

**ABC SUPPLY CATALOGING**  
**IN THE**  
**ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE**

## CATALOGUING

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1. Supply Cataloguing is essential to the efficient supply management of any complex business enterprise or Government agency. It provides the means by which supplies and equipment necessary to the performance of a function can be standardised, and supply operations systematized, resulting in improved efficiency and increased economy. To some extent its function is analogous to the catalogue issued by a large retail store to illustrate and describe its goods so that customers are aware of what is available for sale.
2. Between 1919-20 the RAAF instituted a cataloguing system to enable identification and bring to account a gift of airforce equipment from the British Government. This equipment was catalogued into broad categories of 23 groups thus:
  - (a) Aircraft and Airframe spares
  - (b) Aero Engines and Spares
  - (c) Mechanical Transport and Spares, Stationary Engines and Generating Sets, and etc.
3. The next step in the evolution of the RAAF Cataloguing system was the division of groups into sections commencing at unity in each group. In 1927 it was decided to use RAF Publications and RAF Identification of items so far as differing local conditions permit. To those influences can be attributed the mixture of "section numbers" at present in use. In the airframe (A) and engine (B) groups, sections are principally numerical, thus :

<u>R.A.A.F.</u> <u>Group and Section</u>	<u>R.A.F.</u> <u>Section</u>	<u>R.A.A.F.</u> <u>Group and Section</u>	<u>R.A.F.</u> <u>Section</u>
A4 - Anson	25DD	B4 - Cheetah	36U
A20 - Wirraway	-	B20 -Wasp Single Row	-
A73 - Lincoln Mk. 30	26EA	B22 - Merlin 66, 85B, 102	36DD
A87 - Canberra	36FZ	B47 - Avon Mk. 1	36VV

but in the majority of other groups R. A. F. section numbers were fitted into the R. A. A. F. group framework as the following show :

<u>R.A.A.F.</u> <u>Group and Section</u>	<u>Nomenclature</u>	<u>R.A.F.</u> <u>Section</u>
D1A	Tools – Hand – A – F	1A
E7G	Hispano Guns	7G
G5C	Aircraft Electrical Stores	5C

In all cases the group/section plus numerical No. plus detailed description of the item were listed in a publication known as the RAAF Vocabulary of Stores, AAP No.2 one of which was produced covering each group/section. An example of an item identified under this system is W1/111 Plugs, 3 pin, 10 amps (all rubber).

4. A further development in "section numbers" occurred during the 1939-45 war when early in 1940 it was decided that lend lease supplies manufactured in U. S. A. and similar in nature and appearance to British items were to be identified in new sections in the "100" series. Therefore, in the case of Aircraft Instruments in section 6A, 106A was the new section reference assigned to "Aircraft Instruments - U. S. A" Later, items such as Neptune range & certain radio equipment were brought on charge under their USAF and USN identification numbers using the relevant RAAF group and section.

5. Yet another development was the identification of equipment in the 500,000 series. This series was introduced to identify equipment for use in the RAAF and was applied to those items procured from United Kingdom not identified by the RAF or that equipment purchased from USA which was not identified in the "100" series.

A typical example being G5V/500001 Urn Aircraft Electric.

6. It will be obvious that the present system has grown by successive modifications and is too restricted for effective supply classification. This fact coupled with the existence of other cataloguing systems in the Australian Army & Navy has resulted in a direction by the Department of Defence that a new system is to be adopted by the Australian Defence Group of government departments (Air, Army, Navy & Supply).

7. In the supply systems of the Military and Civilian Departments there are millions of apparently different items worth many thousands of pounds, which are identified as different solely because item names, descriptions and identification numbers are not uniform in the various systems. Experience of the armed forces in World War 2 emphasised the necessity for a single identification system for efficient procurement and distribution of materials to operational formations. Such a system would have saved "many thousands of pounds and hundreds of lives". In addition, operations with allied forces would be facilitated if all operatives have a common system of supply cataloguing. These diverse considerations dictated our adoption of the ABCSC system i.e. American British Canadian Supply Cataloguing System.

