

Heritage Overlay No.: 049
Citation No.: 080
Place: Former Army Radio Station Diggers Rest

Other Names of Place: Australian Army Transmitting (or Sending) Station.
Location: 107 – 207 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road, Diggers Rest
Critical Dates: Establishment of Transmitting Station: 1942; Construction of Building 1944.
Existing Heritage Listings: None.
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL¹



Statement of Significance:

The former Army Radio Transmitting Building, at 107-207 Diggers Rest -Coimadai Road at Diggers Rest, is significant for its association with the US presence in Australia in 1942; with Australian Army's international radio communication during and after the Second World War; as an apparently rare surviving example of this type of building; and as the only significant wartime building remaining on the Army's Diggers Rest and Rockbank radio transmitting and receiving stations.

¹ Future statewide comparative assessment of places associated with the presence of the United States in Victoria during the Second World War, or a nationwide survey of similar bow roofed prefabricated portable wartime structures, may determine that it is of higher significance.

The former Army Radio Transmitting Building at 107-207 Diggers Rest is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A.4, B2, H1). The place is significant for its associations with the American wartime presence in Australia, and in particular, the presence of General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of Allied forces in the Southwest Pacific during the Second World War, in Melbourne in 1942. The Diggers Rest transmitting and Rockbank receiving radio bases were established for the USA military command in Melbourne during the crisis year of 1942. These radio bases are rare places developed in this very dark period of the nation's history, when Japan had invaded Australia's northern neighbours, and attacked Australia itself. As the war moved northwards after the naval battles of the Coral Sea and Midway and the defeat of Japan's New Guinea campaign, and as US troops began their Pacific island-hopping offensives, communications facilities also moved north, and by early 1943 the Diggers Rest and Rockbank bases had been vacated by the Americans and handed over to the Australian Army.

This building, erected by the Australians in 1944, is the only significant wartime building remaining at either the Diggers Rest or Rockbank stations. Although it takes the form of the common portable prefabricated bow-roofed Nissen and similar styled huts built by British and American forces for wartime service, it is much larger than these standard buildings, and was customised to accommodate radio transmitting equipment (none of which remains). It may be an example of an 'Armco hut' manufactured in Australia during the Second World War. Although other examples may survive elsewhere, at this stage no other examples are known to have been definitely identified in Australia.

The building succeeded a woolshed that in 1942 the American signals unit had converted into a transmission station to link MacArthur with the United States and the Pacific military fields of operation. Built by the Australian Army in 1944, the building was used for communication with London (and possibly Moscow). By the war's end the building was the Australian Army's link with London and other Commonwealth centres in South-East Asia (Delhi, Kandy, Singapore and Wellington), and Rabaul in New Guinea. The building was also the lynch-pin of communication between the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, handling all UK, NZ and Indian traffic between Melbourne and Japan (Kure).

In the decades following the war, at least until the construction of a new transmission building in the late 1950s, the building was the Australian radio link with the 'British Commonwealth' (or 'Empire') Army Wireless Chain. This was a strategic radio relay network which linked the British War Office and Defence Ministry with Canada, East and West Africa, Ceylon, Singapore, Middle East, Japan, New Zealand and Australia. The building also played a critical role in international radio coverage of the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1956.

The building is also expressive of the particular suitability, as found in comprehensive early surveys, of the Shire of Melton for international radio transmission and reception purposes. Its huge flat spaces, lack of radio 'noise' and trees, and uninterrupted proximity to Melbourne control centres made Melton prominent in early international 'wireless' ventures.

The former Army Radio Transmitting Building at Diggers Rest is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2). It demonstrates original design qualities associated with late interwar and postwar semi-cylindrical military huts. These qualities include the semi-cylindrical and bowed roof form that terminates at ground level, lapped galvanised corrugated steel roof and wall construction, regularly arranged flat rectangular skylights, horizontal bank of elevated windows and the timber framed double hung windows (arranged singularly and in pairs). The projecting flat-roofed porch also contributes to the architectural significance of the design.

