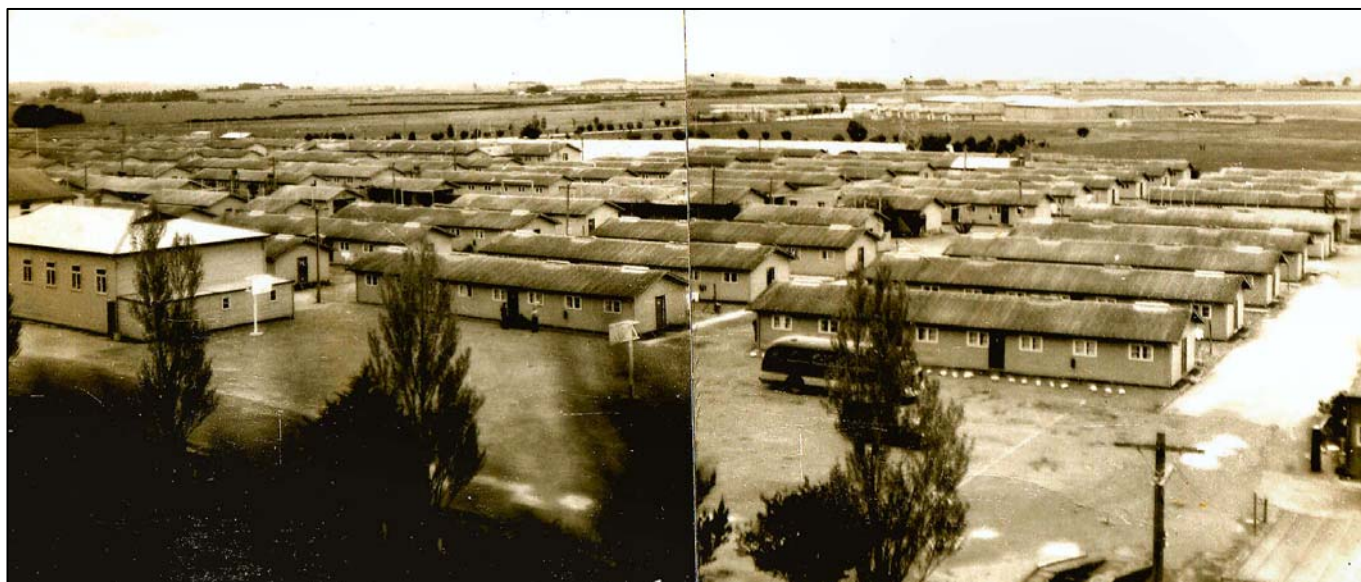


## RADSCHOOL “BALLAARAT” 1952-1954

### Ken Corkhill.

It was a lovely summer day when I, Ken “Corky” Corkhill, left Archerfield, Queensland, at the beginning of November in 1952 and headed for Ballaarat (that’s how it was often spelt on signs around the town then and some clubs still spell it that way). We had been in “Drabs” since mid-September and this is what I had to wear while travelling.

The usual way to travel was on the steam trains and you only got a Second Class seat. It was not unusual to climb up into the luggage racks to sleep at night especially in the cross centre corridors of the NSW trains. This was much more preferable to sitting up straight all night. To actually get to Ballarat it was a long trip as you changed trains in Sydney, Albury and Melbourne. Still you got to see a bit of Sydney as you had a whole day to wait before the next stage of the journey.



This photo of Ballarat in 1955” has the gymnasium on the left and the sleeping quarters in the middle..

You can make out the headquarters building in front of the parade ground which is the white patch in the middle left. The hanger area is just perceptible in the top area and you can see the road running down to it.



There was a problem when I finally arrived at Ballarat as my luggage (the old green metal trunk) had gone missing and I was left only with what I had in my duffel bag which was mostly summer dress. Parade the next morning was sheer misery as it was snowing slightly and freezing cold. The best I could do was to leave my pyjamas on under my Drabs. The only consolation was that everybody would be in the same boat after 15<sup>th</sup> November when the “southerners” all changed to Drabs. Fortunately, the next day my metal

trunk finally arrived and I could change into the much warmer “Blues”.

The course I was to undertake was not due to start for a few months so I was assigned to work in the Officers/Sergeants Mess kitchen in the mean time. Washing up dishes and cleaning pots and pans became the order of the day and a lot of early rises. Often, under the supervision of the head cook Sgt Anderson, you also learnt how to prepare meals for large groups. Still the meals were a lot better than the Airman’s Mess. Some of you will probably still remember lining up to be served in the alleyway at the end a tin hut that served as the kitchen. We used to joke about getting fried eggs for breakfast and walking into the eating area being able to turn the plate upside down as the eggs were stuck to it with frozen fat. Fortunately a new Airman’s Mess was constructed shortly after.

Mess duties unfortunately did not get us out of having to go on CO’s parade every Tuesday under the watchful eyes of Warrant Officer Maher and Cpl (later Sergeant) Woollard and who would forget Squadron Leader Cleghorn.