8. The ABCSC system of cataloguing originated out of joint discussions held between the United States and the United Kingdom shortly after the end of the second World War. Adopted in the United States under the title of Federal Supply Classification and with the backing of a Public Law, it was accepted by the United Kingdom and Canada under the title of "American-British-Canadian Supply Classification System". To this system, Australia was invited to subscribe and accepted the invitation in October 1958, the Minister for Defence approving the introduction of ABCSC cataloguing into the three Services and the Department of Supply. It is of interest that in January 1957, the NATO group of countries adopted the system under the title of NATO Supply Classification System. Notwithstanding the different names given to the system, it is essentially the same and a brief description of it is detailed later.

9. At the same time, the Joint Cataloguing Committee was set up under the Joint War Production Committee of the Department of Defence. Included in its terms of reference are :-

- (i) To formulate policy on joint cataloguing within the Defence Group of Departments under the A.B.C. Supply Cataloguing System.
- (ii) To consider problems common to cataloguing and standardisation.

- (iii) To stimulate the interest of other government Departments and Industry in the advantages to be gained from participating in joint cataloguing.
10. Also within the Department of Defence, a Defence Cataloguing Authority was set up “to initiate, develop, control and co-ordinate the implementation of the ABCSC system”. This authority is the executive arm of this Committee.
11. The system is numerical to facilitate machine accounting. All supplies are divided on a basis of technical affinity into groups bearing a two digit number. There are thus a possible 99 groups, of which 75 have been allotted so far ensuring sufficient flexibility and reserve to cover any item whatsoever.
12. Groups are further broken down into classes, also having a two digit number. At present there are about 537 classes. Group and class are written as one four figure group.
13. The selection of the appropriate group and class is known as “Supply Classification”.
14. A specific item within a class is given a seven-digit number, known as the Defence Item Identification number (D. I. I. N.). The number is always written in the form three digits hyphen four digits.
15. The method of differentiating one item from another is known as “Item Identification”. The essence of item identification is to provide such a description of an item that the cataloguing authority, without physically sighting the item and merely by comparison of descriptions, no matter by whom prepared, can determine whether or not that particular item has been catalogued previously. This is achieved in one of two general ways, either by the selection of the appropriate one from a very great number of standardised description patterns (questionnaires) and the preparation of a written description of the item to be catalogued in the format of the pattern, or by the submission of a punch card giving the manufacturer’s name and his part number for the item.
16. In order to indicate the country which first catalogued the item, a two digit number is inserted between the four digit group and class indicator and the seven digit item identification number. Hyphens are used to isolate this nation code number from the other two numbers.
17. Where an item designed in one country is manufactured in another, the normal national code number is replaced by a special “reproduction” nation code number.
18. The full identification number is referred to as the Defence Stock Number and is written in the form 1234-00-789-9876.
19. The placing of an item in its correct group and class is achieved with the aid of four handbooks.
20. Cataloguing Handbook H2-1 - Groups and Classes. This Handbook shows all groups and classes presented in the arrangement of the four - digit ABCSC code-numbering system. Appropriate notes assist in defining the coverage of a particular class. A sample copy of Cataloguing Handbook. H2-1 is available on request to the Defence Cataloguing Authority.

21. Cataloguing Handbook H2-2 Numeric Index of Classes. The numeric index is arranged numerically by groups and classes, and contains within each Class an alphabetical list of entries included in the class. In addition, the notes from H2-1 are inserted following appropriate group and class titles.
22. Cataloguing Handbook H2-3 - Alphabetic Index. The Alphabetic Index contains an alphabetical arrangement of the entries listed in the Numeric Index. Among the entries are approved names and certain colloquial and standardised names. Each entry is referred to a single four-digit ABCSC class code number.
23. Cataloguing Handbook H6-1 - Section A - Alphabetic Index of Names to Item Identification Patterns. In addition to the classification guidance provided by H2-1, H2-2 and H2-3, H6-1, Section A lists all approved basic names, item names, and their colloquial names, and refers each approved item name to an appropriate group or groups, and if possible, to a class or classes within the group.
24. Determination of Correct Group and Class. Where the item to be classified has an approved name, the name is first found in H6-1. Alongside the name is a reference which leads to the correct group and class in which the item should be classified. If there is no approved name appropriate to the item, reference is made to H2-3, which contains a wider selection of names, cross-references to likely group classes. By looking up a group class in H2-2 and if necessary, referring back to H2-1, the correct group class can be determined. Special rules apply for dealing with specially designed items, kits, assemblies and items having multiple applications.
25. Adaptation of U.S. Handbooks. The cataloguing handbooks referred to above are of US origin. To adapt them to Australian conditions it has been agreed :-
  - (a) All spellings shall be in accordance with the Oxford English Dictionary.
  - (b) US names will be used as much as possible but where a name is not generally understood in procurement circles in Australia or its use might cause serious difficulties in supply operations a more suitable name will be approved and adopted for use in Australia.
  - (c) The Defence Cataloguing Authority will publish in a suitable form, names approved for use in Australia, which are not in H6-1.
26. Item Identification. Two methods have been established for accomplishing the process of item identification.
27. The Descriptive Method. This method establishes the concept of an item by describing in words the essential characteristics of the item which give it its unique character and serve to differentiate it from every other item. To assist in achieving uniformity in the description of an item, fixed formats are followed in recording the relevant data. The formats, known as description patterns, are such that all items having the same approved name present specific variations in the same sequence, thereby enabling the logical and quick elimination of duplicates and ensuring that the description contains all the information necessary for supply management. A separate description pattern is available for each approved item name and is indexed against that name in Cataloguing Handbook H6-1.

