

## BOOK REVIEW:

# *Fighting Australia's Cold War – The Nexus of Strategy and Operations in a Multipolar Asia, 1945-1965*

Edited by Peter Dean and Tristan Moss

ANU Press; 2021; 206 pp.; ISBN 9781760464820 (paperback); RRP \$50.00



The period 1945-1965 is a relatively little studied era in Australian military history. The popular perception is that Australia switched its major security alliance partner in 1941 but the reality is that really did not happen until the Vietnam War and some might argue that the pendulum is now set to swing back a little towards the UK. The UK retained significant strategic and economic interests centred on the Malay Peninsula in South East Asia, and as Australia's largest trading partner it remained in Australia's strategic interest to work with the UK to ensure security in the region.

The period under consideration was a complex and difficult one for Australia as the Second World War concluded; Japan was occupied, communism became more assertive, the US and USSR faced off in Europe and great swathes of territory were decolonised. The editors define this era as the first two decades of the Cold War but there were many other strategic trends and influences in play.

In this period Australia had forces deployed almost continuously throughout East Asia; fought in three conflicts and prepared to fight in a possible wider conflagration in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. In Korea, Malaya and Borneo, Australian forces encountered new types of warfare, integrated new equipment and ideas, and were part of the longest continual overseas deployments in Australia's history. Working closely with its allies, Australia also trained for a large conventional war in Southeast Asia, while a significant percentage of the defence force guarded the Papua New Guinea - Indonesian border. At home, the Defence organisation grappled with new threats and military expansion, while the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation defended the nation from domestic and foreign threats.

This book examines this crucial part of Australia's security history, so often overlooked as merely a precursor to the Vietnam War. It addresses key questions such as how did Australia achieve its security goals at home and in the region in this new Cold War environment? What were the experiences

of the services, units and individuals serving in Southeast Asia? How did this period shape Australia's defence for years to come?

*Fighting Australia's Cold War* contains nine essays and includes a list of abbreviations, four maps, footnotes, and an index. The contributors include Peter Dean, Tristan Moss, David Horner, John Blaxland, Stephan Frühling, Thomas Ricardson, Lachlan Grant and Michael Kelly. The topics in each of the essays are defined and complementary, with Frühling providing a broad strategic policy context essay upfront. Dean's introduction and conclusion are insightful, but I'm not sure of the utility of his use of Liddell-Hart's strategy model in the concluding chapter; he might have just said "Australia pursued its strategic interests which shifted over time."

Although mentioned in passing, Australia's quest to become an atomic power during the period should have earned an essay in its own right. Then, as now, Australia's large landmass and small population demands a credible strategic deterrent capability. This quest was no small endeavour and deserved more fulsome examination as part of the milieu of factors and decisions.

*Fighting Australia's Cold War* provides a valuable insight and summary of Australia's strategic security environment between Tokyo Bay and Vũng Tàu. I commend it to all students of military history and strategic studies.

**Marcus Fielding**

