital Development Council (NCDC), who were a little concerned over details of project funding (Note 1).

By 08JUL74, Dept of Housing and Construction (DHC) had still not commenced the works because of delays in obtaining full details of the final requirements for the installation, from Defence. They advised that as a result of this further delay the target date was unlikely to be met.

On 21MAR75, a meeting of DTELENG-AF Project Officers was held to discuss the current status of the project. DNC was advised on 27APR75, by DTELS-AF that the installation was to take place in JUN75 under authority of Ground Technical Installation Order (GTIO) 13/74. Due to some problems with equipment supply, the target date of 21JUL75, was slipped once again, this time by one month.
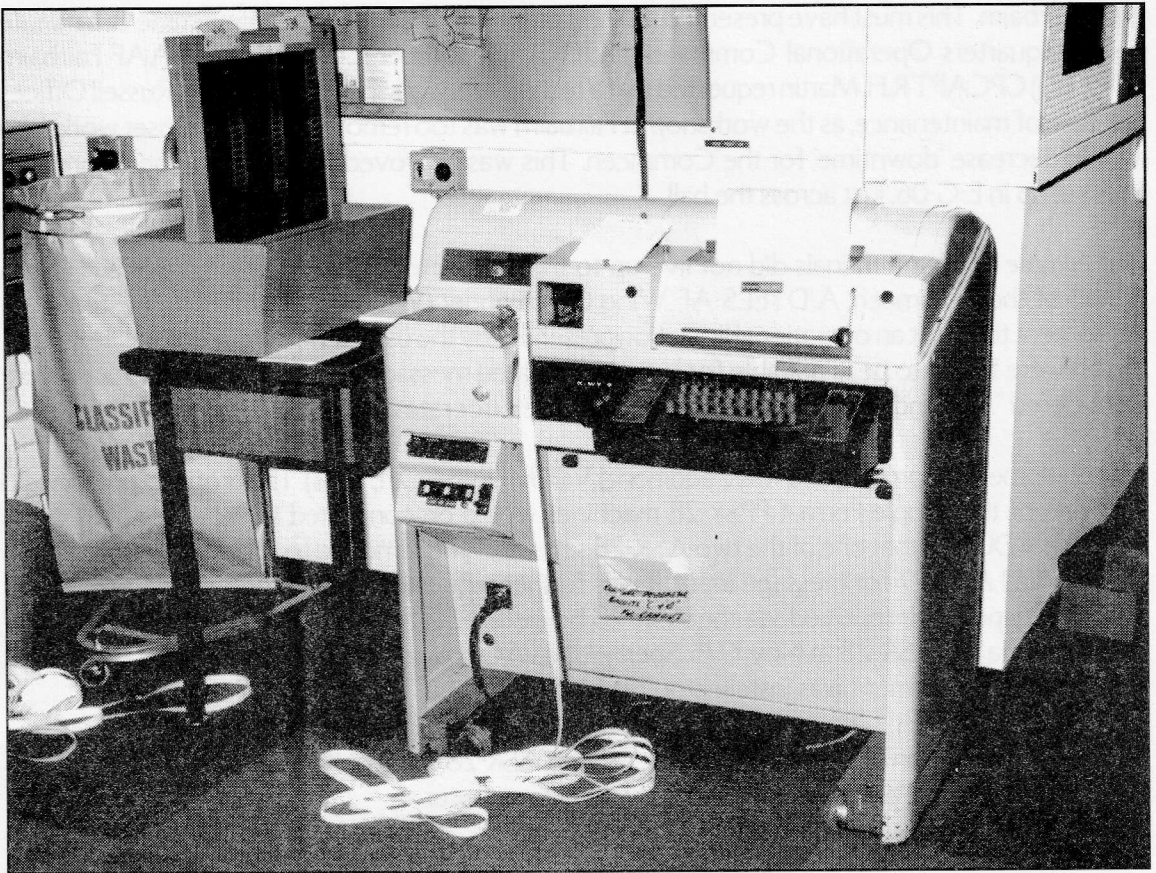
In a message dated 27AUG75, Air Force Communications Network - Operations No 2 (AFCNOPS2) WOFF S.E. Leader stated that the Commcen would start processing traffic at 312230Z AUG 75. In a further message, dated 27AUG75, the opening time was amended to read 070630Z SEP 75.

Note 1: The cause of their concern was not mentioned in the correspondence.

Finally, on the 16OCT75, 77 Commcen was opened to traffic. Defair Organisation Directive No 17/75 detailed the execution of the opening of 77 Commcen. The new Commcen was formed as part of DTELS (AFCN) within Air Force Office, and AFCNOPS was appointed as Officer in Charge of Communications (OICCOMMS).

Model 28 ASR. This machine could receive, transmit and allow an operator to prepare a message all at the same time. Note on the washboard to the left the small signs 'WAG' and 'FBN' written on them. 77 Commcen used to be the relay (via secure telex) for the WAGGA Commcen, and also transmitted after hours priority and above traffic to the Fairbairn Duty Officer via the telex. (JUN 1977)

EQUIPMENT

The installation of 77 Commcen was undertaken by No 1 Aircraft Depot (1AD) utilising technical staff from RAAF Base Fairbairn. GTIO 13/74 nominated the following equipment to be installed:

- 3 x Model 28 Simple Format Terminals (comprising a Page Printer Send/Receive 28, Table Teletypewriter B, and Transformer Power),
- 2 x Automatic Send/Receive sets,
- 1 x Secure Telex, and
- 1 x DEFCOMMARS Service Position (comprising a UNIVAC Visual Display Unit - directly connected, Page Printer and Keyboard).

All equipment from the Commcen was serviced by the technicians from the Commcen at RAAF Base Fairbairn. This must have presented a time-consuming maintenance programme. In a minute to Headquarters Operational Command (HQOC), the Officer Commanding RAAF Fairbairn (OCFBN) GPCAPT R.H. Martin requested that a technicians workshop be located at Russell Offices for ease of maintenance, as the workshop at Fairbairn was too remote and that a closer workshop would decrease 'downtime' for the Commcen. This was approved and a technicians workshop was set up in E-G-06, just across the hall.

The Simple Format terminals did not live up to their expected standards, for on 08OCT75, on behalf of the Commcen, A/DTELS-AF Wing Commander (WGCDR) R.N. Bell requested extra equipment to offset an operational limitation presented by the use of the Simple Format Terminals, which were found to be unsuitable for long or tabulated messages. The PPSR-28 machines were considered "...old and to be presenting unacceptable error rates...". (Note 1).

The equipment recommended was 2 additional VDUs (UNISCOPE 100s). The proposal put forward that one of the Simple Format PPSR-28 machines would be converted to receive echo copies from the VDU, and that one of the two ASR-28 sets would be removed to allow for the installation of the VDU ACP127 for message input. It was further requested that a reperforator position for patching paper tape received via the ASR-28 be installed. This would also aid the inputting of messages via the ASR-28. In Nov 1975, Sperry-UNIVAC provided quotes for the new equipment required. The equipment was installed on 19MAR76.

Due to the installation of the new VDUs, the second ASR-28, input only circuit to DEFCOMMARS was closed and held as a back-up should any backlogs occur.

Note 1: It is almost unbelievable that this recommendation for replacement of Model 28 equipment should be found at this time. Model 28 equipment was actually phased out of RAAF Commcens in 1990, with the arrival of the Compucat Terminal Systems - modern personal computers and high speed printers.

The equipment was subjected to trials to ensure its operational effectiveness. As a result of successful trials, the equipment was officially accepted on 07OCT76. It was however, not connected on-line immediately, and in Feb 1977, Director of Communications Electronics (DCE-AF) GPCAPT R.C. Rowell, requested a connection date from the Navy at DEFCOMMARS.

On the 15MAR77, DNC advised that connection to DEFCOMMARS would take place in early May 1977, more than 12 months after initial installation.

