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978-1-107-03127-2 - A Soldier's Soldier: A Biography of Lieutenant - General Sir Thomas Daly

Jeffrey Grey

Excerpt

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CHAPTER

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.¹ 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.²

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

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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.³ 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.⁴ 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.

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The population of Australia, as reflected in the census of 1911, stood at 4 455 005; unemployment nationally was a little over 5.5 per cent, while the average weekly wage varied between trades and location: electrical fitters earned 66s a week in Sydney but 72s in Perth; the weekly rate for a shoeing smith in Melbourne was 57s 6d in Melbourne but only 45s in Brisbane. Cellarmen in a brewery could expect between 48s and 60s, but milliners earned just 15s in Hobart and 22s 6d in Melbourne. Pastoral workers were, likewise, relatively poorly paid; shearers when in work, on the other hand, earned 24–25s a day. The United Kingdom provided the major market for Australian exports, was the overwhelming source of investment capital and was the source of more than 50 per cent of Australian imports, both material and population. Primary industries dominated the economy.

As their name would suggest, the Daly family was of Irish extraction: Thomas Joseph Daly arrived in the Australian colonies in 1878 from a small village in County Clare. Daly's own father, also Thomas Joseph and born in Coburg in 1884, was a bank manager with the State Savings Bank in rural Murtoa in the Wimmera district and at equally rural Maffra in Gippsland. His mother, Eileen Mary, was a native of Ballarat, and the two married in 1912. The family was Catholic, and lived the comfortable life of the professional middle class of the time. Daly senior had completed matriculation at Marist Brothers, Melbourne, in 1899 and successfully sat the Civil Service examination. He was a dedicated citizen soldier, joining the 4th Battalion in 1901 before transferring to the light horse, in which he held various appointments in several different units over the next decade or more.⁵

The Australia into which the young Daly was born, and in which his family lived an ordered and predictable existence, was largely to disappear during his childhood as a consequence of the Great War. The most immediate impact for Daly was his father's enlistment, with his peacetime rank of major, on 21 October 1914 in the 9th Light Horse, part of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade. One squadron of the 9th was drawn from Victoria, the rest from South Australia. The first commanding officer was a South Australian militia officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Albert Miell, a veteran of the South African War and peacetime commanding officer of the 24th Light Horse, Citizen Military Forces.⁶ Initial induction took place at Morphettville in South Australia, and the men then entrained for Broadmeadows Camp, near Melbourne, where the Victorian A Squadron, under Daly's command, joined them to complete the unit's establishment. With his father's enlistment the family moved to new lodgings at Albert Park;

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Photo 2 Major T.J. Daly, Broadmeadows Camp, December 1911.
(Daly family)

families often moved closer to relatives or amenities upon the enlistment of the head of the household, and perhaps Daly's wife and very young son went to be closer to him during the work-up period since they lived there for a while with young Daly's paternal grandmother. In any case, they subsequently returned to Ballarat and lived with Eileen's three unmarried sisters.⁷

Daly's father had both a good and a fortunate war, not least through contracting pneumonia in Egypt. He thus missed the Gallipoli campaign; most of the regiment's officers who sailed from Australia and landed at the Dardanelles were killed, wounded or evacuated due to sickness. Daly rejoined in Egypt after the evacuation as second-in-command under Major (subsequently Lieutenant-Colonel) W.H. Scott and spent most of the rest of the war in that role.⁸ He commanded the 9th Australian Light Horse in the CO's absence on several occasions, and on one such in July 1918 was injured while making a forward reconnaissance by motor vehicle when the car rolled, trapping him beneath it. Several months of convalescence followed. Daly saw action with the 9th Australian Light Horse

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Photo 3 Young Tom, aged three, 1916. (Daly family)

in all the major actions of the Sinai and Palestine campaigns: Romani, Maghdaba, Rafa, First and Second Gaza, Beersheba (or Third Gaza), the capture of Jerusalem, Es Salt, and the operations in 1918 in the Jordan Valley and Syria. He led his regiment in a mounted charge on 2 October 1918 ('the last light horse engagement in the campaign', according to the official history), and in a spirited action captured a Turkish column of around 1500 Turks, eight Germans, three artillery pieces and twenty-six machine-guns as well as the regimental standard of the Ottoman 46th Infantry Regiment.⁹ He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order 'for distinguished service in connection with operations in Egypt', was twice

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Photo 4 Major T.J. Daly, Palestine, 1917.
(Daly family)

mentioned in despatches, and was judged 'an all-round good officer thoroughly competent to command a regiment' by Major-General Granville Ryrle, commander of the Australian Mounted Division, at the end of the war.

He returned to Australia in July 1919, and young Daly, aged six, and his mother were at Port Melbourne to welcome him home. 'He came striding along Station Pier swinging his cane; somehow I knew it was he and I ran to meet him', his son wrote many decades after.¹⁰ Daly's father continued his service in the citizen forces after the war and his repatriation, commanding the 13th and 4th Light Horse Regiments. He transferred to the Unattached List in 1924, and to the Reserve of Officers in 1929. Like many of his generation, he re-entered service at the outbreak of the Second World War, in his case on the staff of the Chief Censor

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(then a military office), only finally being placed on the Retired List in December 1944.

