

THE OXFORD
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AUSTRALIAN
MILITARY HISTORY



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SOUTH-EAST ASIA TREATY ORGANIZATION

Protector: displacement 920 tons; length 185 feet (overall); beam 30 feet; draught 12.5 feet; speed 14 knots; armament 1 × 8-inch gun, 5 × 6-inch guns, 4 × 3-pounders, 5 × machine-guns; rearmed during First World War with 2 × 4-inch guns, 2 × 12-pounders, 4 × 3-pounders.

(See also COLONIAL NAVIES.)

SOUTH-EAST ASIA TREATY ORGANIZATION (SEATO)

was a regional defence organisation formed as a result of the Geneva Conference of 1954, which had failed to resolve the outstanding issues arising from the Korean War and the French defeat in Indo-China. In September that year a conference in Manila resulted in the South-east Asia Collective Defence Treaty, signed by the United States, Australia, New Zealand, France, Britain, Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines. The Australian Minister for External Affairs, R. G. Casey, played an important role in bringing it to fruition. The treaty designated any attack on a member state, or on protocol states (which meant South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) as a matter of common danger inviting a common response, and was thus an attempt to create a regional counterpart to NATO. The United States specified that the treaty could be invoked only in response to a communist attack, thus placing, for example, the Indo-Pakistan conflict outside its provisions. SEATO had no standing forces of its own, unlike NATO, and the United States refused to designate any forces for SEATO tasks ahead of need. The British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve (q.v.), based in Malaya and formed from forces contributed by Britain, Australia and New Zealand, was earmarked for SEATO tasks, though never used for that purpose. SEATO was headed by a secretary-general, had a combined headquarters and contingency planning, and was the coordinating body for regular military exercises between member states. The Laos crisis of 1961-62 demonstrated the organisation's inability to act collectively, and in March 1962 the American Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, declared that member states' obligations were individual as well as collective; this was used as a rationale for Australian intervention in the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s. Pakistan withdrew in 1968 and France suspended membership in 1975. The last SEATO exercise was held in February 1976 and the organisation was wound up formally in June 1977. Its principal advantage to Australia was the opportunity it provided for dialogue and defence cooperation within the region and with the United States. Indeed between 1956 and 1972 most of the consultative process under ANZUS (q.v.) was conducted through SEATO, and neither

the ANZUS Council nor the Military Representatives met in that period. Its main disadvantages were that it identified Australia closely with American foreign policy in the region (but then ANZUS already did that), while its particular regional grouping (White regional and former colonial powers with a small number of politically acceptable Asian nations) became increasingly inappropriate in the 1970s.

Leszek Buszynski, *SEATO: The Failure of an Alliance Strategy* (Singapore University Press, Singapore, 1983).

SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC AREA (SWPA), consisting of Australia and the islands to its north, was created in March 1942 under the command of General Douglas MacArthur (q.v.) when the British and American Combined Chiefs of Staff divided the world into operational areas including the SWPA, under US Army control, and the adjoining South Pacific Area, under US Navy control. The choice of MacArthur as Supreme Commander was supported by the Australian government to ensure the allocation of American resources to the defence of Australia. General Sir Thomas Blamey (q.v.) was appointed Commander Allied Land Forces in the SWPA, but had little practical control over American troops. Australian troops were involved in fighting in the SWPA in Papua, New Guinea and Borneo.

SPANISH CIVIL WAR, AUSTRALIANS IN see AUSTRALIANS IN THE SERVICE OF OTHER NATIONS

SPECIAL AIR SERVICE REGIMENT (SAS) The decision to form an SAS company was announced in April 1957, and came out of deliberations over the future shape of the regular army, based as well on observation of the British SAS in Malaya during the Emergency (q.v.). Its original establishment was 16 officers and 144 other ranks, but beyond that little detailed consideration was given initially to its function or purpose. During the flirtation with the Pentropic division (q.v.) in the early 1960s, the SAS became for a time part of the Royal Australian Regiment (q.v.), and its principal wartime task was to act in an infantry reconnaissance role at divisional level. Pressure to deploy the Australian SAS to Borneo to assist in operations against the Indonesians (see CONFRONTATION) led to the dispatch of the 1st Squadron for active service in 1965 and, in preparation for this, led to the separation of the SAS from the RAR and its reorganisation as a regiment consisting of a headquarters and two squadrons (since if one squadron was deployed overseas, a second would be necessary for duties in the defence of Australia), with an establishment