Overall, the former Army Radio Transmitting Building at 107-207 Diggers Rest is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The former Australian Army transmitting building is situated on the south side of the Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road. It is a large Nissen hut style building, with an iron clad bow roof. The elevated, semi-cylindrical building is especially characterised by its bowed roof form that terminates at ground level. It is constructed of lapped galvanised corrugated steel,, punctuated by regularly arranged flat rectangular skylights. The end façade has a horizontal bank of elevated fenestration, with a projecting flat-roofed porch below. This porch has constructed in timber with timber framed windows. Flanking the porch are timber framed double hung ground floor windows, arranged singularly and in pairs.

Its context is the former Diggers Rest Transmitting station, situated alongside a spacious Army personnel estate of c.20 cream brick houses, open space and tennis court, that would appear to date to the late 1950s and 1960s, with newish plantations of both natives and exotics. Situated some distance away are the c.1960s brick buildings of the later Army transmitting station. The adjoining paddock has piles of massive concrete blocks, presumably stay piles or foundations of former aerials.

History:

The surprise Japanese air-raid on Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941 created a new Pacific arena in the Second World War, and brought the United States of America into the conflict. In the following months the Japanese conducted lightning advances throughout South East Asia including, on 15th February 1942, the defeat of the British fortress at Singapore. Four days later the Japanese carried out the first of their bombing raids on Darwin.

This crisis impelled Prime Minister Curtin to make his historic declaration that Australia's future would now depend more on its relationship with the USA than with Britain. In March 1942 US General Douglas MacArthur arrived in Australia to co-ordinate the war against the Japanese. Australia's war effort was being controlled from Melbourne's Victoria Barracks on St Kilda Road, and MacArthur also established his headquarters in Melbourne. These were Australia's dark days, of slit trenches in parks, concrete air raid shelters and city 'brown-outs'. In May 1942 Japanese midget submarines attacked Sydney Harbour.

International radio communications were vital to the establishment of US headquarters in Melbourne. By April 1942 survey works for radio stations at Diggers Rest (transmitting) and Rockbank (receiving) stations had been completed.² In April four rhombic aerials, mounted on sixteen 100 foot masts, were commissioned at both Diggers Rest and Rockbank to connect US command with 'Panama, Pearce, Washington, and Bombay (India)'.³

In July 1942 a 'secret' memo requesting a cable between Diggers Rest and Sydenham (to connect with existing cable links to Melbourne) advised that:

'Wireless Transmitting and Receiving Stations have been established by the US Forces at Diggers Rest and Rockbank, and control lines are required between these stations and US Headquarters, St Kilda Road, Melbourne.'⁴

(The US headquarters were noted to be at the Port Melbourne Seaman's Mission, and the Bowen Crescent High School, Melbourne.)

² National Australian Archives, Series MP927/1, Item 205/16

³ *ibid*, Item W405/259

⁴ *ibid*, Item W343/113

In August 1942 the Director General of the PMG Department informed the RAAF that both the Diggers Rest and Rockbank signalling stations ‘were for the exclusive use of the US Forces in Australia.’⁵

Later Australian Army documents provide further information as to how the original survey had been conducted, and the major advantages of Diggers Rest and Rockbank as radio stations:

‘The Diggers Rest and Rockbank sites were originally selected by the US Signal Corps in conjunction with the RAAF and PMG Research Section after a most exhaustive survey of the whole of Victoria for suitable areas for the installation of short wave transmitting and receiving centres which could provide communication on a world wide basis.

The installation at Rockbank prior to the War of the Australian terminal of the commercial Beam Wireless network operated by Amalgamated Wireless was also due to the excellent noise free⁶ conditions that exist for the reception of long range wireless signals in that locality.

It is very necessary in the establishment of Service Wireless Centres to select sites which provide good alternative routes for remote control keying circuits. The Diggers Rest area has an excellent line-of-sight path from the City of Melbourne, and this has enabled the installation of a number of VHF radio links, between *Grosvenor* Signal Office and Diggers Rest, which are capable of maintaining essential channels in the event of a major line circuit failure.

