

## **Chapter 5**

### **HQ Commander Royal Australian Army Ordnance Corps, Northern Command Troops 1951 - 1960**

#### **The Kerr Years - 1951 to 1959**

On 15 January 1951, the unit was re-designated as 16 Base Ordnance Depot (BOD) Technical Stores Company. The reason behind the change was seen as an attempt to establish a Northern Company in the ORBAT of 16 BOD which was located in Victoria. LTCOL Kerr continued command of the major Ordnance unit of the time. Camps were held in 1951 at Pomona and in 1952 at Wacol. Working and training as Ordnance Storemen was the main role fulfilled by members during these camps.

Compulsory National Service for all 18-year-old males was introduced in February 1952, and to cater for the anticipated influx of personnel, it became necessary to expand the units.

Reorganization took place on 7 August 1952 with 7 Infantry Brigade OFP being raised as well as 1 Central Ordnance Small Craft Depot (COSD). LTCOL Kerr appointed LT W.G. Moody as OC of the COSD and administered command of the OFP himself until 1 March 1956. HQ Commander Royal Australian Army Ordnance Corps, Northern Command Troops (HQ CRAAOC N/Comd Tps) was raised on 8 December 1952 and LTCOL Kerr appointed CRAAOC. This role was to command 1 Stores Company, 7 Infantry Brigade Ordnance Field Park (7 Inf Bde OFP) and 1 Central Ordnance Small Craft Depot (COSD) and to provide RAAOC Cadre for administration and training of those units. The Technical Stores Company was disbanded and replaced by 1 Stores Company RAAOC with MAJ W.J. Powell appointed OC.

By late 1952, Compulsory National Service was providing approximately 40 men each three months to these units. Unfortunately, volunteer members took a dislike to this new concept of compulsory service and their numbers dwindled. The new units were needed to accommodate the larger intakes of national servicemen. Promotion in some cases came very quickly. A number of officers of the WW2 era answered the call to re-enlist between 1952 and 1954 - CAPT R.S. Taylor, CAPT A.W. Farley, CAPT T.G. Peel and LT H.P.J. Swan. The training depot was very fortunate to gain the quality of officers that



enlisted and several rose to higher rank in later years. Having served in Infantry or Ordnance during WW2, the knowledge passed on by these officers proved of great benefit to all ranks.

Unit strength was in excess of 150 at some stages. National Service training demanded 98 days continuous training. A further three years of CMF part-time training required 26 home training parade days, of which 14 were of a camp of continuous training. This caused problems as members could finish their commitment in the middle of a camp period and could take their discharge immediately. Many did, and this disrupted training and also caused associated transport and logistic problems. The ARA QM at the time, WO2 K.D. Ferris, carried out the very onerous role of kitting out each new intake of National Servicemen, and then withdrawing their uniforms and equipment at the end of their term. He carried out this role in a most professional way with the assistance of an ARA CPL storeman and a CMF CPL. During his term, despite the large volume of equipment handled, he carried out his duty without complaint and with minimal losses or write-offs. He was most approachable by all ranks.

The Stores Coy consisted of four Platoons: Returned Stores Group, General Stores Platoon, Technical Stores Platoon, and Ammunition Platoon. The role of the Coy was to receive, store and issue general and technical stores and ammunition. Except during camps, this role was never fully carried out as most training was centred on infantry minor tactics and TEWT's (Tactical Exercise Without Troops). The COSD was to provide spare parts for army small craft but this role was not to materialize for many years until 1957 when the unit went into camp at Colmslie. 1 Stores Coy had annual camps at Wallangarra until 1957. MAJ Powell retired on 3 December 1956 and was succeeded by MAJ J.W.L. Donovan, who had transferred from 2/14 QMI.

During the era of the Stores Coy, several stores cells had been raised but were not manned. However, rising from what was known as 3 Stores Section came 104 Infantry Workshop Stores Section. This small unit of 14 personnel carried out its camp training at Greenbank in support of 104 Field Infantry Workshop which was a RAEME unit. Normal home training was conducted at Albion. On 12 March 1954, WO1 I.D. Petitt was promoted LT and appointed OC. LT Petitt had been the first person to be promoted to WO1 in the Ordnance CMF in Qld.



