

A celebration of life Ernest James 'Jim' Partridge

15 August 1939 – 19 April 2018

4.00 pm, 3 May 2018, Cardiff and Vale Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Jim was born in Ynysmeudwy (Ynys Me Do), which is near Pontardawe, on the 15th of August 1939 to William and Marjorie and had an elder sister Violet. His father worked underground and was killed in a colliery accident when Jim was just fifteen months old.

He didn't talk to Steve about his childhood, other than to say that he regretted not knowing his father or anything about his life. He did say that his practical side came out early and he remembered papering a ceiling at home when he was only about eleven years old and that he enjoyed tinkering with motorcycles and cars. This interest got him an early job working in a garage, but looking back he said he was used like slave labour, covering the garage while the owner went off to the pub.

When he was fifteen he left school and started an apprenticeship as a machinist at Smiths, which was a clock factory and known locally as the 'Tick Tock.' While working there he met another machinist working on the lathes, who was a couple of years older than him and was to be the love of his life.

They wanted to get married but Wendy's parents wouldn't agree to the wedding, so they had to wait until she was twenty-one and no longer needed her father's permission before they could marry.

They were married in 1959 and set up home in Alltwen until the following year, when he had finished his apprenticeship and it was time for Jim to leave and undergo his National Service.

Already having a trade, he applied to be an engineer in the RAF, but didn't get through the selection and joined the South Wales Borderers instead. Though initially disappointed, he didn't regret this change to his plans until many years

later, when Steve passed the selection and joined the RAF as an engineer, and only then because Steve teased his dad about it a lot.

Jim completed his basic training in Crickhowell and signed on as a regular. His first posting was to Worcester and Wendy joined him living in married quarters. They were soon on the move in the first of many deployments with the regiment to Minden in Germany. It didn't start well as their accommodation on camp was appalling so they moved out of the camp and lived with a German family in the town. They got involved with the local community and had a really good time in Germany, including the birth of Steve in 1962.

In 1963 they were posted to the far east, living first in Hong Kong, which they didn't like; finding it very dirty; and then living in Singapore which they really enjoyed. Even as a private and his wife they were able to live like royalty, even having a servant.

In 1966 the regiment and the Partridges came back to the UK and were stationed in Lydd-on-Sea in Kent. In 1967 the South Wales Borderers were deployed to Aden for nine months, as the British Forces withdrew and the Borderers were one of the last regiments to leave. This was the first time that Jim saw active duty in a conflict zone and it wasn't something he spoke about to Steve until last year when there was a drama on the TV about the British Forces in Aden.

This depicted families sunbathing on the beach and living the good life. He said that it was nothing like that when he was there, but he went no further than to say in his usual, understated manner that it was not very nice at all. Steve

remembers his Dad bringing home a present of an Arab head dress, which he took to wearing around the camp.

In 1969 The Borderers were amalgamated with the Welch Regiment to form the Royal Regiment of Wales and were based in Osnabruck in Germany. It was from here in August that Jim and the Regiment were the first British soldiers to be deployed in Belfast to protect the catholic residents. Jim spoke of how they were initially welcomed but over the course of the deployment this changed completely.

While the regiment was based in Osnabruck, it was deployed to Northern Ireland twice more over the next four years. Jim was a corporal by now and when in Germany he worked on ammunition and became well known to many members of the regiment when he ran the bar at the Prince of Wales Club.

Steve told of how he saw the two sides of his father during these years for the first time. The loving, attentive father and family man he had always known, and the professional side. He remembers hearing his father shouting at privates for the first time and being shocked, thinking that's not like my dad.

Jim used to let Steve help in the bar selling beer and taking the money and when there was ammunition for destruction he would secretly take Steve to the firing range and let him fire some weapons. Steve remembers using SLRs and SMGs when he was only ten.

