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**Location:** Aberystwyth, Wales

**Interviewer:** Jessica Davies

**Audio:** Neil Davies



**Jim Jones**

**Royal Army Pay Corps**

**1960**

Jim's story of National Service in the British Army was gleaned from a conversation which took place during a meeting at his home in April 2026. That interview was recorded in audio format.

Some conversation has been summarized but Jim is quoted from conversation in the interview. The use of quotes in this narrative, is aimed at bringing authenticity and a sense of Jim's jovial character to the story.

The interview focuses on basic recruit training and his recollections, make for a fascinating and often humorous account. The reader is subtly asked to consider that Jim is recounting memories of life in the Army of the 1960's. Social attitudes and society in general was very different from today's society. This is especially true of the armed forces, where NCOs often used harsh and abrasive language when addressing the young National Servicemen in their charge.

## **Background**

Jim was born in a rural cottage in the hills above the beautiful town of Bala in Northeast Wales. He attended both primary and grammar schools in Bala. Jim was born into a traditional family. His father regularly moved between jobs, in order to secure paid work during the tough times during and immediately after World War Two. Sometimes, this resulted in his father travelling to the larger towns to work on construction projects, such as the bridge over the River Dee. Interestingly, his mother had a gift for singing and would later appear on the Welsh language television channel S4C. Jim had two sisters and a brother, all of whom enjoyed good health and progressed into work.

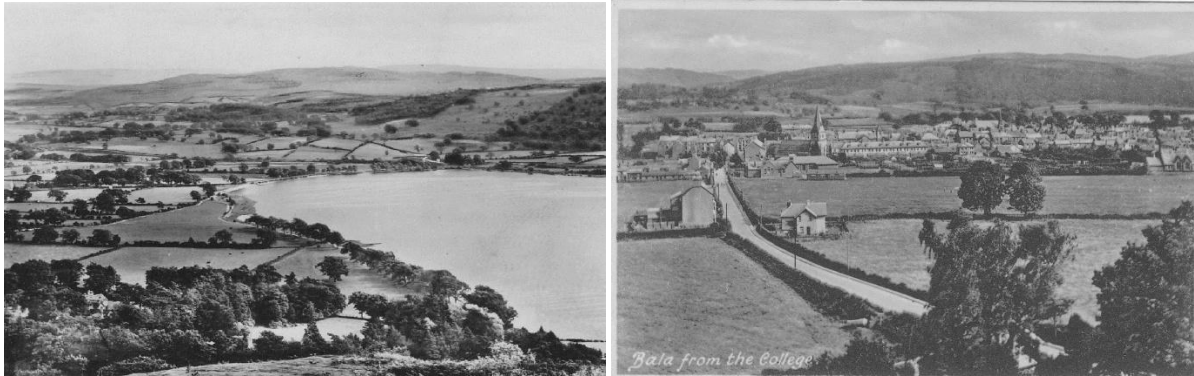
Upon leaving school, Jim went to study at a college in Wrexham, qualifying in business studies. This led to him securing employment with Denbighshire County Council as a Junior Clerk at Denbighshire College. Historically the term Denbighshire college generally refers to the Technical College, which later became known as the Northeast Wales Institute. It has evolved to become Wrexham University. It was whilst working at the college that Jim was conscripted into the Army.

Very early in Jim's account of National Service, with characteristic humour he offers a clue as to what happened to him when he did join up.

*"It was strange because I left at the beginning of the holidays. It must have been June or July. Everybody gave into a collection, and it was lovely. I had a good £10. A lot of thought went into it from the staff. The problem was I was back in work when they came back from the holidays, which was 7 weeks. They said we want our money back. It was very funny!"*

However, despite Jim recalling this episode with good humour, there was a painful episode that led to Jim's prompt return to his civilian job.

