In August 1943, Mountbatten was appointed Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia (SACSEA); he arrived in India to take up his post in the following October. The newly created South East Asia Command (SEAC) included Burma, Ceylon, Siam, the Malay peninsula and Sumatra; Mountbatten was in overall charge of all allied forces within this area, on land, sea and in the air, and he was consequently responsible to the governments of each country contributing forces. At first, Mountbatten's headquarters (HQ SACSEA) was based in Delhi; in April 1944, it moved to Kandy, in Ceylon, which had a more bearable climate and was nearer to the centre of Mountbatten's command. India continued to be important as a source of supplies and manpower and as SEAC's channel of communications, and Mountbatten retained a smaller staff in New Delhi in what was termed 'Rear HQ SEAC'. SEAC was also represented in London at the offices of the War Cabinet by a staff known as the 'Rear Link'. When the war in South East Asia was at an end, HQ SACSEA moved again, this time to Singapore, where Mountbatten received the formal surrender of the Japanese and from where his post-war tasks in the region were carried out. Administratively Mountbatten's subordinate as SACSEA was his deputy (DSACSEA), below whom were a chief of staff (COS) and deputy chief of staff (DCOS). Responsible to this hierarchy were three allied commanders-in-chief, in charge of British and American naval, air and land forces in the theatre. Between October and December 1944, there was an almost complete change of personnel in these posts and also some change in their responsibilities. Lieutenant General Stilwell, US Army, had been not only DSACSEA, but also Commanding General of the American China-Burma-India (CBI) theatre, and COS to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in China. After his departure in October 1944, each of these tasks was given to a separate individual. From November 1944, the Eastern Fleet became known as the East Indies Fleet to reflect its different responsibilities, and 11 Army Group, for similar reasons, was renamed Allied Land Forces South East Asia (ALFSEA). The responsibilities of Mountbatten's position as SACSEA were not clearly defined and there was debate whether his role was solely that of a co-ordinator of the forces under his command, or one of more active participation. Mountbatten adopted the latter stance.

In August 1943, when Mountbatten arrived in South East Asia, there were serious problems facing the allies. Japan had occupied most of Burma, malaria and other tropical diseases had seriously weakened the allied forces, and morale was low. Under Mountbatten's command, much was done to bring malaria gradually under control; morale was boosted by a concerted propaganda campaign, which included visits by Mountbatten to front-line troops and increased coverage of the war in South East Asia in newspapers in Britain and the USA. Mountbatten appointed a journalist, Frank Owen, to produce a newspaper (entitled SEAC) for the troops in SEAC, together with an Anglo-American magazine, PHOENIX.

Mountbatten held regular meetings with his three commanders-in-chief and other major personalities in his theatre of war. British and American aims were different: Britain wanted to liberate Burma and to push on to reclaim Malaya and Singapore from the Japanese, whereas the Americans were primarily interested in Burma as a supply route to China, which, once a land route had been opened, could be liberated from the Japanese and Communist forces within it. While this led to clashes between Mountbatten and his American allies, and especially with his deputy, Lieutenant General Stilwell, on the whole, Anglo-US co-operation in South East Asia increased during Mountbatten's term of command, most notably between the air forces of the two countries.

Mountbatten believed that combined operations, and especially those involving the navy, were the key to allied success in Burma. The British government, however, concentrated its resources on winning the war in Europe, which had the effect of leaving SEAC consistently short of supplies, and it even lost some of those it had with the recall of forces to the European theatre. A succession of operations was planned, only to be cancelled or drastically scaled down, and Mountbatten also had to contend with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, who regularly threatened to withdraw Chinese troops from Burma. Mountbatten paid several visits to China, and corresponded frequently with Lieutenant General Carton de Wiart, Special Military Representative with Chiang Kai-shek and Personal Representative of the Prime Minister of Great Britain, who was based in Chungking and had regular meetings with the Generalissimo.
Most allied victories in SEAC began as defensive actions against Japanese attacks, rather than as offensive operations. In February 1944, Japan attacked the Arakan area of Burma in an attempt to weaken and divert allied forces before a larger attack in the Imphal Plain the following month. The allies won victories in both areas, opening the land route to China, and by the end of October the Japanese were in retreat. Mountbatten was determined to take Rangoon before the monsoon began the following June, as the Americans had only promised him air support until that time. In March 1945, Mandalay fell to the allies, and when they arrived in Rangoon in April, they found that the Japanese had already fled from the city. After the allied victory in Europe in May 1945, supplies were more plentiful in SEAC, and in August of that year, after the explosion of the two atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese surrendered. Mountbatten received the formal surrender of the Japanese to SEAC on 12 September 1945.

