Australian exchange

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by Maj.(P) Scott C. Long and Lt. Col. Richard W. Steiner

Due to recent fear of travel in Europe and the Middle East, many American tourists are now taking the opportunity to travel to the distant, peaceful continent of Australia. Most of these tourists are amazed at the size of the country, the huge distances between major cities, and the unique beauty of the driest and most open continent in the world. However, few visitors from America actually gain an appreciation for Australia during a short visit. Only a lengthy stay allows one to grasp what Australians and Australia are all about. Occupying one of 25 United States Army exchange positions, the Signal exchange officer, who is assigned to Melbourne, Australia, for two years, is one of those Americans able to get an in-depth look at the land "down under."

This article, written by two officers who recently participated in the exchange program, is intended to educate the reader on Australia in general and the Australian Army and Corps of Signals in particular. Additionally, it is intended to provide essential information on the U.S. Army Personnel Exchange Program (PEP), including the prerequisites for serving as a U.S. exchange officer and a basic description of an exchange officer's duties.

Although Aboriginal occupation dates back 120,000 years, western settlements in Australia began a mere 200 years ago. Initially settled by the occupants of a fleet of eleven ships containing a ragtag assortment of humanity, mostly convicts, the land was not initially kind to the settlers and their optimistic leader, Governor Arthur Phillip of England. Charged with the responsibility to establish settlements in a land nearly at the base of the world, Governor Phillip was eager for the challenge; the motley collection of criminals supervised by a handful of soldiers

ABOVE: The famous Birdsville Hotel, Birdsville, Queensland. RIGHT: A koala and a few of the million kangaroos. FAR RIGHT: The border between South Australia and the Northern Territory.

DARWIN
GULF OF CARPENTARIA
GREAT BARRIER REEF
CORAL SEA
INDIAN OCEAN
TOWNSVILLE
NORTHERN TERRITORY
QUEENSLAND
PORT HEDLAND
ALICE SPRINGS
AYERS ROCK
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
BRISBANE
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
NEW SOUTH WALES
PERTH
GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT
SYDNEY
ADELAIDE
CANBERRA
SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN
VICTORIA
INDIAN OCEAN
MELBOURNE
SOUTHERN OCEAN
TASMAN SEA
0 200 400
KILOMETERS
TASMANIA
HOBART

decidedly were not. Today, many Australians have traced their family tree back to one of those original convicts. Yet the Aussies of today, as Paul Hogan accurately advertises, are friendly, outgoing, fun-loving, and proud. Sincere greetings of "G'day, mate, you orright?" are the norm.

However, after 200 years, Australia is still very much an untamed country, with many areas of Western Australia and the Northern Territory solely occupied by aboriginal tribes. Australia claims the harshest desert, the best camels, and more space per capita than any other country. Though Australia is roughly the same size as the United States, less Alaska, the United States has over 240 million people to Australia's 16 million. And of that 16 million, over half live in two cities, Sydney and Melbourne. Isolation is a way of life for many Australians living in "the outback." Australia's language is full of such allusions to vastness: The Never Never, Back O'Bourke, the outback, and Beyond the Black Stump.

Overseas visitors to Perth, the site of the 1987 America's Cup Challenge, probably do not realize that the closest major city is Adelaide, 1,200 miles away. Sydney to Perth, as the crow flies, is roughly equivalent to a journey from London to the Ural Mountains in Siberia. And it's quicker to fly from Darwin to Cam Rhan Bay in Vietnam than from Darwin to Melbourne. These vast distances between population centers afford Australia a certain natural resistance to military invasion. Seizing huge chunks of land in Central and Western Australia would mean virtually nothing militarily. A good example of this would be an operation involving movement from Darwin to Adelaide. This equates to a trip in the United States from Minneapolis to Houston. One 2,500 kilometer road connects these two cities, with 75% of it being two-lane dirt. Only one main city, Alice Springs, in the Northern Territory, lies along that road. Logistics support for such a move through this hot, dusty, desert region would be a nightmare. The trip would offer the company of kangaroos, dingos, and other desert wildlife, but little else.

