Decades of Dedication

After 25 years in the U.S. Army and 30 years working for a state agricultural department, this retired veterinarian relaxes and remembers.

The proverbial farm boy walked a mile to a one-room school in the snow. Independence Village resident Dr. Ron Anderson actually made that kind of trek in a Depression Era farming community near Halstad, Minn.—even in winter. “After 3rd grade, that school closed, and the town sent a bus to pick up the rural kids,” he says.

Small-town values and work for Future Farmers of America prepared him to work as a veterinarian, serving the military and the public in a long, varied career. Now Anderson, 84, lives in San Antonio and participates in golf and fitness at The Club at Sonterra, where Independence Village residents enjoy privileges.

An R.O.T.C. graduate at what’s now North Dakota State University, he married his wife, Jacquelin, just as he was commissioned as a U.S. Army 2nd lieutenant. He became an Army aviator and deployed to Germany in the mid-1950s as part of the occupying force. “I got to see all the castles close up [as I was] flying up and down the Rhine,” he says. Back in the U.S., on mission in Arizona, his unit helped with recovery efforts after two commercial airliners collided above the Grand Canyon in 1956, killing 128 people.

Anderson's agricultural roots called him out of the cockpit. He earned a doctorate in veterinary medicine and masters of public health at the University of Minnesota, then joined the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps. He directed and managed food safety, public health, and animal medicine programs in Italy, Thailand, Korea, and the U.S.—and even cared for a U.S. ambassador's Bengal tiger cubs Burma.

He and Jacquelin had a son and a daughter, and after 25 military years, he retired as a colonel. Anderson moved the next day to Reno, Nevada, to work as the state epidemiologist at the Nevada Department of Agriculture. Involved with state and federal animal health programs, his major focus was helping to eradicate brucellosis, a disease in cattle. He also developed a state-wide dog bite prevention program. Following Hurricane Andrew, he helped pioneer the nationwide Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams (VMATS) program, still in use today. “After Andrew, we learned not all emergency responders were prepared to deal with the animals,” he says.

Now a widow, Anderson moved to San Antonio to be near his daughter and grandkids. He recently attended a 100th anniversary celebration for the Army Veterinary Corps at Fort Sam Houston. In a way, it felt like a celebration of the work he’s done in his long life, as well.