After the war, Mountbatten's tasks were to locate allied prisoners of war and to gain control of the Japanese in SEAC. The command was now enlarged to include French Indo-China and the Netherlands East Indies. These tasks proved difficult and complicated. The removal of the Japanese forces of occupation created a power vacuum in these countries; temporary military administrations were established in some areas, which, although helping to keep control, added to existing tensions. Not only were the original colonial powers and new nationalist elements at loggerheads, but both sides felt threatened by the imposition of the new military rule. These problems were most marked in French Indo-China and the Netherlands East Indies. It had been agreed at the Potsdam Conference to divide Vietnam (part of French Indo-China) along the Sixteenth Parallel. Chiang Kai-shek was to have control of the north and SEAC was to round up Japanese survivors in the French-controlled south. In September 1945, the Communist Viet Minh in the southern sector proclaimed the Republic of Vietnam. Without SACSEA's opinion being sought, British forces were used to help the French regain control, thus committing Britain to supporting the French colonial power in this region. In the Netherlands East Indies, Dutch rule had weakened during the war, and the strength of nationalist feeling was seriously underestimated, causing much unrest. Ultimately, the two sides were persuaded to negotiate on the basis of a form of dominion status for Indonesia, in return for British cooperation in maintaining key areas of the country peaceful.

Mountbatten returned to London in May 1946, retaining the title of SACSEA until the end of the year while he wrote his despatches.

Most of the papers in MB1/C created during Mountbatten's time as SACSEA take the form of correspondence - letters, memoranda, minutes, signals and telegrams, or copies of these - and the contents of this part of the archive are overwhelmingly concerned with official business. Much of this correspondence was addressed to, or dealt with, by SACSEA's secretary, Captain R.V.Brockman, RN, or by Mountbatten's assistant and personal secretaries. Carbon copies of their largely typewritten replies and of letters dictated by Mountbatten are in the archives. The papers are now in files, arranged alphabetically by file title. A few remain with their SEAC dockets, reflecting the original arrangement of the archive. The correspondence has been arranged chronologically within each file. The papers and correspondence were often circulated to other staff in HQ SACSEA who had an interest in the matter; circulation lists are frequently appended, together with the views and memoranda of the staff of the headquarters, loose, or recorded on the circulation dockets.

MB1/C contains some material from 1943 relating to Mountbatten's service as Chief of Combined Operations, as he began to organise his staff for SEAC while still CCO.

Papers relating to the publication of the official despatches for the war in South East Asia are in MB1/F16-20. Material concerning the history of SEAC is in files MB1/K263-264E.

MB1/C1 Correspondence with Air Marshal Sir George Clarke Pirie, Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, Air Command South East Asia 1946

MB1/C2 General Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, Adjutant General to the Forces 1943-6

MB1/C3 Correspondence with Sir Henry Vaughan Markham, Secretary of the Admiralty 1943-6
MB1/C4 Airborne Forces Security Fund 1945-6
MB1/C5 Air Command Headquarters, South East Asia 1945-6
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MB1/C7 Allied Land Forces South East Asia, searcher organisation: prisoner of war enquiries 1945-6
MB1/C8 Leopold Stennett Amery, PC, MP, Secretary of State for India and Burma 1943-5
MB1/C9 Correspondence with J. Forbes Amory 1945-6
MB1/C9A Lord Louis Mountbatten's appointment as Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia: photocopy of a letter to the Prime Minister (PRO PREM 3/53/4) 1943
MB1/C10 Correspondence with Vice Admiral George Thiery d'Argenlieu, French Navy, Haut Commissaire de France pour l'Indochine 1945-6
MB1/C11 Correspondence with General Henry H. Arnold, US Army, General Officer Commanding United States Army Air Forces 1943-5
MB1/C12 Tour of Australia: letters of thanks to Brisbane, Darwin, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, and VIPs 1946
MB1/C13 Tour of Australia and New Zealand: general correspondence 1946
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MB1/C21 Rear Admiral Oliver Bevir, Senior Officer Royal Naval Establishments, India: requisitioning of The Anchorage, Bombay, for use by the Women's Royal Naval Service and the Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service 1945
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MB1/C25 Rear Admiral W. G. Benn, Director of Navigation, Admiralty 1943-5
MB1/C26 British Military Administration, Malaya 1945-6
MB1/C27 Brendan Bracken, PC, MP, Minister of Information: includes correspondence with the Ministry
of Information 1943-5

MB1/C28 General R.C. Blaizot, French Army (Chief of the French Military Mission, South East Asia Command, and Commander-in-Chief French Forces, South East Asia, 1944-5; General Officer Commanding Colonial Troops, 1946) 1944-6