Description patterns, of which there are over 14,000 are bound in volumes applicable to a specific group of the supply classification. There are ninety such volumes. Further to assist in describing an item and quoting its dimensions, drawings have been produced covering a wide range of supplies. The drawings are bound into the appropriate volumes of the description patterns.

28. The Reference Method. The concept of an item is established by reference(s) to the part number(s) of one or more manufacturers. Thus, under the reference method the essential characteristics of the item are not described directly in the item identification but are established by recording the data represented by the manufacturer's part number(s), qualified by the manufacturer's name. Uniformity in the preparation of item identifications by the reference method is achieved through the medium of two fixed formats known as reference patterns. Reference pattern No. 1 contains requirements for data essential in Type 2 item identifications, (see paragraph 37 below) including the name of the item, the code number for the manufacturer taken from the DEFENCE CATALOGUING CODE FOR MANUFACTURERS (a code prepared by the Defence Cataloguing authority to simplify the recording of manufacturer's names on punch cards) and the manufacturer's part number. Reference pattern No.2 contains requirements for data essential in Type 2a (see paragraph 39 below) item identifications, including the name of the item, the Defence Cataloguing Code number for the manufacturer, the manufacturer's part number for the item, the minimum characteristics required to complete the identification of the item and to differentiate it from all other items having the same manufacturer's part number, and the specific application of the item.
29. Types of Item Identification. The two methods of item identification, descriptive and reference, are used singly and in combination to give 5 types of item identification. Descriptive identification is preferred wherever possible.
30. Type 1 (Descriptive). The Type 1 item identification defines the essential characteristics of the item by the use of the following kinds of identification data :-
- (a) The approved item name, which is the first element in the identification.
  - (b) A description of the characteristics of the item by a series of statements in words or numerals ordinarily forms the major kind of identification data used in Type 1 identifications. Such description continues the definition of the characteristics of the item initiated by the item name, and progressively, with the listing of each successive characteristic, differentiates between items covered by the same item name. When it is not feasible to define all essential characteristics of the item in the description, the description may be augmented by referring to particular documents or other sources of relevant data such as Government, professional association, industrial association, and manufacturer's specifications and standards. It is essential that such references be to documents which are available for distribution throughout the Departments of the Defence Group, or which are recognised within the industry and are generally available.
  - (c) Illustration of the item is a third kind of identification data used in a Type 1 item identification, when it is required as a supplement to, or substitute for, the description of certain characteristics of the item. The applicable illustration may be included as a part of the item identification, or given indirectly

by reference to a drawing or other illustrative document. It is essential that all references be to documents which are available for distribution throughout the Departments of the Defence Group, or which are recognised within the industry and are generally available. An illustration includes a drawing, graph, table, diagram, sketch, photograph, or statement used to represent certain characteristics of the item. It is especially valuable in the identification of items of complex or irregular outline and for indicating where dimensions included in the description of the item have been measured. If accompanied by a scale, an illustration may be used to give an idea of the relative sizes of various components of complex items.

A Type 1 identification is used where a specific proprietary item is not essential. e. g. a hammer, towelling, paint.

