

# The “Communicator”

A newsletter by and for AFFSC members

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## Editors Ramble

By David Smith

The summer of 2002 is almost behind us and I for one will miss those warm and sunny days those of us in this part of the country enjoyed. The arrival of fall reminds me it is time for another CM newsletter and this edition will continue with serials of previous stories. I thank all of you who have taken the time to share your memories with us. I assure you that all readers enjoy these "tales from the past". Who is better positioned than former CM's to have an endless supply of experiences given our own unique background.

A special note: T.E. (Buck) Arbuckle has written a wonderful article which will soon grace the pages of our newsletter. It is a special piece so stay tuned, keep your memberships up-to-date and continue to enjoy these submissions by your former colleagues and friends.  
*Your editor.*

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## Rambling thru Rio Part II

By Leigh Shankland

A footnote: In the months following, a number of USA Diplomatic Couriers who, having heard I had been hijacked wanted, over a few drinks in Vienna, a 'blow by blow' account of what had taken place. On hearing about the disappointment of the hijackers that I was a Canadian not an American Diplomatic Courier my US colleagues stated if they should find themselves in a similar fix they were opting to become "instant" members of the Canadian Diplomatic Courier Service.

On receiving the news of my nationality the hijacker lost interest in me and the diplomatic bag and in a loud voice shouted a series orders (of which I understood not one word) to the passengers. I was again taken by surprise when the door to the cockpit of the aircraft opened and out stepped "Mr. Plaster Cast" - minus the cast! In the excitement of having a pistol waved about my face I had not even noticed his seat, across from mine, was vacant.

It was only after the days events were over that I learned the "baby" the female had been carrying was actually hand grenades and a small revolver. The other hijackers cast had contained two small handguns.

The door to the cockpit was left open and there was much chatter emitting from the cockpit radios. Over the next minutes it became apparent the aircraft had been taken over by four hijackers- one female and three males. All appeared to be in their early twenties and all were armed.

Once the passengers, including yours truly, had overcome our initial shock we settled back in our seats to await the next chapter. I spent a couple of minutes checking out the telephone numbers of our Havana Embassy from the contact list all Diplomatic Couriers carried. This proved unnecessary. Within a half-hour we started to descend and a short time later the aircraft landed and taxied toward a parking bay at Rio airport. From the military aircraft passed while taxiing we appeared to be heading toward the military section of Rio airport. This was confirmed as on arrival at our isolated parking area the aircraft engines were shut down the aircraft was immediately surrounded by light armoured vehicles and heavily armed military.

The next couple of hours passed uneventfully other than the increasing heat - no airconditioning unit or any other equipment were allowed near the aircraft. The hijackers had ordered all window shades closed and consequently under the noonday sun the situation in the aircraft soon became similar to being inside a tin cigar container under a heat lamp. The hijackers did allow food and beverages to be served to the passengers and from what I could see the fact that we had been hijacked did not inhibit the appetite of my fellow captives. Some of them became quite jolly and they actually sang songs and a couple performed skits. Though I understood not a word of what they were singing or talking about I thought it most admirable of them considering their situation.

I should mention that the hijackers had taken possession of my diplomatic bag and, with the exception of myself and the flight attendants, moved all the other passengers to the rear seats of the aircraft (the flight had been only half full). Because of this I could still listen in, for what it was worth, on the radio conversations in the cockpit. This became rather disconcerting at one point when I distinctly heard the words 'Courier Diplomatico' in one conversation. One of the hijackers manning the radios answered and then he and the other hijacker at the front of the aircraft broke into laughter. I queried the (fortunately) English speaking member of the flight crew sitting beside as to what had been said. Apparently the Canadian Ambassador had 'demanded in the 'name of the Canadian Government' that the Canadian Diplomatic Courier be released. The reply from the hijackers was that the only way I would be released (if their demands were not met) would be after

being shot dead my body would be dumped on the tarmac.

I have always felt that our Ambassador handled this very poorly and put my life in danger. After all, what if I had managed to have kept the fact that I was a Diplomatic Courier from the hijackers? His request would have certainly blown my 'cover'. Though the window shades had been closed it was possible to occasionally open them slightly to see what was going on outside. I noticed at one point that the troops and officials surrounding the aircraft were enjoy a box lunch repast. Half an hour later, around 1430, I again 'sneaked a peek' and noticed the troops had now finished their lunches and were putting on their helmets and checking their gear. I felt if something was going to happen it would not be long before it commenced.

Within minutes my 'hunch' was borne out as suddenly the ventilation system on the aircraft activated and what appeared to be fresh air started to pour out of the 'punchah louveres' above the passenger seats. There were shouts of glee from most of the passengers and many of them leapt up to get closer to this 'fresh air'. I knew something was amiss as the flight crew sitting around me immediately dove down to the cabin floor under the seats. It only took seconds for me to realize (having had the good fortune to having gone through ABC training while serving in the Royal Canadian Navy) that what was coming from the ventilation system was not fresh air but tear gas! The other passengers to their dismay were now realizing this as well. Simultaneously with the introduction of the tear gas there was a loud pounding on the outer surface of the aircraft and it became quite dark inside. The tear gas and the lack of visibility combined with shouts, screams as well as gunfire from the hijackers contributed to the surreal situation we were all in. Suddenly the emergency exits as well as the front door of the aircraft burst inwards. The intensity of the gunfire in and out of the aircraft increased

considerably. It is amazing how one's survival instinct kicks in when you realize that within seconds you could be shot. Fortunately I also recalled from my RCN days and the tear gas school someone mentioning that a wet cloth over the eyes and nose slowed down the effects of the tear gas. Because of this I had grabbed one of the head rest doilies from the back of my seat, spit upon it and put it over my eyes. This gave me a bit more 'reaction time' than I would have had if I had gulped down a few mouthfuls of tear gas.