*"I was back, but not back in work because of my knee. I couldn't walk and the Army didn't supply me with a walking stick or anything. They didn't do anything. I could've done with help to walk. They just sent me home as unfit for military service. I said it's not my fault."*



Some old images of Bala, the nearest town to Jim's rural family home where he grew up.

Image courtesy of Visitbala.co.uk

### National Service

In response to the official letter of conscription, one summer morning Jim woke up at 6am at home in Bala to the comforting odour of bacon and eggs. No doubt his mother was concerned for his welfare and wanted her son to begin his adventure with a hearty meal. The conscription letter ordered Jim to arrive at the army training camp by 3pm that afternoon.

At 7:10am Jim was at Bala railway station, where he caught a train and set out on his journey to join the army. Jim was actually facing a logistical challenge to arrive safely and on time at the army training camp, near Devizes, Wiltshire. In 1960 the transport network in mid Wales presented its own set of problems and there were several connections to make, which relied on everything going to plan. Which it didn't.



Bala junction, where Jim set off to join the army in the summer of 1960.

Image courtesy of Wikipedia

*“There's an incline from Trefor up to Acrefair and the engine couldn't make it. I was 20 minutes in Acrefair, so I missed the connection. I waited an hour and a train came and I went to Shrewsbury. I missed the connection at Shrewsbury. I waited an hour and a half and got to Reading. There was no train to Devizes. But there was a shuttle service, and I eventually got to Devizes at about 5:30pm.*”

Jim now found himself two and a half hours late and stranded at Devizes railway station. A predicament for a young man and no doubt he was concerned about the welcome he would receive when he eventually arrived at the camp.

*“There was a chap in uniform, and I asked if he could direct me to the Royal Army Pay Corps camp. Oh, you’re the missing sheep he said. They’ve told us there’s one missing. He made a telephone call and a massive lorry came. A huge thing with 4 wheels at the back. I climbed into the back and there were 2 fellas in there with rifles. I said what do you want the rifles for and they laughed and said you’re absent without leave.”*

Jim was in a spot of bother by this time and the journey to camp was a nervous one. Jim protested his innocence.

*“It’s not my fault, blame the railway, it’s their fault not mine”.*

When Jim arrived at the camp, he was presented to an officer and asked for an explanation. His response offers insight into his character.

*“I explained to him everything that happened and I said I’ve had nothing to eat or drink since 6 ‘o clock this morning, when I left Bala. Oh, you’re from Bala he said. I’ve been through there. Right , take him to the NAAFI. I had a bacon roll and a cup of tea. God, it was lovely.”*



Above is a photograph of the keep at Le Marchant barracks. The barracks were originally the home of the county regiment, later becoming the Royal Army Pay Corps training centre. Pay Corps recruits undertook their basic training here in the 1960s. The photograph on the right is a typical British Army truck circa 1960. The truck that collected Jim from the railway station would have been of similar design.

Images courtesy of Robin Earle - Facebook

Fortunately, the ‘Orderly Officer’ had some understanding of the geography of Wales and showed some empathy with Jim’s predicament. After the welcome NAAFI bacon roll, Jim was shown to his new home and introduced to the Corporal.

*“They sent me to the hut and the Corporal said ‘Come in, come in’ with all the swear words coming out. I don’t think they could have a conversation without a swear word. I was shown to my bed. On the wall above was a small placard 23802386 Jones J P Pte.*

*The Army, being the army put every Jones they recruited in one hut. There were 7 of us! I was Jones 6."*

Jim had endured a long, difficult journey, only to be being arrested at gun point for being absent without leave. He then appeared before an officer, who held Jim's immediate destiny in his hands. His introduction into the British Army was eventful to say the least. The following morning heralded the arrival of a new problem.

*"Next day I was marching with them in my civvies, and they had hall been kitted out with uniform. I felt like an Onion in a Petunia pot. It was terrible at the time but looking back it was funny. I was scared stiff at the time, I really was."*

It wasn't long however, that Jim was inducted into the Army proper when he was issued with his uniform. The platoon Sergeant was none too amused when he saw the odd-looking soldier spoiling the uniformed appearance of his new troop.

