

The Communicator

A newsletter by and for AFFSC members

Vol II, Edition 1

Winter 2002

Happy New Year to all

Editors ramble

by David Smith

An explanation. Your newsletter will be produced three times a year with a winter, summer and fall edition. This gives us time between runs to seek stories that we all know are out there.

I am very happy to report that a number of AFFSC members have submitted articles for publication. Who would argue that our group has great tales to take us back in time. Some of course, are probably best left untold but there are stories which would be a crime to keep buried. This edition, which contains nothing but our stories, will reflect that.

Readers will note that space requires a serialization of some submissions so keep your membership active and watch for successive editions and enjoy. Read on.

Memories of Paris - Part I

by George Levasseur

When I left for Paris in 1961, I had decided to bring my skates with me although people back here told me there were not many places to skate in Paris at that time. But loving the sport and loving to play hockey I brought my skates just in case. One winters

evening, a friend of mine and myself decided to go and check out the only public skating arena in town. We were able to skate that night and returned many times after that. One evening after buying our tickets and going through the gate, an elderly gentleman who was collecting the tickets began a conversation with us. He most likely had watched the skating "style" of both of us and went on to ask me if I played hockey and if so, would I be interested in playing. Needless to say, I replied YES. He instructed me to come to the arena the coming Wednesday. When the day arrived he introduced me to the hockey coach of the French Gendarmerie. While chatting, we got to know each other and he went on to tell me that they were part of the local league involving teams like the Racing Club de France, the Gendarmerie, The Metro and so on. He also explained that under their rules they were allowed to have some imports. It turns out they were anxious to find someone to show them a few tricks of the trade. In those days, the French were not great hockey players!

I quickly accepted the challenge, put on my skates and practiced with them that first night. While driving back home, I was thinking to myself, "This is not real. Me in Paris, 8 million Parisians, one arena, and I have the privilege of having ice time 2 hours every week to play hockey." This is something we didn't even get in Canada unless we wanted

to play at 4 in the morning! Well a few weeks went by and over a beer together with the "boys", I suggested to the coach that I could possibly bring more "Canadians". I explained that rather than splitting their team and playing friendly games with the same guys all the time, they would benefit more if I could form one whole line with a goalie and we then could play against each other. He just loved that one but warned me that we had to restrict the amount of players.

I quickly went to ask other Canadians and form a "one line" team. That first line, if my memory serves me right, included Bob Belter, a registry clerk as goalie, myself, Gerry Spenard, Marcel Seguin, Barry Kimball, Ron Wensell, Henri Fluet and a chap in the admin office by the name of Moe Routhier. One problem was a shortage of hockey equipment so we decided to get our own. But how?

I had a friend at the Embassy, the Sargeant who worked in the Military Attache's office who put me in contact with a Flight Lt Zink at Marville, France. I drove over there with a friend to find out what he could do for us. We got there in the morning spoke with him and told him what we wanted. He was more than ready to help. After some research by FL Zink, he called us into his office to tell us that in Marville there was little equipment to give us, but, if I was ready to go to Zweibrocken in

Germany, there would be some equipment for us there. This was, if I recall, 2:30 pm in the afternoon. We took off immediately for Germany to the base in Zweibrocken. When we got there it was late and the sports people at the arena had gone home but word had been left at the base gate that we were coming and to take care of us. The guard at the gate sent us over to the officers mess and (I forget his name) asked us if we could stay overnight to which we agreed but explained we had no German marks or American money. For him, this was not a problem. To make a long story short, they issued us blankets, pillows etc and we stayed at the base. We were well fed and we were even treated to a free movie that night.

Next morning we met the officer in charge of sports at the arena who brought us into a stock room with all kinds of hockey equipment. Again to make a long story short. I left the base with my trunk and back seat of the car full of hockey equipment - enough for 15 players. Sweaters, pants, stocking, garter belts, cups, etc.....all brand new.....and a total outfit for a goalie. The only thing we didn't get were gloves as their stock was too low. However, Lt. Zink had told me that if in the future we required anything from Canada regarding hockey equipment, we could order them direct from Canada (having given me all the catalogues) and have the companies address the shipment to "Base Commander Marville" via Trenton Ont. I would do that occasionally and the shipment would arrive in Marville via the weekly military Boeing and then was shipped to the Embassy via the military courier who used to handle mail between Military attache and Marville and Metz.

End of Part I

The Barley Mow

by Bob Hutchins

It is rather ironic that your CM Lime Nights are at the Barley Mow in Ottawa.

Trivia: With roughly 20 CM positions in London during the 70's and 80's, any CM passing through London could pop in to the Barley Mow here and be almost certain to find at least one fellow CM there. There is an off track betting office next door and we used to place our bets there on the thoroughbreds and jumpers and then head into the Barley Mow to grab a Pinta and watch the race on TV. What is even worse, we used to do this during working hours - (blush).



