

The Australian Army and the national system of Vocational Education & Training (VET) – an historical review of collaboration

Abstract

This paper examines the historical links between the Australian Army and national civilian VET systems of training through documentary research. A framework drawn from cultural-historical activity theory is used to analyse the changing relationships between the two systems. This paper reports on the contribution of Australian Army training to the development of the national skills base. The research examined documentary sources to determine the state of military training and education at times of key national VET developments, such as: use of apprenticeships in the period following World War 2; the establishment of national/industry training councils in the 1970s; expansion of VET and traineeships following the 1985 Kirby report; and, development of the Army Registered Training Organisation. National Archives of Australia, National Library of Australia and military records were researched for relevant documents and references. Items were then analysed thematically to demonstrate why the connections between the two systems have changed over time. As well as informing the future direction for Army VET practices, these findings contribute to our understanding of how national policies are developed and how large employers can collaborate to improve the nation's vocational skills and qualifications.

Introduction

This paper is in the area of military social history and examines the links between Australian Army training and wider national vocational education and training (VET). Army is a learning organisation, characterised by Dodgson (1993) as one that 'purposefully construct structures and strategies so as to enhance and maximize organizational learning' and the organisation invests considerably in its training system. The project examined documentary sources to determine the state of training and education in the Army at times of key VET developments. In some instances, the Army conducted all its training separately from the civilian system while, around the millennium, it formally aligned with the national VET system. This paper considers four periods then applies Cultural-historical Activity Theory as a framework for analysing why the relationship between Army training and the national civilian system has changed over time.

Background

This study has relied entirely on documents as a source of information about the national system of VET in Australia and in the Australian Army. During the study, original documents from the National Archives of Australia (NAA) in Melbourne and Canberra were examined. Material collected by the National Library of Australia and the Australian War Memorial were useful sources. Finally, papers in the archive of the Royal Australian Army Educational Corps (RAAEC) were made available. Each of these collections has the advantage

of being digitally catalogued so items of interest were located by selecting key years of interest then using the search terms: Training / education / trade training / apprentices policies / apprentices records / traineeships / competency based training / Training Packages. Further, the words “Army”, “defence” and “military” were used to filter items in the NAA and the National Library catalogues.

It is important to recognize that the items uncovered in this process were used as a set of data so the contents of the documents were of interest rather than studying the documents themselves, a distinction which Scott makes clear:

Systematic documentary research may involve one of two interdependent focuses of interest: documents can be used as *resources* or as *topics*. ... the use of documents as *resources* might involve the use of biographical reference books to compile a comprehensive set of data When documents are used as *topics*, on the other hand, the researcher’s main concern is to explain the nature of the documents themselves: they are regarded as social products (Scott, 1990, pp. 36-37)

As should be expected, previous researchers have taken an interest in apprenticeships, vocational and adult education in Australia and the military. NCVER’s *History of VET in Australia* (2012) was used to select times of significant change in the national system – such as expansion, new types of training or regulatory change – and these were used as the focus for examining the relationship between it and the Army training system. Other key, secondary sources on the national system were Gillian Goozee’s work (2001) and Brian Knight’s ‘unfinished history’ (2012). Historians have also written specifically about Army education and training and four authors’ works were used in scoping this study (Lambert, 1975; Bleakley, 1981; Dymock, 1995; Gallagher, 2003).

Findings – national and Army VET

1940 – 1950: The war and its aftermath

During World War 2, Australia had adapted civilian industry and training schemes to meet the needs of the military effort. A Defence scheme within industry was established to increase production of munitions and materiel, drawing on a labour force depleted of trained workers who had volunteered for military service. It was common for technical colleges to change their practices:

Soon after the outbreak of war the Department purchased every suitable available machine tool and duplicated the machine shop equipment of the Central Technical College. Thousands of skilled artisans were trained for munitions works, the aircraft factories and the technical branches of the services. To do this, it was necessary to suspend practical training of many groups of apprentices. (NAA: MP463/1 T18, Barcode 456771)

On conclusion of hostilities, it was necessary to make arrangements to reposition the sector, accommodate the return to civilian life of qualified tradesmen, and recognize the skills of those who had trained during the war. The key legislation in this regard was the 1946 *Act to make provision in relation*

to the Regulation of Tradesmen's Rights of Employment in certain Trades, and Employment of Members of the Forces in those Trades, and for other purposes, known as the Tradesmen's Rights Act (Commonwealth of Australia, 1946).

The Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS) was designed primarily to prepare former members of the Armed Forces for their return to civilian life after the war. It consisted of full time courses of vocational training, studies at universities and a correspondence course scheme. It operated from March 1944 until the early 1950s. There was debate about the appropriateness of running separate military schemes for these ex-Army personnel. In response to a proposal for a military rehabilitation scheme (for groups rather than individuals), J Webster, Acting Chairman of the Repatriation Commission wrote on 15 January 1945: "... it is not apparent what it is expected to gain by segregating ex-members of the Forces from the general civilian community, and that there seems no good reason why the Government, rather than private enterprise, should shoulder the financial responsibility for the undertaking..." (NAA: A9816 1943/1421 Barcode 244730).

However, at this time, the Army was aware that resources available within the military training system might be useful for reconstruction training. The Joint Administrative Planning Sub-Committee had an Education and Vocational Training Advisory Panel, which reviewed the capacity in all the Army's technical training units. A matrix of the units was constructed, showing location / courses / duration of courses / number of students / instructors / equivalent civilian trade (approx.). The civilian equivalence was significant, with the entry for the Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Training Centre, Workshop Training Battalion noting "Could readily be converted to allied civil trades." Similarly, the School of Military Engineering (Field) indicated that the civilian equivalent is "Drivers of bull dozers and similar equipment," while there is a remark that "specific trg. [training] such as road making, bridge building, would be included, in addition to the normal Sapper [military engineering] instruction." (NAA: CP7/1 S890/38 Barcode 8916288).

The Army trained military personnel for civilian qualifications through an apprenticeship scheme in the post-war period. To meet growing, post-war technological needs, the Australian Army commenced an Apprentice scheme on 2nd August 1948 at Balcombe Barracks on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. Youths aged between 14 and 18 were recruited for a four-year apprenticeship in various technical and clerical trades, and as musicians (www.austarmyapprentice.org).

While this was a military establishment which prepared apprentices for work within the Army, there were links to the civilian system:

By arrangement with the Education Department, all Army apprentices sit for trade theory and practical examinations conducted by that department throughout the State each year, the final grade examinations being taken towards the end of their third year at the Army school, compared with the end of the fourth year by civilian apprentices. (RAAEC: Item 1591, Appendix H, p 87).

In this period, then, the Army used civilian facilities and systems for the education and training of military personnel for trades within the Army and for technical employment when they left the Forces. There were also parts of the civilian training system which were established exclusively for military and ex-Army personnel, although the merits of providing such segregated courses was debated.

The 1970s – Industry Training Councils

The National Training Council (NTC) was established, initially as a Steering Committee, in 1971 and was responsible for developing training programs for industry and commerce. There were considerable moves to formalise the relationship between training providers, industry and employer groups and with State and Commonwealth governments. However, the Army appears to have remained largely separate, and was not a formal partner within the NTC. No evidence of formal submissions to the Council was found, somewhat surprising given Army was a large employer that invested considerably in vocational training. The report did, however, comment in general on employer training:

Most industries stated that much of the detailed short-term training could, in theory, be better provided in-plant by employers, but that in practice, many employers lack the expertise and often the inclination to provide effective training. Some industries indicated that they would like to have their employees in non-trade occupations trained in TAFE institutions but that these institutions are often unable to provide a service.... (A4960 SU568 Barcode 7425065, pp. 5-6)

One commentator believed that this isolation from civilian training and education was probably due to the Army's training systems being flawed so civilian institutions would not want to use them, continuing on to state:

What one finds, though, is that the involvement with civil educational/training establishments is a one-way affair, i.e. the Army tends to make substantial use of these establishments but does very little in an organised way to cater for the needs of organisations or individuals outside the Army. (RAAEC: Item 1622, p. 82)

However, the Army did acknowledge that the civilian system was important. The charter for the Royal Australian Army Educational Corps (RAAEC) remitted the organisation, "Through appropriate channels, the RAAEC is to maintain liaison with civil educational and examining authorities." (RAAEC: Uncatalogued MBI 75-5, para 4). Later in the decade, when reviewing the Army Scheme of Education, terms of reference made explicit the need to "determine whether civilian educational qualifications should be accepted as evidence of attainment of the educational standards." (RAAEC: Item 41). It appears that loose liaison and a weak system of recognition of civilian qualifications were regarded as sufficient for an independent Army system of vocational training.