In 1973 rumours were running riot on the camp that they were to be deployed to Jamaica, and Steve was looking forward the sunshine and starting school early in the morning, so they could play on the beach in the afternoon. Then it was rumoured that the CO had volunteered for a different deployment and the

Regiment was posted to Belfast as the resident unit for two years. Regardless of how true the Jamaica rumours were, the CO was not popular.

They lived on Hollywood camp with their back garden adjacent to the perimeter road. One night at about three in the morning there was hammering on the door and Jim opened it to find a fully kitted-out bomb disposal unit at the door. The house was evacuated, and they went into the back garden to investigate a report of something having been thrown into it from the road. The young Steve saw another flash of his dad's professionalism. Wendy was frightened and very upset, Jim was completely calm and was able to reassure her and calm her down.

The family lived in Belfast for two years until 1975, during which time Jim and Wendy scrimped and saved so that they could buy a brand new tax-free car under the British Forces Scheme. So just before the regiment was deployed again Jim and Steve took the ferry from Larne to Stranraer to pick up the car, a Vauxhall Viva. The trip back was terrible, both Steve and Jim were very ill but that was the least of Jim's worries when he heard the crew discussing how they would ditch the cars if needed to save the ship.

When the time came to deploy the family piled into the Viva and drove from Belfast, across the UK and Europe and along the corridor to Berlin, which was still behind the Iron Curtain at the time and divided by The Wall. Jim was in charge of the ammunition supplies and Steve's main memory of the time was Jim teaching him to drive the Viva on an area behind the ammunition depot which was overlooked by Spandau prison and possibly Rudolph Hess himself.

In 1977 they returned to Aldershot in the UK, where the family stayed for the next four years. In 1977 Jim was sent to Belize for six months and Steve visited

him over Christmas, having a memorable holiday with his father including being allowed to drink beer for the first time.

Throughout his service Jim was always busy, taking on more duties and roles than was required and giving the Regiment great service. This was recognised in 1977 when he was one of only two members of the regiment awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee medal and he was presented it by Prince Charles. But he played the whole thing down, as was his nature, not making or wanting any fuss.

Upon his return to Aldershot Jim worked in the Sgts mess until they moved to Brecon in 1981 and his last posting, running the Officers' Mess. In 1982 he retired but carried on managing the Officers' Mess as a civilian employee.

Over the coming years Jim's eyes deteriorated and he eventually had to take early retirement as his sight became worse. His retirement allowed him the opportunity to spend more time on his garden.

There had been a set pattern to their life on each redeployment throughout his service. The family would move into new quarters, Jim and Wendy would set about redecorating it so that it became their home and Jim would redesign the garden. He would always build a wall, lay an area of crazy paving and then plant a beautiful garden, which would just be coming to fruition when they would be moved, and the next residents would thank Jim for leaving such a beautiful garden behind.

Now he and Wendy stayed in Brecon and were able to enjoy the fruits of his labour. Perhaps because of all their moving around and perhaps because of their quiet natures, they were a very self-contained couple, happy with each

other's company and never happier than when at home together or in their garden.

Jim spent much of his time tinkering in the shed with his many projects and before he lost his sight he took up oil painting. He showed a real talent for it, but he would often forget that his hands were covered in paint when he brushed his face, so becoming a piece of art himself.

Wendy died in 2011 and though now nearly completely blind he carried on looking after himself. He was incredibly independent and found ways to cope so that people didn't always realise he was blind, for example he would walk into town following the yellow lines in the gutter, which were about all he could see.

He was very family orientated and eventually Steve managed to persuade him to move down to Llantwit where it was easier to keep an eye on him, though Jim saw it as him keeping an eye on Steve, Annette and the boys.

Steve told me how inspirational Jim was over the last few years as his illnesses developed. He was never in bad mood and never complained. Even when in Holme Towers he was still able to laugh at himself as the staff wheeled his bed outside, so he could have a puff on his e-cigarette, and he remained happy as long as he had a Yorkie Bar to eat and someone to argue about politics with.