## *The Messes*

Individual Officers and Sergeants Messes were established at Albion, as well as a very functional Soldiers Club. Many social activities were held in the messes and the drill hall. Control of their own messes and the running of social activities formed a bond amongst all members and provided them with experience in management. Many lasting friendships were made during these years. In both Messes, the Albion members had a bond between them that other mess members in later years found hard to understand. This bond was known as the 'Albion clique' and it only diminished with the passing of those who had served during that time.

The unwritten law of each mess was to attempt to undermine the building foundations of the opposite mess. On each parade or social activity, these foundations were severely tested as members of the other mess relieved their person of surplus fluids. It was unnecessary to plan any mowing between the buildings as no grass could survive the acidity of this constant watering!

However, the foundations and buildings remained intact until the messes were closed in February 1963 when the depot moved to Gaythorne. The messes, which so much volunteer work had brought to a high standard and which were the envy of other units, came to an inglorious end. They were shut and later dismantled for road works to take place.

Before the formation of the Soldiers Club the Sergeants Mess supplied drinks to the ORs. An FS table would be set up in the drill hall and drinks sold to the soldiers by duty members of the Sergeants Mess. A number of SGTs objected strenuously to having to do this 'demeaning' duty and signed a petition asking for this practice to cease. Their request was denied and as a result, a number of promising careers were either cut short or put on hold. Shortly after this event, a Soldiers Club was formed under the supervision of CAPT R.F. Backman. He worked tirelessly in obtaining funds to purchase equipment for the club and spent many hours of his free time working for the benefit of the ORs. In recognition of his efforts, the Club was later named the 'Ron Backman Club'.



*Sgt.'s Mess members during 1957. **Front:** WO1 C. Remis (RSM 1 BOD), WO2 K.D. Fitzpatrick (ARA Cadre), SGT D.W. Lovejoy, WO2 A.V. Watson PMC, CAPT A.W. Farley (Mess Supervising Officer), SGT A.F. Symons **Back:** SGT B. Carr, WO2 M. Young (ARA Cadre), SGT G. Suttle, SGT C. Sullivan, SGT R. Cuthbert, SGT R. Owen, SGT L. Witt, SGT J. O'Sullivan, SGT G.J. Sheehan, SSGT L.J. Koch, SGT D.J. Jenkins, SGT J. Plath, SGT J.F. Betzel*

### ***Wallangarra Camps 1953 - 1957***

Between 1953 and 1954 the units travelled by rail to the Ordnance Depot at Wallangarra for the annual camp. This proved to be quite an experience as the 'Garra was reached late at night and then the camp had to be set up. Wallangarra at this stage was a reserve depot for stores and vehicles. Members of the unit were able to see and handle various types of vehicles and ordnance stores. A feature of the area was the major workshop and the ammunition depot, where a vast amount of war surplus vehicles and equipment was held either under cover or in open spaces. Soldiers in the Motor Transport and Technical Stores Platoon were able to work in the workshop and handle these vehicles, affording them valuable practical experience.

Camps during this period all had their points of historical significance. For example, in 1955 vehicle breakdowns regularly caused delays and personnel spent many hours sitting on the side of roads waiting for repairs or alternative



transport. On one occasion, they were ordered to board two open semi-trailers without seating. These semi-trailers consisted of a modified 4x4 Blitz truck with an open single-axle dual-wheeled trailer attached at the turntable. These vehicles were already loaded with stores and the troops sat wherever they could find space; a far cry from the safety conscious Army of later years. In 1956 and 1957, twenty plus vehicle convoys departed Albion en route to camp at Wallangarra complete with motor-cycle Provost escorts through the Valley, over the Story Bridge, through the 'Gabba and along Ipswich Road. At every intersection along the way, the civilian traffic, including trams, was brought to a stop to allow the convoys to proceed. Many of the vehicles were late into camp due to breakdowns once again.