*"Grrrrrr ! He played hell with the Lance Corporal for letting me march with them. I'll take the platoon, you take him to the Quarter Master. They took me and I went in."*

Jim had arrived at the clothing stores.

*'Oh yes, we got some things ready for you. What size boots ?'*

*" and a half I said"*

*'7 he said'.*

*'What size shirt?'*

*"14 and a half"*

*'15!'*

*"Oh dear, we had vest, slack green pants and 2 sets of battle dress"*

*'Waist ?'*

*"32 I said"*

*'36!'*

*"Oh god, 36 trousers. Later on, the damn trousers fell down. I couldn't help it."*

Having been issued with their new uniforms, they now had to learn how to look after their kit. An important task, which had to be completed to a high standard for inspection by the Corporal and Sergeant.

*"The boots were marvellous boots. Brand new leather with studs. We had to 'bull' them, the back heel and toes. They had little indentations and we had to press them and then polish them. That's where the term spit and polish came from. We had a candle and put a fork in the flame and would then press the indentions out. Mine came up beautiful."*

At this early stage, a spirit of camaraderie was already beginning to form amongst the platoon. Jim played his part.

*“Jones couldn’t do it, the boots. So, I showed him how to do his toecaps.”*

Every National Serviceman remembers the harsh regime in the training camps. Jim’s experience began to mirror that of the thousands of National Servicemen who came before him.

*“Every morning, oh god! Your bed blanket had a black line from top to bottom. You had to fold your blanket, so that line came down the middle. You folded your pyjamas and put them on top. I still fold my pyjamas today! Jones couldn’t do it, but I could. An old army chap in Bala had told me how to square your blankets and bed sheets. The Corporal said. ‘Who taught you that?’”*

Jim again stepped in to help his comrade.

*“I did it for Jones, he just couldn’t do it”.*

The wily instructors rarely missed a trick, and the unfortunate Jones was eventually caught out.

*“One morning, I was busy doing my boots or something and the Corporal came in without notice. ‘Stand by your beds! Oh god. I just happened to notice Jones’ bed was a real mess. There was no back line or anything, he’d made a real mess of it.”*

*The Corporal came and he looked at mine, ‘good, who taught you that? He went to Jones. My god, talk about the words, he must’ve practised them for years. Jones was standing to attention with big eyes. ‘Jones 6’ the corporal said. ‘Come and have a look at this. I marched over and the Corporal said, ‘Tell him.’”*

*I turned to Jones 6 and in Welsh told him to tell the Corporal to put his finger where the sun doesn’t shine. Of course, Jones laughed. Oh god, the Corporal went mad. Because Jones had laughed, we had to run around the square 3 or 4 times. We were banned then from speaking Welsh in the hut.”*

The two Private Jones’ clearly shared some new experiences together, but Jim last saw his comrade in the medical centre. Jones was covered in a red skin rash. This condition was known as ‘Khaki rash’ and in serious cases, resulted in men being discharged. The uniforms were made from 100% wool, that could rub against the skin, causing severe discomfort to some unfortunate recruits.

Jim remembers a comrade, who seemed ill fitted to military life. In fact, this young recruit went on to demonstrate great skill and determination in executing a well thought out plan.

*“There was a chap from London. He was very effeminate. He couldn’t march or do his bed either. When the corporal was addressing a recruit, you had to look at his ear not at his eyes. He was there and he looked at the Corporal’s eyes.”*

*‘Don’t look at me, do you fancy me ? Oh yes Corporal, he said! Oh, the whole hut went berserk. At the time, the tension was so much that anything funny, broke the whole ice.”*

As Jim goes on to explain, all was not quite as it seems with this recruit from London.