The Commcen traffic statistics were building steadily, and in APR 1977, due to the large number of transactions on the main receive circuit (RGA), a request for the installation of a second receive circuit was put forward to AFCNOPS. There is no record of the installation date of the second circuit, but its channel designator was RGB, and it allowed for precedence 'splitting'. All priority and above messages were received on the RGA circuit and all routine traffic was diverted to RGB. This allowed for a faster processing of the higher precedence traffic.

This equipment served the Commcen for the next 5 years. In June 1982, FSGT Dalmeida requested the expansion of the Simple Format input capability from two to three positions. The Commcen would relinquish one of the UNISCOPE positions to enable a third line for the third simple format position.

In reply, AFCN(F) (SQNLDR Gill) advised that this request would be completed within 6 - 12 months due to higher priority tasks. It was suggested that the lines and equipment held on standby for Canberra and Fairbairn for any emergency contingency, could be used to provide an interim Simple Format input circuit. This was confirmed by the OIC DEFCOMMARS, and the Regional Network Control Centre (RNCC) ACT was approached for approval to activate the third channel.

By 1984, the UNIVAC computer at DEFCOMMARS was nearing the end of its career. A new system - Defence Integrated Secure Communications Network (DISCON) - had been in the mill for some years, but had been plagued by programming and contractual problems since its inception. An interim message switch - Defence Interim Switch (DINTS) - was put on-line at DEFCOMMARS Canberra as a stop gap measure until the introduction of DISCON.

TELENG Task 3913 dated 13NOV84, detailed the site survey to take place for the installation of DINTS terminal equipment into the Commcen.

On 04FEB86, the UNIVAC equipment in the Commcen was removed by the 1AD DINTS Terminal Equipment Installation Team, and the DINTS equipment installed. DEFCOMMARS Canberra completed the cutover to the new DINTS system on the 30APR86, and on 11JUL86, the Commcen DINTS equipment was put on-line. (Note 1).

Note 1: Installed and on-line it may have been, but future files dated 22DEC88 from TELENG3-AF (WGCDR Schmidt) requested approval from DEFCOMMARS Canberra for further testing of the 2 terminals until at least 30JAN89! In fact no indication of operational acceptance was found even up to the point of the equipment upgrade in the Commcen in 1990.

For the Communications Centre serving Air Force Office, the workload was tremendous. For a Communications Centre in the mid-80s the equipment in use was very much outdated. Messages from Air Force Office were prepared manually before transmission over a circuit at a very slow 75 baud! In an effort to streamline the system, DTELENG-AF (GPCAPT Noble) requested in a minute (dated 12MAR86) that the Commcen be provided with a paper-tape interface with the Defence Personnel Computing System (DPCS-AF) computer. This would allow for the input of the taped message into the DINTS computer from the ASR-28 position, rather than re-type the entire message manually at a DINTS input terminal, thus saving a large portion of the message preparation time. (Note 1)

Message Distribution Section. (Aug 1977)

Note 1: The DPCS-AF computer contains all information available (i.e. personnel records) of all RAAF members. All postings, attachments, and promotions are issued through this computer. Access is gained by a network of personal computers located throughout Defair.

On the 13AUG86, TELENG3B1B (FSGT M. Rogerson) conducted a working visit to ascertain the feasibility of installing a Tape Preparation facility. Whilst 'on-site', he investigated the proposal from DTELENG. The Tape Preparation facility installation was completed on 23FEB87. There is no mention of the tape interface until correspondence dated 12OCT88 revealed that the interface equipment had been installed, although operational testing was not possible as not all software changes had been implemented.

Nothing more is available on this project. It was never mentioned in future files, and discussions held with past personnel working in the DPCS area have indicated that the project died a natural death due to more pressing commitments.

Up until 1990, the mainstay equipment for the RAAF had been the Model 28 equipment. This equipment was now so ancient that any unserviceabilities were becoming un-repairable. Spares were unobtainable and technicians were cannibalising parts off unserviceable machines to keep others running. A replacement programme had to be introduced.

On the 24SEP90, approval was granted by the Director of Strategic Communications Systems (DSCS), GPCAPT Holsken, for the connection of an optical character reader and COMPUCAT Terminal System into the DEFCOMMNET as part of the proposal to upgrade the Commcen.

This system was 'off the shelf' equipment which was programmed to handle all ACP127 message format. It could also be directly connected to DINTS. The system was also extremely user friendly, and as a result of successful trials, was fully installed on the 07JAN91.

The new equipment consisted of the following:

- 4 x workstation systems (comprising Olivetti XP4 25MHZ 80386 DX Computers, VGA Colour Monitors, 40 MByte Plus Passport Hard Disc, 80 MByte Streamer Tape, Intelligent I/O Card and Dot Matrix Printer),
- 1 x Compucat Optical Reader Workstation extension· (comprising Canon 1 x 12F Flatbed Scanner and Interface Card, and Calera Optical Character Reader System),
- Store and Forward Switch (comprising Store and Forward Switch software package, I/O Card and additional Hard Disk Drive),
- 1 additional Dot Matrix printer, and
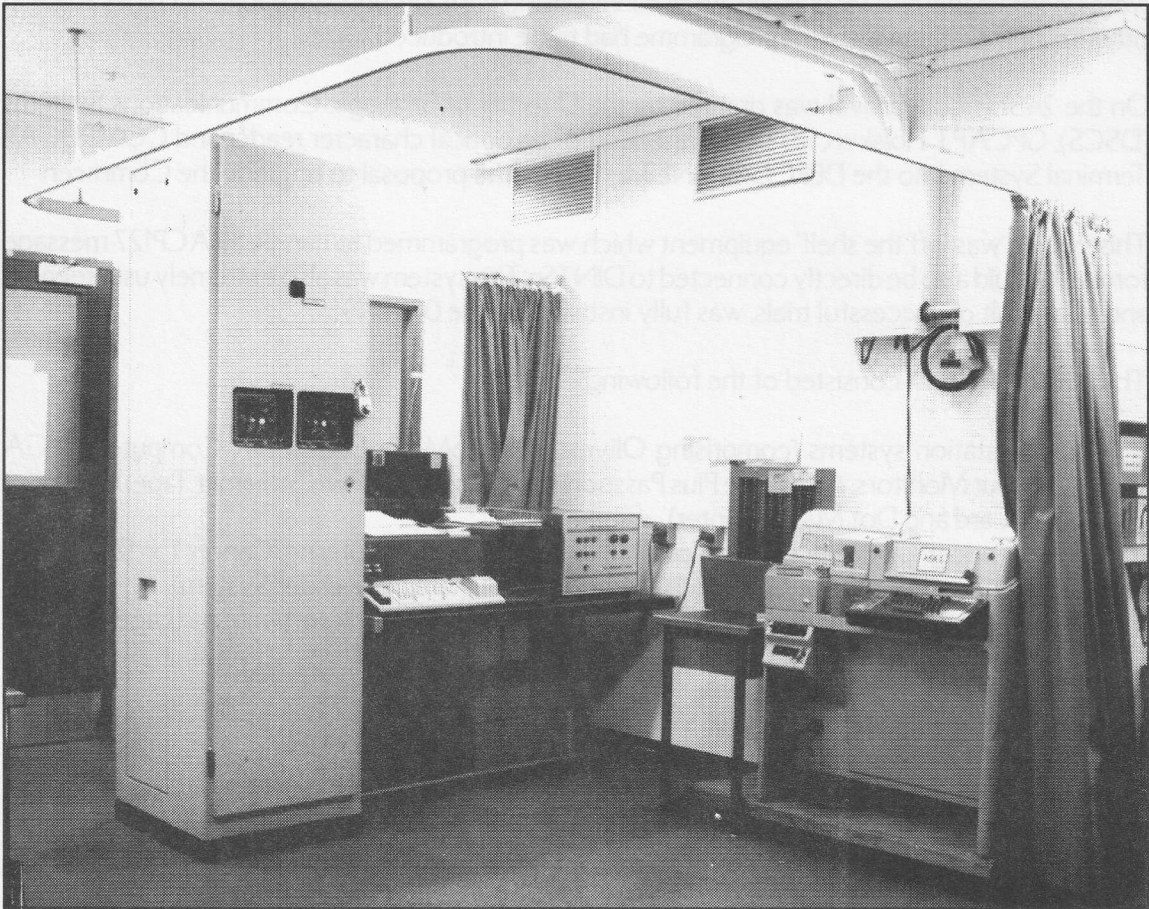- Telex interface (including Summit STI-24 Interface).