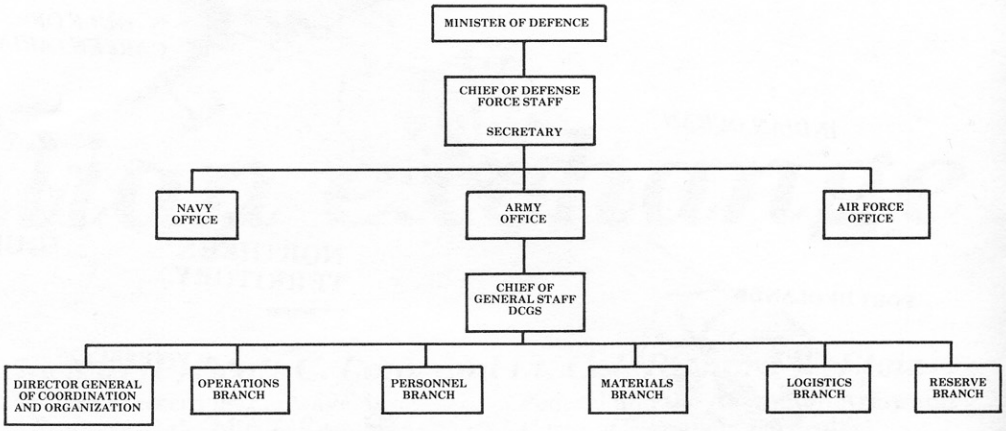


Figure 1. Organization of the Australian Department of Defence

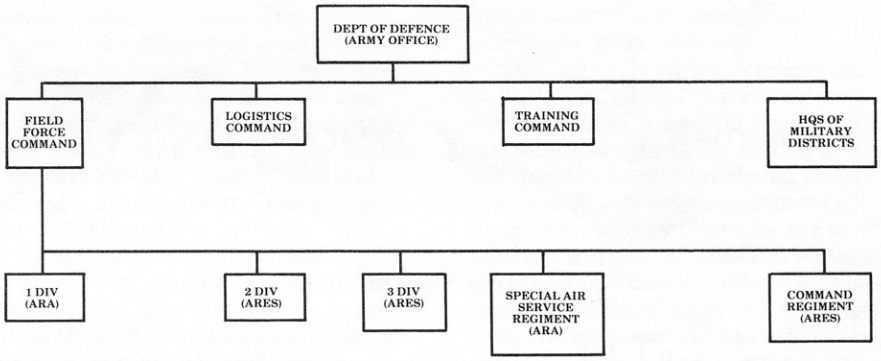


Figure 2. Organization of the Australian Army

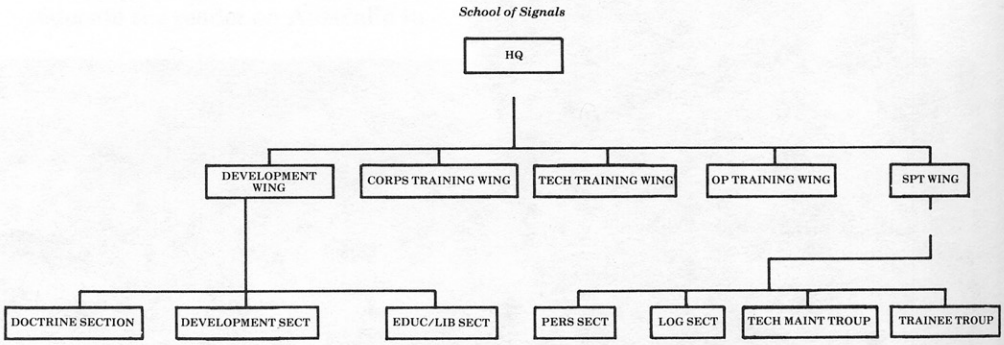
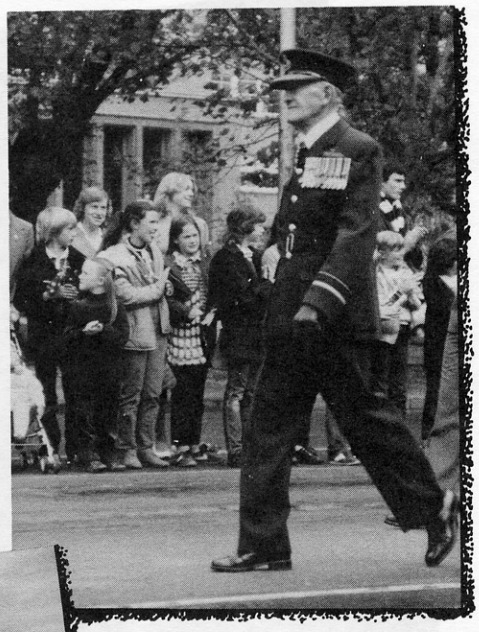
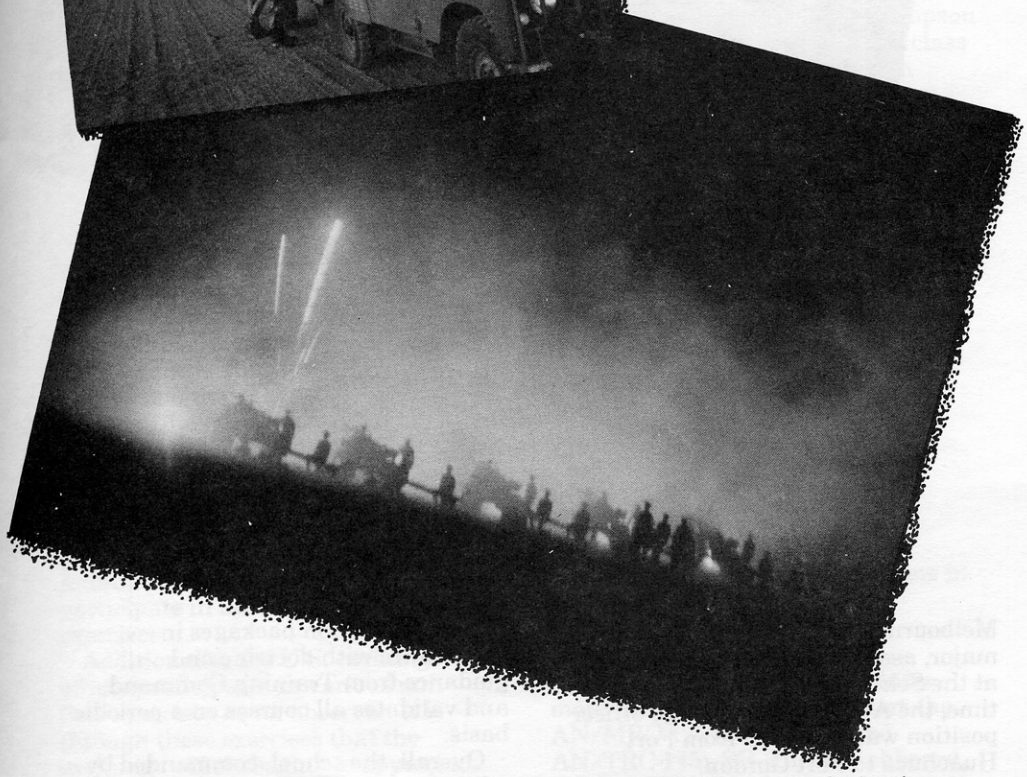


Figure 3. Organization of the Australian School of Signals

Australian military

The Australian Defence Force consists of approximately 73,000 servicemen and women. Of that total, 33,000 serve in the Active Army. (The organization of the Australian Department of Defence is shown at Figure 1. The organization of the Army is shown at Figure 2.) Most Americans are surprised to learn that the Active Australian Army consists of only one division, which is at approximately 70% strength. The division consists of three combat brigades, including a mechanized brigade at Holsworthy, New South Wales; a rapid deployment brigade at Townsville, Queensland; and an infantry brigade in Brisbane. The division headquarters is also in Brisbane, at Enoggera Barracks. The division's primary fire power comes from the Army's only armored





