

Matthew David Cleland was born at Goulburn, NSW, on 14 May 1946, a brother to Paul and Hilary (Willy). He completed his secondary education at Normanhurst Boys High School, at Normanhurst, an inner north-western Sydney suburb. Matt gained employment as a Computer Production Control Clerk with the Commonwealth Public Service. He commenced his NS as 2785230 on 28 September with the fourth intake in 1966. He was selected for officer training and commenced at OTU on 14 October. Matt was allocated to 18 Section, 6 Platoon, B Company. His 'Father' was OC Jackett. In his Senior Term, Matt was the Regimental Duties Corporal at Battalion Headquarters. In his second Senior Term he was the Section Commander of 14 Section, 5 Platoon, B Company. He was not allocated a 'Son'. Matt graduated with Class 1/67 on 14 July 1967, was allocated to the Artillery and posted to the School of Artillery at North Head in Sydney.

From the School of Artillery, Matt was posted to 12 Field Regiment. He deployed to Vietnam with 12 Field Regiment on 4 March 1968. He was a Gun Section Commander in 102 Field Battery. Matt was with his battery during the Battle for Coral. The AWM records that the occupation of Fire Support Base (FSB) Coral was begun on 12 May, but the defences were unfinished when, at about 3.30 am on 13 May, it was attacked following a brief but intense rocket and mortar barrage. The 1RAR Mortar Platoon position was over-run, along with one of 102 Field Battery's six 105 mm M2A2 howitzers in the base. With the aid of extensive air support, the attack was beaten off by 6.30 am and the captured gun-pit was retaken – still with the gun in it (this howitzer is now on display in the Vietnam gallery at the Australian War Memorial). Eleven Australians were killed and 28 wounded, while the attackers lost more than the 52 bodies they left behind. A further three Australians died in patrol clashes on the 14 May.



At 2.30 am on 16 May Coral again came under attack, this time from a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) force estimated at three battalions strong. The base was now defended by armoured personnel carriers of A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, and 1RAR's rifle companies, all of which were heavily engaged; part of the A Company position was occupied for a period, but the enemy was forced to withdraw. The attack was repelled after four hours of fighting, with the Australians having



suffered five men killed and 19 wounded. Two members of an American battery which had reinforced the base were also wounded. Only 34 enemy bodies were recovered, but blood trails and drag marks indicated that many more casualties had been removed.

Above: AWM photo, FSB Coral, Bien Hoa Province, Vietnam.

13 May 1968. Members of 102 Field Battery, 12 Field Regiment, RAA, with the Battery's No. 6 gun, on the morning after the first series of attacks on FSB Coral by the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA) 7th Division. This position was temporarily overrun by the NVA on the night of 12/13 May 1968 and the

howitzer was seriously damaged by a satchel charge and was withdrawn for repair. The soldiers are: unknown; unknown; Gnr Schwarze, Gnr Walker, Sgt Franklin, Commander of No. 6 gun; 2Lt Matt Cleland, Commander of the Battery Section of No's. 4, 5 and 6 guns.

While in Vietnam, Matt (right) was interviewed by Lex McAulay for the Australian War Memorial. 12 Field Regiment remained in Vietnam until March 1969, but having extended his NS for some 11 weeks, Matt returned to Australia on 19 December 1968. He was then discharged from NS. Matt returned to the computer world and worked as an IT Specialist with the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In the early 1980s Matt married Anne Bromwich. The couple would have four children: Andrei, Mischa, Deb and Nick. A colleague to generations of IT professionals at the ABS, Matt was known to be short on words, big on actions and a connoisseur of fine wine. Matt passed away peacefully on 12 July 2023 at the Sir Leslie Morshead Nursing Home in Canberra with loved ones by his side. A funeral service for Matt was held at Norwood Park Crematorium, Canberra, on 20 July 2023. Ann wore red and invited guests to wear colours of choice.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Fire Support Base Clowes, ? Phuoc Tuy Province, Vietnam, 1968. Informal portrait of a group of junior officers, mostly from 102 Field Battery, Royal Australian Artillery (RAA). The soldiers are, left to right: Captain Don Tait, Artillery Officer of B Company, 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR); Second Lieutenant (2nd Lt) Bob Lowry, Right Section Commander, 102 Field Battery; **2nd Lt Matt Cleland**, Left Section Commander, 102 Field Battery; Lt Ian Ahearn, Gun Position Officer, 102 Field Battery; Captain David Brook, Battery Captain, 102 Field Battery. Lt Ahearn is holding an M16 rifle, while Captain Brook has a 9mm F1 submachine gun slung over his right shoulder.