With the installation came other positive changes. The line to DEFCOMMARS was upgraded to 300 baud, still very slow by modern day computer standards, but it was all that the limited facilities of DINTS allowed. It was still, however, four times faster than the older circuit. (Note 1).

Note 1: It is rather ironic that the COMPUCAT system was purchased by the RAAF for the Model 28 replacement programme. As stated it was extremely user friendly and any programming changes required could be done with ease to suit any local conditions. Eventually when DISCON was to come on-line, Communications Centres would have to relinquish their COMPUCAT equipment for the DISCON equipment; seen by many as a step backwards for Defence Communications.

The cutover to DISCON seemed as if it would never take place. What was once hailed as the greatest innovation to Defence Force communications was still beset with programming difficulties.

The Secure telex and ASR position. (JAN 1979)

MANNING

The re-commissioned 77 Commcen was originally to be manned by 11 staff. The manning level was raised to 19 when the decision not to proceed with the LDP concept was made in Sep 1973. The extra 8 personnel were offset from reductions at MTU (Frognall) after the closure of that unit. In Jun 1976, an extra 2 personnel were added after the transfer of those personnel from Defence Communications Centre (DEFCOMMCEN) in 'F' block.

Exchange duties for Communications Operators (COMMSOPS) from 77 COMMCEN to the RAAF Electronic Data Processing (EDP) Centre at Russell Offices, and for junior Corporals to the position of AFCN(F)2A took place on a regular basis in the early years of the Commcen. The EDP exchange was a local programme and was being studied by DEFAIR, with a view to amalgamation of the two musterings. In a minute dated 14MAR78, the Chief of Air Force Personnel (CAFP) AVM Parker had the following to say about the future of the COMMSOP mustering:

> " As the EDP mustering is phased out, the responsibilities of the COMMSOP mustering will be broadened to embrace the residual data transcription workload. Appropriate training courses will be developed for COMMSOPS" (Note 1).

The exchange to AFCN(F)2A position was hoped to give junior Corporals some experience in undertaking the responsibility that the job carried.

The manning of the Commcen also included 2 Public Service Clerk Administrative (CA2) positions at the MDS area. These positions must have been considered to be good 'starting positions' for a public service career, as administrative files are overwhelmed with 'positions vacant' reports, and written applications for the jobs; none of the public servants seemed to stay in these positions for too long. Conversations with past 77 Commcen members indicated that these 2 positions often went unmanned due to flex-time and copious sick leave. As it was, the RAAF personnel were manning the position after hours; there was not a public servant on duty after 1650 hours.

The situation in getting public servants to man this position and stay for any appreciable length of time became difficult. In Oct 1982, FSGT Dalmeida suggested in a minute to AFCN(F) that the positions could be manned by AC/LAC COMMSOPS or RAAF Clerks, due to the "apparent inability of the Public Service to provide adequate manning for this section".

The 2 public service positions finally ceded, and COMMSOPS took over the manning of the position. It was, however, only half a victory. The 2 positions were never filled by posting in new personnel, they had to be filled from within the Commcens resources; i.e. two troops were taken from their current duties to fill the gaps, and this meant that the Commcen manning would be spread thinner, covering larger work commitments with more work for all.

Note 1:   As at JUN93, the COMMSOP and EDPOP musterings are preparing for amalgamation into 'CISCONs' - Communications and Information Systems Controllers wef 01JAN94.

In Mar 1984, staff shortages forced WOFFCOMMS (WOFF Douglas) to commence reduced manning on weekends and public holidays down to one person on duty. In a minute to the OIC DEFCOMMARS, he requested that DEFCOMMARS keep in regular contact with 77 Commcen to ensure the safety of the operator on duty.

In reply to this request the Regional Controller for the Defence Communications Network (DEFCOMMNET) ACT advised that he could not agree to a reduced capability of a regional station. He further advised that he had instructed OIC DEFCOMMARS that the safety contact procedures were not to be implemented, but that DEFCOMMARS was to assist if 'band-aid' staffing was necessary. He also stated that he would hold discussions with DCE-AF to find a permanent solution. No relief manning was provided, and the Safety contact procedures denied by DEFCOMMARS were provided by the Aust Federal Police Guard.

The 'Smoko' room. According to an ex-Commcen member the installation of the water alone cost in the vicinity of $5000, as the pipes had to be run from the outside of the compound wall. (FEB 1981)

In June 1984 the shifts reverted back to a 2 person roster, but in a few short months the manning was critical once again due to 3 members being on maternity leave simultaneously. The files did not show whether relief manning was forthcoming for this situation.

Manning remained steady up until May 1988. At this period, due to leave prior to posting, maternity leave and one non-effective due to a motor vehicle accident, the strength of 10 Corporals was eroded to 3. To make up the numbers, a Corporal on attachment to Base Squadron Wagga (for relief manning!) was re-called to 77Commcen, and his attachment cancelled.

After the installation of the COMPUCAT Terminal System in Jan 1991, a review of Commcen manning was held, and as a result of the savings the new system brought with it, 1 LAC/LACW position was lost. Later that same year 1 SGT position was lost to the imminent cutover to the DISCON system, and the proposed amalgamation of Commcens. The strength of the Commcen was now 19; 1 FSGT, 1 SGT, 9 CPLS and 8 AC/LAC.

ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL

For a Commcen to operate efficiently, administration must be handled efficiently, and this is a job in itself. Admin covers a wide range of subjects from ordering pens to organising shift rosters.

As previously mentioned, the Commcen was formed as part of DTELS(AFCN) within Air Force Office and AFCNOPS1 was appointed as OICCOMMS.

On 27 Sep 1988, a proposal was put forward by DCE-AF (GPCAPT R.G. White) to Directorate Office of the Chief of the Air Staff (DOCAS) that the management of the Commcen should be transferred to RAAF Support Unit Canberra (RAAFSUCAN). He further stated that the structure of DCE-AF could no longer accommodate the administration of the Commcen. In a minute to CO RAAFSUCAN dated 04OCT88, the SNCOIC Commcen (FSGT Guthrie) endorsed the proposed transfer.

DOCAS (GPCAPT Walker) agreed to the change, and granted direct liaison authority to CO RAAFSUCAN to finalise the details. The transfer of management of ASAFCOMMCEN Canberra took place by the end of that month.

ROSTERS

The original roster system employed by 77 Commcen ran as follows:

Day 1 - Night Shift (2300 - 0830 hrs),
Day 2 - Night Shift (2300 - 0830 hrs),
Day 3 - Evening Shift (1700 - 2300 hrs),
Day 4 - Evening Shift (1700 - 2300 hrs),
Day 5 - Day Shift (0830 - 1700 hrs), and
Day 6 - Day Shift (0830 - 1700 hrs).

This was followed by 3 days stand-down. On the night of the 3rd stand-down day, the shiftworker started cycle again at 2300 hrs.

The problem with this roster system was the 'quick changeover' from night shift to evening shift and from evening shift to day shift. (e.g. finish the 2nd night shift at 0830 hrs, go home to sleep and then have to report for duty at 1700 hrs that afternoon!)

In April 1977, Cpl Merv Vivian submitted a proposed new roster system, consisting of 4 days on and 4 days off. The proposed system ran as follows:

Day 1 - Day Shift (0830 - 2030 hrs),
Day 2 - Day Shift (0830 - 2030 hrs),
Day 3 - Night Shift (2030 - 0830 hrs), and
Day 4 - Night Shift (2030 - 0830 hrs).

