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# A SOLDIER'S SOLDIER

A Biography of Lieutenant-General  
Sir Thomas Daly

J E F F R E Y   G R E Y



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A BIOGRAPHY OF  
LIEUTENANT-GENERAL  
SIR THOMAS DALY

JEFFREY GREY



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107031272](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107031272)

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First published 2013

Cover design by Rob Cowpe

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*A Cataloguing-in-Publication entry is available from the catalogue of the National Library of Australia at [www.nla.gov.au](http://www.nla.gov.au)*

ISBN 978-1-107-03127-2 Hardback

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# A SOLDIER'S SOLDIER

## A BIOGRAPHY OF LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR THOMAS DALY

Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Daly was a renowned soldier and one of the most important and influential figures in Australia's military history. As Chief of the General Staff during the Vietnam War, he oversaw a significant reorganisation of the army as he fought a war under political and resource restrictions. In this unique biography, Jeffrey Grey shows how Daly prepared himself for the challenges of command in a time of great turbulence and political upheaval.

*A Soldier's Soldier* examines Daly's career from his entry to Duntroon in the early 1930s until his retirement forty years later, covering the key issues in the development of the Australian Army along the way. Drawing on extensive interview transcripts, the book provides a compelling portrait of Sir Thomas Daly and his distinguished career.

Jeffrey Grey is Professor of History and founding director of the Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society at the University of New South Wales, Canberra. The author or editor of numerous books and articles, he has held the Major General Matthew C. Horner Chair in Military Theory at Marine Corps University, Quantico, and served as a trustee of the Society of Military History.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a young and impatient academic a long time ago, I used to wonder why productive historians in their seeming prime often appeared to drop away completely and write less just when one might think they had more in them. I know the answer now – it's called 'life', and it has a habit of getting in the way. I started work on this book fifteen years ago, and a lot of things have happened in the intervening period to explain why it has taken so long to reach fruition. On the one hand, it has travelled with me like the spectre at the feast, reproving me silently for its unfinished state and at the same time stopping me from moving on with anything new. On the other hand, biography is a difficult form of historical writing (which is why I think every serious historian should attempt one), and I think this one is a better book for being written by someone in his early fifties rather than, as might otherwise have been the case, appearing from the keyboard of an author in his late thirties. Readers will be the judge of that.

As with every book I have written, this one has accrued debts near and far, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge and thank those whose contribution was essential at some step along the way. The staff of various archives head the list: National Archives of Australia, Parkes (especially Tim Mifsud, who dealt with a barrage of access clearance requests quickly and efficiently) and Melbourne; Australian War Memorial, Canberra; and the National Archives, Kew (which must now be the best public archive in the English-speaking world in which to work). Roger Lee and his people in the Australian Army History Unit helped with access to records not yet transferred to archival custody and with photographs, production of the maps and the provision of transcripts of Bob Breen's series of interviews with Sir Thomas Daly, and supported the early research with an Army history research grant, for which I thank them. Dr Breen was kind enough to fill in some gaps in the transcripts as well. Dr Garth Pratten very generously gave me a copy of his own interview with Daly and notes on interviews with former soldiers of the 2/10th Battalion, and shared

thoughts on the record of unit commanders in the latter years of the war. Tom Richardson kindly gave me a copy of his paper on Giarabub. David Nalson, Queen's Royal Lancers Museum, answered some queries about the regiment's service in India, and Colonel A.J. Lenard, Chief of Staff, Royal College of Defence Studies, London, provided photos from the 1956 course together with a class list for that year. Yasmin Tadich of the Army Production Learning Centre kindly transferred two interviews with Daly to DVD and forwarded them to me. I also benefited from correspondence and the provision of papers from Brigadier John Salmon, Colonel Derek Sharp and Colonel Stan Maizey, and from Monsignor Eugene Harley.

I had the advantage of several extended conversations with my subject before his death in 2004, greatly to my benefit. I think Daly was slightly bemused by the idea of a biography, although he recognised a certain inevitability in the process given his long and distinguished public career. I have also had considerable assistance from the Daly family and especially his oldest daughter, Betty-Ann, or BA, as she is generally known. I was generously given the run of the family photo albums, and BA has dealt with my intrusions into the details of family life and lore with good humour and patience; I am very grateful for her efforts. The editor of the Army History Series, David Horner, read the manuscript with his usual gimlet eye. Isabella Mead at Cambridge University Press smoothed the submission process of the manuscript, and she and the staff at CUP Melbourne have my thanks. My editor, Cathryn Game, imposed order, discipline and readability on me.

The book is dedicated to the memory of my mother, and to my small son, Sebastian. My mother used to ask periodically, 'How's Tom going?' I regret that she did not live to see its publication. She never met Sebastian, either, although I am sure she would have approved of him. He is, as yet, too young to understand what Dadda does for long periods in his study, which perhaps is just as well.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AAF	Australian Army Force
AATTV	Australian Army Training Team Vietnam
ACAU	Australian Civil Affairs Unit
ADC	aide-de-camp
AFV	Australian Force Vietnam
AG	Adjutant-General
AHQ	Army Headquarters
AHU	Army History Unit
A&I	Administrative and Instructional
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
ALH	Australian Light Horse
ALSG	Australian Logistic Support Group
AMF	Australian Military Forces; official name of the army of Australia, 1916–80, encompassing both full-time and part-time forces
ARA	Australian Regular Army
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
ATF	Australian Task Force
ATIS	Allied Translator and Interpreter Section
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CMF	Citizen Military Forces
CNS	Chief of Naval Staff
CO	Commanding Officer
COMAFV	Commander, Australian Forces Vietnam
COMUSMACV	Commander, United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam
COSC	Chiefs of Staff Committee
DCGS	Deputy Chief of the General Staff
FAELF	Far East Land Forces