TOP TO BOTTOM: A WWI veteran marches in the annual ANZAC Day Parade. A convoy rest break on the road between Alice Springs, Northern Territory, and Adelaide, South Australia. A ceremonial climax at the Australian Royal Military College.

regiment, equipped with the Leopard Tank. The Army has no attack helicopter capability and very little lift capability. Close air support is currently provided by the Royal Australian Air Force's Mirage aircraft, and Army lift requirements are handled by two squadrons of C-130 Hercules.

To put the Army population in perspective, if the entire force decided to attend an Atlanta Braves baseball game, Atlanta Fulton County Stadium would not even be half full.

But small should not be confused with weak. The Australian Army's greatest asset is clearly the "digger" or the soldier. The "digger" is a very professional, highly motivated, well disciplined, tough fighting man. Seldom able to train in a combined arms setting, sometimes under-equipped, and generally underpaid, the "digger" is not a "whinger" (a complainer). Just like his forefathers who fought at Gallipoli in World War I, France, and the Pacific in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, today's soldier is certainly up to any reasonable task.

It may seem questionable whether this small force would be able to defend the entire continent of Australia. With over 12,000 miles of coastline and a Navy of only 17 capital ships, entry of a small force could occur with relative ease in virtually every state. However, the Army uses the terrain to its advantage and relies on a reserve force to assist in regional defense. As mentioned earlier, the terrain in well over half the country, particularly the north, northwest, and western areas, is virtually impassable for military maneuver units, with roads being almost nonexistent in those areas. The few available roads are one- and two-lane dirt tracks requiring 4-wheel drive in most cases. During rainy seasons, passable roads become flooded and can leave travelers stranded for weeks at a time. The Army is able to address defense in remote areas with the Rapid Deployment Force. However, they concentrate mostly on the key industrial regions of Australia, which would be of most interest to an invading force. (The only invasion attempt was by Japan in WW II; however, the Japanese made it only as far south as New Guinea, with two exceptions. Those exceptions involved incidents in Australian territory in 1942 that frightened Australians and made the war feel very close. One incident involved four Japanese submarines which entered Sydney harbor. Little damage occurred, and one of the four was captured by the Royal Australian Navy. The other involved the bombing of Darwin by the same task force that bombed Pearl harbor, with large amounts of damage, but few casualties.)

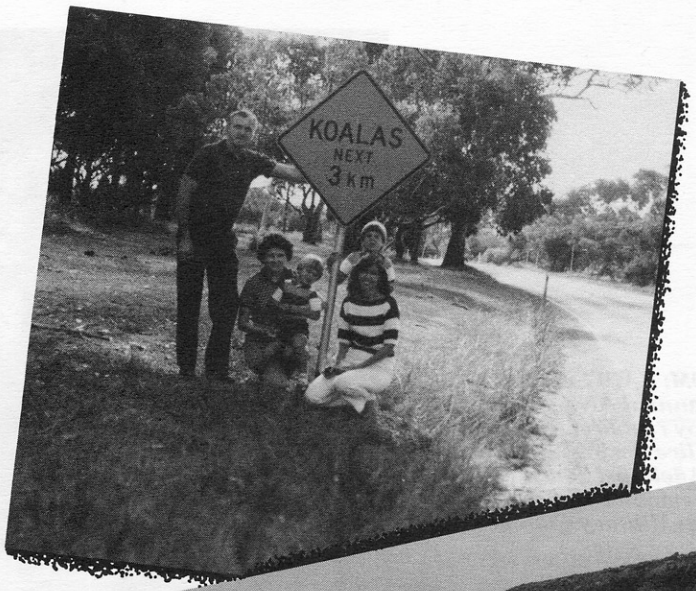
Communications for the Australian Corps of Signals is a major problem with the massive distances involved, since the division could be fighting in several different locations at once. HF