Following the Kirby Report

The Army had a clear focus on technical trade training in the 1980s, although the degree to which it was connected to civilian equivalents remained of interest. In a review from 1981, there was a mix of civilian and military instructors teaching Army apprentices:

The Army uses Army tradesmen as instructors at Watsonia and Bandiana, with Education Officers carrying out some academic instruction. However, at Army Apprentice School, Balcombe many of the instructors are civilian technical teachers, employed by the Victorian Education Department under a civilian Principal. The remainder of the instructional staff at Balcombe are senior Army tradesmen or Army Education Officers. (RAAEC: Item 337, para 1.16)

The Kirby report, more formally, the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs was published in 1985 and the Commonwealth Government decided to increase its investment in adult and technical training, as well as introducing traineeships to regulate technical training in areas of work that were not traditionally covered by apprenticeships.

The Cabinet noted the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations' intention to allocate the \$30 million approved by Cabinet for the implementation of the Kirby recommendations as follows:-

- (a) \$15.7 million for the introduction of Traineeships;
- (b) \$5.0 million for the expansion of Adult Training;
- (c) \$4.3 million for the expansion of Community Based training;... (NAA: A14039 Control symbol 3049 Barcode 31427526)

Around this time, the Army was also reviewing its trade training. It was determined that civilian recognition of Army's qualifications was desirable but that there would be limitations:

- a. Civil recognition of apprentice trade training be considered as desirable, not essential, and such recognition be negotiated through the Industrial Trades Commission Victoria (ITCV) or under the Tradesmen's (sic) Rights Regulations Act (TRR) as appropriate. ...
- c. 100 hours of additional training be the maximum allowable increase in the technical training requirement to satisfy civil recognition. (RAAEC: Item 7)

Logistics and engineering training facilities had high student throughput in the latter half of the 1980s, with the RAEME Training Centre conducting over 50 different types of courses with a high technical content and student throughput of 1243 in 1987/88, while the RAAOC had 45 different courses (NAA: A7695 Control Symbol 24 Barcode 8276842, paras 12 – 14). In parallel with civilian vocational training, however, the need for increased investment in training facilities was acknowledged:

The requirement to train personnel to higher skill levels has led to more intensive, lengthy and expensive training. The number, frequency and duration of courses have increased but the availability and suitability of instructional facilities have not kept pace with this increase. (NAA: A7695 Control Symbol 24 Barcode 8276842 (para 5.02)

The Army within the National Training System – a model for the new millennium

Given the central importance of being able to 'get the job done' and the outcome-oriented nature of Army training, competency based training (CBT) fitted well with the military training system. Once the Australian national system adopted CBT, the Army aligned itself more closely with the national system and civilian consultants were used to achieve accreditation:

Army has engaged CIT Solutions, a consultancy company wholly owned by the Canberra Institute of Technology, to complete the third [Civil Accreditation Program] cycle to secure (re)accreditation of Army training and experience. ... Under AQF, the primary emphasis is on the ability to demonstrate a package of competencies 'no matter how gained'. (RAAEC: Item 1707)

By 2001, it was formal Defence policy to align all its training with the National Training Framework and the Army's Training Command sought to become a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) by 2004.

In 2001, Defence policy was issued (reference B) that requires all Defence education and training to be aligned, where appropriate, with the NTF. In response, TC-A became a Quality Endorsed Training Organisation (QETYO) (sic) with the view to becoming a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) in Jan 04; developed new policies in the form of ATIs and TCIs; and initiated several new processes to meet the NTF requirement....(RAAEC Item 1020a, para 5)

In addition, Army established a mechanism to review its own processes any time there were changes in civilian VET, noting that reviews should be triggered by, *inter alia*, "VET progress towards Army Training Package and Defence ITAB including current training continuums and regimes with respect to their current and future accreditation, their alignment with civilian competencies where ever possible,... ANTA's National Strategy for VET 2004-10; ... RTO audits and continuous improvement, ... opportunities for single Army Training Packages, ... maximum use of civilian competency units, National competency database, automatic granting of credentials;..." (Ibid, Annex A).