GOC	General Officer Commanding
GSO	General Staff Officer
GVN	Government of [South] Vietnam
JIO	Joint Intelligence Organisation
LST	Landing Ship Tank
MA	military assistant
MGO	Master-General of the Ordnance
MM	Military Medal
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OCS	Officer Cadet School, Portsea
PIR	Pacific Islands Regiment
PMF	Permanent Military Forces
PNGVR	Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles
QMG	Quartermaster General
RAAOC	Royal Australian Army Ordnance Corps
RAEME	Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
RAR	Royal Australian Regiment
RF/PF	Regional Forces/Popular Forces
RMC	Royal Military College
RNSWR	Royal New South Wales Regiment
RQR	Royal Queensland Regiment
RSM	regimental sergeant major
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
RWAR	Royal Western Australian Regiment
SAS	Special Air Service
VC	Victoria Cross; Viet Cong
WRAAC	Women's Royal Australian Army Corps

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# REGIMENTAL SOLDIERING

Armies are living entities, human organisations that develop their own cultures and characteristics over time. Some armies have commonalities, but no two national armies are the same, although they might, on occasions, be alike. Field Marshal Lord Carver, a senior soldier and noted scholar of his institution, wrote of the British Army as possessing seven ‘ages’, periods associated with an individual such as Marlborough, Wellington or Montgomery, who dominated or typified a period in the life of the institution.<sup>1</sup> The Australian Army was, and is, a ‘British-pattern’ army; it has many things in common with its British counterpart, but is not the same institution. It lacks, for example, a tradition of ‘great captains’, which provided Carver with a useful organising device around which to structure his account of the British Army’s history. The Australian Army’s development nonetheless can be organised around a ‘generational’ perspective, one that helps to identify both the continuities and distinct differences in different periods of its existence.<sup>2</sup>

The army emerged from the tangle of confusions that accompanied Federation, the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia and the gradual development of centralised government at the federal level. The first generation of the army came of age during the Great War and reached its culminating point in 1918, both on the Western Front and in Palestine (the latter often being overlooked). Thereafter it entered a period of neglect and decline that saw the Regular Army, at least, attenuated almost out of existence by the early 1930s. The growing threat of war in Europe and Asia led to the renewal of the army and arguably

to its greatest achievements during the latter half of the Second World War, during which its senior leadership functioned at the strategic level for the first time.<sup>3</sup> As with the generation following the Great War, this army was quickly broken up and the organisation 'forgot' much of what it had learned at such expense during the Pacific War. However, unlike the 1920s, the army's leadership was able to take the organisation forward into a new generation of development and activity, made possible both by the very different strategic circumstances that confronted the nation after 1945 and, ironically perhaps, by a shared memory of the consequences of decisions made by an earlier generation of political leadership.

The third-generation army was characterised by the creation of a regular standing field force in peacetime and the extensive use of that force on operations in Asia between 1946 and 1972. The army developed and extended a professional ethos, one that stood it in good stead during the twenty-five years that followed the withdrawal from Vietnam – during which the army was attenuated once again, if not quite on this occasion to the point of non-existence then, certainly, to a position where its ability to respond effectively had it been called on must be very severely doubted.<sup>4</sup> The intervention in East Timor in the second half of 1999 marked the emergence of the current generation of the Australian Army, one that again has been more or less continuously deployed on operations in various parts of the world simultaneously, and whose foundations were laid by far-sighted senior leadership in the mid-1990s, against the political trend of the previous two decades. The generations of the army have thus occupied a 'boom and bust' cycle familiar to students of Western armies elsewhere in the course of the twentieth century.

Thomas Joseph Daly joined the Australian Army towards the end of its first generation, gained his experience of the craft of soldiering during its second, and had a sizeable influence upon its development during its third, during which time he came to its head as Chief of the General Staff (CGS). A few of the things he put in train during that period – especially the development of army aviation and the acquisition of helicopter capabilities – have stood it in good stead subsequently, but the army that deployed in Afghanistan or Timor Leste bears few similarities to that in which he spent his entire adult life. Armies, after all, are living entities.

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Photo 1 Baby Tom. (Daly family)

Daly was born on 19 March 1913 in Ballarat, Victoria. His Majesty George V was King-Emperor; his viceregal representative, Viscount Denman, the fifth Governor-General since Federation, exercised a broadly supervisory role over the Labor government of Andrew Fisher (and, after Labor's defeat in the federal election in June, the Liberal government of Joseph Cook). The first Australian postage stamps were issued that year, as were the first national banknotes. Eastern Suburbs won the 1913 rugby league premiership (there was no grand final; the minor premiers were considered league champions by dint of topping the competition table against their seven rival sides that season). Posinatus won the Melbourne Cup; the site of the new national capital, Canberra, was dedicated by Lady Denman; and the flagship of the new Australian squadron, HMAS *Australia*, sailed from Portsmouth upon commissioning. In rugby, Australia toured New Zealand for only the second time, losing five of its nine matches, although it scored 118 points with only 114 scored against, and beat the All Blacks in the third test 16–5.