In 1956 in excess of 200 all ranks camped at the 'Garra under canvas and in PL formations. Four persons were allocated to a 12 x 14 tent that were of WW2 vintage. Preparation for this camp required a large Advance Party of up to 20 people. They had to collect from the BOD at Meeandah all tentage and camp stores on the Wednesday, then travel to Wallangarra, and then have all accommodation ready for occupation by the main body by the Saturday evening. Catering was a major issue as the Stores Coy and attached units took over the kitchen facilities at Wallangarra which were unused for the remainder of the year. The Advance Party had to clean and ready the kitchen facilities for the arrival of the main body. A catering staff of a SGT cook (SGT J. Moore), two CPL and 10 PTE cooks worked in shifts to cater for the unit's fortnight camp. SGT J. Moore had served in two world wars and wore two full rows of decorations. His dedication to his role was unsurpassed as he prepared excellent meals under at times primitive conditions at camps and bivouacs. Army Records Office finally caught up with him in 1958 as he was well past the compulsory retirement age of 48. LTCOL Kerr could hide him no longer!

In 1957, the Wiles Cooker parted company with the tow truck and careered along Albion Street, Warwick, until finally striking a tree and overturning. The soldiers' dinner was spilled to the roadway. Cabbage, rice and stew littered the road. However, the resilience of the cooks showed through and all were fed that evening, even though late. Fortunately, the Convoy Commander had earlier insisted that the cooks travel in the backs of the vehicles. They had wanted to travel in the Wiles Cooker and prepare the evening meal en route.



What was probably the most notorious event in this era was the exercise conducted in the Bonoo Bonoo area of northern New South Wales. Noted for the high ranges, steep slopes and swamps, this area was selected for a map reading exercise without any prior reconnaissance. Details of troops were transported to the start point and left to their own resources to reach a finish point. There they arrived late in the evening, many in an exhausted condition. Bonoo lived long in the memories of those who walked it in 1957.



*A typical intake posted to the Albion training depot. (The author is third from left, second back row).*

The years 1955-59 were important times. National Service was in full swing by 1955. The Wacol Training Area was now well established and members were receiving Corps training before being posted to Albion. Most bivouacs were conducted as practical Infantry exercises and several large-scale exercises were able to be held because of the numbers available. TEWTS were conducted mainly in the Samford area and most officers nominating for promotion had the task of siting units such as Corps Ordnance Maintenance Areas or Divisional Ordnance Field Parks. The Samford area probably had more factional battles fought over it than any other piece of ground in Queensland!



It was during this time that many of the officers and NCOs were coming to the fore and making their presence felt.

Promotional courses for Commissioned Officers and NCO ranks were conducted with senior cadre staff offering coaching in their own time to any candidate who sought assistance. WO2 K.D. Fitzpatrick, who proudly wore the badge QI (Qualified Instructor), was keenly sought out by members requiring to do weapon and drill training. An interesting quirk at that time was that the pre-requisite for promotion to LT was to be a substantive CPL whereas only a substantive SGT could nominate for promotion to WO. On one occasion, four SGTs sat for WO exams and failed, but later qualified as LT. Clearly, there must have been other selection criteria apart from the promotional subjects.

### *Parades*

All obligatory parades were held in the Drill Hall. With the Unit strength on 28 August 1956 numbering nine officers and 220 Other Ranks, the old wooden building echoed to the stamping of parade ground activities as all units under Command of CRAAOC in Brisbane crammed into the small space in parade formations. Officers were posted on parade and the CO carried out inspections. Very few members in this period had motor cars so members came to parades by train, tram and bus and in full uniform together with their rifle. Night parades were held on a Monday night and were of a 2-hour duration.

Failure to attend an obligatory parade whilst a National Serviceman often brought a £5 (\$10) fine and your name entered on a charge report. As a consequence, the Government funds were usually swelled after each obligatory parade. A book could be written on the weird and wonderful excuses offered for non-attendance. Members not attending camp or bivouac could be arrested in their own homes and then taken off to camp regardless of their protests. This duty fell to the ARA Cadre staff who would enlist some assistance from some NCOs for this duty. WO2s K.D. Fitzpatrick, M.P. Cunnane and M. Young led many raids on unsuspecting defaulters.

On non-obligatory or voluntary nights members were noted for their absence and on most nights 20 or more persons constituted a good roll up. Members were trained in Ordnance procedures, Infantry minor tactics and map reading. The Cadre staff of 5 was very capable and members enjoyed the fruits of their



labour on camps and bivouacs because of the equipment they were able to obtain for realistic training purposes. The clerical Cadre staff consisted of a WO2 and a CPL who maintained all unit personnel records and pay requirements. On the occasion of a bivouac Officers and Sergeants messes were set up in the field and stewards served meals.

