

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FORMATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN REGULAR ARMY

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On 13 September 1947, The Hon Cyril Chambers, Minister for Army, approved the use of the term 'Regular Army' when referring to what had previously been known as the Australian Permanent Military Force (PMF) and in November 1947, the Military Board directed it be referred to as the Australian Regular Army (ARA), giving birth to today's modern, professional Army.¹ The formation of the ARA has given Australia the capacity to respond quickly and decisively to emerging security risks, and other crisis, domestically, regionally and internationally.

Prior to the Second World War the PMF was a small cadre, averaging around 2000 soldiers, whose role was to provide administration and instruction to the Citizens Military Force (CMF), which was the main military force intended for the defence of Australia.² Due to the restrictions on the PMF contained within the *Defence Act 1903* the only corps the PMF could form in peacetime were the Staff, Instructional, Aviation, Survey, Service, Medical, Veterinarian, Ordnance, Artillery and Engineer corps.³ The Act also did not allow any soldier, either PMF or CMF, to serve outside of Australia or its territories unless they volunteered to do so.⁴ This restriction was what led to the formation of the Australian Imperial Forces so that Australia could provide troops to serve overseas during the First and Second World Wars.⁵



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Soldiers of the 6th Light Horse Regiment, Citizen Military Forces.

Because of the impact of these restrictions on Australia's ability to mobilise for the Second World War, in 1944 the government directed Army to consider what the strength, organisation

¹ Graeme Sligo, 'The Development of the Australian Regular Army, 1944-1952', in *The Second Fifty Years: The Australian Army 1947-1997*, Canberra, https://www.army.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-11/1997_the_second_fifty_years_the_australian_army_1947_to_1997_0.pdf

² '20220725 Army Statistics 1901-2021', Force Structure – Army.

³ Sligo, 'The Development of the Australian Regular Army'.

⁴ Albert Palazzo, *The Australian Army: A History of its Organisation 1901-2001*, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 25-26.

⁵ Peter Dennis, Jeffrey Grey, Ewan Morris, Robin Prior and Jean Bou, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, 2nd edn, Melbourne, 2008, pp. 62-64; Jeffery Grey, *The Australian Army*, Melbourne, 2001, p. 168.

and capability of a post-war force should be.⁶ This led to the implementation of the Post-War Army Planning Committee and the Vasey Report.⁷ In 1946, a recommendation was made to government for a permanent Army of some 30,000 soldiers, including a brigade of 4,000, and a CMF of around 40,000.⁸ However, financial limitations meant that the final numbers approved were an ARA of 19,000 with a CMF of 50,000.⁹ The Minister for Defence approved its creation on 4 June 1947.¹⁰

To ensure Army could meet its commitments in the period covering the demobilisation of the AIF and the formation of the ARA, particularly to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan, Australia formed the Interim Army.¹¹ The Interim Army served between May 1946 and August 1952.¹²



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The Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, inspects Australian troops of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) on parade at Anzac Park, Kure, Japan on 16 August 1950. Standing behind Prime Minister Menzies is Lieutenant General H C H Robertson, Commander in Chief of BCOF.

On the same day that Chambers approved the naming of the PMF as the Regular Army two Australian soldiers arrived in Jakarta on Australia's first Peacekeeping mission and since then Army has had soldiers on Peacekeeping Operations somewhere in the world every day for the last 75 years.¹³ The ARA has served honourably and with distinction in combat operations in Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq and supported our regional partners in building their capacity and supporting them in times of need with humanitarian assistance and

⁶ Sligo, 'The Development of the Australian Regular Army'.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Palazzo, *The Australian Army*: p. 205; Sligo, 'The Development of the Australian Regular Army'.

⁹ Palazzo, *The Australian Army*: p. 206; Roland Wilson, *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia: No. 37 – 1946 and 1947*, Canberra, 1948, p. 1147.

¹⁰ Sligo, 'The Development of the Australian Regular Army'.

¹¹ Grey, *The Australian Army*, p. 166.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Peter Londy, Rhys Crawley and David Horner, *The Long Search for Peace: Observer Missions and Beyond, 1947-2006*, Port Melbourne, 2020, p. 31; '75 Years of Australian Army Peacekeeping: 1947-2022, Australian Army History Unit.

disaster relief. It has served the people of Australia directly with support and assistance during domestic disaster events, and most recently with the COVID-19 pandemic. The ARA has 75 years of proud and distinguished service to all Australians.