This shift was very popular as it allowed for 24 hrs off in between day and night shift, and on a roster running 4 shifts, allowed 4 stand-down days.

The Senior Medical Officer of Joint Services Hospital Centre (JSHC) gave verbal approval for the proposed roster to proceed in May 1977, and it was implemented in June 1977.

There were also increment shifts run in conjunction with the main roster system. Evening shift (1300 - 2120 hrs) and Late Evening shift (1500 - 2300 hrs). These increment shifts allowed for the maximum manning levels possible, during the periods of highest workloads, and ran Mondays through Fridays.

REFURBISHMENT OF 'E' BLOCK

In 1990, due to the re-organisation with Russell Offices, and the expanding of Headquarters Australian Defence Force (HQADF) in 'F' block, it was decided that 'E' block would be refurbished and that HQADF would move in. As a result of this Systems Engineering No 2B (SYSENG2B) WGCDR Schmidt, advised in a minute dated 08MAR90, that the re-positioning of ASAFCOMMCEN Canberra may be required. The search was on to find a suitable area to accommodate the Commcen. Three options soon became identified:

1. Move into an area on the fourth floor 'C' block, which could meet all security requirements, with little work required,
2. Relocate to the basement of 'A' block, and share accommodation with DEFCOMMARS Canberra, or
3. Relocate and amalgamate with ASNCOMMCEN in 'D' block.

On the 15MAR90, in a minute to Directorate of the Office of the Chief of Air Staff (DOCAS) and the Director of Coordination for Navy (DCOORD(N), the Director of Financial and General Services (DFGS) Mr P. Oldham, requested nominations from all interested parties to join a working group in examining a proposal for the re-location of the Commcen to the basement of 'A' block with DEFCOMMARS.

On the 28MAR90 a meeting was held with Ms K. Brett (2IC ASNCOMMCEN), and Lieutenant Campbell and Sub-Lieutenant Connell of DEFCOMMARS to discuss the feasibility of re-locating in either ASNCOMMCEN or DEFCOMMARS. Due to a number of reasons not stated, neither of these areas were found to be suitable.

This left the first option available. This, however, was short lived. A cost study showed that a move to a new area would cost more than a move to either of the other 2 options, which were already 'fitted out' for any communications requirements.

The main option being pushed was to move to the basement of 'A' block. On the 03JUL90, Air Force Office Ground Safety Officer (GSO) SQNLDR Coyne, RAAFSUCAN GSO (FLGOFF Drieberg) and SNCOIC Commcen (FSGT Guthrie) inspected the area for assessment as a potential for re-location. A number of hazards were listed, among them an antiquated air conditioning system, hazardous fire escape (SQNLDR Coyne injured his leg falling down an uncovered drainage hole in an unlit area of the fire escape tunnel), and inadequate lighting.
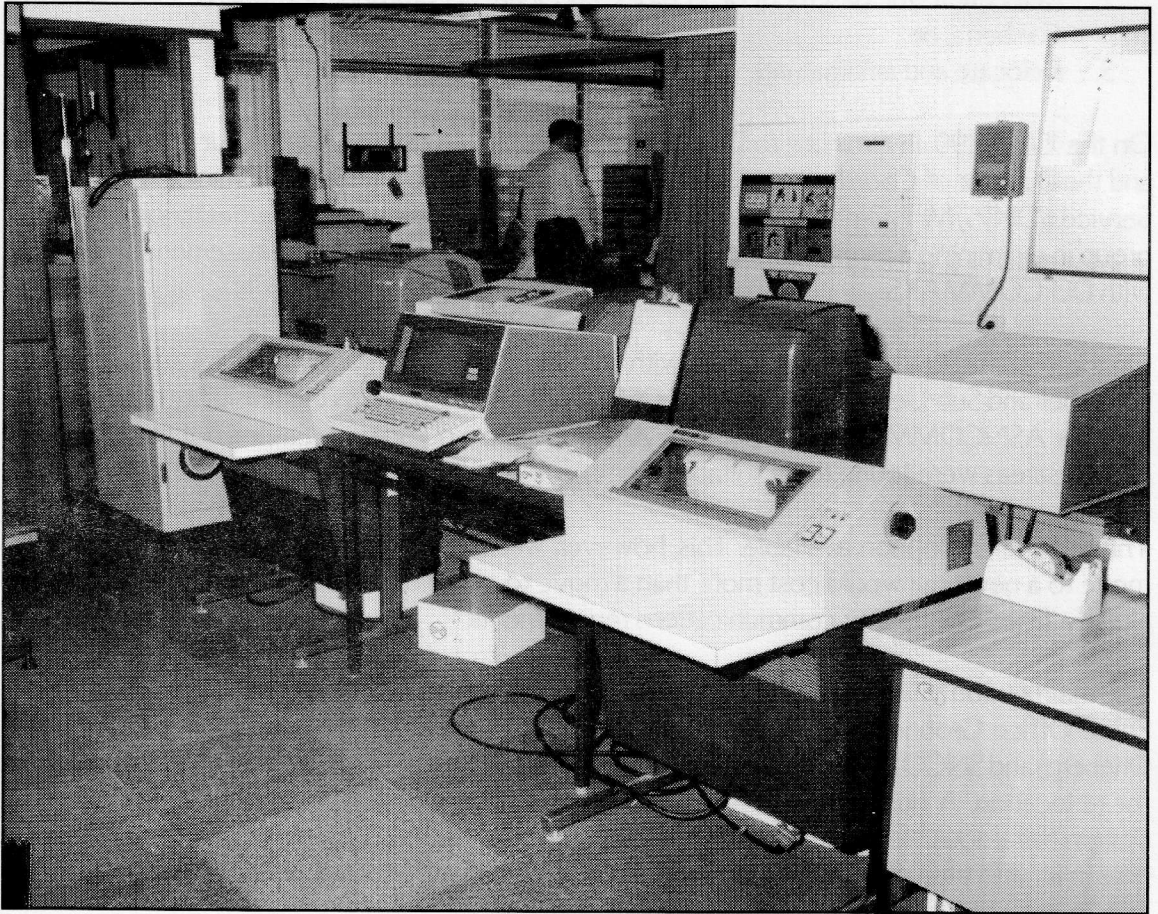
The major problem was the considerable water run-off from the surrounding limestone geo-strata, which ran into the ceiling, filling the light cavities with water and shorting out some lights altogether. The piece d'resistance was the plastic rubbish bins at 20ft intervals throughout the basement.

Each bin was fed by a hose from the ceiling. During any rain storms, the water run-off from the ceiling would empty down the hoses and into the bins, which had to be emptied regularly before they overflowed.

As a result, the area was considered to be unsafe for any occupation for any type of work function. (Note 1)

Nothing was heard of the proposed move for some weeks, until, in a minute dated 07 AUG 90 to all Air Force Sections, A/CAS (AVM Neil) advised of the delay in refurbishment of 'E' block. As a result, any proposed moves were delayed for a further 12 months.

A UNIVAC Visual Display Unit and printer. (FEB 1981)

Note 1: Sympathy must be shown for the Navy Operators who had to endure such conditions since MAR 1973

DISCON MANNING

In 1990 a majority of Communication Centres were fitted out with DISCON equipment awaiting the cutover to the new system. On 24JUL90, Director General Air Warfare Policy and Plans (DGAPP) Air Commodore (AIRCDRE) Rogers, expressed his concern over an apparent inability by the RAAF, to man the new DISCON Switchs' located at Tindal and Perth.

In reply to this manning deficiency, A/DCAS (AIRCDRE Beck) requested an investigation and report into the feasibility of the earliest possible closure of the Commcen. The Commcen was to be amalgamated with ASNCOMMCEN. A minimum number of COMMSOPS was to be transferred over with the remaining being posted to meet DISCON manning requirements. This proposal was parried by DNC3 Commander (CDR) Ladomirski, who advised that due to insufficient space available at the Navy Commcen, the Navy could not support the proposed amalgamation.

