ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the result of a major team effort. It arose out of the several draft accounts written 50 years after the events that they describe. Max Carroll led the way, demonstrating in his late 80s that he had retained the quality of memory and the analytical mind that had enabled him to produce the well-constructed, detailed operation orders that guided us through our first six months in Phuoc Tuy. His accounts were followed by Peter Isaacs, the adjutant, and Mick von Berg, our Reconnaissance (formerly Anti-Tank) Platoon commander.

It was not difficult to find others willing and able to write of their own experiences of war in Vietnam. Soon we had 30 contributors all keen to write, and more material than we could cope with in a single volume. We are thankful both for their willingness to write, and then for the spirit in which they accepted the need for cuts so that we could fit the story into a book of medium size. We are fortunate to have the range of rank levels, and hence of perspectives, which this team offers. A good battalion allows for and encourages a two-way flow of ideas and information, but command in war remains a top-down system. Difficult decisions need to be taken by commanders at various levels, and we have tried to convey an understanding of where the hard choices lay in the way in which John Warr, and his company and platoon commanders, conducted our operations.

Our battalion, 5 RAR – 5th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment – and our sister unit, 6 RAR, were the first two Australian battalions in Vietnam to be composed of both regular (volunteer) soldiers and conscripted national servicemen. Given the controversial nature of the Vietnam War, there was ample potential for friction to occur between national servicemen and regulars. Due to good fortune and careful management, the two units were harmonious in the way in which they functioned. There were times when some of the national servicemen let

it be known that there were other ways in which they would rather be occupied than being in the army. However, we were spared the disciplinary crises that some of our allies had to endure. The battalion functioned as a team, and its members saw to it that the dividing line between conscript and volunteer was not accentuated. We all knew that we needed the full team, with its many components, if we were to survive the year and achieve something useful. Hence, we have put together a team of authors that includes both regular and conscript soldiers. We are grateful to those, both officers and soldiers, who contributed their recollections of testing experiences to Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 15.

Our rifle company soldiers were grouped into sections, small teams of nominally 10 men, who were right at the point of most of our actions and contacts with the enemy. Three sections and a four-man headquarters made up a rifle platoon, so we have some chapters written by young officers, again both conscript and volunteer, in their first command appointments. These young men were seldom older than the soldiers they commanded, so they had to make a major adjustment in how they related to the people that they led, and for whose lives they were directly responsible.

Moving up the chain of command, we have been assisted by our operations officer, Major Max Carroll, who also served as a rifle company commander, and Captain Peter Isaacs, the adjutant and assistant operations officer. Sadly, our commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel John Warr, died in 1999, but his family have rallied to give us their thoughts and comments, particularly concerning John's wider thinking on how to meet our responsibilities most effectively. We are particularly grateful to John's widow Shirley, and their daughter Anne and sons Peter and Mark, for their contributions, especially Mark for his part in writing Chapter 16.

Working closely with John Warr were our second in command, Major Stan Maizey, and our multi-skilled regimental medical officer, Captain Tony White, who both had unusual and enlightening perspectives to give us. Stan passed away in 2018, but he has left his readers with a rare picture of a battalion that went to war under-equipped and that had to 'live off the land' in order to be able to function properly in terms of food, tentage, radios and weapons. Tony, a young graduate medical officer, had to keep over 800 young Australians fit and healthy, and treat all the injuries and sicknesses that are regular occurrences in war. Sometimes he was called upon to expose himself to danger in order to assist those who had been

seriously wounded. He and some of the rifle company medical assistants have given us their perspectives on what it was like to meet the same challenges over lengthy periods.

Other battalion members who have contributed to the book include Captains Ron Bade and Ron Boxall, who served separately at Binh Ba for several weeks. Ron Boxall's detachment from the battalion saw him involved with a CIA-sponsored charade. Ron Bade later mentored a South Vietnamese Regional Force company in the same environment.

The battalion could not have functioned without the assistance of other parts of the army, and the Royal Australian Air Force. We thank three of our supporting Sioux helicopter pilots, aided by Captain Bob Supple, and our supporting artillery team, led by Captain George Bindley, who have contributed their perspectives on their problems and how they increased their effectiveness during our very testing first months of operations. And finally, there are two friends who, although both army officers, did not serve in 5 RAR during 1966–67. They are Brigadier Ernest Chamberlain CSM, an intelligence specialist who has studied and written on the Viet Cong over many years, and Colonel Professor David Horner AM, who knows more than most people about how the Australian commitment to the Vietnam War was made in 1965–66 and why we were stationed in Phuoc Tuy Province. We are very grateful to them both for their major contributions.

There are also many other individuals who have contributed to the book behind the scenes. The members of the Executive Committee of the 5 RAR Association, chaired by Colonel Roger Wainwright, have helped with the financing of this publication and its general administration. Roger, who is in his 15th year as the Association's president, has been of invaluable assistance to us. Our perfect backstop, he has been an inveterate chaser of information through his innumerable contacts and is an ever-reliable source of detailed knowledge about the battalion from its earliest days up to the present. Other association members, particularly Gary Townsend and Ted Harrison, have helped with the illustrations. Author and Vietnam veteran Major Bruce Davies MBE (Retd) magically provided pristine military map coverage of Phuoc Tuy Province in 1966; and Alan Mayne of Mayne Maps cleverly used it to produce the maps which support our authors' narratives.

We are grateful to Ashley Ekins and other members of the staff of the Australian War Memorial for their assistance, especially in obtaining access to photographs and official records of our operations. We appreciate also the very helpful way in which members of the staff of ANU Press, and our copyeditor Beth Battrick, have assisted us in the publication process.

We also gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Commonwealth Government's 'Saluting Their Service' Commemorations Program, which provided a significant grant towards the funding of the project. Any benefits that accrue from the project will be dedicated to the support of 5 RAR veterans or serving members of 5 RAR.

Finally, we wish to thank our wives, Sally O'Neill and Joan Boxall, for their comments and support of our work and their tolerance of the time commitment it has imposed on us for almost three years. They are well qualified for the task, having been our partners for over 50 years, including our various times in Vietnam. Sally helped Bob to produce *Vietnam Task*, based on his letters to her of 1966–67. Joan's management of all family affairs throughout Ron's two tours of duty was a source of helpful reflection, and her many years as a soldier's wife provided invaluable scrutiny which helped reduce the use of arcane 'military speak'.

Ron Boxall
Robert O'Neill

Map 1: Phuoc Tuy Province 1966.

Source: Designed by Ron Boxall and produced by Alan Mayne from a map provided by the Army History Unit.

This text is taken from *Vietnam Vanguard: The 5th Battalion's Approach to Counter-Insurgency, 1966*, edited by Ron Boxall and Robert O'Neill, published 2020 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.