Some of this work was conducted using in-house Army expertise but civilian consultants were engaged through a prime contract to deliver: "A revised scope of registration of TC-A [Training Command – Army] as an RTO and details of the process and tools for maintaining the scope of registration. A process and tools for the endorsement of Defence competencies and the recognition of Defence qualifications by ANTA." (RAAEC Item 1020a, para 5f).

By October 2004, some military training courses were entirely geared to participants achieving Units of Competence. For example, the Army's education officers were interested in a series of education and training units (including BSZ401A – Plan assessment; BSZ404A – Train small groups; BSZ501A – Analyse competency requirements; and a series of e-learning units) listed by the National Training Information Service (RAAEC: Item 1633).

Discussion – a changing relationship

Examination of records in the archives has resulted in a deeper knowledge of training in the Australian Army and in national VET at notable points in the past 70 years. Each system has operated autonomously while seeking to achieve similar goals, i.e. developing people's skills so they can complete technical and skilled tasks and play a role in an organisation that must continuously adapt and change. At some points, it can be seen that the Army's training fed into the national system; at other times, Army drew from the wider civilian organisation; and, joint development of training also occurred. The components of a Cultural-

historical Activity Theory model can be used to analyse the relationship between the two systems.

Cultural-historical Activity Theory

Third generation activity theory allows analysis of two (or more) interacting activity systems and this is depicted in Figure 1.

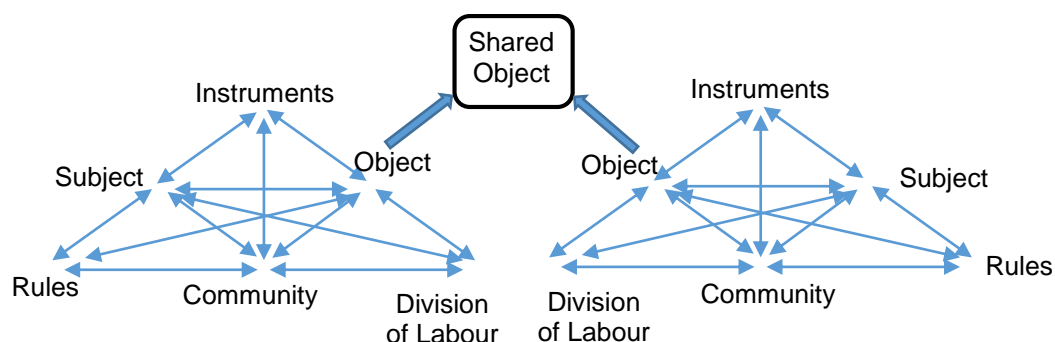


Figure 1. Two interacting activity systems

In each ‘triangle’, the subject is the item which is the focus of analysis. The thing the activity is directed to achieve is the object, subsequently transformed into outcomes, through mediating instruments. This part of the depicted system is similar to early activity theory based on Vygotsky’s model (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 40). The other parts are required to reflect that all activity has a social dimension. ‘Rules’ is shorthand for the cultural expectations, regulations and laws that govern individuals. The community represents groups, or individuals, who seek to achieve a common object with the ways they share tasks shown in the final element, division of labour. More detail on this Cultural-historical Activity Theory is available at the CRADLE website.

Application of the cultural-historical activity theory model

The most prominent component that is common to both systems is when Rules are in place for the recognition by one system of – for example, qualifications, work status or credentialing – the other. In the period following World War 2, the civilian system arranged through legislation for the recognition “...by reason of his service in the Forces, the skill necessary for the performance of work” or where an individual “has had training and experience in the Forces in trade”. However, the situation was reversed with Army apprentices being examined by the Department of Education rather than taking military assessments. During the 1970s, with the exception of apprenticeships, the systems were largely separate with the Army accepting the need only for a loose consideration of whether it would recognise civilian education qualifications. By the 1980s, civilian recognition of Army training was considered “desirable but not essential” and, in contrast, “maximum use of civilian competency units ... [and] automatic granting of credentials” was Army policy.

