

From helping the poor of Cambodia and Afghanistan to leading Rutherglen's council and RSL sub-branch - Brian Murtagh was as global as he was local. A career soldier who later provided aid across Asia and the South Pacific, he died at Browns Plains early on Saturday 25th May at the age of 79.

Mr Murtagh served for 12 years on Rutherglen Shire with six of those years as president, the equivalent of mayor. In 2011-12 he was president of the Rutherglen RSL Sub Branch, but he believed his greatest achievement was helping in the 1990s to resettle 300,000 Cambodian refugees in their homeland after war displaced them in Thailand.

In all Mr Murtagh was involved in more than 40 overseas aid assignments after his retirement from the Army. "He was a great man, a great humanitarian," Rutherglen RSL Sub Branch Secretary David Martin said. "He was a bit of an adventurer and enjoyed going around the world helping people."

Peter Graham, who served alongside Mr Murtagh on Rutherglen Shire, said his former colleague was the last shire president before Rutherglen Shire was folded into Indigo Shire. "He will be sadly missed around the place," Mr Graham said. "He's got a great reputation, he was known far and wide and he was an interesting person to know and widely involved in things."

Brian Neil Murtagh was born in Melbourne on 31st May 1933, the eldest of two children. After leaving school, he spent four years completing officer training at the Royal Military College, Duntroon and joined the Australian Army's artillery division upon graduating.

Mr Murtagh was involved in the Malayan Emergency in 1957, a time when he also met his wife Betty, who grew up at Browns Plains. They wed in Malaya in 1959 and raised four children, Christine, Timothy, Julianne and Michael. Various postings took him around Australia, including a stint in Hobart which involved him co-ordinating the efforts of 1400 soldiers who helped fight bushfires in 1967.

Mr Murtagh then served in the Vietnam War from 1968-69 as a major, participating in the Battle of Coral-Balmoral as part of the 12th Field Regiment. He has received mentions in dispatches for his distinguished service in the Vietnam conflict.

Mr Murtagh retired from the Army in 1981 as a lieutenant colonel and focused on international aid. In addition to his Cambodian work, Mr Murtagh worked in Afghanistan as a logistic co-coordinator for Oxfam and assisted in the response to the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami in the Maldives and Aceh.

Mr Murtagh's funeral was held on Friday 31st May at 10.30am at St John's Anglican Church, Rutherglen, with his military medals displayed and a guard of honour formed by comrades. It would have been his 80th birthday.

Mr Murtagh is survived by his wife, children and eight grandchildren. He will be sadly missed ... He's got a great reputation, he was known far and wide and he was an interesting person to know and widely involved in things.