Diggers Rest site is ideal for transmission purposes as it is entirely free from screening by mountains or trees in any direction, and in addition, both sites, being flat, are ideal for ease of erection of large antenna arrays.’⁷

After conquests throughout Asia - in China, the Philippines and Singapore - the focus of the Japanese by late 1942 was the invasion of New Guinea, where they were met by Australian and US forces. Two major naval battles dealt a major blow to the Japanese offensive. The Battle of the Coral Sea in May, while inflicting equal damage on both sides, repelled the Japanese naval assault on Port Moresby. In the Battle of Midway in June, the US and allied forces inflicted a major defeat on Japan.

While the New Guinea campaign continued throughout 1942, these naval battles represented a turning point in the war. MacArthur pronounced that the allied forces recapture of Sanananda in northern New Guinea in January 1943 signalled the start of the Japanese collapse.

US forces were now on a northward offensive, on an island hopping campaign in the central and south Pacific. Their infrastructure, including radio communication facilities, moved north with them. The Diggers Rest and Rockbank stations were no longer of use to the US military command. On 12th January 1943 an Australian War Cabinet agenda advised that:

‘The Army have recently taken possession of a transmitting station at Diggers Rest and a receiving station at Rockbank, Victoria, plus underground cables connecting both sites to Melbourne.’⁸

⁵ National Australian Archives, Series MP927/1, Item W205/16

⁶ ‘Noise’ means electrical or weather related interference in radio.

⁷ National Australian Archives, Series MP927/1, Item A259/18/442: Feb 1946: AMF Minute Paper, ‘Sigs 5099’

⁸ *ibid*, Minute Paper, 12/1/1943 (458/45)

The Australian Army took over these newly vacated US stations at Diggers Rest and Rockbank in the first weeks of 1943, and developed them for its own needs. In January 1943 it was expected that a:

‘... high power multi frequency transmitter and associated equipment is expected to be delivered in the next few months. This will be used to operate a radio link to London and possibly Moscow.’⁹

Diggers Rest and Rockbank stations enabled the Australian Army to restructure its radio communications. The control centre of these communications, an old mansion named *Grosvenor*, situated on the corner of Queens Road and Beatrice Streets, South Melbourne (still standing), would remain throughout the war. But existing transmission and receiving stations at Coldstream and Park Orchards (Mitcham) were considered: ‘not satisfactory for overseas channels’ due to aerial problems and terrain:

‘These disabilities to be overcome by making use of a transmitting station at Diggers Rest and a receiving station at Rockbank recently vacated by the USA authorities, and handed over to the Australian Army for signals use ...’¹⁰

The rhombic aerials inherited by the Australian Army from the Americans had been directed at Darwin (or ‘Chunking’), Townsville and Port Moresby, London, San Francisco and Noumea. While Diggers Rest and Rockbank were to be the Army’s new international radio stations, a domestic aerial (from Perth) was contemplated at Rockbank, as ‘due to the terrain of the Park Orchards receiving station, it is not possible to erect an efficient rhombic aerial.’¹¹

Given the relative isolation of the Melton Shire sites, and the upgraded operations proposed, accommodation for an additional 30 staff at each site would be required. It was proposed to build two ‘3PF composite mess huts and kitchen 60 ft x 18 ft’, and one ‘PT sleeping hut 60 ft x 18 ft’.¹² The only water supply for Diggers Rest was ‘by windmills drawing highly mineralised water of such a density that it cannot be treated’, and water pumped to the station from the ‘rail water tank’ at the Diggers Rest railway siding.¹³