The Instruments through which training leads to skilled workers in the Army or the nation also show a change over time in the commonality of the two systems. In the 1970s, employers including the Army would have liked to use TAFEs to

train non-trade technical workers but there was insufficient capacity in the civilian system and TAFEs were “unable to provide a service”. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Army used its own, independent training facilities. The Commonwealth investment in training facilities for an expanded number of areas beyond traditional apprentice trades in the 1980s was reflected in the Army, with the Logistics and Training Complex redevelopment evidence of the increased investment. By the early 2000s, the Army had moved much further into the civilian system, using units of competence in Army training, starting with courses for education officers and training staffs.

Considering the Division of Labour within both systems, there was a requirement in the 1970s for close liaison between Army and “civilian educational and examining authorities” through the RAAEC but the Army did “very little in an organised way to cater for the needs of organisations or individuals outside the Army”. More recently, the Army became a Quality Endorsed Training Organisation and latterly an Enterprise Registered Training Organisation, becoming a full player in the civilian system instead of an external group which might share tasks. By 2001, all Defence training was to be “aligned, where appropriate” with the National Training Framework, with ANTA’s national strategy for VET triggering a review of Army training.

Note that there have always been Army students completing courses of technical training, e.g. there were over 95 RAEME and RAAOC courses in 1987/88. Such courses are the Subject within the activity model. The Object is trained personnel ready to enter a trade or other skilled role at work. During World War 2, some Objects were not achieved with suspension of practical training for apprentices outside the trades needed for munitions and Defence work.

Turning to the Community component of the activity model, military and civilian personnel can be regarded as distinct groups within the Army activity system, while the Army has, at times, been a group within the civilian VET activity system. In the aftermath of World War 2, there was some resistance to segregating ex-members of the Forces but Army establishments were used to train military personnel for civilian trades and civilian employment. Placing people into Army and civilian groups has also occurred for teaching staff. For example, Army trainers and officers constituted the teaching staff at Bandiana and Watsonia schools in the 1980s but the Army Apprentices School at Balcombe had civilian teachers employed by the Victorian Education Department as well as military instructors.

The changing relationship

It can be seen that training in the Australian Army and the national system of VET have collaborated as two interacting activity systems. At times, however, it seems that Army has adopted in full the Rules, Instruments and Objects of the national civilian system. In such circumstances, it may be more accurate to regard the Army as one Community within a single activity system, taking a share of the Division of Labour and ensuring its training meets national requirements. This paper has shown that the separation of the systems has

changed over time, with most interactivity in the period following World War 2 and since 2000.

In the aftermath of the war, the degree of disruption to civilian VET during hostilities, the large numbers of Army personnel returning to civilian life, and the willingness of the Commonwealth to invest in skills training account for the importance of the Army to civilian VET. The situation in recent times has seen the Army align its procedures with the civilian norms. This allows for the most efficient and cost effective movement of individuals between military and civilian work. It is important because the Army recruits members from a wide age range (with different degrees of life experience and qualifications) and people spend sometimes only a small percentage of their entire working career in the military.

To determine the relationship between both systems, one should consider the similarity of each of the six components of the activity system. There may be times when the outputs of the Army's training system have no parallels in civilian VET or when the Rules and Instruments are so dissimilar that the activity systems remain separate. However, the extent to which Army and national VET have a shared purpose for their endeavours ultimately determines the strength of the relationship.

Conclusions

This paper has described connections between Army training and the civilian VET system in the period following World War 2, the 1970s, at the time of expansion of apprenticeships and traineeships and – more recently – since the Army became an RTO. The degree to which the two systems have been separate has changed over time and this has been examined using the six components of the activity system model. As Australia continues to evolve a national system for VET, it is contended that large employers (similarly to the Army) might be viewed as interacting activity systems. In this way, they can negotiate the outputs of their technical and vocational training as a common purpose and adopt some or all of the national components of the system.

