
Ex-Royal New Zealand Dental Corps Dentist and Korean Veteran turns 100

P Hurley

A few years ago, JMVH published an article on the Korean War. The front-page photograph showed a Royal New Zealand Dental Corps officer working in a Field Dental Unit. That officer was Major (Rtd) Alan Cull OBE.

On Thursday 28 March, Alan celebrated his 100th birthday at a dinner hosted by the Manawatu Officers' Club – of which Alan is a Life member. The dinner was a success and involved a theme along the lines of "this is your Life." The mayor of Palmerston North was present, and messages of congratulations were received from King Charles, and the Prime minister among others.

Born in Palmerston North in New Zealand and went to school in Palmerston North. He says that when he started school, it was the time of the great depression, but at the age of 5 he didn't know what depression meant. "a lot of people suffered, but I had resilient working parents!" He was also at school in 1931 at the time of the Napier earthquake and says that he experienced the shake 180 Km away.

After school, he worked at Palmerston North Hospital as a trainee radiographer. He remembers that people were scared that the Japanese would bomb Palmerston North and that there were frequent air raid warnings.

He then studied dentistry at the University of Otago and worked at Wellington Hospital. He joined the army as a reserve dental officer and volunteered to go to Korea. He initially signed on for a year, but then his replacement couldn't relieve him, so he stayed for two years.

He served in the Mobile Dental Unit; the mobile dental unit was attached to a field artillery regiment, and he treated soldiers' dental problems with primitive equipment.

They weren't at the front, but he said they had to be prepared to move in a hurry. "We had a few moments of tension when the Chinese broke through the lines."

The freezing climate was difficult, and his anaesthetic would freeze. "I was most popular during the first very cold winter. All the troops got a rum ration. "I used to have a queue outside the dental tent because I had oil of clove and cloves with rum was a popular drink."

After the war he came home to Palmerston North and joined a practice in Coleman Place for about 30 years and retired aged 60. Alan used to do a 2 mile walk every day. "I reached 100, so I must have done something right!" he says. Alan also enjoys a whisky – "usquebaugh - the water of life!" It seems to have worked in his case.



Alan Cull

He was awarded an OBE by Queen Elizabeth during her visit to New Zealand in 1953.

Alan lives by himself and still maintains his own property in Palmerston North.

The picture below, shows Alan in Korea with his mobile Dental Unit performing dental work on a soldier.

Alan says “ I must have done something right – scored a century!”

Attached is also a link to NZ History on line, when Alan was interviewed in 2011

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/sound/alan-cull-describes-being-dentist-korea>



Alan Cull in his tent somewhere in Korea