In 1944 the Australian Army transmitting equipment (valued at approximately £70,000), was housed in a wooden farm building (a woolshed), measuring 29’ x 30’, which had been converted by the Americans. There was no standard Army building regarded as suitable for the necessary new transmitter station so a unique building was designed. This is the large bow roofed building that is the subject of this report. This transmitting building would appear to be the only Second World War building that survives at either Diggers Rest or Rockbank. It would be 60’ x 100’ (with provision for a future extension), with a concrete floor, lining, and partitioning. It comprised a large single open space with two catwalks, four sky-lights, a ventilating ridge and two ‘continuous ventilating bellcasts’, and two small offices, a workshop and a store along the façade.¹⁴ Its cost was estimated at £5000.¹⁵

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ *ibid*, Minute Paper 17/2/1943

¹¹ *ibid*, Minute Paper, 12/1/1943

¹² *ibid*, Item A259/18/44 (1/3/1943)

¹³ *ibid*, Item A259/18/442 (12/9/1944)

¹⁴ *ibid*, Drawing ‘Diggers Rest Proposed Transmitter Building’ (14/6/1944).

¹⁵ *ibid*, Item A259/18/442 (12/9/1944)

The Rockbank receiving equipment was housed in a ‘temporary structure of wood and fibrolite’ built for the Americans. A modified ‘Sidney Williams Type “C” Hut’, 60’v x 20’, was regarded as a suitable replacement for the receiving station.¹⁶⁾

At this time (1944) both sites were rented under National Security Regulations. It was not envisaged that either would be occupied in the post-war period.¹⁷ Upon conclusion of the war however the Signals department had a change of mind. In light of the previously researched suitability of these sites for radio, their location ‘within a suitable radius of Melbourne’, and the fact that no other Commonwealth land had the required ‘technical qualifications’ in February 1946 the Signal Officer-in-Chief recommended that both properties be purchased outright by the Commonwealth.¹⁸

In March 1946, before committing another £3,700 for generating plant and buildings at Diggers Rest, the Minister sought to be assured of the long-term future of the station, and also inquired as to whether, ‘in peace-time’, it would not be possible to combine the Army, Navy and Air Force wireless stations ‘to reduce unnecessary expenditure and maintenance’.¹⁹

Next month the Chief of the General Staff responded to the Minister. Diggers Rest, he said, ‘is the main Army transmitting centre’ in Australia. It housed wireless circuits connecting army headquarters with:

- Kure, Japan: Diggers Rest ‘not only handles HQ BCOF [Headquarters for British Commonwealth Occupation Forces] traffic but also handles UK, NZ, Indian and JCOSA traffic between Melbourne and Japan’;
- London, Delhi, Kandy, Singapore and Wellington NZ: ‘The AMF are also responsible for handling traffic between BCOF and the respective headquarters in the countries of origin of the components of the BCOF ...’;
- Rabaul [New Guinea]: ‘the requirement for communications ... will be continuing one’;
- Australian Capital Cities: the continuing requirement to maintain a commonwealth-wide emergency wireless communications network ... with the HQ of each Military District’.²⁰

The Chief of General Staff also opposed the possibility of combining all the forces radio communications facilities. It was ‘not practicable’ for joint facilities to be established between the Army, the RAN, whose major international communications base was at Belconnen (Canberra), and the RAAF, which was situated in Melbourne. The wireless transmitting centre at Diggers Rest was ‘a definite Army requirement for the Interim and Post War Periods’ he advised.²¹

Much of the following years were spent with valuation reports on the land to be purchased: 160 acres of Mr SG Spittle’s ‘Cavern Down’s at Diggers Rest. It was described as having a small dwelling, woolshed (used as Officer’s quarters and billiard room) and small outbuildings, its land suitable only for grazing, having been:- ‘flogged from a cropping point of view with the result that “Hoary Cress” is very prevalent.’²² Another report noted the ‘old cultivation, sown

¹⁶ *ibid*, Item A259/18/442 (2/6/1944)

¹⁷ *ibid*, Item A259/18/442 (12/9/1944)

¹⁸ *ibid*: AMF Minute Paper, Minister, 21/3/1946

¹⁹ *ibid*: AMF Minute Paper, Minister, 21/3/1946

²⁰ *ibid*: Minute Paper, 9/4/1946

²¹ *loc cit*.

