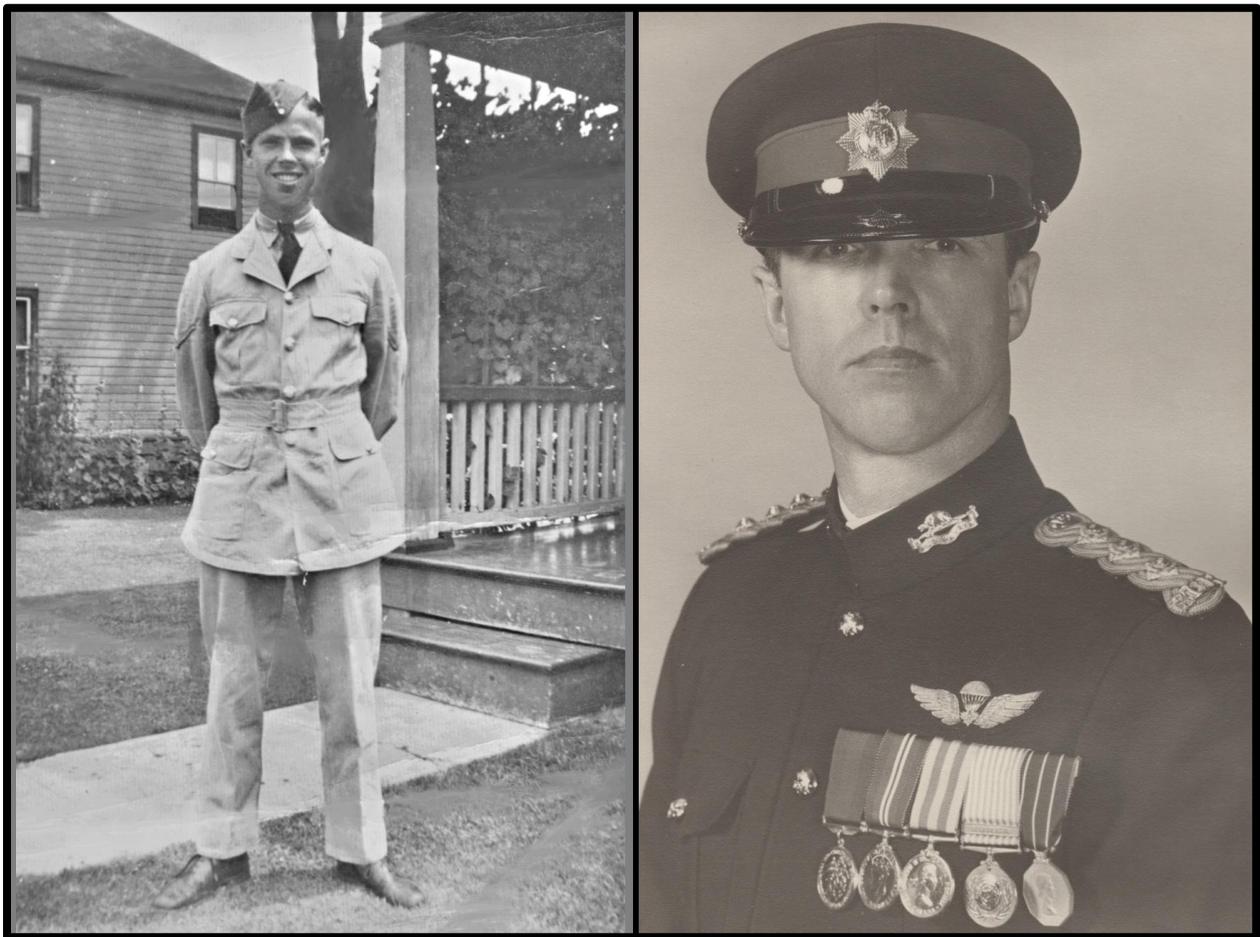


**By Terry O'Hearn**

**Eric Devlin – A life of dedication to country and community**

Perth Legion President Eric Devlin gave more than 42 years' military service to his country at various times in the previous century. He served in the Canadian Army during World War II, as well as in Japan, Korea, Germany, and with the Canadian Army in Active, Special Force, and Regular categories. Deployments included Indo-China with the International Commission for Supervision and Control, and Canadian Armed Forces Regular and Reserve, including Supplementary List, Primary Reserve, and Cadet Instructor List.



That in itself is remarkable, but Eric Devlin never intended to fade away with rocking chair and slippers after his military career was over. At age 96, he is still

going strong. In keeping with his personal policy: “when you leave town and come back, you put something back into the community”, he is still on two town committees, namely McMartin House and the Recreation Advisory Panel, after having served on Town Council for many years. From 1989 to 1991 he was Chair of the Police Committee, and for the following 20 years was on the Police Services Board after it was formed in 1991.

Born in Drummond Township on December 1, 1920, to Joseph Henry Devlin and Mabel May Whyte, the family lived in a house on what was then known as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Concession of Drummond Township, about four miles east of Perth. Great Grandfather William Allen Devlin came over from County Wexford, Ireland in 1819, three years after the Military Settlement in Perth was founded, making a home for his family on the 4<sup>th</sup> Concession of Drummond.