Another proposal was proffered. A meeting was held on 12OCT90 to discuss whether the Commcen could operate on a part-time basis with the Army Commcen or Defence Commcen (both manned by 135 Signals Squadron (Sig Sqn) accepting the out of hours traffic. 135 Sig Sqn admitted that they could probably handle the extra traffic, but stated that they would prefer not to become involved.
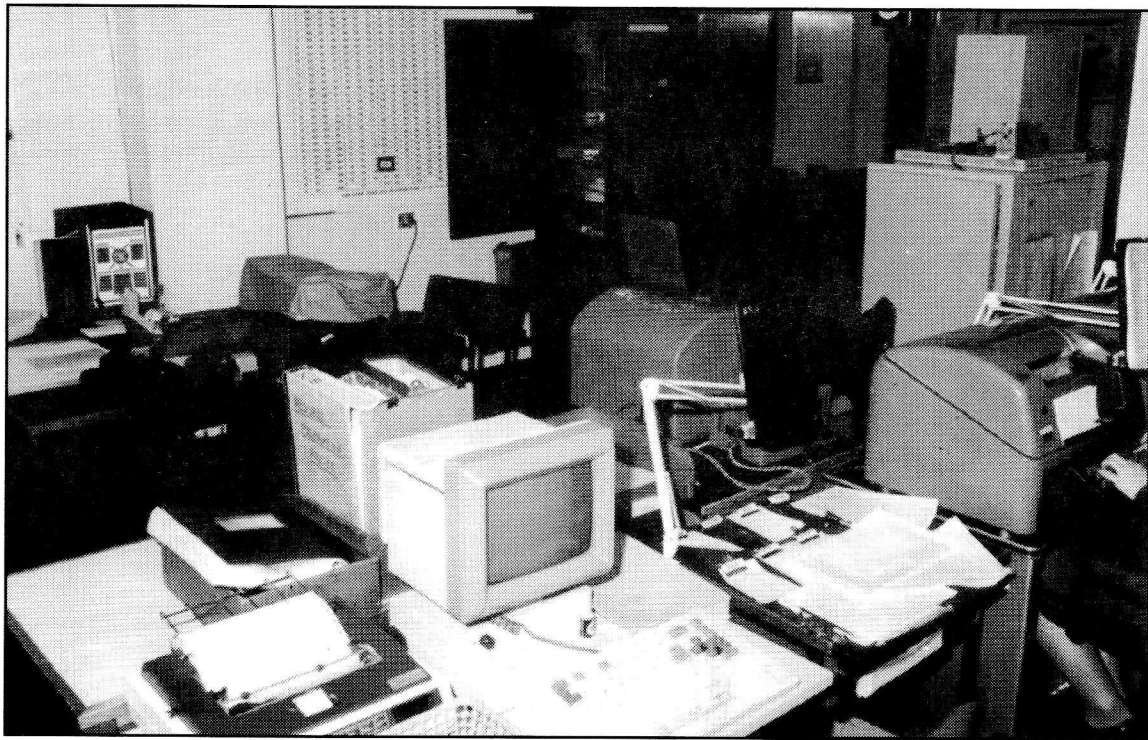
The idea of posting out members of ASAFCOMMCEN Canberra to meet the needs of DISCON manning in Tindal and Perth was eventually dropped and the positions were filled by members posted in from other various units.

RATIONALISATION OF COMMUNICATIONS CENTRES

The direction of Defence Force Communications was steadily moving towards joint operations as opposed to the individual service systems that had been operating. As a result of this it was recognised that there was a need to rationalise and amalgamate the single service communications facilities in some areas to form a single Defence facility, thus producing savings in manpower and equipment. Canberra was a prime area in which this could be achieved.

In May 1990, DSCS (GPCAPT Holsken) spoke of a 'perceived inefficiency' in the communications facilities serving the Canberra region. He tasked the Regional Controller (CDR T T Brogan) of RNCC ACT to review the communications support provided by these communications facilities.

RNCC ACT replied with a series of recommendations which would meet the requirements of the DSCS task. The plan that was to affect ASAFCOMMCEN Canberra was that, after a temporary relocation (the Commcen at this time was still under the cloud of the refurbishment programme for building 'E'), it would amalgamate with ASNCOMMCEN Canberra. The sites for the combined

A DINTS Terminal. Note the line drawn on the screen so that the typist did not venture past the 69th character. (Message preparation rules dictated that only 69 characters per line be used). (JUL 1987)

facility were the same as for the refurbishment plan. The proposal to move to the basement of building 'A' was rejected due to the safety hazards already identified on previous matters, and due to the cancellation of the refurbishment programme for building 'E', the temporary re-location to the fourth floor building 'C' was no longer an issue. The only viable recommendation left was amalgamation with ASNCOMMCEN Canberra in their current location (D-1-11).

Both Commcens opposed any such amalgamation. It was felt that they could serve their respective Air Force/Navy users better by retaining their single service identity. Each Commcen also operated using totally different procedures. It was these different operating procedures that formed the basis of opposition and kept the amalgamation at bay for some time.

Finally, on the 16MAY91, the Director of Communications and Information Systems (DCIS-AF) - formerly AFCN-OPS and DCE-AF, GPCAPT Tyrell advised all concerned of the forming of a working group to reach a conclusion on the Rationalisation of Communications Centres in the ACT. The aim of the study was "to achieve operating and manpower cost savings without detriment to the acceptable performance of the Defence Force".

Being the only real option, the amalgamation with ASNCOMMCEN Canberra was forced to proceed as planned, and on the 18SEP91 the JCEC gave their stamp of approval to the project.

In Nov 1991, a decision was made to host a trial amalgamation of ASAF/ASNCOMMCENs over the Christmas reduced activity period. On the 16DEC91 the Commcen was temporarily relocated to D block for the trial, which lasted until the 24JAN92.

The trial had limited success, and in a minute dated 31JAN92, Comms Supervisor (SGT D. Mitchell) outlined some of the problems experienced, the most outstanding difficulty being the different operating methods employed by Navy, and their manpower intensive message distribution system.

The thrust of the minute from SGT Mitchell pointed toward an RAAF/RAN military manning of a Joint Commcen, ensuring savings in manpower and monetary resources by relocating the civilian staff. This proposal was endorsed by DGAPP (AIRCDRE Cox) who stated that an independent manning review (sponsored by Air Force) had shown that this proposal would require a staff total of 35 to man the Commcen; a saving of 23 personnel overall, as opposed to a saving of only 9 under the current proposal.
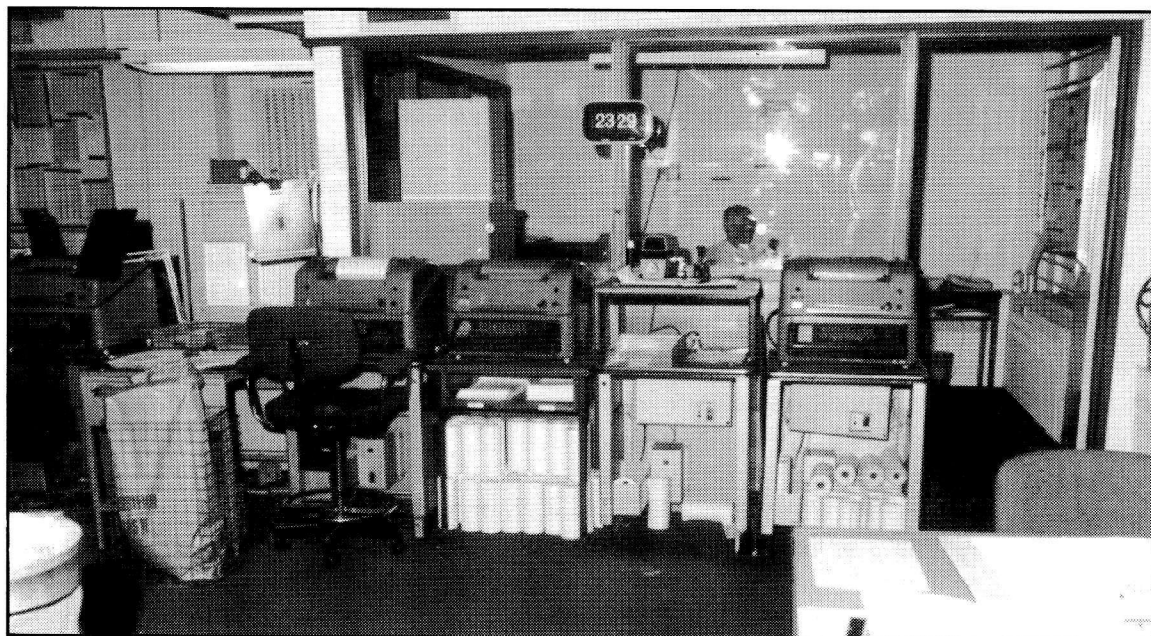
In a minute to CO RAAFSUCAN, DSCS (COL M.A. Swan) advised that the amalgamation should proceed in early Mar 1992. This date was deferred due to the works programme required in the Navy Commcen. The deferment was confirmed by the Director General of Joint Communications Electronic (DGJCE) AIRCDRE Middleton, who advised that the amalgamation would proceed as planned with the manning situation being reviewed in 3 months and again in 12 months after the implementation of DISCON.