²² *ibid*, Item A259/18/442 (nd, c.1946)

to rye and clover; this has not been top dressed since approx.1938: it badly requires treating with superphosphate now.’ Fencing was mixed wire netting, post & wire, and ‘some stone fencing in fair order’.²³

In 1949 another major review considered the functions, and future works required at the Diggers Rest and Rockbank stations. By this time stations were described as ‘the radio transmitting and receiving centres of the Australian Relay Station of the Empire Army Wireless Chain and the AMF communication system.’ Messages were relayed by landline for processing at the Army Headquarters Signal Office at Grosvenor. Administration of these three installations was at the AHQ Signal Regiment at Albert Park.²⁴

The stations were the hub of Australia’s defence communications strategy. Their major communications tasks were associated with the:

‘British Commonwealth Army Wireless Chain (known as the AWC) which is a strategic wireless relay network with the UK as the basis ... This system links the War Office and UK Defence Ministry with Commonwealth countries and overseas theatres, namely Canada, East and West Africa, Ceylon, Singapore, Middle East, Japan, New Zealand and Australia.’²⁵

The stations maintained communication with London, Singapore, Kure (2 sets) and Wellington, and Australian centres (including Long Range Weapons Experimental Establishment). It also operated communication with Honolulu on behalf of the Department of Civil Aviation. However the equipment was then ‘outmoded’, and the British War Office had prepared a plan for the ‘complete modernisation’ of the AWC. High powered transmitters, high grade diversity receivers, and modern (‘virtually automatic’) telegraph equipment would be installed at Diggers Rest and Rockbank.

Expansion associated with intra-Australian communication would also be required, and additional land acquired for aerial systems. It was proposed that the Army’s 101 Wireless Regiment would be moved from Cabarlah in Queensland to Rockbank. New transmitting buildings would be required at Diggers Rest, along with ‘vast improvement both in quantity and quality of the quarters provided for officers and ORs’ in view of the ‘isolation’ of the installation. At Rockbank ‘permanent barrack accommodation for a total of approximately 300 personnel’ would be required. (There were at the time ‘fewer than a dozen’ personnel accommodated at the station.) An additional three square miles of land would be required, together with ‘an adequate piped water supply’. The additional accommodation subsequently provided was not ‘permanent’ however; it comprised huts transferred from other army properties around Melbourne.²⁶

The ‘small amount of rainwater available ... assists slightly in alleviating the problem of carting water.’ Various schemes for water reticulation from Melton Reservoir, Deer Park and Sunbury were considered in 1950.²⁷

At Diggers Rest in 1952:- ‘An Army Wireless Transmitting Station to meet the outward signal traffic requirements of both Comcan and Austcan is to be constructed’, of brick walls, concrete floor, steel roof trusses and asbestos cement roofing. Six inch water mains would connect it with Sunbury. At Rockbank, a new ‘brick or concrete’ receiving station would be constructed

²³ *ibid* (30/8/1948)

²⁴ NAA, Series MP742/1, Item 217/1/226, 11/8/1949

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ *ibid*, Item 337/1/273

well to the east of the original station. Some 53 wooden masts (70-90') and 11 steel masts (90') were in preparation. However these building developments do not appear to have taken place until years later.

News of a proposed two square mile acquisition of land at Rockbank Army Signals Station was reported in the local paper in early 1952. The area would take in four farm dwellings: the old homestead known as 'Gidneys' (described by the Army as c.100 years old, in poor condition), Mr Harold Missen's home, Mr GW Harrison's new home, and a house on the property of Mr Chas Beatty, leased to Mr JV Trethowan. Owners to lose freehold were Mr Harrison, Mrs Gidney, Messrs H Missen, J Campbell ('Deanside'), and JR Wallace. They sought £50 per acre. A deputation had been given an understanding that houses and five acres contiguous to each would not be acquired, and that properties taken over would be available for lease to the current owners. Still, landholders in the area were reported to be 'jittery' – 'no property is safe'. Council was also concerned about loss of rate revenue associated with Commonwealth ownership:- 'Already the Council is 'carrying' several such properties, notably the beam wireless station at Rockbank.'²⁸ Army records indicate that in 1953 it was negotiating with Rockbank owners EM Hughes and GWA Harrison, and five lessees regarding the acquisition of 884 acres of land and three dwellings.