In 1921 the Devlin family moved to Perth when father Joseph Henry became first a Children’s Aid Inspector, and a member of Town Council, and then a Division Court Clerk and Justice of the Peace in the 1930’s. Young Eric attended Perth Collegiate Institute (PCI) from 1933 to 1940 inclusive.

Marilyn Walker Devlin recently recalled her husband’s musings on the day of this year’s Grey Cup football game: “As we watch the pre-game Eric reminisces about using his money earned from delivering papers to buy a ticket for himself for the 1939 Grey Cup game in Ottawa. He earned \$3.25 a week. He was 19. He saved \$2.00 from every pay. He hitchhiked from Perth to Ottawa to buy the ticket at the gate. He thinks the ticket cost him \$10.00.”

Eric enrolled in the Royal Canadian Artillery (25 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, 9<sup>th</sup> LAA Regiment, RCA) of the Canadian Army in May, 1942 with basic training at Lansdowne Park, Ottawa, followed by a posting to Petawawa that July. He served with the Regiment in Vancouver, Port Alberni, Wainwright, Terrace, Vernon, Nanaimo, and Wainwright, then posted to Officers Training Centre in Aldershot, NS. At Aldershot he was known as “Doubling Devlin”, as he had a penchant for pushing his platoon to high fitness levels by using the double (time) march during training.

An Infantry Training Battalion posting to Peterborough took place in October, 1945, and Eric then attended a Sports Instructor Course in Kingston, Ontario in January, 1946. After a stint with The Royal Canadian Regiment in Brockville starting in March, 1946, he was released from service in late July, 1946.

Following World War II, Eric bided his time as a farm worker during harvest season near Yorkton, Saskatchewan, then returned to Perth due to the illness of father. In January, 1947, he obtained employment in the Credit Department of Andrew Jergens Co. Ltd. He also assumed the local positions of his father temporarily, until his father died in April, 1948.

In The Perth Courier of May 1, 1947, the following appeared in a column titled "Rollin' Around" (roller skating): "There is a great deal of talent among these young people, and you can bet that they'll get all the help they need to develop it. Already there are two or three dance teams forming who show real promise. Eric Devlin and Joan Barrie show all the earmarks of being real skaters, and both are putting their minds on the steps, as they are done correctly."

Eric then resigned from Andrew Jergens and was confirmed in the positions for the Ontario Attorney-General appointments of Justice of the Peace, Division Court Clerk, and Bailiff, and Sheriff's Officer in Perth until October 1950.

"As a result of the invasion of South Korea by North Korea in June, 1950, and the announcement of Canada's participation in August, I volunteered by mail, through channels, for service with 25<sup>th</sup> Special Force Brigade of the Canadian Army", said Eric. He managed to see his sister married before going off to another war, as indicated by this notice in The Perth Courier of July 20, 1950: "A pretty wedding ceremony was held in the garden of Eric H. Devlin recently, when his sister, Helen Noreen, became the bride of F.L. Donald Evan Cameron, R.C.A.F. Mrs. Cameron's parents are the late Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Devlin of Perth and the groom is the son of the late Dr. D.R. Cameron and Mrs. Cameron of Ottawa."

Another newspaper article dated November 15, 1951, mentions that: “Mr. Ivan K. Penfold of Perth has been officially appointed Clerk and Bailiff of the First Division Court of the County of Lanark by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor under the division Court Act. Mr. Penfold has been acting in this capacity for the past year plus the duties of the Justice of the Peace. He succeeded Mr. Eric Devlin in these positions and the appointment was only temporary. This official release verifies the investiture.” Of course Eric left those positions to re-enlist in the Canadian Army, answering the call to service yet again because of the War in Korea.

Legion president, war veteran, and long-time member Eric Devlin recently mused about his early days growing up in Perth, revealing that he had been a proficient roller skater at the height of that sport’s popularity. He was one of the few local skaters to own booted skates, rather than clip-ons and he recalls skating on the wooden floor of the old hockey rink, which was near the existing Perth & District Community Centre. He went on to skate in Toronto, and other large cities in North America and overseas, and mastered a total of 17 dance moves.

As mentioned, Eric resigned from positions in the Perth Justice system to serve his country following the invasion of South Korea in 1950. He volunteered for service with 25th Special Force Brigade of the Canadian Army, and was enrolled in the Canadian Army Special Force in Kingston, followed by training at Camp Petawawa for 2nd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment (2RCR).

He served in Fort Lewis, Washington and Wainwright, Alberta, with 2RCR and 3RCR. His transfer to the Canadian Army (Regular) came in early 1951, and he was posted to Yokohama, Japan in June of that year. He was then posted to Korea, landing at Inchon, on Sept. 1, 1951, and proceeded to join 2RCR as a Platoon Commander.