31. Type 1A (Descriptive Reference) Item Identification. A Type 1a item identification relates to a specific proprietary item which is capable of being described in words, but where uniqueness is established by the part number allotted to it by the manufacturer. The Type 1a item identification defines essential characteristics of the item in the same manner and to the same extent as for a comparable Type 1 (descriptive) item identification, but includes the reference to the manufacturer and to the manufacturer's part Number.
32. Type 1B (Descriptive – Reference – Descriptive) Item. A Type 1b identification also relates to a proprietary item which is capable of being described in words and covers the case where a manufacturer uses the same part number for what are essentially different items. e. g. a pump outlet arranged for either right hand or left hand delivery. The Type 1b item identification defines essential characteristics of the item in the same manner and to the same extent as for a comparable Type 1a (descriptive-reference) item identification, but includes a statement of those minimum characteristics required to differentiate it from other items having the same manufacturer's number
33. Type 2 (Reference) item Identification. A Type 2 identification is reserved for a proprietary item which cannot conveniently be described in words but which is uniquely identified by a manufacturer's part number. The Type 2 item identification denotes the item by use of the following kinds of identification data :-
  - (a) References to the manufacturer of the item and to the manufacturer's (s) part number, from the basic identification data used in a Type 2 (reference) item identification.
    - (i) A manufacturer is one (a) who controls the design and production of an item or (b) who produces an item from crude or fabricated materials, or (c) who assembles materials or components, with or without modification, into more complex items.
    - (ii) A manufacturer may be an individual, company, firm corporation, or Government factory or department.

- (b) The name of the item is also an element of each Type 2 identification. The name is the title by which the item is known or designated, and shall be the approved item name when appropriate, or may be the name standardized for the item by a participating Department, or the name applied to the item by the manufacturer.

34. Type 2A (Reference – Descriptive) Item Identification. The Type 2a (reference-descriptive) identification is used for a proprietary item which cannot conveniently be described in words and where the manufacturer's part number is applicable to more than one item. It differs from Type 2 item identification by the addition of the minimum characteristics required to differentiate the item from other items having the same manufacturer's part number.

35. It is policy that all items received from overseas or those manufactured in Australia to overseas design will be identified by their overseas ABCSC numbers where these are known. Likewise all new items of Australian origin are being brought on charge using Australian identification numbers under the ABCSC system.

36. Over the next few years RAAF equipment will be progressively converted to ABCSC on advice from Department of Air, and in the long term all RAAF equipment will be identified under this system. However, for some years to come both systems will be used side by side, old ranges of equipment being identified under the old RAAF system and new equipment under ABCSC. Items will not be identified and held under more than one system. Obsolete redundant and obsolescent stock will probably never be converted, but large scale conversion can be expected in the following current ranges : -

- (a) Equipment received from the United States and identified in the "100" series sections (H128F etc.)
- (b) Equipment received from UK and identified in the RAF sections (Y10C etc).
- (c) Current locally produced equipment –Nuts, Screws, hand Tools etc.

37. All conversions or reidentifications of equipment to ABCSC will be on the authority of an official letter or amendment list issued by Department of Air. Special conversion listings will also be produced giving advice of conversion, and extensive cross reference indexes will be produced showing new ident numbers, part numbers and superseded numbers.

38. The RAAF Conversion Program extends over an extended period commencing January, 1960. In the year 1960/61, it is planned to convert to ABCSC identification all items held in the RAAF supply system under former United States Navy and USAF stock numbers. In the period 1961/1963 to convert to ABCSC identification those items of American origin held to identification in the RAAF group and "100" series sections. The conversion of items in the RAAF group and section system of identification will be phased over an extended period and coordinated with the Conversion programs of the Army and Navy.

39. With full appreciation of the impact which conversion will have on all echelons of supply, planning has been based on the capacity of the weakest link to cope with the conversion program. It is of paramount importance that all supply activities be speaking the same language, that is, the same identification numbers. The program must be completed with the absolute minimum disruption of the normal supply activity and by the most economical and effective means practicable. Conversion must be accomplished with minimum impairment to the supply support of operating activities.
40. It is essential that conversion be “en phase” with the provisioning review cycle. This will distribute the conversion backload and minimize disruption of the provisioning review cycle. Conversion will be executed in four phases as follows : -
- (a) Phase I - This will take place entirely within Department of Air. Action will be taken to obtain identification data and supporting documentation from USA.
  - (b) Phase II - Will begin by providing Conversion lists in USN and USAF stock number sequence cross referring to the applicable ABCSC ident number. This information is provided for field activity use as a conversion cross- reference for re-marking tally sheets, stock control cards, bin cards, stock location cards and similar records, and re-marking material identification, etc, during this phase. Identification change cards will be used to the maximum possible extent.
  - (c) Phase III - Appropriate Amendment lists or new editions of the RAAF Catalogue of Stores and Scales of Entitlement will be issued to field activities at least two months prior to conversion “cut off date”. On receipt of this information, units are to demand under the new identification number, but ensure that details of the former stock number are quoted in brackets after the description. A master cross-reference index will be prepared which will provide details of former and converted identification numbers.
  - (d) Phase IV - This will involve the actual conversion and will be accompanied at all levels of supply simultaneously. The conversion “out of date” will mean that all stock records will be held under ABCSC identification; that all demands and issues are to be actioned in accordance with the new (ABCSC identification).

