

## PREFACE

*The Final Tally* encapsulates the career of Colonel Philip ('Tom') Cobley MBE, late PARA, which spans 40 years of continuous active service in two Armies, initially commencing with 16 years at the Australian Regular Army, and including a further 24 years in the British Army. During this time, he has seen service in five infantry regiments (The Pacific Islands Regiment, The Royal Australian Regiment, The Staffordshire Regiment, The King's Own Royal Border Regiment, and The Parachute Regiment) and this has included deployment on a score of operational tours.

Colonel Tom Cobley was born in Paignton, Devon in 1950, and his parents immigrated to Australia under the 'Assisted Passage Scheme' in 1958. He then finished his schooling at Sydney Grammar School where he gained a scholarship to the Royal Military College, Duntroon, as well as receiving a Commonwealth Secondary School Scholarship.

He joined the Royal Military College, Duntroon in January 1969, and as a Fourth Class Cadet he was embroiled in the 'bastardisation scandal' that engulfed the College during that year. After four years in December 1972, he graduated from the College and volunteered for service in the Pacific Islands Regiment in Papua New Guinea, where he served as a Platoon Commander and an Instructor from 1973–75.

Upon his return to Australia, he served as a Company Second-in-Command in the 8/9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment in Enoggera, Queensland (1976–77), then as the Adjutant of the Officer Cadet School, Portsea, Victoria (1978–79). He then returned to 8/9<sup>th</sup> Battalion as a Company Commander (1980–81), and finally served as a staff officer in the Office of the Chief of the General Staff (OCGS) in Canberra (1982–84). It was at this time, by then completing 16 years in the Australian Regular Army, that he realised that the operational opportunities to serve overseas (due to the political and military climate post-Vietnam) were negligible.

As a result, he applied to transfer his regular commission to the British Army, which was at that time fully engaged at the height of the Cold War. After transferring, his initial service was as a Mechanised, then Armoured Infantry Company Commander in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, The Staffordshire Regiment, which was part of the famous 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade (The Desert Rats), based in Fallingbommel, West Germany (1985–88).

Upon his return to the UK at the end of this posting, he became a Staff Officer at HQ South East District, Aldershot, where the GOC

at the time was General Sir Peter de la Billiere. The General wholeheartedly supported Colonel Cobley in his attempt to pass Parachute Regiment Selection, which he did at 39 years and ten months of age, becoming the oldest man to have ever attempted and passed the course up to that time. Then followed a posting to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, The Parachute Regiment as a Company Commander (1989–90). During this time, the battalion deployed to County Fermanagh in Northern Ireland on anti-terrorist operations, and during this period he was awarded the MBE. He then served as the Training Major 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion (SV), The Parachute Regiment in Glasgow (1991–92).

Soon after, promotion to Lieutenant Colonel followed, and a posting to the Air Force Department, at the MoD Main Building, Whitehall (1993–94), where he was responsible for all parachuting and parachute trials/development undertaken by the UK forces worldwide. This included training Special Forces personnel in High Altitude Low Opening (HALO) and High Altitude High Opening (HAHO) skills. He was responsible for the development of the Low Level Aerial Delivery System (LLADS) and the High Altitude Aerial Delivery System (HAADS).

Then followed selection to become the Commanding Officer of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The King's Own Royal Border Regiment based in Cumbria and northern Lancashire (1994–97).

After completing this command appointment, Colonel Cobley was then involved in a prolonged series of operational deployments. Initially, this was as the Chief Operations Officer, United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), former Soviet Union, in Sukhumi, Abkhazia from February to August 1997.

He was then posted to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium, where he deployed to the NATO Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia during 1998 and then to Kosovo Force (KFOR) during the NATO 'Air War' from March to July 1999.

Then he became the first British Officer ever to return to UNOMIG for a second tour, this time as the Gali Sector Commander in Abkhazia, from November 2000 to May 2001.

Upon returning from the Republic of Georgia, he gained another appointment in SHAPE, where he soon became embroiled in the 'global war on terrorism'. This initially involved deployments to the International Stabilisation and Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan from 2003 to 2004.

As the NATO commitments broadened to Iraq, Colonel Cobley volunteered for service there, and as a result he became the Chief J2/3 (Intelligence and Operations) for the NATO Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I), from February to November 2005. As a result of this

deployment, he was promoted to the acting rank of full Colonel and was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal (MSM), which is NATO's highest decoration for operational service.

Colonel Cobley continues to serve in the British Army in a posting to the European Union Force (EUFOR), being the J1/4 (Personnel and Logistics) Staff Officer responsible for the EUFOR mission in Bosnia. However, as well as pursuing his military career, he has undertaken further academic studies, gaining a Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1983 and then a Bachelor of Educational Studies degree in 1987, both from the University of Queensland. In later years, he went on to study a Dual Masters Degree in Education and Human Relations with the University of Oklahoma and was awarded both these degrees in 2005. He is currently studying for a Ph.D. in Organisational Leadership with the North Central University, Arizona.

In conclusion, *The Final Tally* graphically depicts four decades of operational Infantry experience from the 1960–70s 'Vietnam era', to the height of the Cold War in the 1980s, then to the volatility of the 1990s 'New World Order' and finally, to the 'global war on terrorism' of the new millennium. The narrative includes the personal insights of Colonel Cobley into the Australian and British Armies, as well as on his extensive operational experiences with the UN, NATO, and the EU throughout the world. This experience includes service at the highest level of military decision-making as he served in the Australian MoD in the Office of the Chief of the General Staff (OCGS), in the British MoD with the Assistant Chief of Defence, in NATO at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), and at the European Union, Operation Headquarter for Operation ALTHEA.