DGAPP (AIRCDRE Cox) replied to this expressing his disappointment that the RAAF proposal for manpower in the new Joint Commcen would not be implemented. He stated that the work study team to review the manning after the 3 month period did not have the authority to make the required changes and sought agreement from HQADF and RAN that the recommendations of the team would be accepted without delay or contest. He also suggested that manpower savings be apportioned equally between Navy and RAAF, on the grounds that equal workloads were being rationalised into the Joint Commcen. He was concerned that the RAAF should not be disadvantaged because of its adoption of improved work practices.

At the ACT regional conference held on 28may92, the OIC ASNCOMMCEN Canberra (Mr 'Tug' Wilson), advised that the works programme required to effect the initial co-location (with a view to amalgamation) was almost complete, and forecast a completion date of mid to late June, and that ASJCOMMCEN Canberra should be operational at the end of June 1992.

On Wednesday 24 June, the OIC ASNCOMMCEN phoned the SNCOIC ASAFCOMMCEN (FSGT J.G. 'Paddy' Templeton) and advised that he had just been informed by RNCC ACT that the co-location would be effected on Monday, 29JUN92. On the Friday, 26JUN92 official advice was received by message from RNCC ACT confirming that date.

So it was that at 290109Z JUN 92, ASAFCOMMCEN Canberra (formerly 77Commcen) transmitted its last message, - Cease Transmitting - (QRT), and silence reigned supreme in E-G-05.

Receive position. The printer on the right is RGB, used for routine only traffic, and the printer to its left is RGA, used for priority and above traffic. (JUL 1987).

INSIGHT INTO A COMMCEN

A workplace always seems to create its own atmosphere, and a Commcen is always more than just sending and receiving messages. In this section I have quoted from past files the 'goings on' that made up the day to day running of ASAFCOMMCEN Canberra.

In some instances it is not possible to give an exact date of a certain occurrence and, in these cases, only a month and year are provided in an effort to maintain continuity. This is the same for some events that are known to have taken place but no actual record found in the files available.

Only events post re-commissioning are shown as these were taken from files belonging to the Defence Registry System and were available from archives.

10SEP75 - WOFF Gimm and SGT Tyler were appointed as paying officers for pay point 5 (77Commcen).

MAY76 - LACW Zammit was selected as a member of the Interservice Basketball Team.

JUN76 - WOFF Gimm was moved to the AFCNOPS2 position and WOFF Leader replaced him as WOCOMMS.

13JUL76 - WOFF Leader and SGT Tyler are appointed as paying officers.

27JUL76 - SGT Tyler and SGT West are appointed as deputy and ground floor warden respectively, for Russell Offices 'E' block.

28JAN77 - CPLs Stephens, Brett, Vartuli and AC Williams were nominated for a Royal Guard of Honour and Silver Jubilee parade.

07FEB77 - WOFF Leader requested the installation of an extension bell for the fire alarm into the Commcen as the alarm, located outside, was unable to be heard above the noise level from the communications equipment.

29MAR77 - WOFF Leader and SGT West attended the AFCN Supervisors Seminar in Sydney.

28APR77 - CPL M. Vivian was attached to No 5 Squadron (5SQN) at Fairbairn to undergo assessment for helicopter crewman training.

16MAY77 - CPL K. Brett attended selection trials for Interservice Basketball.

07JUN77 - CPL Sivyer proposed a wives visit to the Commcen to enable them a better understanding of their spouses job. The visit was conducted through the Commcen at Fairbairn (date unknown) due to the disapproval of the visit by civilian security appointments.

03JUL77 - All members of the telegraphist (TELEG), telecommunications operator (TELSOP), and teleprinter operator (TRINOP) musterings were compulsorily remustered to the new communications operator (COMMSOP) mustering.

05AUG77 - CPL K. Brett attended the Interservice Hockey trials at Richmond.

28NOV77 - CPL Sivyer was presented with a 'Good Show' award from DCAS (reason not stated in files).

MAY78 - WOFF B. Gluyas assumes the position of WOCOMMS.

18AUG78 - RAAFSUCAN Welfare provided a television set for shiftworkers.

23OCT78 - LACs Tregilgas and Casey attended the Guard of Honour for the visit to Australia by the President of the Federal Republic of Germany.

JUL79 - FSGT Tyler assumes the position of A/WOCOMMS.

31JUL80 - CPL K. Brett attended Sergeants Supervisory and Management (SERGSUPMAN) CSE No 197 (Non-Tech) for the period 31JUL-20AUG80.

SEP80 - FSGT Tyler promoted to WOFF.

APR81 - CPLs Tregilgas and Gibson were nominated as exchange personnel with the position of AFCN(F)2A.

19NOV81 - CPL J. Quast submitted a request to the Defence Suggestions Scheme that runners for the directorates use brief cases for picking up messages.

22APR82 - FSGT Dalmeida requested that a replacement for the old black and white television set be obtained from Welfare.

29APR82 - FSGT Dalmeida and SGT B. Smith have been appointed Specialist Officers for the COMMSOP mustering in ASAFCOMMCEN Canberra.

14SEP82 - CPL M. Bell and ACW D. Moloney are attached to the National Disaster Organisation Commcen for Exercise COMCOORD 82.

22SEP82 - CPL Gardiner attached to RAAF School of Radio (RADS) for No 20 Custodian Cse.

12OCT82 - AC Pickett and AC Fitzsimmons were part of a Royal House Guard of Honour at Government House.

15FEB83 - Received a dart board (but no darts!) from Welfare.

MAR83 - WOFF R. Douglass assumes the position of WOCOMMS.

05MAY83 - CPL S. Welsh nominated for No 271 SERGSUPMAN CSE at RAAF School of Technical Training (RAAFSTT) for the period 5JUL-28JUL83.

21OCT83 - CPL J McEwen is nominated for 4/84 SERGSUPMAN CSE.

09JUL84 - CPLs McEwen and Whitford took part in the Guard of Honour for the Commander in Chief Strategic Air Command, USAF.

18SEP84 - CPL McEwen and LAC Starrick took part in the Guard of Honour for the High Commissioner of Kenya.

16OCT84 - CPL Whitford and LAC Howard took part in the Guard of Honour for the Chief of General Staff Singapore Armed Forces.

08NOV85 - CPL K Smith took part in the Guard of Honour for the Prince and Princess of Wales.

21NOV85 - CPL McEwen and LAC Howard took part in a Credential Guard of Honour for the Ambassadors-Designate of Iran and Guatemala.