The other Barley Mow

The Gun in Guyana

by D.G. (Dave) Morton

One story that comes to mind is that of my gunslinger period in Georgetown. I lived in a non-air-conditioned third story flat that was cooled by the ocean breezes. The only drawback to that was a family of owls that chose a nesting site outside my bedroom window and insisted on asking "Who" all night long. My response to their question was to have a CO2 pistol sent

from home. The end result was no owls and a new toy !

One evening a bunch of the boys from the Corps Diplomatie were having a few pops at my flat and admiring my toy. We decided to test its accuracy by shooting at a street light from my balcony. Despite many shots and lots of comment on shooting ability, we were unable to extinguish the street light.

When my guests departed, I stuck the pistol in my belt and went downstairs to bid them good night. As we were standing by the side of road, someone challenged me to see if I could hit the light from where I was standing. My hand was a blur as I drew and fired one shot, and the street light disintegrated.

Amid the expressions of awe and congratulations from my friends there came the sounds of outrage from the house next door. Unfortunately, I had forgotten that the Managing Director of the Guyana Electricity Commission lived there and that he and his family had witnessed the event and were less than thrilled by my marksmanship. When I told my companions who it was that was making all the noise, the speed of their departure led to the analogy of rats abandoning sinking ships.

In the end, a phone call to the next door neighbour pleading guilty, begging forgiveness for my sin and promising to pay for the restoration of the street light kept me from becoming an international incident. The final word on the subject went to my boss, Glen Buick, who strongly suggested that I "hang up my gun".

Editors Note:

A special thanks to all contributors

Remembering Kuwait - Part I

by Brian Friebe (Op 152)

I was recently contacted by Dave Smith and asked to put down some memories from our time as hostages to the Iraqis in Kuwait. I thought this would be a good time to get down on paper some of the events and experiences we went through during those days from August 2nd 1990 to December 9th 1990.

I won't go into a long-winded explanation of how we got there, but will just say that we were posted to the Canadian Embassy in Kuwait city at the time the Iraqis invaded. The invasion started for me about 0500 Saturday morning August 2nd 1990. We were sleeping in our apartment overlooking the picturesque Persian Gulf, when the phone rang. The immigration officer in charge of the embassy at the time was on the line. The Iraqis have invaded quote he, rather in a state of excitement. Yea yea Bill quote I.

Just as I said that, the most god-awful explosion took place just slightly north of my digs, getting my attention, big time, and making me a believer.

It was suggested by our glorious leader that it would be a good idea if I would get out of the sack, and proceed with my wife to the embassy, as it might be a good idea if we let Ottawa know that Saddam had pulled a nasty and we were in danger of becoming martyrs.

My wife and I loaded into my trusty old second hand Beamer and made haste to the embassy. The trip down as I recall was uneventful, and other than a few loud explosions that we could not see but could hear, there was nothing much happening. Arriving at the embassy we immediately made our way to the roof of the four-story building to see what was going on. It looked a bit like a war movie. Helicopters buzzing around, jet planes zooming up and down the coast,

Shells landing in the city with great puffs of smoke and dust.

About that time I was pretty sure that the war was on, so I opened my trusty comcenter and proceeded to try and make contact with Ottawa. As I recall at the time we had a full speed dedicated circuit with Ottawa. I managed to let them know that things weren't all that great in sunny Kuwait. The circuit to Ottawa lasted for a very short time. The bad guys put a round through the local PTT office and that shut down our direct communications with Ottawa. I was able to raise Saudi Arabia on the telex and had them for about two days then they cut the international telex lines and that was it. The communicator to Kuwait was out of business. I did have a small hand-held VHF set that I could use to communicate with the USA embassy guards and that was it. We did manage to get some phone circuits working but they were limited only to local areas and the number of areas in the city we could talk to was greatly restricted. So with that, our first few days of captivity came to an end.

About August 3 or 4th 1990, all the members of the Canadian embassy that were in Kuwait at the time had gathered at the embassy, and were making arrangements to live there until this thing got sorted out. The Canadian embassy building in Kuwait city was a three story building with a basement. It had originally been designed as a small apartment building, but had been purchased and converted by the Canadian govt. into an office building. There were no arrangements for overnight accommodation. There were however the usual couches, easy chairs and the like that go along with the average office building. These were all converted into sleeping arrangements and the cushions were laid out as mattresses. As I recall everyone made their own sleeping arrangements, and pretty much slept wherever they felt they could be the most comfortable. I

slept on the third floor in the comcenter, because that is where the VHF radio was.

The Americans had asked me if I would stay in contact with them hourly. It was just an on the hour radio check. They were very worried that their embassy was going to be overrun. As it turned out the embassy was never overrun, and the hourly radio checks ended in about three or four days.

The number of people that were staying in the embassy between August 4th and August 20th was about ten. There was, the 2nd secty immig, 2nd secty trade and his wife, admin officer and wife, ambassadors secty, Canadian based secty, with her boyfriend (who as fate would have it was a Brit), and myself and my wife. As you can see from this list, all the high priced help and decision makers happened to be absent from Kuwait at this time, it being the height of the hot season and the best time to take vacation. This in my mind was a god-send. Had that lot been there, the outcome of this whole thing would no doubt have been very different.