*“Franklyn Engelman was coming down your way. It was a Sunday programme, and he would go all over speaking to people. He was coming to the camp to speak to the commanding officer. It was a radio programme, but we had to clean everywhere.*

*There were 4 of us, detailed as latrine cleaners. With me was the chap from London. We went to work. Suddenly his voice changed altogether. Don’t worry he said. I’m a member of the Methodist chapel in the east end. I don’t want to learn how to shoot people or do anything for the army. I couldn’t be a conscientious objector, so I want them to kick me out.”*

Jim’s comrade was seeking to exploit the army’s prejudice against homosexual men. His story offers an intriguing insight into conscription and how strict rules presented young men with difficult choices.

*“That’s why he was being funny. He could march and do everything correctly, but he was working his way out of the army. Very crafty. His father was a lay preacher and was at Normandy. We talked a lot after that.”*

Jim remembers another incident during training that brings a smile to his face.

*“I remember an inspection. It must have been about week 3 or 4. I had seen on a film, either ‘Carry on Sergeant’ or ‘Private’s Progress’. In the film they hadn’t cleaned the beams in the hut. There was one big fellow who was a weightlifter. He picked me up and put me on his shoulders. I dusted all the beams, right into the corners. Anyway, the Corporal came into the hut for inspection. Our beds were done, he went all along and on top of the wardrobes, testing for dust, nothing. He climbed up by the window and put his hand in where the 2 beams met.”*

*‘Who’s been up here. There’s no \*\*\*\* dust! Hut passed muster’.*



The period photographs above are of inspections at army training camps. The scenes will be familiar to Jim, who talks of inspections in his interview.

Images courtesy of John Davies - Facebook

Most National Servicemen when referring to basic training use the term 'Square bashing'. This is not a term of endearment. It refers to the many, many hours National Servicemen spent practising and perfecting military 'drill'. Drill being the art of moving a body of men proficiently and in good order from one location to another. In practice this meant recruits responding to shrill commands shouted at them by drill instructors, as they marched up and down the parade square. This was an activity that was to have dire consequences for Jim.

*"It was the floor of the hut where it was dry and warm. It was raining and the Corporal marched us into this big, massive hut. The floor was concrete with little ripples. It wasn't one whole floor, it had joins and sections. It had been there for years, and the soldiers had been marching and stomping on the floor. In between there were holes. Gosh like potholes and as it happened, I was standing on one. Just sheer bad luck really."*

Jim explains what happened to him.

*"I was front row of the platoon, number 2. The Corporal was in front and we had to march at arm's length and all the rest of these things. Anyway, we stopped and were put at ease with your arms behind your back. I looked down and my left foot was just on the edge of this big crack. He ordered us to attention and to right turn, to mark time and so forth. I banged my foot down and hurt it. So, I thought, I'm not going to bang my foot down hard again. I just put it down gently and he saw."*

*'Jones 6' he said, 'bang that \*\*\*\*\* left foot down'.*

*"I banged my foot down and I missed and went into the hole. I collapsed."*

Unfortunately for Jim, it would seem that the recruits were being exercised in a large hut where the floor was succumbing to the impact of thousands and thousands of hob nailed 'Ammo boots' stomping on the surface. Along general degradation of the surface concrete over time, it would seem that in places the surface was developing a moon scape appearance.

Without wishing to attach blame to any particular individual, when parading, troops are forbidden to look down. The soldier is required to perform each manoeuvre with head held high, chin up fashion. The scenario Jim is describing occurred 66 years previously, and with hindsight, an accident seemed inevitable.

*"I don't remember everything because I was in absolute agony. He came over."*

*'What's wrong with you ?' Accompanied by all kinds of swear words.*

*"I told him I had done something to my knee."*

*'Get up, you silly \*\*\*\*\*'.*

*"I got up but collapsed again, I couldn't put any weight on it."*

*'Oh right, let's have a look'.*

*"They pulled my trouser leg up and my knee had come up like a cricket ball and was every colour you can think of."*

*'My god, what have you done' he said.*

*"I told him I hit my foot in the hole, you told me to bang it!"*

Jim was then carted off the parade square by two of his fellow recruits and carried to the medical centre. The Corporal accompanied them.