At the end of each year, members received their payment in cash for attendance at all home training parades. Pay parades were an important and formal occasion. Pay Officers sat at a desk, either with an armed escort standing nearby or armed themselves with a pistol for security. A Nominal Roll call took place with members falling in in alphabetical order. When their name was called they marched up to the Officer, saluted, received and signed for their pay, responded "All correct, Sir", saluted again and marched off. Pay was also available in cash at the end of camps and courses. On one occasion at Albion a storm caused a power failure, thus blackening out the drill hall whilst the pay parade was in progress. This caused the Paying Officer great concern until he was able to secure the money, using torchlight. Members also received travelling and meal allowances for home parades until 1962.

### ***Rifle Issue***

Rifle shooting and range parades were conducted at the Enoggera main and Siberia ranges. Members fired the 303 rifle, Bren LMG and Owen machine carbine. Range practices were easy to conduct in this period. Members were told to report to the range and meet under the Moreton Bay fig tree outside the Armoury at Enoggera. How they arrived there was their own concern. Practices were conducted with the minimum of fuss. At the end of the range practice, members queued up to clean their rifles. The procedure was to pour boiling water from a copper boiler down the barrel, then oil the barrel with a piece of 4x2 flannelette on a steel ramrod and then move to the range officer for inspection.

All ORs were issued, upon enlistment, with their clothing entitlement and rifles. This equipment was taken home. Rifles were brought along to parades. Many was the occasion when a rifle was presented to the Q Store either with the woodwork broken or damaged after an unsuccessful shooting expedition of a private nature. A £5 (\$10) fine was the order of the day for this practice.





One unfortunate accident occurred when CPL R. Hart lost an eye while experimenting with his service rifle during a weekend shooting expedition.

1 Stores Coy was disbanded on 8 October 1957 and 1 Ordnance Vehicle Depot was raised. This action brought about a new type of training for unit members and the end of the Wallangarra camps for many years. Further changes came about in 1957. The period of service required under the National Service Act was reduced and the Defence budget for the CMF was significantly reduced. Bivouacs and training activities were curtailed for a short period.

### *A Name Change*

1 Ordnance Vehicle Depot was re-designated 1 Advanced Vehicle Depot (AVD) on 10 April 1958. However, it was only a name change and did not affect the role or training activities. Driving courses were popular and ballots were conducted to select those who were to attend the course. The annual course with its convoy drive gave members their chance to handle army vehicles. The 2 ½ ton GMC and Studebaker trucks, the crash gearbox of the Ford and Chev 4X4 Blitz wagons required great skill whilst the synchronised gearboxes of the Ford and International CL were much easier to master. The Jeep provided great fun and members vied with one another to see who could get the highest number of licence types. Unit members with current licences were used as instructors and many risked their lives in this capacity. ARA Testing Officers were drawn from the Vehicle Depot at Banyo, until about 1960. WO2 N.T. Congram, SGT M. Drew and CPL W. Wright attended many courses in this capacity. WO2 N.T. Congram, later as a CAPT, became the Unit Adjutant in May of 1973. As Testing Officer courses became available LTs L.J. Koch, A.F. Symons and WO2 D.J. Jenkins were the first unit members to attend such a course and therefore be able to issue licences to unit members.

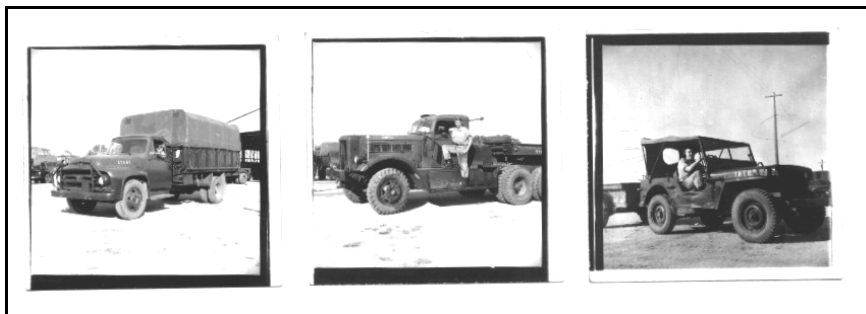
Further units raised in this era were 2 Ordnance Field Parks (OFP) and 3 Ordnance Field Park on 8 October 1957. CAPT J.F. Hughes and CAPT H.P.J. Swan were appointed OC's respectively. These units replaced 7 and 11 Infantry Brigade Ordnance Field Parks (Inf Bde OFP) respectively. 2 OFP and 3 OFP serviced 7 and 11 Infantry Brigades until a total army reorganization in 1960, when the Brigade system was replaced by the Pentropic Divisional system. This concept replaced the long-serving British traditional system and Infantry Battalions were restructured to form new battle groups. The old traditional



