

THE LIFE OF CANADIAN ARMY VETERAN

Alan (Jim) King

"A good soldier has to be understanding. It's not just about his side of the story. He must understand all sides, and its context."
- Alan (Jim) King

Meet Alan (Jim) King, Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) veteran and current resident at the Veterans Memorial Lodge, a Broadmead Care Home. From joining the cadets as a young boy to pursuing work in animal welfare following his retirement, Jim's life is one defined by service and care for all those around him.



A formal military portrait of Alan (Jim) King taken during his time in service to Canada. Photo supplied.

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When Jim speaks about life, it rarely unfolds in long statements. Instead, he often speaks in small, vivid moments — memories of meeting his wife with a fence between them, the first pair of pants he ever wore as a young boy. Together, these fragments build a full life, one shaped by duty and his enduring belief in understanding others.

Jim was born in the spring of 1936 in Uckfield, England. His father, a carpenter, died of tuberculosis when Jim was only eight weeks old. Not long after, Jim and his mother made the long journey to Canada, settling in Kelvington, Saskatchewan.

The transition was not simple. Jim still remembers the early days in Canada with striking clarity — not because of hardship alone, but because of what change felt like through a child's eyes.

"The first few months I cried my eyes out," he recalled, laughing softly.

But Jim was also excited to learn and explore. "I got long pants then, and I wore them to bed."

In England, boys wore shorts well into childhood. To Jim, long pants meant something else entirely. "It was a big thing," he said. "It meant I was grown up." The symbolism of those pants stayed with him all his life, a powerful marker of

belonging in a new country.

Soon after, Jim joined the Canadian Army Cadets.

"I loved being a cadet," said Jim. "I remember being so proud becoming the head cadet in my hometown, for a while, of course."

By 18, Jim was enlisted in the Canadian Army with his mother's full support. To him, his enlistment didn't feel like a leap into the unknown. Instead, it felt like continuity.

"It was exciting," he said simply.

Jim's early training took him to Calgary, Alta, where he served within the Queen's Own Rifles before the regiment transitioned into the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI), where he would remain throughout his career. The Korean War had recently ended in the summer of 1953 and so much of his service became rooted in what Canada was increasingly becoming known for: peacekeeping.

"We were trained by the nation as a peacekeeping force," he said. "But we were prepared to go the other way on a moment's notice."

This duality defined much of Jim's

service as he continued to complete two tours in Cyprus, served three years in Germany during the Cold War, and took part in several exercises across Canada. When asked about any friendships formed overseas, Jim paused.

"It's hard to put into words," he said. "We were soldiers. Our aim in life was to promote peace. Anything we could do that promoted peace, we did."

At the same time, I did meet people overseas I considered friends."

In Germany, the complexities of a peacekeeping role became even more apparent. Not long after the Second World War, Jim was one of many Canadian soldiers stationed in West Germany as part of Cold War operations.

"At first, Germany was the enemy," said Jim. "It always had been that way to us. And then you get to know the people, slowly ... and surprisingly enough, they're the same as you and me."

He described this shift in his mindset as something both gradual and profound, a slow undoing of expectation.

"There's a very fine line," explained Jim. "At first, you're there to watch over them. And then after a while, it begins to

change. You're not there to watch over them anymore — you're there to be with them."

After retiring from the Canadian forces, Jim continued to carry his sense of service into a very different role: working as an SPCA inspector in Victoria. In this new role, Jim spent years working with animals, visiting shelters, responding to incidents, and speaking about the importance of animal care at local schools.

"I think very highly of animals," said Jim. "...but I've learned to live with people, too," he said with a chuckle.

When asked to distill his life experiences thus far into a single idea, Jim responds simply, with "friendships". This is a reminder that whether in or out of uniform, what endures most is not the mission itself, but the people you carry with you long after it ends.

Special thanks to Shannon Donnelly, Broadmead Care, for her contributions to this story.

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A casual portrait of Alan (Jim) King today.
Photo: Shannon Donnelly, Broadmead Care

