

James Dring (1944-). British Army Bow Street, Ceredigion

West Wales Veterans' Archive, National Library of Wales
Date of interview: 4.9.19.

Description

Born in Tywyn in 1944, James Dring spent most of his childhood in Ceredigion. Aged just 15yrs James joined the British Army in the All Arms Junior Leaders' Regiment, before being posted to the 1st Queens Dragoon Guards (The Welsh Cavalry) where he served first in the UK followed by three years on the border between East and West Germany. With a keen interest in music, James got to see some very famous names in Germany during the early part of their long careers, including a certain Elvis Presley. In 1964 James was posted to Aden where he spent six 'lively' months. James received a compassionate discharge in 1965 but remained on the Reserve list for a further nine years, finishing in 1974. James' post-Army career took him from working in the shoes trade to becoming a tour guide based in Switzerland, leading expeditions to several countries. Today, James lives in Bow Street, Ceredigion.

Early Years

James was born in 1944 in Tywyn, Gwynedd before moving at an early age to Salem, Ceredigion. At the age of just 15yrs James joined the British Army, when he became a member of the first course of the All Arms Junior Leaders' Regiment (AAJLR) which started in May 1959 (later disbanded in August 1966). The AAJLR was located at Tonfanau some 4miles from Tywyn in Gwynedd and trained boys aged between 15 and 17½ as future senior NCOs for a variety of regiments within the British army. James remembers this as a harsh environment mainly because the officers and NCOs who had been posted to North Wales had been guilty of some indiscretion and were resentful of having been dispatched to this 'outpost'.

Germany

James was then posted to serve in the 1st Queens Dragoon Guards (The Welsh Cavalry 59-64) initially in Catterick, Yorkshire and then with the Guards to Wolfenbüttel, some 12miles south of Brunswick (Braunschweig). He was a Trooper 1st Class. Here he patrolled the border between West and East Germany for around 3yrs. Later in life the impact of having to patrol great distances in all weathers wearing unforgiving army boots has left his feet in a poor condition, affecting his mobility.

James recalls a particular highlight of his service in Germany being the "The Party Club" in Brunswick. Here he saw The Beatles, The Who, The Rolling Stones and even Elvis Presley. He recalls that Elvis played one number that night which was never recorded.

In 1964 James was posted to the British Protectorate of Aden, spending around 6 months there. He recalls *'one minute we were fighting the Arabs and the next the Russians'*. It was in Aden that he was promoted in the field to 'Acting Unpaid 2nd Lieutenant'. He feels that this was likely due to a number of officers and NCOs having been killed or wounded and probably also because he was the shortest and *'so could dodge the bullets'*.

Post-Army Career

Leaving the Army in 1965 with a compassionate discharge, James remained as a 'Reservist' for the next nine years finishing in 1974. He returned to live in Ceredigion, taking a job with Mansfield Shoes in Great Darkgate Street, Aberystwyth. He was then promoted to become the manager of a branch in Denbigh, and then onto Ormskirk, near Southport, before finishing his 'career in shoes' with the British Shoe Corporation.

James then became a tour guide for 'Jerrycan Expeditions' based near Geneva in Switzerland, driving guests by land-rover off the beaten track in countries such as Morocco. He did this for the next five to six years before retiring in Ceredigion. He lives today in Bow Street.