In 1954 another Government committee, the 'Board of Business Administration' presented a report on proposed works at the two stations, and on defence services communications policy. The unsatisfactory condition under which equipment was housed was noted, and expenditure of £340,200 was approved, on the basis that it was necessary for the 'Empire Army Wireless Chain'. Water remained a stumbling block however. In 1954 two men were employed full-time to cart water from Sunbury to Diggers Rest, and Deer Park to Rockbank, at a cost of £2200 per annum. The Board only recommended the proposed heavy expenditure on the stations, subject to satisfactory arrangements with the Overseas Telecommunications Commission (which had taken over the AWA Beam Wireless Service at Rockbank) to share the cost of reticulating water from Deer Park to Rockbank. The £44,000 of reticulation to both stations was 'a heavy capital cost to cater for an average strength of only 23 personnel at Rockbank and 28 at Diggers Rest.'²⁹

In 1956 the stations played a key role in the Melbourne Olympic Games. Additional lines connecting the stations with *Grosvenor* were required as:

'In addition to the overall Comcan requirements, they are needed to supply circuits for the Olympic Games radio communications and therefore should be completed without delay.'³⁰

In July 1958 yet another report recommended the construction of permanent accommodation for staff at the two stations. Diggers Rest and Rockbank were 'only hamlets' with only a few houses and no extra accommodation, and the two stations were beyond the normal suburban train services. Staff had to live-in, accommodated in old and uncomfortable 'wooden and galvanised iron or asbestos cement hutments of wartime construction'. There was a combined total of only 40 personnel at the stations, with five married quarters at each.³¹ (The married quarters were the first brick house of the estates houses that are built at both sites.³²) In June 1960 the new accommodation quarters on the stations had been planned but were still awaiting final approval. Major construction was undertaken in 1961/62.³³

²⁸ *The Express*, 29/3/1952

²⁹ NAA Series MP729/8, Item 67/432/12

³⁰ Item A319.5.102

³¹ NAA Series MP927/1, Item A259/18/641

³² Eg, Plan 8254 341.32 (5/12/1958)

³³ NAA, Series MT1131/1/2, Item A259/18/871

In 1962 it was reported locally that:- ‘*Half a dozen new homes for married Signals personnel at Rockbank are under construction ... They are sited behind the existing Army housing on the highway.*’³⁴ By 1965 all of the Army houses along the Western Highway had been built, and the local newspaper was reported that: ‘*Half a dozen new homes for married Signals personnel at Rockbank are under construction ... They are sited behind the existing Army housing on the highway.*’³⁵ A plan entitled ‘Rockbank, Army MQ Housing’ shows them as part of a layout for ten allotments on a new road behind the Western Highway (Mt Koroit Road). These ‘married quarters’ houses were planned and built by CHI (Vic) Pty Ltd, a division of Consolidated Home Industries Ltd. It submitted plans for brick veneer residences for the Department of Works. Drawings dated February 1965 show three types of house: ‘Balcombe 707 Special’ (11 squares, 3 bedrooms), ‘Vermont 707 Special’ (12 squares, 4 bedrooms), and ‘Squire 707 Special’ (11 squares, 3 bedrooms).³⁶ It is presumed that similar development was occurring at the same time at the Diggers Rest station.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: ‘Developing Communications: Radio and Aviation’

Known Comparable Example in Melton Shires:

This is the only known Second World War era building remaining at the former Diggers Rest Army Transmitting Station.

