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## BIOGRAPHY

# Who was ..... John Soame Richardson?

*Major-General J. S. Richardson, CB, a veteran of the Crimean (1855) and Maori (1860-61 and 1862-64) wars, was Commandant of the New South Wales Military Forces from 1865 to 1892. He commanded the New South Wales Contingent during the Soudan Expedition (1885) and founded The United Service Institution of New South Wales in 1888.*



John Soame Richardson was born in England on 16 March 1836. He was educated at Rugby School and then commissioned as an ensign in the 72<sup>nd</sup> Regiment (The Duke of Albany's Own Highlanders) in November 1854. He served with his regiment in the Crimean Campaign in 1855, including the expedition to Kertch, the attacks at Redan and the capitulation of Sebastopol, following which he was promoted to lieutenant in November and was awarded (Anon. 1889) the Crimea Medal with Sebastopol Clasp and the Turkish War Medal.

In 1858, Richardson transferred to the 12<sup>th</sup> Regiment (The East Suffolk Regiment) and joined it in Australia as a reinforcement officer. In June 1860, he was appointed adjutant and accompanied two companies of the regiment to New Zealand to assist with an expected Maori uprising in Taranaki (Moir 1969). They found New Plymouth in a state of siege. The 40<sup>th</sup>, 57<sup>th</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> Regiments and a naval brigade were also despatched to New Zealand and in March 1861, an instrument of peace was signed. In 1862, fighting broke out in Waikato and the 12<sup>th</sup> Regiment was again transferred from Sydney to assist (Moir 1969). During the Waikato Campaign, Richardson was promoted to captain (July 1863). He resigned from the British army in September 1864, returned to New South Wales and was awarded (Anon. 1889) the New Zealand Medal.

Back in Sydney, Richardson gained his majority in the New South Wales Volunteer Forces and, on 17 February 1865, he was appointed inspecting field officer with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. A thorough professional, he re-organised the forces several times, initiated a system of part-paid volunteers and established reserve rifle companies; but his plans were frustrated as finance and ministerial approvals were withheld (Pemberton 1976). When the British regiments withdrew from Australasia in 1870, Richardson was appointed president of a commission on defence from foreign aggression and of a board set up for inspecting and maintaining the supply of colonial warlike stores. On 1 August 1871, he was appointed commandant of the permanent and volunteer military forces of New South Wales and on 26 August 1876 was promoted to colonel. In 1881, he was a member of the Martin royal commission on military defences in which he defended the payment of volunteers and urged the formation of a permanent Australia-wide defence reserve. Despite poor health, he travelled to France in 1882 to inspect the Franco-Prussian War battlefields and assess the latest developments in warfare.

On 11 February 1885, the New South Wales Government offered a military contingent to Britain for the Soudan campaign and Richardson was appointed the

commander (Sutton 1985). The contingent departed from Sydney on 3 March 1885, reached Suakin on 29 March and was brigaded with the Guards, with whom it participated in the advance on Tamai. Otherwise, the contingent saw little action and returned to Sydney on 12 June 1885. Richardson (Anon. 1889) was appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath, awarded the Soudan Medal and the Khedive Star, mentioned in despatches (*London Gazette*, 25 August 1885) and promoted to major-general (15 August 1885).

After the war, Richardson was appointed to a joint United Kingdom/Colonial commission inquiring into the defences of Thursday Island and King George's Sound. His health, however, deteriorated further and he had to contend with continued government indifference to his proposed reforms and the enmity of certain colleagues (Pemberton 1976). He retired on 9 December 1892 and after a time was admitted to a mental hospital where he died on 9 June 1896. He was buried at Waverley Cemetery on 11 June with full military honours. Richardson, an esteemed soldier in his lifetime, had laid the foundation for what was to become a decade later the Australian Commonwealth Military Forces.

The United Service Institution of New South Wales was established on 20 August 1888 at Richardson's instigation and he was its first President (1888-1891). To commemorate its centenary, the Institution placed a plaque on his grave on 30 October 1988 (Anon. 1988); and to commemorate the centenary of his death, the Institution arranged the restoration of his grave and conducted a wreath-laying ceremony there on 20 October 1996.

### References and Further Reading

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- Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 1896, p. 5.
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<sup>1</sup>Prepared from notes and information compiled between 1988 and 1997 by the late Colonel Ralph Sutton, LVO, Mr Phil Thompson and the late Mrs Ursula Davidson, OAM. Photo of Major-General J. S. Richardson, CB, circa 1888, courtesy of Mrs Luciana Arrighi Chetwynd, great grand-daughter.