Battalions were disbanded and enlarged into 1RQR and 2RQR with Support Arms and Services. The Ordnance structure, while still having a major base unit, became more mobile-oriented with forward units supplying the groups. The Pentropic Divisional concept was, however, disbanded in November 1964.

No 31113		Australian Military Forces		TESTING OFFICER.		ARMY DRIVING LICENCE		AAF G11 Revised July, 1961	
Army No. 145982		Rank	Epl	Name (in full)		SHERRINGTON John Joseph			
Having passed the prescribed tests is hereby qualified to drive and operate the following types of mechanical vehicles.									
Code letter of vehicle qualified to drive		Date	Signature of Transport Officer/NCO		Unit				
A-B1-B2-C-E-K1		9 Feb 64	Transcribed from		RAASC CENTRE				
Q-(Drive only)		8 Mar 64	AAF G11 No A27060		PUCKAPUNY				
F3-F4		1 MAY 65	B. Dwyer		21C RAASC Centre				
A-B1-B2-C-E-K1-F3-F4-Q(Drive)		11 Feb 66	G. Copland		BASE VEHICLE DEPT				
G1G2-L		19 Jun 66	R. W. W.		IBVD.				
H1(Drive Only)		20 Mar 67	R. W. W.		IBVD.				

*An AAF G11 Drivers Licence of this era.*



*Ford CL, Diamond T, and Jeep - B vehicles typical of this era.*

The AVD moved into army barracks at Colmslie for their annual camp in 1958 under CAPT T.G. Peel, whilst 2 OFP went to Greenbank in support of the RAEME Light Aid Detachment (LAD). Members of 3 OFP travelled by plane to Cairns and then by road to Danbulla on the Atherton Tableland, where it rained for 12 of the 14 days. 104 Inf Wkspcs Stores Sec carried out a mobile role during their annual camp supplying vehicle spare parts to the RAEME detachment in support of RAASC exercise. These units issued many vehicle spare parts to their respective LADs under the G982E indent voucher system. Corps training before these camps was spent in raising indents for demand on



1 BOD, bringing the stock to account, and after camp, returning unissued stores back to the depot. Members of these units, during these times, were most fortunate to see both 7 and 11 Bdes at near full strength with their inter-battalion rivalry, traditions and military bands. At this time, these battalions still bore the proud traditions handed down from father to son from as far back as WW I.



*104 Inf Wksp's Stores Sec campsite.*

### ***Bivouacs***

One of the best-conducted bivouacs in the unit's history was conducted in 1958. Morale was high and the unit boasted a strength of approximately 150 effective members.

Areas selected for bivouacs included the 9 Div AIF camp area at Strathpine. On these occasions the exercise planners were able to have two Coy strength forces pitted against each other. On one such bivouac, Exercise 'Swan Ho', an all-in fight almost broke out as the OFP personnel defended their localities. After the supply of Aldershot grenades had run out, smoke bombs, flour bombs and finally sticks and rocks were used as missiles to ward off the attackers. This exercise was designed to site and defend an OFP and it was



probably the only time that potential NCOs were able to experience all phases 'siting, layout and defence' of a mobile Ordnance unit. The OFP had its full complement of 21 vehicles sited, weapon pits were dug and a complete defensive complex was developed.

In May of that year, unit members were startled on arriving at parade to find that CPL A. (Bert) Prowse, an ARA CPL attached to the Q Store, had committed suicide in the Q Store that afternoon with a 303 rifle. As a direct result of this incident, a Board of Inquiry held to determine the circumstances of the death found that the live ammunition was brought in by the member and no blame was attributed to any other member.