The Rockbank Receiving Station was the sister station of Diggers Rest Transmitting Station. No Second World War era buildings appear to remain at Rockbank.

The AWA/OTC Beam Wireless station built at Rockbank in 1926 (Greigs Road) is also a comparable nationally significant international radio communication station. It retains its original accommodation quarters, but no technical buildings or equipment.

Known Comparable Examples Elsewhere: Military Radio installations.

The Royal Australian Navy’s International Transmitting Station at Belconnen in Canberra, decommissioned relatively recently, retains many early buildings and some significant equipment. Despite recognition of its high military, engineering and social significance, and a vigorous public campaign, it remains under threat of sale (with little heritage protection) by the Federal Government.³⁷

It is not known whether the RAAF international radio facilities (including at Werribee) retain Second World War era buildings.

Known Comparable Examples Elsewhere: Second World War Prefabricated Buildings.

The style of building is very similar to the prefabricated portable Nissen and Quonset huts used by the British and American forces respectively. The common Nissen hut (imported into Australian military bases for immigrant accommodation after the Second World War) had a span of 16 feet, and its larger ‘hospital’ variety a span of 24 feet. The standard American Quonset huts had a 20 feet span, while the larger ‘Warehouse’ hut (also known as ‘Elephant’ or SAAR huts) spanned 40 feet. At 100 feet long (with

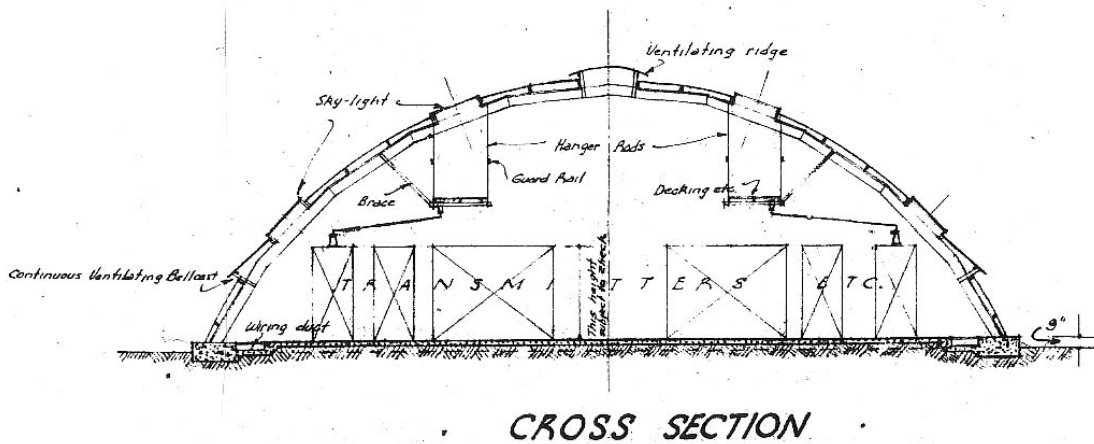
³⁴ The *Express*, 18/3/1965

³⁵ The *Express*, 18/3/1965

³⁶ NAA, 28/1/04

³⁷ The ACT National Trust and Engineers Australia are leading the campaign for its preservation.

provision for extension), and with a span of 60 feet, the Diggers Rest building is very much larger than these standard types of hut.³⁸



While the Diggers Rest building was described as being of unique design, to house the Diggers Rest Transmitting equipment, the shell of the building may have been the ‘the large 100 ft by 60 ft semi-cylindrical Armco hut’ that was manufactured in Australia during the war. A recent article on portable prefabricated Second World War huts in Australia did not identify any surviving examples of this larger building. However the report recommended that it would be desirable to conserve ‘at least one example of each type of hut along with an archive of plans and specifications.’³⁹ The plans and cross sections of the Diggers Rest building survive at the National Australian Archives. Further field survey may identify this building as a candidate for heritage significance at a high (State or National) level.⁴⁰

Known Comparable Examples Elsewhere: US Forces in Melbourne in early years of Second World War.

