Royal Australian Army Dental Corps (RAADC)

RAADC Overview

Although informal dental treatment was provided in Australian Military Medicine since the late 1800s, and many efforts were made to establish an organised dental service within the Army, it was not until June 1915 that dental personnel were enlisted for the specific purpose of providing dental treatment to the Australian forces overseas. Until 1943 dental personnel serving with the Australian Army were members of the Medical Corps, and in April 1943 the corps achieved separate status and came into being as the Australian Army Dental Corps (RAANC).

RAADC HISTORY

World War I

At the outbreak of war no system for dental treatment existed in the Army. Many practitioners volunteered for service as dentists but enlistment was refused as not being provided for in British War Establishments. Thus ‘Dental Service’ in the Army during 1914 existed by virtue of individuals who enlisted and took with them their own dental equipment. In May 1915 a dental officer was appointed to each MD to advise the SMO. No liability was to be incurred in regard to dental work. The dental profession itself stepped into the gap and organised clinics in every State to treat troops on a purely and gratuitous and patriotic basis. Dental hospitals were placed at the disposal of the Minister for Defence and work also done gratuitously for members of the AIF by member of the profession in their own rooms. Despite the voluntary effort, the first Expeditionary Force sailed from Australia with widespread prevalence of varied dental pathology. Before the Force reached Egypt the medical officers realised the magnitude of the dental problem and within a short time after arrival large numbers of men were presenting to the dentists of Cairo, qualified and unqualified, for dental attention at their own expense. Dental disease became more widespread, and by July 1915, 600 dental casualties has been evacuated from Aust Div. On 6th January, 1915, Military Order 11 gave approval for the formation of the AAMC (Dental) Reserve, and in June 1915 Military Order 387 authorised the appointment of dentists to the AIF. As members of the AAMC, all units were allocated to medical installations on disembarkation. By April 1916, 36 dental units had been formed. By November 1919 there were 130 dental officers serving with the AIF and dental officer to troops rations had dropped from 1:7500 in 1916-17 to 1:4250 in 1918-19.

World War II

Between the wars tactical exercises were carried out to provide knowledge of the constitution, equipment, administration and tactical handling of dental units. By October 1939 dental units were provided on the establishment of three field ambulances, one casualty clearing station, two general hospitals and one convalescent depot. Ultimately, approval was granted for the formation of additional dental units on the basis of one unit per 1000 troops. At the onset of mobilisation militia dental forces were called up to assist full-time dental officers. Dental centres were built in training camps and the Australian Dental Association (ADA) formed a roster of volunteers to work in these centres. In March, 1942 the dental sub-committee of the Central Medical Coordination Committee was formed. Honorary dental advisers were appointed to each State coordination committee to advise on the calling up of dentists for service. In 1940 dental officers were appointed in the rank of Captain AAMC (Dental). Prior to this all appointments were to Lieutenant rank. During 1941 ADMS (Dental) were appointed to 1 Aust Corps, 1 Aust Base Area and AIF HQ Middle East. On 23rd April, 1943 the Corps was granted separate status and became the AADC. AADC personnel served with distinction in all theatres in which Australian Forces were deployed.

Post War Period

The Australian component of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan initially included a dental unit of six sections, an ADDS on the staff of HQ BCOF, and later a dental stores sub-depot. The unit dwindled in strength as a result of demobilisation until by December 1947 it had only four officers left. With the reorganisation of the BCOF, 89 Dental Unit was disbanded and reformed as BCOF Dental Unit restricted to a HQ and one section with only three dental officers. It operated dental centres in the BCOF General Hospital and in the Base Area at Kure.

Korea
It was originally planned that the dental service for the British Commonwealth Division should be the joint responsibility of Australia and the United Kingdom. Accordingly, Britcom Dental Unit was formed, to which Australia contributed the HQ and one section, while two sections were provided by the UK. The arrangement proved unsatisfactory. Accordingly, in July 1952 the 101st Dental Section was raised and sent to Korea to become an integral part of the British Commonwealth Division. With the arrival of a second Australia Battalion in Korea the dental officer to troops ratio became insufficient, and 102nd Dental Section was raised and flown to Korea in July 1953.

Malaya

With the emergency in Malaya and the presence of Australian troops in the area it was decided to send 103rd Dental Section into Malaya. They arrived on 10 October 1955. This section was later expanded and 32 Dental Unit was raised.

Vietnam

With the participation of Australian Forces in the war in South Vietnam (SVN) the RAADC was called to provide a dental service. On 10th June, 1965, a dental detachment arrived at Bien Hoa. With the build up of Australian troops in SVN as well as the enormous amount of civil aid work which could be done, the dental contingent in SVN was increased and 33 Dental Unit became operational on 27th May 1966, at Vung Tau. By 1967, the strength of the unit in SVN was five officers and 18 other ranks, with a HQ and one section at Vung Tau and three sections at Nui Dat.