MB1/C30 Ernest Bevin, PC, MP (Minister of Labour, 1944; Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1945) 1944-6

MB1/C31 Major General Reginald Alexander Dallas Brooks, RM, Political Intelligence Department, Foreign Office 1943-6

MB1/C32 Lieutenant General Sir Frederick Arthur Montague Browning, Chief of Staff, South East Asia Command 1945-6

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MB1/C36 Miscellaneous correspondents: Bra - Bri 1943-6

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MB1/C39 Sir Andrew Caldecott, Governor of Ceylon: includes papers about the use of the King's Pavilion, Kandy, by Lord Louis Mountbatten as SACSEA 1944

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MB1/C41 Bridget Helen Hore-Ruthven, Countess of Carlisle 1944-6

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MB1/C56 Petitions concerning British Military Administration and Civil Affairs in Malaya and Singapore 1945-6

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MB1/C63 Congratulations files: includes letters to Lord Louis Mountbatten about the capture of Mandalay 1943-6

MB1/C64 Congratulations files 1945

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MB1/C67 Congratulations files: fall of Rangoon and the liberation of Burma 1945

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MB1/C83  General Sir Miles Christopher Dempsey (General Officer Commanding 14 Army, 1945; Commander-in-Chief Allied Land Forces South East Asia, 1945; Commander-in-Chief Middle East Forces, 1946)  1945-6

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MB1/C94  Vice Admiral Sir Arthur Francis Eric Palliser: Fourth Sea Lord, 1944-6; Commander-in-Chief East Indies Station, 1946  1944-6

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| MB1/C100 | Albert Victor Alexander, PC, MP, First Lord of the Admiralty | 1943-5 |
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| MB1/C102 | Vice Admiral John Henry Godfrey, Flag Officer Commanding Royal Indian Navy | 1943-5 |
| MB1/C103 | Major General Francis Wogan Festing, General Officer Commanding Land Forces (36 Division), Hong Kong | 1944-6 |
| MB1/C104 | Farewell letters and signals to formations leaving South East Asia Command | 1945-6 |
| MB1/C105 | Commander Douglas Fairbanks, junior, US Naval Reserve | 1941-6 |
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| MB1/C111 | Gestapo file on Lord Mountbatten (with memorandum by Lord Mountbatten dated June 1967) | 1943-4 1967 |
| MB1/C112 | Major General Sir Colin McVean Gubbins, Head of the Special Operations Executive | 1943-5 |
| MB1/C113 | Major General Douglas David Gracey (General Officer Commanding-in-Chief 20 Indian Division 1945; Commander Allied Land Forces French Indo-China, 1945-6; General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Northern Command India, 1946) | 1945-6 |
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| MB1/C119 | Miscellaneous correspondents: Hu - Hw | 1943-6 |
| MB1/C120 | George Henry Hall, PC, MP, Secretary of State for the Colonies | 1945-6 |
| MB1/C121 | Major General J. Charles Haydon (Vice Chief of Combined Operations, 1943-4; Officer Commanding 1st Guards Brigade, Central Mediterranean Forces, 1944; British Joint Staff Mission, Office of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Washington, DC, 1945; Head of the Joint Staff Mission, Melbourne, Australia, 1946) | 1943-6 |
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MB1/C212  Political warfare: Batavia; allegations of M.E.Dening, Chief Political Adviser to the Supreme Commander South East Asia, against the Far Eastern Publicity Division of the Supreme Allied Command South East Asia 1945-6


MB1/C214  Naval matters: the Mountbatten 'ruler'; Mountbatten station keeping equipment; postings 1931-45

MB1/C215  Kandy (South East Asia Command) airstrip 1945

MB1/C216  Relief of General Sir George James Giffard, Commander-in-Chief 11 Army Group (later Allied Land Forces South East Asia) 1944
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MB1/C217  Telegrams and letters concerning commanders-in-chief 1944-6
Relief of Air Marshal Sir Richard Edmund Charles Peirse as Commander-in-Chief Air Command South East Asia, and other correspondence 1944-6
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MB1/C219  Supreme Allied Commander's quarterly Press meetings 1944
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MB1/C226  Miscellaneous personal files 1944-6
MB1/C227  Victory honours for war leaders and peerage for Mountbatten 1945-6
MB1/C228  Supreme Allied Commander's caravan 1945-6
MB1/C229  Admiral Sir James Fownes Somerville (Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet, 1943-4; Admiral Sir Bruce Austin Fraser, Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet, 1944; Vice Admiral Sir Arthur John Power, Commander-in-Chief East Indies Fleet, 1944-5) 1943-5
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