

Murray James Fletcher was born on 27 November 1945, at Pittsworth, Queensland, the younger son of Sir Alan, a farmer, and Lady Enid Fletcher (nee Thompson), a New Zealand born music teacher, of Te Mata, Irongate, a farming community near Mt Tyson, west of Toowoomba. Alan and Enid met while Enid was on a working holiday in Australia in 1929. Alan went from farming to representing the seat of Cunningham in the Queensland State Parliament from 1953-1974. Alan was knighted in 1972.

Murray's primary education was at Irongate and Mt Tyson schools. His parents then enrolled him at The Scots College, Warwick, as a boarder. Murray's father, a College Old Boy, served on the School Council and was President of The Old Scots Collegians' Association for many years. There was a strong family connection between Scots and Presbyterian Girls' College. Murray's brother, Mostyn, went to Scots and sisters Jill and Lyndsey attended PGC, so it was natural Murray would attend Scots.

Arriving at Scots in February 1960, Murray became known as a resourceful, industrious student who adapted to secondary education. He passed the Junior Certificate in 1961 and was a better than average sportsman, being a member of the First XI in 1962 and proving to be a competent high jumper. He developed further as a leader and sportsman in his final year in 1963 when he was appointed a Prefect and Captain of DeConlay House. He made his mark as a member of the First XI and in the winter season, captaining the college Second XV rugby team. He was also awarded the A. W. Fadden Cup for Outstanding Citizenship and Service.

After leaving school he worked as a Jackeroo on Thylungra, a sheep station north-west of Quilpie, then on Granada, a Shorthorn and Santa Gertrudis stud at Cloncurry. He returned to Mt Tyson in October 1964 to work and manage Te Mata, his parents' property, and Mt Russell, the property he would later buy. Murray proved to be a capable farmer with a great love and respect for the land. Profit was secondary to the conservation of the soil and the best outcome for both farmer and land.

Murray's destiny changed in November 1965 when the then 19-year-old learnt his birth-date had come up in the National Service Ballot. Like most young men who were 'Called Up', Murray accepted his fate and entered the Army. Being a Queenslanders, on 20 April 1966 Murray commenced his service as 1731783 at 3 TB, Singleton. Selected for officer training, on 6 May 1966 he commenced OTU with Class 2/66 in 3 Platoon, A Company. In his Senior Term, he was in 9 Section, 3 Platoon, A Company. Murray graduated with his class on 29 September 1966, was allocated to Infantry and posted to the 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR) located in the Brisbane suburb of Enoggera.



When Murray arrived at 2 RAR the battalion was preparing to deploy to Vietnam to replace one of the existing battalions of the 1st Australian Task Force. With 2 RAR, Murray undertook the pre-embarkation course at the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra before departing for his 'tour'.

On 19 May 1967, Murray said farewell to his parents on the dock at Hamilton in Brisbane and boarded HMAS Sydney for a one-year tour of duty in Vietnam. The troops disembarked at Vung Tau on 30 May. Their main role would be to carry out patrols and search and destroy missions around Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy Province. In July-August of 1967 Murray took part in Operation Cairns, the purpose of which was to protect the eastern approaches to the barrier minefield and nearby population centres. Two companies of 2 RAR were flown in at night by Chinook helicopters then moved by foot at night. They encountered small groups of Viet Cong and enemy booby traps. It was in this operation Murray's courage came to the fore when he risked his life to rescue wounded soldiers. For this action, he was Mentioned in Despatches.

His citation read:

“On 1 August 1967 Second Lieutenant Fletcher was commanding 12 Platoon, C Company, 2 RAR involved in Operation Cairns, a search and destroy operation to clear the area East of Hoi My. “At 1220 hours, the forward section of the platoon found a Viet Cong camp where an anti-personnel mine exploded, killing two soldiers and wounding three of his soldiers.



“Second Lieutenant Fletcher moved forward taking his Platoon Medic with him and gave immediate first aid to the wounded and removed them from the area. He removed the body of one soldier, in the process of which a further mine was uncovered.

“His actions enabled the swift evacuation of the wounded, who, without immediate attention, could also have died. His choice in this action was to probe slowly forward or to move forward quickly disregarding his own safety. Probing later took trained engineers one and a half hours,.

“Second Lieutenant Fletcher by his action allowed seriously wounded soldiers to be evacuated quickly; possibly preventing more deaths. His disregard for his own safety in moving into an area known to contain mines displayed a standard of personal courage and bravery that brings great credit upon himself.”

Murray’s time with 2 RAR ended on 21 November 1967 when he was posted to HQ, 1 ATF. This was followed by a further posting to the AFV Amenities and Welfare Unit on 22 January 1968. Murray returned to Australia on 26 February 1968 and on 19 April was discharged from the Army on the completion of his NS commitment.

In early 1967, while Murray had been undergoing his training at the Army’s Jungle Training Centre at Canungra, he had met Barbara Bolton. The Boltons were long-time family friends with the Fletchers. Murray and Barbara married in a garden wedding at Toowoomba on 12 October 1968. Murray and Barbara returned to Mt Tyson where they managed the property growing sorghum, wheat and barley, as well as breeding Hereford cattle. They raised two children, Tom and Cathy, and lived a quiet life until tragedy struck on 22 April 1980, when Murray’s life ended, no doubt hastened by his war time service. He was cremated at Toowoomba.