With his father's return the family moved to Elwood, a seaside suburb of Melbourne, where Daly senior taught his young son to swim ('every morning down to the beach irrespective of weather') until a transfer to Koroit, in the Western District, in 1921 where Daly's father opened a new branch of the bank and young Daly went to a convent school staffed by Irish nuns. Another transfer by the bank took the family to Sale in east Gippsland. A sister, Margaret, was born in 1920, a post-war service baby, and her arrival completed the family. Like his father, Daly was educated by the Marist Brothers, in his case at St Patrick's College, Sale. Daly was bright, and his progression through school was accelerated to the extent that he first attempted his Intermediate certificate at the age of 12, although he failed it on that occasion, resitting it the following year. He was also a keen and talented sportsman and especially good at cricket, talents undoubtedly inherited from his gregarious father whose taste for and skill in cricket and golf passed to his son. Daly completed his Leaving certificate at the age of 15, and the question of a future career now beckoned, although not urgently, given his relatively tender years. His father's intention was that he study medicine, but this would require a scholarship to support his residence at the University of Melbourne and one was not available. Instead he was sent to do a final year of secondary education as a boarder at Xavier College, Melbourne, during which he undertook Leaving Honours. A personal connection with General Sir Harry Chauvel, whose own sons were then at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, appears to have settled Daly's future.

Daly entered RMC at the beginning of 1930, as the Depression began to bite – the following year there would be no Fourth Class entry at all as an economy measure, while the college closed altogether at Duntroon and moved to Victoria Barracks, Sydney. He was not yet 17. Duntroon was a very monastic and isolated environment, nestled into a Canberra that had a population of fewer than 5000. The classes of the Depression era were small and got smaller, while the army generally underwent a period of retrenchment occasioned by the global economic situation and a then orthodox federal response that saw budget outlays cut rather than enhanced.

Daly recalled enjoying RMC, having been through a stint at a Jesuit boarding school; the physical abuse of the entry class – known more recently as bastardisation and in his time as 'Fourth Class training' – did not worry him unduly, either. 'There were one or two sadists round

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Photo 5 Tom Daly and Joe St Ellen winning the junior pairs, Xavier College, 1929. (Daly family)

about the place. There always are, I suppose . . . and they made life miserable for anybody they could get their hands on.¹¹ The leading historian of the college has shown that harassment of the entry class intensified significantly in the early and mid-1920s, and was clearly well established by the time Daly entered.¹² The first year emphasised civilian academic subjects, drill and loads of sport, with formal military instruction largely relegated to the later years, peaking in the final year known, confusingly (to outsiders), as First Class. For what it was worth, given that his entering class had numbered just twelve, Daly was listed as one of the three most academically distinguished in his year.¹³

Dunroon was 'a monastic institution' and 'a little inbred', in Daly's own words, populated by 'rather narrow, restricted little boys'.¹⁴ The move to Victoria Barracks, Sydney, brought a very different, and much improved, environment.¹⁵ As part of the economy measures, many of the directing and administrative staff held dual appointments: the Commandant, Brigadier F.B. Heritage, for example, was also commanding the 2nd Military District. Daly's results were solid, if unspectacular, and he graduated fourth in a class of just nine.¹⁶ As noted, the emphasis in instruction swung heavily towards tactics, weapon training, military history, law and administration, although in Daly's case he maintained study

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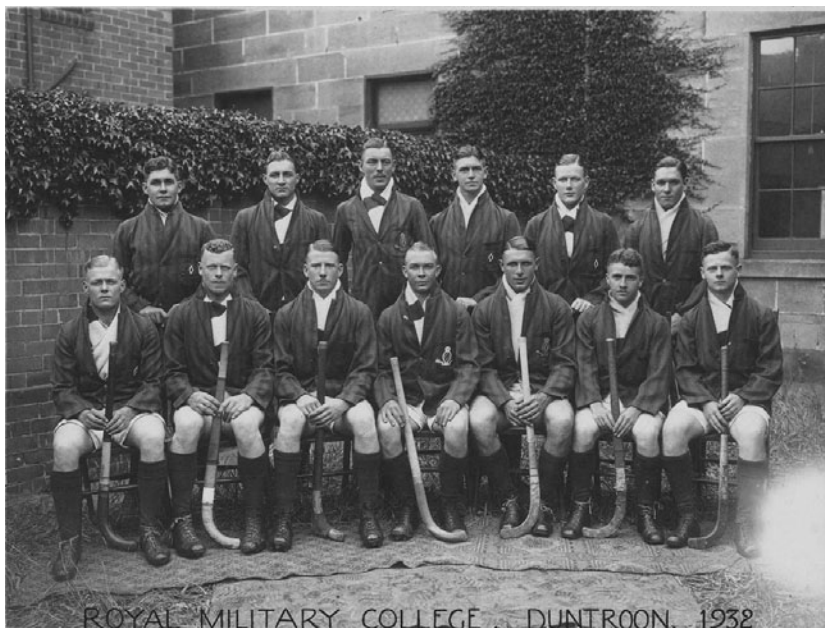
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Photo 6 First Eleven, Royal Military College, 1932. Daly second from left, standing. (Daly family)

in Japanese at a respectable level across the full four years.¹⁷ He played a lot of sport – as they all did: hockey (of which he was captain), tennis, rugby and becoming ‘a most consistent batsman’ and bowling well ‘at times’.¹⁸ He also wrote for publication in-house, usually humorous or whimsical pieces and some poetry.

Opportunities were narrowing as the Depression worsened and, like others around him, Daly wondered whether he had made a sound decision by opting for the army. His father counselled patience, and in truth he probably had little choice but to see it through; attendance at university was not an option, and few others beckoned. At the beginning of the college year in 1931 there were just thirty-one cadets, all classes; some graduates in these years transferred to the British and Indian armies while a few exercised the right to transfer to the public service and others still, destined for service in the RAAF, were transferred early to their parent service. At the beginning of his final year he was appointed corps sergeant major (equivalent to the more familiar battalion sergeant major, but so called because the Corps of Staff Cadets was now so small that it could no longer be sensibly described as a ‘battalion’). He was stripped of the