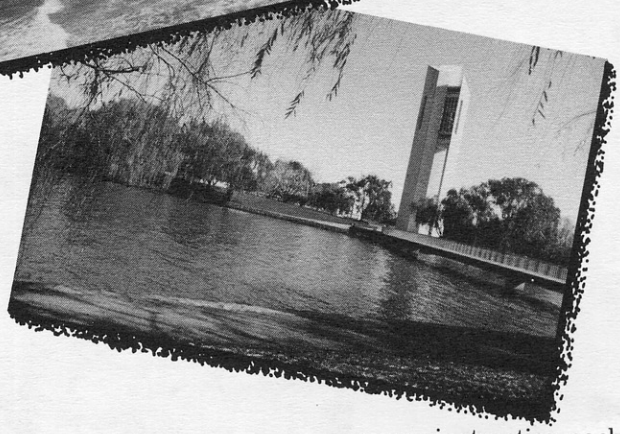
instead of VHF communications are doctrine for trunking links from land force headquarters at corps level to division, and sometimes from division to maneuver brigades.

However, since the "digger" is defending home soil, those responsible for defense communications have the advantage of being able to access the communications resources of other national organizations. The Defence Strategic Communications System not only coordinates the resources of the three services, but also integrates these with civilian systems. Some of the civilian systems include Telecom Australia, the Department of Aviation, railway and electrical authorities, mining facilities, forestry groups, the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and the Australian School of the Air.

The long lines of tactical communications tied in to these existing facilities provide a network suitable for responsive tactical command and control. Communications personnel who support invading forces would be frustrated attempting to provide similar capabilities to remote areas of Australia with organic equipment.

The absence of a "real time" threat to the security of Australia affords the Army the luxury of time to effect the coordination and preparation of the battlefield. This opportunity is an advantage historically wasted or denied most combatants. So, all in all, the Australian Army and the Royal Australian Corps of Signals, although quite small, are highly capable of defending Australia and projecting power, if required, in areas close to the country.





Exchange program

The exchange program is administered under the provision of AR 614-10. The Signal exchange position is currently located at the Australian School of Signals in Simpson Barracks, which is about 20 minutes north of the center of Melbourne.

The exchange position dates back to 1975. The previous five Signal exchange officers all served in Canberra, either in the Office of the Director of Communications - Army or with the Defence Communications Systems Division. Commencing in February 1985, the job moved to Melbourne, with the U.S. officer, a major, assigned as a doctrine officer at the School of Signals. At the same time, the Australian exchange officer position was relocated from Fort Huachuca to Fort Gordon.

The U.S. exchange officer normally serves as the doctrine officer in Development Wing, Australian School of Signals. (See Figure 3.) Development Wing, with a staff of 15 officers and NCOs, writes corps doctrine, compiles and coordinates the production of communications training pamphlets, writes all school course instruction packages in accordance with doctrine and guidance from Training Command, and validates all courses on a periodic basis.

Overall, the school, commanded by a lieutenant colonel, operates with a staff of 186 and an average student population of 200. Broken into five wings, the school provides some 56 courses, ranging from operator radio and operator keyboard, to technician-electronic instruction and career progression courses for NCOs and officers.

LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: A typical Aussie sign. "The Twelve Apostles," a famous Australian landmark in Victoria. "The carillon," a unique bell tower with chimes in Canberra. BELOW: A tasmanian devil saying "g'day mate."

Each wing is commanded by a major. Although assigned supervisory duties, the U.S. major has no judicial authority over the Australian serviceman under his direct control. However, he does write efficiency reports, marches in parades, and conducts in-ranks inspections when required. He is also required to pass the Australian Army PT test (sit-ups, pull-ups, and 3-mile run), to be familiar with basic weapons, and to participate in annual land navigation exercises.

Additionally, the U.S. exchange officer participates in various unit field exercises as an observer. It is through these exercises that the exchange officer begins to appreciate the unusual and unique requirement for long-range tactical communications in Australia. These experiences, coupled with a good background in tactical communications in the U.S. Army, enable him to adequately perform the additional duties as a doctrine writer for the Australian Army.