After about three months, sufficient numbers of prospective technicians had been recruited and



they decided that before we started the Course, which was to be called No 5 RADTECHG, that we had to undergo a three month basic fitting course at Rathmines in NSW. So it was back on the train and off to some unknown station called Awaba where we were picked up and taken to the Rathmines Base.

Here it was back in the classroom to study maths, science and metal working. Metal working classes were carried out in the very large old hanger that was

near the lake. The hanger was a “non smoking” area and had large signs to this effect all over the hanger walls. Most of the signs were still in Dutch as they were left over from the war when the Dutch used the hanger. Several years later the hanger part was dismantled and moved down to Richmond.

Because we had done metal working in Technical School, two of us completed all the metal working projects so quickly we had nothing to do so we were asked if we would assist in servicing the last of the Catalinas.

The other Trainee was Charlie “Screwdriver” Atherton – the nickname “Screwdriver” came from the fact no matter where you were if you wanted a screwdriver then Charlie had one. This also had another advantage that when it came to test flying we were allowed to go along for the flights. It was rather disconcerting when it put out its wheels and came out of the water and onto the tarmac – the amount of water that we had collected in the hull during landing was incredible and you wondered why it didn’t sink.

For weekend recreation we used to hire out a boat and go across to Speers Point RSL and play those one armed bandits called poker machines. Afterwards it was a rather dangerous trip across Lake Macquarie back to Rathmines in the middle of the night with no lights and almost awash but somehow we always made it. Screwdriver and I would also go on boat trips to other parts of the lake including along the shore of the island in the middle of the lake to find mussels to eat straight off the rocks.

About halfway thru the course someone got “Crabs” so we all had to line up in the sleeping huts and drop our daks so the nursing sisters could inspect our private parts (a “short arm inspection”).

It was the beginning of May 1953 when we completed our fitting course and it was back to Ballarat to learn how to fix radios. At least on arrival we were assigned to the better living quarters with only four persons per room instead of 24 and the rooms were lined.

Some of the other members on this course were Keith Backhouse, (later commissioned and OIC 2AD radio), Jimmy Davidson, Mervyn Nelson, Bob Campbell, Kenny Wyatt, Bill Sandeman, Kevin Telfer, “Chalky”

White and “Soapy” Hudson (E&OE). The rest of the names have been wiped by old age but will probably come back two minutes after this goes on-line.



The snow picture is only a guess but I would make it Headquarters due to the part that juts out at front plus the smart car. The other alternative is is the officer’s mess but it does not look right for that although it was altered after we left.

As we were on course and not working in the Officers Mess anymore we no longer escaped guard duty and many of you will remember being assigned to the tarmac area and sleeping in a

hut close by. Guard duty was pretty quiet and boring and mostly we would walk around the hangers and huts to make sure nobody got in and pinched one of the aircraft. There were also several Beaufort Bombers to look after still located on the tarmac. The only excitement we ever had doing this was the day a civilian pilot had to make an emergency landing. He landed safely and was immediately whisked off to the Officers Mess for refreshments.

If you were guarding the main camp area then you also had the task of keeping several hot water service boilers alight and ensuring that there was hot water for morning showers. It was not a pleasant task in the mid-winter snow and did you ever cop it from your mates if the water was a little cool in the morning. Not far into the course Charlie and I found out that if we volunteered to work in the Canteen for two nights a week (usually Tuesday and Thursday) then we could avoid guard duty. This also came with a free coffee and other goodies.

The course itself consisted of periods on lectures and then periods of practical experience on very old equipment. The only lecturer's name I can remember was a Flight Lieutenant Wrigley who later became a Wing Commander and [CO of Radio School at Laverton](#) (April 1975 – Jan 78) and Charlie can also remember a Gordon Beavis whom he later worked with at Williamtown. The lecture huts were heated by wood fires in winter and if you were lucky you got to sit near the fire otherwise you froze which made taking notes difficult.



Practical lessons gave us a whole new insight into electronics and some of the hazards. Invariably one or more of us received electric shocks by touching the wrong part or by looking for something in a piece of equipment only to have someone accidentally turn on the power. You also saw the other side with one of the radar sets that had two transmission wires running across the room and the instructor showing us how you could produce sparks by holding your finger on one wire and pointing it at the other wire. At least during the practicals you got to know what diodes, triodes, pentodes, tetrodes, resistors and condensers were and who could forget their first encounter with the large output triodes (3J160E) from the AT26.