From August 2nd to about August 20th, we were pretty much able to travel to and from the embassy building. We decided during this period to stock up the embassy as much as possible with drinking water and food. These supplies were gathered up from the apartments and accommodations of the Canadian based staff and stored in the embassy. We managed to get a good supply of rice, bottled water, and it will never cease to amaze me how many people eat canned tuna fish!

As I could no longer communicate with our headquarters, due to our unserviceable equipment, we found out that the Danish embassy was still on the air with their radio to Copenhagen. We made arrangements to forward our traffic through them. This meant carrying the traffic to the Danish embassy, punching it up, and transmitting it to Copenhagen via their

working radio link. This worked well, but it put a tremendous extra load on the Danes, whose staff had been cut to the Ambassador, 1st secty, and a Danish based steno. I mentioned to them that I would be available to work their communication eqpt if they could get permission from Copenhagen for me to do so. The ambassador shot a message off to Copen requesting permission for me to work in their comcenter and the answer in the affirmative came back virtually within the hour. It never failed to amaze me at the speed in which some organizations work. Had that been us trying to get permission for a Dane to enter our comcenter it probably would have taken an act of parliament and a month and a half delay just to say maybe.

So there I was, an assistant Danish communicator. It was truly great working with these people, and to this day feel a deep sense of gratitude for the help they gave us. Their ambassador was great. He had a cute little Volkswagen bug convertible that he liked very much. It was his intention to drive this bug to Baghdad when the time came for him to close his embassy. About this time, I would say it would be around August 13th or 14th, the Iraqis were putting the embassies under a lot of pressure to close. There was also a lot of shooting going on. Every night they would open up with machine guns and tracer bullets would be flying all over the place. I have no idea what they were shooting at, as the Kuwaiti army had long since thrown in the towel. The morning of the 14th I had trucked our traffic over to the Danes to start my day in their comcenter, and came across the ambassador in the garden standing beside his beloved bug. To say he was a bit upset would be an understatement. He called me over and said, look at that.

Right in the middle of the windshield of this cute little bug, there were three really neat bullet holes! His first priority for the day was to send his driver out into war torn Kuwait to find a

new windshield for his bug. This being done he got a message off to Copenhagen to say that he had enough and it was time for him to close the embassy and leave for Baghdad, which he did about two days later.

The day before the Danes were due to close their embassy, I sent off my Knobstick message to Ottawa. I informed them that we were going to be without communications, and things were not good. That night I went back to the embassy, rooted through my safe for my *How to Destroy* book, gave it a bit of read, then with great glee proceeded to beat the living bejeezus out of my cipher equipment with the handy dandy smash kit that the govt supplied every mission. After having done that I adjourned for cocktail hour and had a pleasant evening. The next morning I made one last trip to the Danes to pick up any traffic that may have come in overnight. Sure enough Ottawa said wait 12 hours & ya rite.

So with that I was once again an unemployed communicator. I returned to our embassy and began to prepare for the next chapter in the siege.

End of Part I

Double Encryption

by Jon Livingston

Jim Fannings' well written piece on Delhi from the last newsletter has triggered a memory or two of my own . . .

It was Joe MacPherson that first introduced me to the wonders of the Jama Masjid Junk Market; perhaps best described as an Indian version of Portobello Road. On one memorable visit we were astonished to discover an old Typex machine lying on the side of a large heap of scrap metal. Seen in the bright sunlight, it looked to be in

4 better condition than the ones we were using at the time! Let me explain.

You may recall the role Canada's military played, along with India and Poland, on the International Control Commission (ICC), during the war in Vietnam. For a relatively short period in the mid Sixties, Canadian ICC traffic from Indo-China was encrypted on Typex machines and relayed to Delhi in Morse code by the Indian Army. Each evening an Indian soldier would roll up to the High Commission on a huge 4Rajadoot motorcycle and deliver a thick sheaf of fools-cap size paper containing our daily cypher traffic. These hand-written groupers, single-spaced and with no readily discernable blocks, became a real challenge to our skill as Communicators.

In copying what must have seemed like endless transmissions, the Morse operators had devised a number of creative ways to relieve their boredom. For example, it was not uncommon to find the groups had been copied in columns instead of rows. As another example, they would, - after apparently having lost their signal - begin the message again, and without missing a beat, bury starting indicators and all in the middle of the existing cypher text. Adding dummy characters and groups were also a specialty.

At worst a message would be a non-starter. At best, the finished product would be littered with the caveat (Groups Corrupt), re-encrypted in Rockex, and relayed to Ottawa as received. (A ZDK would take 24 hours and this stuff was invariably priority traffic.) The system must have been fairly secure though. I mean, considering the number of times that even we couldn't break the damn things!

Next edition:

Part II s and more stories e.g.

Rambling in Rio , - a fascinating account of a hijacking by Leigh Shankland