In the Australian Army, because of its size, officers and NCOs are afforded more decision-making latitude and responsibility than their American counterparts. As mentioned above, the person directing the activities of an Armywide Signal School is only a lieutenant colonel. Similarly, the director of communications for the Army, the person in charge of all Signal functions, is not a general officer but only a full colonel. The U.S. exchange officer, in many cases, is trusted to make decisions in Australia that brigadier generals would make in the United States. Prospective officers can be assured that once they are in Australia, all efforts are made to insure they are part of the team.

There is also an exchange position in Australia for an E-7, MOS 26Y4H, who serves as the maintenance supervisor for the only modified AN/FSC-78 satellite terminal for the Australian Defence Force. The terminal facility is located at Simpson Barracks, and the sergeant first class is assigned to the Australian 6th Signal Regiment. His exchange counterpart, an Australian technician-electronic warrant officer, is assigned to Camp Roberts, California, for similar duty. This posting is also for two years.

Prerequisites for duty as the Signal exchange officer are straightforward and simple. Since the Australian Army has no corps level units, it requires an exchange officer with extensive divisional experience at both the brigade and the Signal battalion level. This background allows the exchange officer to contribute advice in the areas of tactical trunking, manual and automatic switching, and communications center operations in support of a division.

Since the Australian Army purchases a vast amount of equipment from the United States, many similarities exist, such as the AN/MRC-127 (pallet mounted AN/TRC-145), SB-3614 switchboard, the AN/UGC-74 teletypewriter, and VINSON speech security equipment. The Australian Army, over the next five years, will also receive a new family of tactical HF and VHF single-channel radios. This frequency hopping equipment falls under the project title RAVEN and is similar to the U.S. Army's SINCGARS system.

To reiterate, the U.S. exchange officer must have a broad tactical background and should be an AFSC or CGSC graduate.

Though the U.S. exchange officer can expect to work hard during his two-year Australian tour, he also will have unique recreational opportunities in Australia. Thanks to space available flights with the Royal Australian Air Force, sightseeing costs for the exchange officer and family can be greatly reduced. Also, an excellent interstate rail system and modern commercial airline service offer travel throughout Australia at reasonable prices. Melbourne, a city of 3 million people, offers a broad range of schools for dependent children and extensive opportunities for a working spouse. All of these things, combined with a city offering hundreds of restaurants and activities ranging from opera to Aussie Rules Football, makes an assignment "down under" a chance of a lifetime.

Maj.(P) Long was the U.S. Signal Corps exchange officer in Australia from 1985 to 1987, where he was assigned to the Australian School of Signals at Simpson Barracks, Melbourne. A graduate of Virginia Tech and the Armed Forces Staff College, Maj. Long has served as a Signal platoon leader in the 426th Signal Battalion, Fort Bragg, N.C.; company commander in the 1st Signal Brigade, Korea; CESO of the 3rd Battalion, 68th Armor; company commander in the 8th Signal Battalion, 8th Infantry Division in Germany; assistant PMS at Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va.; and CESO of the 197th Infantry Brigade (Mech) (Sep), Fort Benning, Ga. Presently, he is the chief of the Inspections Branch, Office of the Inspector General, Fort Gordon, Ga.

Lt. Col. Steiner, a 1968 graduate of the United States Military Academy, was the U.S. Signal Corps Exchange Officer in Australia from 1983 to 1985, where he was assigned to the Defence Communications System Division at the Defence Department in Canberra. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the Armed Forces Staff College. Lt. Col. Steiner has served as communications officer for an artillery group in Vietnam; company commander in the 8th Signal Battalion; assistant division Signal officer for the 8th Infantry Division in Germany; and executive officer for the Communications-Electronics Command Research and Development Center at Fort Monmouth, N.J. Presently, he is the chief of Military Personnel Operations at the Defense Communications Agency in Washington, D.C.