Acknowledgements

Spending time in the archives where material for this paper was located would not have been possible without the support of an Army History Research Grant. I also wish to acknowledge Colonel Deborah Bradford, Colonel Katrina Schildberger and Colonel (Retired) Bill Monfries of the Royal Australian Army Educational Corps for their insight and advice during this research.

References

- Bleakley, N (1981). Educational Prerequisites of Technical Trade Training in the Armed Services. The Report of a Defence Fellowship Study at School of Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education.
- Commonwealth of Australia. (1946) Tradesmen's Rights Regulation Act 1946. Act No. 41 of 1946.
- CRADLE. Cultural-historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Developmental Work Research (DWR) at <http://www.helsinki.fi/cradle/chat.htm>, retrieved 3 March, 2016.

- Dodgson, M. (1993). Organizational Learning: A Review of Some Literatures. *Organization Studies*, 14(3), 375-394.
- Dymock, D (1995). A Sweet Use of Adversity: The Australian Army Education Service in World War II and its Impact on Australian Adult Education. Armidale, NSW: University of New England Press.
- Goozee, G (2001). The Development of TAFE in Australia (3rd edn). Leabrook, SA: National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd.
- Gallagher, H (2003). We got a fair go: a history of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme 1945-1952. Kew, Vic: H. Gallagher.
- Knight, B (2012). Evolution of apprenticeships and traineeships in Australia: an unfinished history. Adelaide, SA: National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd.
- Lambert, TE (1975). An Analysis of the Australian Army as an Agent of Adult Education. RAAEC Archive.
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) (2012) History of VET in Australia – Overview.
<http://web.archive.org/web/20140126012258/http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources>, retrieved 3 March, 2016.
- Scott, J (1990) A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Vygotsky, LS (1978). Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Archive Material

- NAA: A7695 Control Symbol 24, Barcode 8276842 Various Inquiries 1987 – 1989 – Inquiry into Redevelopment of Army Logistics & Training Complex, Bandiana Vic).
- NAA: A7695 Control Symbol 24, Barcode 8276842 Various Inquiries 1987 – 1989 – Inquiry into Redevelopment of Army Logistics & Training Complex, Bandiana Vic. Bandiana Redevelopment Stage 1 Statement of Evidence to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works by Department of Defence (Army) – September 88
- NAA: A4960 SU568, Barcode 7425065 Submission from National Training Council, Melbourne
- NAA: A9816 1943/1421, Barcode 244730 Vocational Training Technical Education Outside Representations
- NAA: A14039 Control symbol 3049, Barcode 31427526 Cabinet Submission 3049
- NAA: CP7/1 S890/38, Barcode 8916288 Joint Administrative Planning Sub-Committee – Education and Vocational Training Advisory Panel
- NAA: MP463/1 T18, Barcode 456771 Outline of History of Technical Education in Queensland (Extract from 75th Report of the Secretary for Public Instruction for the year 1950)
- RAAEC: Item 7 Review of Army Trade Training HQ TRG COMD 797-G1-80 dated 2 Oct 85
- RAAEC: Item 41 Annex A to A178-4-23 Dated 14 Jul 79.
- RAAEC: Item 337 Educational Prerequisites of Technical Trade Training in the Armed Services by Wing Commander Neville Bleakley. The Report of a Defence Fellowship Study at School of Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1981
- RAAEC: Item 1020a 864-0-046 HQTC/OUT/2003/645 dated 16 Apr 03 COMD TC-A Directive 0305 to LTCOL W.P. Monfries SO1 Trg Sys – Develop a TC-A Training and Education Systems Overview Strategy
- RAAEC: Item 1020b (222-1-4 HQ TTC/OOUT/2003 dated Oct 03) Terms of Reference for TD Prime Contract Development of a Training and Education Systems Overview Strategy for TC-A, Phase 2 – Development
- RAAEC: Item 1591 Commonwealth – State Apprenticeship Inquiry, Report of Committee, March 1954
- RAAEC: Item 1622 An Analysis of the Australian Army as an Agent of Adult Education, Thomas E Lambert (1975)
- RAAEC: Item 1633 dated 2/04/04
- RAAEC: Item 1707 COL ETT letter Reference 295-1-240 ETT (unsigned), Jul 00
- RAAEC: Uncatalogued MBI 75-5 dated 29 Mar 71