During 'Operation Ortona,' in October 1951, Eric's platoon was involved in the capture of five enemy prisoners, who were sent back to the rear echelon. The fate of those prisoners was uncertain at the time, and one of the POW camps was under the command of the United Nations on Koje-do Island. The camp commander at one point was taken prisoner by POWs, and by early 1952 the POW camps were in chaos and the prisoners in full uproar. Many were reported to have been summarily executed.

After being appointed 2RCR Battalion Transport Officer, Devlin was transferred back to Canada in July, 1952, and subsequently served in various positions, moving with the Battalion to London, Ontario, Wolseley Barracks in January, 1953. He attended a two-month career course in Camp Borden, and in June was posted for parachute qualification in Rivers, Manitoba; then appointed Battalion Intelligence Officer on his return to the unit.

In October 1953, he proceeded with 2RCR to Germany as member of the Advance Party and trained at various places in Germany during the next two years. Military historian Bernd Horn describes this period in great detail in his book *From Cold War to New Millennium: The History of The Royal Canadian Regiment*. "In November 1953, the 2nd Battalion, The RCR, was deployed to Germany as part of Canada's continuing NATO commitment. They were part of the newly established

1 Canadian Infantry Brigade Group (1 CIBG), which was replacing 27 Canadian Infantry Brigade (CIB), Canada's initial overseas formation that was deployed to Hanover, Germany, in November 1951.”

Devlin was promoted to Captain in June 1954, and appointed Acting Company Commander for Headquarters Company. In March 1955, he was appointed Transport Officer when the new Headquarters Company commander reported for duty from Canada, and he returned to Canada in October 1955, with 2RCR.

The Vietnam War era soon followed, and in January 1956, Devlin was posted to Indo-china as part of the International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC) following the departure of the French from Vietnam. He arrived in February, and served in various places in North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos until his return to Canada in February 1957.

Eric's memories of that time include patrols of the Lào Cai Chinese border. “Our group included two Polish and two Indian officers, and we were given bicycles and an interpreter. I had done lots of training on bicycles, and was very fit, so it wasn't long before the other team members complained to our superiors that they couldn't keep up. The result was that they took away the bikes and issued us some scruffy and headstrong ponies instead,” he says.

In 1957 Eric was posted to a staff position in Ottawa with Instructional Staff for Militia and then to Army Headquarters (AHQ) in June 1960. The Perth Courier of May 23, 1957 noted, “Ideal weather conditions prevailed for the annual Cadet inspection of the Perth Collegiate Cadet Corps and girls, on Thursday afternoon of last week. About 300 were on parade and again they were complimented for their splendid display by the inspecting officer Capt. Eric H. Devlin.”

Service in AHQ included personnel and training staff positions with a five-week posting in Germany for the Brigade Rotation to Canada in 1966, until he was released from the Canadian Forces in March 1969 due to age factor.

In May 1969, Eric again entered military service, when he was called out for Class “B” special duty with the rank of Major. He organized and participated in Canadian Forces Small Arms Competitions at Connaught Ranges, Ottawa, for 15 years and continued there with the Dominion of Canadian Rifle Association Control Staff until the mid-nineties.

Military decorations include: Canadian Volunteer Service Medal, War Medal 1939-45, Korea Medal, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal (Korea), Special Service Medal, (NATO/OTAN), Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal, United Nations Service Medal (Korea), ICSC (Indo-China), Canadian Forces Decoration with three bars, and several Canadian commemorative medals.

Well known to Legion members across the country, Eric has been a member of Perth-Upon-Tay, Branch 244 since 1965. He has served in various executive positions for most of those years, including his current fifth term as president. He was Branch Parade Marshal for almost 30 years, and continues to organize Remembrance Day ceremonies. A Life Membership was awarded in 1994, and he was named Branch 244 Legionnaire of the Year for 1999. He was awarded the highest Legion medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, in 2005, and the accompanying Palm Leaf in 2010.

Other veterans' groups include: The Royal Canadian Regiment Association, the Korea Veterans Association of Canada, and the Armed Forces Pensioners Association. He is also associated with 42nd Pipes and Drums Heritage Band of Perth and District and served as Drum Major for several years.

Cadet Organizations such as Rideau Wing No. 443, Air Force Association of Canada and 585 Rideau Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Cadets have benefitted from Eric's leadership for many years, and in May, 2001 he was appointed a Director with the Air Cadet League of Canada, Ontario Provincial Committee, and completed 35 years' service.

Eric was a Councilor of the Town of Perth from 1988 until 2010, and served on many committees over the years. He was appointed Deputy Reeve for the Town in July, 1993, and served on the Lanark County council until November, 1994. He continues to serve as a member of Recreation Advisory Panel and McMartin House Seniors Committees for the Town.

He has worked with many local charities, and also with the Perth Minor Hockey Association. One of the most important honours bestowed came with being named "Senior Citizen of the Year for the Corporation of the Town of Perth" on August 10, 1999.



So you have seen some of the athlete, the veteran, the politician, and the active citizen. Eric Devlin continues to keep on giving, and to enjoy life with his wife Marilyn, five children, and six grandchildren.