*"He left the whole platoon in the hut with nobody in charge. He was worried, you see. Because he had told me to bang my foot harder down but fair play to him, he didn't know there was a hole."*

Jim was examined by the Army medical officer.

*"You're done for he said. That'll takes weeks, months to go down."*



A period photograph of Royal Army Pay Corps soldiers marching past 'The Keep' at Le Marchant barracks, Devizes.

Image courtesy of Robin Earle - Facebook

Jim was removed from the platoon, and his training was put on hold. However, the army had no intention of leaving Jim to idle about in the hut.

*"They put me in the holding platoon for two weeks. An officer came there and gave me his army regulations. The officers had to learn these new regulations. He had a thick pile, a pair of scissors and some glue."*

*'How long are you here for?'*

*"Two weeks they told me."*

*'You have plenty of time, it'll take you that long.'*

The officer gave Jim his orders.

*"I had to stick all these new pages into his book."*

*'If the phone rings, answer it, say the number and my name and take a message.'*

It seemed Jim had a new job in the army, and he set about the task with vigour. He had the book sorted in 2 days.

*"The phone rang and this posh voice came on it, and I asked if there was a message."*

*‘Tell him the CO wants a word with him.’*

*‘I nearly fell over and I said Yes sir, what extension please?’*

*‘Number 1 of course, you silly \*\*\*\*’*

When the officer returned, he thanked Jim for putting together his regulations.

*‘By the way, the CO compliments you on your telephone technique.’*

Jim’s brief cameo as an ‘Officers bat man’ heralded the end of his short but eventful career in the army. His National Service was over before it really began, because of the injury his knee sustained whilst ‘square bashing’.

*“That was in then. They sent me home by train with a free ticket.*

*I wanted to get to Bala but ended up in Chester at 1 o clock in the morning. There was no train. My knee was hurting and I was in agony. Well, there was another chap there, who wanted to go to Cefn Mawr. So, we went halves on a taxi. I crawled into this taxi, and he took me to my old digs.”*

### **Back to ‘Civvy street’ - Wrexham**

*“The next day I crawled to my doctor who sent me to the A&E, the war memorial hospital in Wrexham. They had a look at my knee and said that it would take a long time to heal. What happened, it had bulged out and then clamped closed. They couldn’t put it back, so it was a matter of waiting for it to heal.”*

Armed with a crutch, Jim caught a bus and returned to his former workplace at the college.

*“I hadn’t told anybody what had happened. Unfortunately, they’d appointed somebody to my job. But the rule was that if you did National Service, your employer was compelled to give you your old job back. So, within a few weeks, the other chap had gone to the health offices. I got a promotion to the roads and bridges department.”*

There is a footnote to Jim’s story, which is an important point to note. It offers a reminder of the significant impact National Service could have on the young men who were conscripted.

Before joining the Army, Jim had embarked on a fledgling career as an amateur footballer. He enjoyed the game and was receiving a small wage, playing for a team in Wrexham. There was every indication that he could look forward to a long career in football and earn a useful wage to supplement his main source of income.

*“I was a right back. I played for a few teams. I played for Bala under 18’s and a team in Wrexham. You could play for two teams in those days. But after the Army I couldn’t play anymore. The knee put a stop to that.”*

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Readers can listen to the full interview with Jim online at **'The Heritage Lottery fund National Service collection' in the West Wales Veterans Archive on the Peoples Collection Wales website'.**

- The rights including publishing rights to this article remain with Mr Jim Jones or his immediate beneficiary in the event of his death.
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[Visitbala.org.uk](http://Visitbala.org.uk)

[Wikipedia.com](http://Wikipedia.com)

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