The Diggers Rest base was established by the US forces during the Second World War. The transmission building was built by the Australians who took over the base in early 1943.

The US forces commandeered many existing buildings and places in Melbourne during the Second World War, prominent among which were Victoria Barracks (MacArthur), the Mission to Seaman building in Port Melbourne (command), and camps at places such as the MCG and Royal Park. Of these buildings, only Victoria Barracks survives.

There would have been other places specifically established or built by the US forces during their presence in Melbourne, but no specific documentation of surviving examples of these appears to have been compiled.

Condition:

Fair-Good

Integrity:

³⁸ Iain Stuart, ‘Of the hut I bolted: A preliminary account of prefabricated semi-cylindrical huts in Australia’, in *Historic Environment* (Australia ICOMOS, Vol.19 No.1, December 2005), pp.51-57

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ NAA: Plan ECD 11451, ‘Diggers Rest: Proposed Transmitter Building’, 14/6/1944.

Predominantly Intact

Recommendations:

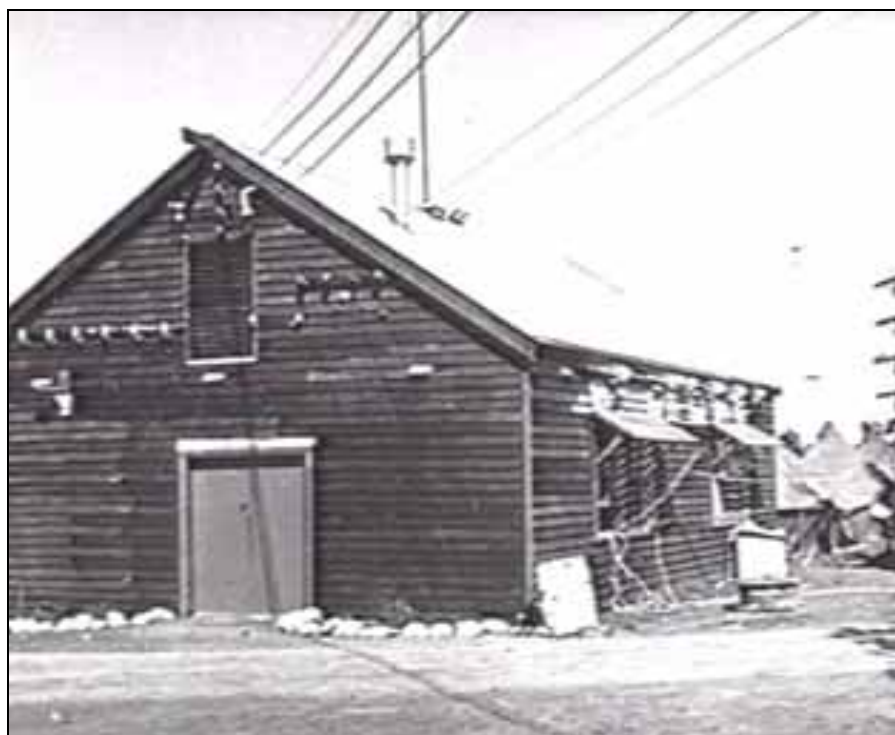
Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| External Paint Controls: | <i>No</i> |
| Internal Alteration Controls: | <i>No</i> |
| Tree Controls: | <i>No</i> |
| Outbuildings and/or Fences: | <i>No</i> |

Other recommendations:

- Future statewide comparative assessment of places associated with the presence of the United States in Victoria during the Second World War, or a nationwide survey of similar bow roofed prefabricated portable wartime structures, may determine that it is of higher significance.



*Diggers Rest, November 1945. The exterior of the old 'shack' at Diggers Rest, used by Land Headquarters Signals to house transmitters. This would have been one of the converted farm buildings.
(Australian War Memorial)*



*Diggers Rest, 1945. 'Exterior view of the new Igloo Building housing land headquarters signals.
(Australian War Memorial)*