I have told you some of the facts about Jim's life and Steve is going to come up now say a few words about his father.

Thank you to all of you for coming today, it's so nice to see so many of my Dads Family and friends here today to pay respects to someone who honestly felt he had very few friends to speak of, and sometimes felt as though no one felt he was that important!

Let me tell you, he was very important to so many people, both during his Regimental days, my childhood, and wherever he went or whoever he met! Dad you are the most important person I know!

There are many words to describe my Dad, here are some that spring immediately to mind - Duty, decency, reliability, honour, dignity, respect, pride, caring, I could go on, but I know he would now be squirming and telling me to stop! That's because he never saw himself in that light, he was so unassuming, sometimes under confident, very reserved and would never be overbearing or pushy (I don't inherit those traits I'm afraid)! That's why I think so many people loved him and found him so easy to get on with. I have heard many references to the term 'Gentleman Jim', and I think that sums him up in one simple statement, he was exactly that, one of life's true Gentleman.

I can hear him now, 'Steve please stop, no more!', and as he knew, I tended not to listen! He was never one for too much sentiment or emotion, although I have seen a different side of him in the last few years, one which has made me love him more than ever - he is really one big softy at heart! Caring for him over the last few years has brought us closer than ever before, and yes it has been hard during his many illnesses and hospital visits, but it's never been a chore - so I can honestly say I have been grateful for the opportunity to get so close to this wonderful man!

Just over three years ago Annette and I brought him to Llantwit to be nearer to us. Both his eyesight and hearing had become a lot worse, and then he was diagnosed with Cancer and had some serious health issues. After his first major operation which was touch and go, his recovery went well, but he was told he needed another possibly lifesaving operation shortly after! I will never forget having to take him to Morriston hospital to take a fitness test on an exercise bike, two months after his first operation which the nurse stopped half way through and told him he had passed with flying colours and was ready for the next major op - This sums him up, never complain and just get on with it!

This approach worked well in the garden, which over all else was his favourite pastime! Every Sunday almost without fail he would be there in the garden, and the only time he moaned, was when it was raining and he couldn't get out there! He was thrilled in the last few weeks that his begonias had begun to sprout again, and we only noticed in the last few days his Hostas have sprouted again too, despite not growing at all last year! He would be chuffed!

No one believes me when I tell them he is blind, and deaf, because of the things he has done over the years around the house or in the garden. Whatever the challenge he always found a way around a problem, coming up with some amazing solutions to sometimes complex issues. He was always a practical man, could turn his hand to anything, this I think is what made him so strong, he never gave up! I mentioned some words earlier on which described my Dad, however I think the one word that

describes him truly is Inspirational! Anyone who has seen his achievements despite his disabilities cannot fail to be inspired!

Living in Llantwit gave his close family time to get to know him better, and I know Dan and Cath, oh and Lunar their dog, were very close to his heart when they all lived together in Brecon St. I hope he knew how much we all loved him. I think this was probably the best time for him, when we were all around him, and I know he loved having his grandchildren around more than anything.

I'm going to begin to close now by saying 'Dad, we are all going to shoot off now, ok?', because every time anyone visited him in hospital, he would tell us to 'now you shoot off' even if we'd only been there for ten minutes. He would say constantly 'I'm ok, I'm alright' even when on occasions he wasn't, just to put the worry out of his family's minds. This was his way, he always thought people had better things to do than come and see him! Typical of the way he thought of others before himself!

In the last few weeks my Dads old Regimental family from both the South Wales Borderers and Royal Regiment of Wales have been paying touching tributes to him, which I know he would have loved! There is one phrase they have used many times which has deeply touched me, and I know would have touched him too! So I want to end by using those fitting words, which as military men both my Father and I can both understand the meaning, I am sure you will all understand the meaning too:

'Dad I am proud to be called your son, stand down your duty is done!'