10DEC85 - FSGT Allen assumes the position of A/WOCOMMS.

23FEB86 - CPL Whitford, LAC Lewis and AC Belford attend a Guard of Honour for visiting Chiefs of Staff of the Indonesian and Thai Air Force.

MAR86 - The position of WOCOMMS was disestablished.

24MAR86 - CPLs Bunyan, Hickey and Hausfield were nominated for exchange duties with 135 Sig Sqn.

25APR86 - LAC K. Howard was part of the RAAF detachment that attended the Australian War Memorial as part of the ANZAC Day ceremonies.

JAN87 - FSGT H. Burlinson assumed position of SNCOICCOMMS.

21SEP87 - In a minute to Building Management, SNCOICCOMMS (FSGT H. Burlinson) requested that the 200 litre refrigerator be either replaced with a new model or a second larger unit be purchased.

28SEP87 - LAC W. Kelly was attached to Air Transportable Telecommunications Unit (ATTU) for exercise Diamond Dollar 87.

27OCT87 - ACW K. Tucker was attached to BSFBN for duty Search and Rescue (SAR) training exercise.

29OCT87 - CPL J. Maitland is attached to the Australian Defence Force Control Centre (ADFCC).

11NOV87 - Members of the Commcen attended a social golf function held at the Belconnen Golf Club.

07DEC87 - CPL W. Kelly and LACW K. Tucker were nominated to attend No 1/88 Communications Systems Operator - Air Operations (COMMSYSOP-AIROP) Course at RADS from 10FEB88 - 09MAR88.

29JAN88 - The attachment of CPL W. Kelly to No 1/88 COMMSYSOP-AIROPS Course is cancelled.

22FEB88 - CPL C. Ede is attached to BSWAG for relief manning.

02JUL88 - LAC A. Hyde was selected to represent ACT in the Combined Service Hockey Team.

JUL88 - SGT A. Guthrie assumed the position of SNCOICCOMMS.

15AUG88 - SNCOICCOMMS (FSGT Guthrie) submitted a minute to Welfare requesting a colour television set, as the current set was hired and was financed by imposing a levy on the section members.

26SEP88 - The Commcen took delivery of a colour television set provided through Welfare.

01OCT88 - COMMS SUPVR (SGT Johnson) and CPL Mitchell attended a farewell morning tea for the Regional Controller ACT (CDR Fraser) at DEFCOMMARS Canberra.

24OCT88 - CPL M. Hughes is attached to the National Disasters Organisation for Exercise COMCOORD, at Northbourne House.

06MAR89 - In a minute to Welfare, SNCOICCOMMS (FSGT Guthrie) requested that they provide a video cassette recorder, for use on weekends and quiet periods during the weekends.

05APR89 - LAC Hyde attended No 3/89 Computer Introduction (COMPINTRO) Course at RADS.

14JUN89 - LAC Hyde attended Interservice Hockey trials at Australian Institute of Sport.

08JUL89 - LAC Hyde attended the Combined Services Hockey Competition at Puckapunyal.

04SEP89 - CPL K Smith is attached to RADS for duty relief manning.

30JUN90 - CPL Hyde attended the ACT Combined Hockey Competition.

08AUG90 - LACW K. Mair was attached to ATTU for exercise Swift Eagle 90.

JAN91 - FSGT J.G. 'Paddy' Templeton assumed the position of SNCOICCOMMS.

STAFF OF ASAFCOMMCEN CANBERRA

THE STAFF WEF SEP 1975:-

STAFF 1976:-

WOFF E.G. GIMM
SGT J. TYLER
SGT J.H. WEST
CPL V. BLAKELEY
CPL L.B. CARTER
CPL L.J. CLARKE
CPL B.F. MCQUADE
CPL A.J. O'HARE
LAC D.J. BLOOMER
LAC G. DANGERFIELD
LAC W.C. FECHNER
LAC G. HOWARD
LAC G.P. SAIT
LACW J. DAVISON
LACW M.M. MARTIN
LACW J. RAISIN
LACW D. ZAMMIT
ACW P.J. MILLER

WOFF E.G. GIMM
WOFF S.E. LEADER
SGT J. MCALLISTER
SGT J.S. TYLER
SGT J.H. WEST
CPL V. BLAKELEY
CPL C.R. HELDON
CPL B.F. MCQUADE
CPL A.J. O'HARE
CPL J.P. SIVYER
CPL J.J. STEPHENS
CPL N.W. VARTULI
CPL J.P. RICHARDS
CPL K.M. BRETT
CPL M.N. SUTTON
CPL M.J. VIVIAN
CPL D. WILSON
CPL D. WILKINSON
A/CPL D. ZAMMIT
LAC D.J. BLOOMER
LAC G. DANGERFIELD
LAC W.C. FECHNER
LAC G. HOWARD
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LAC W.R. HERBERT
LACW J. DAVISON
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ACW P.J. MILLER
ACW W.A. MORRISON
AC G.W. MCLAUGHLAN
AC W.G. WILLIAMS

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AC W.G. WILLIAMS
AC V.P. OLEJNICZAK

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SGT T.W. FENTON
SGT C.R. HELDON
SGT B.H. KERWIN
CPL D.J. BLOOMER
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CPL K.M. BRETT
CPL M.J. GIBSON
CPL J.C. QUAST
CPL M.N. SUTTON
CPL M.J. VIVIAN
CL L.W. BLAKE
CPL T.C. TREGILGAS
CPL D. WILSON
LAC J.D. CASEY
LACW V. BARNDEN
LACW L.M. BROWN
LACW B.A. VAN DER TILLAART
LAC R.J. WDOWIK
AC D.J. BUNYAN
ACW J.M. CORBETT
ACW G.L. MILLER
ACW C. SLITENBACHS
ACW D.J. QUIGLEY

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STAFF 1981:-

WOFF J.S. NEAVE
AC K.J. PARKER
SGT C.R. HELDON
AC P.T. SIMONETTO
SGT M.J. VIVIAN
CPL L.W. BLAKE
CPL D.J. BLOOMER
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LACW J.M. CORBETT
LAC C.W. CUDAHY
LAC K.J. MARSH
LACW G.L. MILLER
LACW D. QUIGLEY
AC K.J. LLOYD

STAFF 1982:-

SGT V. BLAKELEY
SGT B.V. SMITH
SGT M.N. WYSS
CPL B.A. BELL
CPL M.H. BELL
CPL K.M. BRETT
CPL L.W. GARDINER
CPL P.R. HERIVEL
CPL D.H. LAVER
CPL K.J. MARSH
CPL J.W. MCEWEN
CPL T.C. TREGILGAS
CPL S.M. WELSH
LACW H.M. CANNELL
LAC C.W. CUDAHY
LACW S. KETTLE
ACW D.H. MOLONEY
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AC P.G. PICKETT
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LACW J.T. MAITLAND
LACW S.L. MUNCASTER
LACW P.L. WELFARE
AC M.R. BELFORD
ACW K.M. HUTT

STAFF 1987:-

FSGT H.C. BURLINSON
SGT D.W. LANGFORD
SGT W.E. MOSS
CL D.J. BUNYAN
CPL W.R.V. HARRY
CPL P.R. HERIVEL
CPL Y.J.G. HICKEY
CPL J.T. MAITLAND
CPL K.R. MASLEN
CPL G.L. MILLER
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CPL S.M. WEISS
LAC M.R. BELFORD
LAC M.L. LEWIS
LACW S.L. MUNCASTER
LAC I.P. TITMUSS
LACW P.L. WELFARE
LAC W.J. KELLY
ACW J.L. GIBSON
ACW K.M. HUTT
ACW K.L. TUCKER