All units combined in 1959 for a camp at Wacol and they were divided into two Coys. This camp was designed on an infantry training basis, and was an attempt to have a regimental camp which proved most successful. However, after an inspection by the Wacol Area Commanding Officer on the second last day of the camp, an order was issued that the area was to be cleaned before departure. Kitchens were scrubbed from top to bottom, grass was cut, roofs were cleaned and barracks were scrubbed, including areas not allotted to the unit. Prior to this unsavoury matter, the unit had been visited and complimented by the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Northern Command, MAJGEN T.J. Daley and the Formation COMD, BRIG H.J. Kerr. Unit morale suffered because of this thoughtless show of power, and any thoughts that National Servicemen had of staying on in the CMF after their commitment were dashed. In fact, 17 members went AWOL that afternoon and on return to camp were arrested, charged and later fined. All appeared before LTCOL Kerr who handed out swift judgment and fined them five pounds (\$10) and had their service records noted accordingly. CAPT R.S. Taylor and CAPT A.W. Farley sought transfers shortly after this camp and took up postings with 9 BN.

### ***LTCOL Kerr's departure***

After serving as CO since 1948, LTCOL L.G. Kerr relinquished command of the Ordnance units on 1 July 1959 and accepted a position at Northern Command Staff Group. He had seen the unit grow from nil to approximately 150 men on the effective list. Many changes were made in his time. He had the honour of being CO of a unit in the same depot in which he had served as an army cadet in 1928. LTCOL Kerr had served in Ordnance units in the Militia



prior to 1940, and in fact had an unbroken period of service (except for 6 months in 1947-48) from June 1928 until his eventual retirement on 30 January 1967. Further, he enjoyed the title of Honorary Colonel, Royal Australian Corp of Transport, 1st Military District. LTCOL H.R. Magor, another WW2 veteran, succeeded him. LTCOL Magor was a marketing executive with Mobil Oil (Aust).

### **The Magor Years - 1959 to 1960**

A further loss to the unit on 1 July 1959, through age retirement, was CAPT J.F. Hughes who was also an original CMF member and pre-war Militia member. CAPT Hughes had served in Malaya, was taken prisoner and placed in the infamous Changi Jail, and worked on the Burma rail. He rendered valuable service to the CMF as OC of 2 OFP and 7 Inf Bde OFP and as an Officer in the Stores Coy and its predecessors. This officer was particularly noted for his man management capabilities.

CPL D. (Dave) Fraser, a unit member who transferred to the ARA and who returned to Albion after his initial ARA training, was unfortunately killed in a motor vehicle accident while driving a Jeep near Camp Cable on the way to Canungra. CPL Fraser was an excellent rifle shot and a Marksman. After his death, the Sergeants' Mess founded the 'CPL David Fraser Memorial Trophy' for the person achieving the highest point total in the rifle shoot at the annual range parade. This trophy was presented for over 20 years and was keenly sought after.

### ***The end of National Service***

Compulsory National Service ceased on 30 June 1960 and the strength of the CMF fell dramatically as all National Servicemen were allowed to take their discharge. Total strength of the units fell by around 100 when roles were adjusted. In June, 3 OFP travelled to Macrossan outside Charters Towers for what was to be the final camp of 11 Bde. The OFP personnel had the privilege of marching with the Brigade through the streets of Townsville. The city gave a final farewell to its Brigade of three Infantry Battalions and supporting elements as major changes were to take place on 1 July 1960. All who were on that parade would remember the enthusiastic support given by the citizens during that march. The Battalions marched with colours flying and



accompanied by their own bandsmen. After the parade and an afternoon's leave, all personnel travelled by train back to Macrossan and arrived about midnight. They had started the day at Macrossan at 4 am - a 20 hour effort. At the same time, 2 OFP had conducted a technical camp at Greenbank issuing vehicle spares to 9 BN and 25 BN as this was also the final camp of 7 Bde. The AVD carried out regimental training at Wacol . The unit had now gained the services of ARA cadre member WO2 N.J. Garrigan who was posted as Quarter Master. In later years WO2 Garrigan took his commission and reached the rank of MAJ. He became a founding member of the RAAOC Association Inc.

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