FOREWORD

Major General Steve Gower

I regard it as a singular honour to be asked to write the foreword to this book. I write it not as a member of the battalion, as such, but as an attached artillery forward observer.

In the period September to December 1966 I was part of A Company on Operations Canberra, Robin, Queanbeyan, Bundaberg, Yass, Hayman and Canary with Peter Cole, then Max Carroll as the company commander. It was an intense operational period, and it gave me a good insight into the 5th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (5 RAR), approach to countering the VC (Viet Cong) insurgency, as well as the chance to observe closely the fighting capability of the battalion and its spirit. I was impressed.

With my parent battery (101st Field Battery) moving into direct support of 6 RAR, my time as 103rd Field Battery's fourth forward observer in A Company came to a close. I was sorry to leave, as I had developed a great respect, indeed affection, for the battalion and those who served in it.

I regard this book as very important. It is much more contemplative and a more detailed record of the first half of the battalion's tour of duty than has been available before. I hasten to say that observation is in no way a criticism of Bob O'Neill's unit history, a copy of which has long graced my bookshelf. Rather, the contributions in this book have resulted from the passage of time and the opportunity to contemplate, reflect and think more deeply about what was achieved and perhaps what might have been.

The battalion's tour of duty was unique in a number of ways. It was the first battalion to be deployed with national servicemen, and the first to be deployed to occupy the Task Force's operational base at Nui Dat within an autonomous area of operations. Among other things, the battalion

came to develop a very effective technique for conducting cordon and search operations, a fundamental way of disrupting the VC hold on surrounding villages. It was also innovative in other ways, such as forming a battalion reconnaissance platoon. To me, the battalion's approach could be characterised as deliberate but flexible rather than doctrinally rigid, based on intelligence assessments complemented by its own analyses and not one that needlessly took risks.

5 RAR's tour was very successful by any measure, but its resilience was to be tested severely when it suffered the loss of two company commanders and other officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers in a series of tragic mine incidents in early 1967. These incidents could have broken a lesser group of men.

This book contains many worthwhile lessons, particularly those relating to the challenges of facing a capable and determined enemy. It is a tribute to all members of the battalion who served so valiantly in Phuoc Tuy Province. Over 50 years later I remember, commemorate and celebrate their service.

Congratulations to those involved in producing this book, especially Bob O'Neill, Ron Boxall and Roger Wainwright, and to all the authors.

Steve Gower AO AO(Mil)
Director, Australian War Memorial (1996–2012)

Steve Gower graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1961 with the Sword of Honour and the Queen's Medal. In 1966 he went to Vietnam as a forward observer in the 1st Field Regiment. A highlight of his time in Vietnam was being the forward observer attached to A Company of 5th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment, before leaving mid-tour to move to the 6th Battalion. On returning to Australia, he had several artillery appointments and was Commanding Officer of 8th/12th Medium Regiment. He had numerous other training and policy appointments before becoming General Officer Commanding Training Command, then Assistant Chief of the Defence Force for Logistics, and later for Personnel. He retired from the Army as a major general to accept the Directorship of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, a position he held for 16 years.

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.