STAFF 1988:-

FSGT H.C. BURLINSON
SGT M.J. HAYWARD
SGT W.C. JOHNSON
CPL C.J. EDE
CPL C.R. GREENWOOD
CPL W.R.V HARRY
CPL Y.J.G. HICKEY
CPL W.J. KELLY
CPL J.T. MAITLAND
CPL K.R. MASLEN
CPL C.P. MERCER
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LACW P.L. LEECH
LAC S.A. JUDGES
LACW S.L. MUNCASTE
LACW K.L. TUCKER
ACW D.A. HINTON
ACW T.M. HUXLEY
ACW K.S. MAIR
ACW C. SIEGER
AC M.A. ANNELLS

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LAC S.A. JUDGES
LACW C. SIEGER
LACW K.S. MAIR
AC M.G. ANNELLS
ACW B.A. GAINZA
AC J.G. SLEEP

STAFF 1990:-

FSGT A.W.C GUTHRIE
SGT Y.J.G. HICKEY
SGT T.C. TREGILGAS
CPL B.A. BELL
CPL N.K. GOODMAN
CPL J.S. HARLANDER
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LAC M.G. ANNELLS
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LACW D.A. HINTON
LACW T.M. HUXLEY
LACW L.G. ISAAC
LAC S.A. JUDGES
LACW K.S. MAIR
ACW J. CHAPMAN
AC J.G. SLEEP

STAFF 1991:-

FSGT TEMPLETON
SGT D.J. MITCHELL
SGT M.M. MARTIN
CPL B.A. BELL
CPL N.K. GOODMAN
CPL A.G. HYDE
CPL P.E. JORDAN
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LACW K.S. MAIR
LACW T.M. SAUVERAIN
ACW J.A. CHAPMAN
ACW J.A. HIGGINSON
ACW L.D. HULL
ACW J.M. POULTER
ACW J. SRECKOV
AC B.D. HAYCOCK
AC C.J. WHITTINGTON

STAFF 1992:-

FSGT J.G. TEMPLETON
SGT D.J. MITCHELL
CPL B.A. BELL
CPL B.S. FROST
CPL N.K. GOODMAN
CPL P.A. GAYNOR
CPL A.G. HYDE
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ACW M. SORENSON
ACW N.D. KUHAUPT
AC B.D. HAYCOCK
AC C.J. WHITTINGTON
AC A.J. HUGHES

THE FINAL STAFF WEF 29 JUN 1992:-

FSGT J.G. TEMPLETON
CPL B.A. BELL
CPL B.S. FROST
CPL N.K. GOODMAN
CPL A.G. HYDE
CPL P.E. JORDAN
CPL M. NIXON
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LACW L.D. HULL
LACW J. SRECKOV
ACW N.D. KUHAUPT
ACW M. SORENSON
AC C.J. WHITTINGTON

The CO RAAFSU Canberra (SQNLDR D. Mitting), OICCOMMS (FLGOGG J. Polmear), SNCOIC COMMS (FSGT J.G. 'Paddy' Templeton), and Staff farewell the end of an era in RAAF Communications following the de-commissioning of ASAFCOMMCEN Canberra. (JUNE 1992)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AC	-	Aircraftsman (rank title)
ACP 127	-	Allied Communications Publication Nr 127
ADFCC	-	Australian Defence Force Control Centre
AFCN	-	Air Force Communications Network
AFCNOPS	-	Air Force Communications Network - Operations
AIRCDRE	-	Air Commodore (rank title)
ASAFCOMMCEN	-	Australian Air Force Communications Centre
ASARELAY	-	Australian Army Relay Station
ASNCOMMCEN	-	Australian Navy Communications Centre
ASR	-	Automatic Send and Receive
ATC	-	Air Traffic Control
ATTU	-	Air Transportable Telecommunications Unit
AVM	-	Air Vice Marshall (rank title)
BAUD	-	A measure of electrical 'bits' of information, i.e. 75 BAUD = 100 words per minute typing speed
BSWAG	-	Base Squadron Wagga Wagga
CAS	-	Chief of Air Staff
CAFP	-	Chief of Air Force Personnel
COMMCEN	-	Communications Centre
COMMSYSOPAIROP	-	Communications System Operator - Air Operations
COMPINTRO	-	Computer Introduction
CPL	-	Corporal (rank title)
CPOWR	-	Chief Petty Officer - WRAN
CTO	-	Central Telegraphic Office
DCAS	-	Deputy Chief of Air Staff
DCE-AF	-	Director of Communications Electronic -Air Force
DCEC	-	Directorate of Communications Electronic Committee
DCIS-AF	-	Directorate of Communications and Information Systems - Air Force (formerly DCE-AF)
DCOORD-N	-	Director of Coordination - Navy Office
DEFAIR	-	Deptartment of Defence - Air Office
DEFCOMMARS	-	Defence Communications Automatice Relay Station
DEFCOMMCEN	-	Defence Communications Centre
DEFCOMMNET	-	Defence Communications Network
DEPAIR	-	Department of Air
DGAPP	-	Director General of Air Warfare Policy and Plans
DGJCE	-	Director General Joint Communications Electronics
DGPS-AF	-	Director General of Personnel Services Air Force
DINTS	-	Defence Interim Switch

DJSC	-	Director Joint Services Communications
DISCON	-	Defence Integrated Secure Communications Network
DNC	-	Director of Naval Communications
DOCAS	-	Directorate Office of the Chief of Air Staff
DPCS-AF	-	Directorate of Personnel Computing Services - Air Force
DSCS	-	Director of Strategic Communications Systems
DSECADMIN-AF	-	Directorate of Secretarial Administration Air Force
DSIGS	-	Directorate of Signals
DTELS-AF	-	Director of Telecommunications Air Force
DTELENG-AF	-	Director of Telecommunications Engineering Air Force
DUPLEX	-	Transmit and Receive circuit
EDP	-	Electronic Data Processor
FLGOFF	-	Flying Officer (rank title)
FLTLT	-	Flight Leiutenant
FSGT	-	Flight Sergeant (rank title)
GPCAPT	-	Group Captain (rank title)
GTIO	-	Ground Technical Installation Order
GSO	-	Ground Safety Officer
HQADF	-	Headquarters Australian Defence Force
HQHC	-	Headquarters Home Command
HQMC	-	Headquarters Maintenance Command
HQOC	-	Headquarters Operational Command
HQTC	-	Headquarters Training Command
JCC	-	Joint Communications Centre
JCEC	-	Joint Communications Electronic Committee
JSHC	-	Joint Services Hospital Centre
KTR	-	Keyboard Typing Reperforator
LAC	-	Leading Aircraftsman (rank title)
LDP	-	Local Delivery Point
MBE	-	Member of the British Empire
MDS	-	Message Distribution Section
MTU	-	Melbourne Telecommunications Unit
OCFBN	-	Officer Commanding Fairbairn
OIC	-	Officer in charge
OICCOMMS	-	Officer in charge of Communications
PMG	-	Postmaster General
PPSR	-	Page Printer Send/Receive
QRT	-	Stop sending
RAAFSTT	-	RAAF School of Technical Training (Wagga)

RAAFSUCAN	-	RAAF Support Unit Canberra
RADS	-	RAAF School of Radio (Laverton)
RAN	-	Royal Australian Navy
RNCC	-	Regional Network Control Centre
SAR	-	Search and Rescue
SERGSUPMAN	-	Sergeant Supervision and Management
SGT	-	Sergeant (rank title)
SIMPLEX	-	Transmit or Receive only circuit
SMO	-	Senior Medical Officer
SNCOIC	-	Senior Non-commissioned Officer in charge
SQNLDR	-	Squadron Leader (rank title)
SYSENG	-	Systems Engineering
TD	-	Transmitter Distributor
TELEG	-	Telegraphist
TELENG	-	Telecommunications Engineering
TELSOP(C)	-	Telecommunications Operator (Cypher)
TELSTECH	-	Telecommunications Technician
TPRINOP	-	Teleprinter Operator
VDU	-	Visual Display Unit
WGCDR	-	Wing Commander
WOCOMMS	-	Warrant Officer in charge of Communications
1AD	-	No 1 Aircraft Depot
135 SIGS SQN	-	No 135 Signals Squadron (Army)