41. Conversion will be accomplished with the aid of Master Cross-Reference Indexes and Conversion Lists. The former will be :

- (a) Part No. to ABCSC Stock No. to former Ident. No.
- (b) ABCSC to Part No. Stock No. to former Ident. No.
- (c) Former Ident. No. to ABCSC to Part No. Stock No.

It should be borne in mind that initially the Master Cross-Reference index will list only those items for which conversion is being made. However, in due course the Index will be expanded to provide cross reference information for all items in the RAAF Supply System. Sections will be included or withdrawn as circumstances warrant.

42. Conversion lists will serve as the initial cross-reference list from the USN/USAF stock numbers as applicable to ABCSC. The distribution will be in sufficient quantity to meet the needs of Stores Depots and all self-accounting units. It is proposed that a conversion list will be the authority in lieu of a stores adjustment voucher, for the correction of all stock control records, tally sheets, stock location cards, other store records, case and bin markings and stock ledger index cards to the ABCSC identification.

43. To facilitate the conversion process by user activities each conversion list will be accompanied by a three way cross reference index. In addition, Stores Depots and Aircraft Depots will be issued with a set of four cards which cross refer the USN stock number to the applicable ABCSC stock number. Typical action at a user unit will be as follows : -

#### Stores Depots and Aircraft Depots

- (a) Conversion cut off Date: Stores Depots and Aircraft Depots are to : -
  - (i) Post all outstanding vouchers affecting the particular items, by a stated date.
  - (ii) At a stated time on a stated date, a signal is to be despatched to Department of Air Melbourne (Stats 3) advising serial number of the posting sheet covering the last transaction.
  - (iii) These posting sheets are to be despatched air mail to reach Department of Air Melbourne not later than stated date.
- (b) Conversion Date Using the conversion documentation provided and commencing at a stated time to correct all stock holding and dues in records to the ABCSC stock number as applicable. This conversion is to be completed by a stated date. To facilitate the conversion process, Stores Depots and Aircraft Depot may use :-

- (i) The decks of cards to amend stock location and other records, and in addition, by :
  - (ii) attaching the cards to the applicable cases as an interim method of re-identification.
- (c) Vouchers in Progress. All vouchers affecting receipts and issues of equipments in process of being actioned between the conversion “cut off” date and conversion date are not to be posted until completion of the conversion of the stock records.

User Units

- (a) Post all vouchers affecting the particular items, by a stated date;
- (b) After the conversion “cut off” date and prior to the conversion date ensure that all stock records, “due in” records, and other store records are amended to the ABCSC identification as applicable.
- (c) New demands raised after the conversion “cut off” date and before the conversion date are to be endorsed with the ABCSC identification number with a cross reference in the body of the demand to the former USN Class stock number.
- (d) In transit receipt vouchers to be brought on charge under the applicable ABCSC stock number.
- (e) Adjustment of Control Records. Units operating under a machine accounting system of stock accounting will: -
  - (i) Balance control accounts affected by the conversion.
  - (ii) Transfer the total of stock balances from the old to the new control accounts.

The Unit’s Accounting Officer will check the accuracy of all adjustments.

Items held on Store Accounts but not shown on Conversion Lists. If an activity holds equipment either on stock or AIU accounts under USN Class 8 for which an ABCSC identification number is not detailed in the conversion list, this information would be submitted to Department of Air Melbourne. A supplement to the conversion list will then be issued.

Vocabularies. Amendments to the Vocabularies will be processed as expeditiously as possible to reach User Activities prior to the conversion date. However, where large amendments or revisions are necessary it may not be possible to set a pre-determined Target date