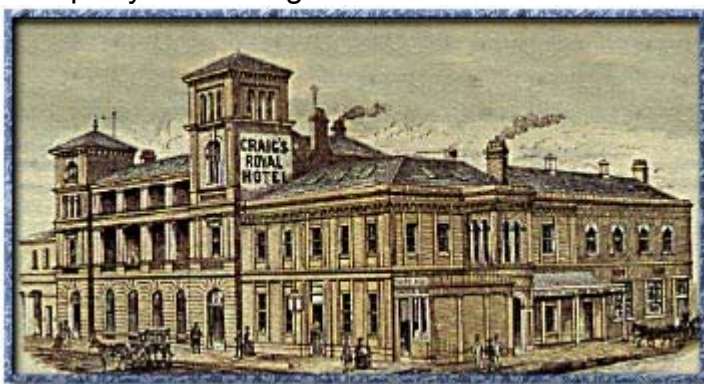
We still could not avoid the CO's parades even in the colder months and it was not unusual to go on parade with pyjamas under your blues with overalls over the top as overcoats were banned unless it was actually raining. You had to hope that Cpl Woollard did not come along and lift your trouser leg to make sure you were not doing this – if you were caught it meant weekend guard duty. How many of you remember the AOC's parades with all the hours spent practicing the drill. Then there was the real "spit and polish" for our Guard of Honour in the streets of downtown Ballarat when the Queen and Prince Philip visited.

Part of Wednesday afternoon was for PT of which you had several choices. One of these that I tried for a while was archery which we did in the paddock across the other side of the main road in. There was also boating down on Lake Wendouree in Ballarat. Later on I switched to shuttlecock in the gymnasium which was a little bit more active. Even this had a problem one day when about half an hour before "Stand-down" I needed to go to the nearest toilet which was in the barracks area but got caught by WOFF Maher and Cpl Woollard and found myself on guard duty the following weekend for being in the barracks area during "working hours".

Regular kit inspections were another chore where you laid all your clothes out on the bed to be checked for serviceability and quantity. For day-to-day wear, if you were short of something, then the Equipment Store sold “U2” clothing left over from the NASHO’s when they left which was very much cheaper than new clothing. The only problem was that it was stained with the “U2” mark to ensure you could not use it during kit inspections. However, we found that, especially on overcoats, we could black out the white “U2” and providing the inspecting officer did not look too close then you got away with it.

Week nights there was “Panic” night on Mondays followed by Barracks Inspection on Tuesday mornings (“Stand by your beds!”). Remember carefully folding those blankets and sheets and placing them at the head of the bed? Tuesday and Thursday nights were study nights and the rest of the week was free and one usually found a way into Ballarat City to go to one of the local Pubs. You soon got to know those Pubs which “put you in the guest room at the back of the

hotel” so you could drink on after 6:00pm (it was still six o’clock closing then). Of course you had to keep an eye open for any sign of the constabulary who often raided these places. A local bus would bring you all back to camp after the pictures finished much later in the night. Card nights in the barracks were also popular and you started by covering the hut windows with blankets in case the RAAF “Spits” (Service Police) were on the prowl



looking for Gamblers. There were also the local dances usually organised by the WRAAF girls on the base. These were supplemented by many of the local girls just out for a good night’s fun with their RAAF boyfriends (or maybe they were just looking for one?).

Unless you were on guard duty then your weekends were completely free. As my parents lived in Preston just outside of Melbourne back then I used to try to go home each free weekend. Sometimes I would have to hitchhike both ways as it was much easier and safer in those days and being in uniform you were very quickly picked up. On other occasions the RAAF took us down on Friday and back on Sunday by bus but I think we had to pay for this. The most exciting trips down were with Screwdriver Charlie who used to come down and stay with my family over the weekend. Charlie had a “CZ” motorcycle and he would take me down on the back which was rather exciting to say the least given the state of the roads in those days.

As you can see life was never dull during these times as there was always plenty to do, you were either studying, guarding, on recreation or just dreaming of when all of this would finish. When it finally came to an end and you moved away to your new unit you realised just how many friends you had made during that time and just how much fun we all had together. Even then we did not realize what a affect the knowledge we gained from the course would be able to be put to such good use in later life when new “inventions” like TV and Computers were introduced. Many course members going on to own their own TV businesses or work their way into extremely well paid positions in the electronic and computer industries.

A Tassie mum writing to her son.

Dear Son,

I'm writing this letter slow - because I know you can't read fast. We don't live where we did when you left home. Your dad read in the newspaper that most accidents happen within 20kms from your home, so we moved. I won't be able to send you the address because the last family that lived here took the house numbers when they moved so that they wouldn't have to change their address.

This place is really nice. It even has a washing machine. I'm not sure it works so well though; last week I put a load in and pulled the chain and haven't seen them since. The weather isn't bad. It only rained twice last week; the first time for three days and the second time for four days.

About that coat you wanted me to send you, your Uncle Stanley said it would be too heavy to send in the mail with the buttons on, so we cut them off and put them in the pockets. John locked his keys in the car yesterday. We were really worried because it took him two hours to get me and your father out. Your sister had a baby this morning; but I haven't found out what it is yet so I don't know if you're an aunt or an uncle. The baby looks just like your brother.

Uncle Ted fell in a whiskey vat last week. Some men tried to pull him out but he fought them off and drowned. We had him cremated and he burned for three days. Three of your friends went off a bridge in a Ute. Ralph was driving. He rolled down the window and swam to safety. Your other two friends were in the back. They drowned because they couldn't get the tailgate down.

There isn't much more news at this time. Nothing much has happened.

Love, Mum

P.S. I was going to send you some money but I had already sealed the envelope.