As soon as the window exits doors imploded inwards I made my move- I jumped to the right-hand window exit fully intending to dive through onto the wing of the aircraft. Keep in mind the aircraft type was a 'Caravelle' and the wing was only two or three feet below the exit, As well, I was a lot more agile than I am now. Just as I was about to dive through the window exit I noticed one of the military personnel at the end of the wing. He raised what I thought was a sub-machine gun and pointed it at me. Time stood still until I was hit a blow in the chest. Not only did this blow knock me back onto the floor of the aircraft it tore the black wrist pouch (which Diplomatic Couriers of the day were issued to keep their passports, tickets, and other documents in) from my wrist. I should add, by the way, that I was not at all concerned at this time as to the whereabouts and security of my diplomatic pouch which the hijackers had relieved me of earlier. It took me a couple of minutes to realize I had not been shot but I had been hit by high pressure foam coming from a hose held in the hands of the military trooper at the end of the aircraft wing. The same yellowish tear gas smelling foam that I was soaked with had also been used to blacken the windows of the aircraft and blow in the emergency exits and doors.

My reverie on the floor was disturbed by a couple of yelling people running over me and crashed up and down the aisle. By this

time the visibility inside the aircraft had improved considerably and I could see the window exit opposite to the one I had attempted to escape from was free. I jumped up and dove through the window exit. I landed on the wing and immediately jumped the five or six feet from the wing to the ground. I hadn't ran more than ten or fifteen feet away from the aircraft when I was knocked flat by a large body. It turned out to be one of the security personnel involved in the rescue operation. I hollered (several times) in my newly acquired impeccable Portuguese 'Courier Diplomatic' to no avail. I was unceremoniously dragged away from the aircraft and thrown through the wide rear door onto a passenger bus parked nearby.

While catching my breath I noticed I was alone on this bus and had a birds eye view of events occurring around the foam covered aircraft. There were armed military personnel on top and under the plane all of whom seemed to be shooting into the aircraft. This confirmed to me that my decision to leave had been correct. Five minutes later passengers started to jump down, some injuring themselves, from the aircraft and were taken hurriedly taken away by security personnel and loaded on buses or ambulances. I was joined in my bus by several passengers in various states of disarray and reeking of tear gas and foam. As the situation on the aircraft improved a set of stairs was rolled up to the front exit which allowed the remaining passengers to disembark. I again attempted to identify myself to one of the security personnel on the bus with us and asked him to allow me to retrieve my diplomatic bag. He looked at me blankly and I realized what I was saying was meaningless and of no importance to him. The bus had just started to depart the scene when it suddenly stopped and a unconscious young male, with a severe head wound was thrown aboard. His appearance amongst us caused

some of my fellow passengers to react violently and they started to swear and kick him. Apparently the young male was one of the hijackers and once the security personnel realized this he was grabbed by the feet and dragged, his head bouncing down the stairs, from the bus. The bus then set off for what I assumed would be the terminal arrival area and I would then be able to retrieve my diplomatic pouch and make contact with our embassy personnel. Events over the next few hours proved my optimism to be unfounded.

### *End of Part II*

## **Remembering Kuwait Part III**

*By Brian Friebe*

After the closure of the Danish embassy, our only form of communication was through the American embassy. We had a land-line telephone link with them, and they had a satellite hook up with the States. We would phone them, and they would relay through Washington to Ottawa. Not the most ideal of situations. Anyway most of the traffic that we were generating was the disposition of Canadians in Kuwait, and we had just about completed this while we still had a link through the Danes. We were letting their families in Canada know what their situation was, and if they were being evacuated, and by what means. Most Canadians were flown out via Baghdad, but some including much of the embassy's locally engaged staff planned to drive their personal vehicles through Iraq to Jordan, and from there they would make their way to their respective homes.

Most of the work being done between about August 15 and August 20 was the destruction of documents, and the stocking of the embassy with food and water. We had managed to get a gas stove and two or three bottles of propane. This was moved to the conference room on the second floor of the embassy, and a makeshift kitchen/dining room was established there. We also managed to get a small auxiliary generator. This was a 1200 watt single cylinder Roberts diesel. One of the locally engaged staff managed to get this for us, and I will be forever grateful to her for this.

One thing that stands out in my mind from this period was an incident that I'm sure no one else took any great notice of, but for me is forever etched in my memory. The 1st Secty trade and myself were in the driveway of the embassy; we had two forty-five gallon drums that we were using to burn classified documents. It was about five o'clock in the evening of an August day in Kuwait City, and the temperature had been in the high forty's. We had been out there most of the afternoon and the heat had been intense. Both of us were sitting on the ground with our backs to a cement wall, watching the embassy's classified documents go up in smoke, and I said jokingly, "wouldn't a beer go good now?" "This being Kuwait and a very dry country to my mind I was just dreaming. Michel who I had been working with said, "wait a sec", and off he went into the embassy building. Moments later he was back with two ice-cold Amstel beers. Where he got them, I have no idea, but seeing those two green bottles with condensation running down the sides and a little foam showing at the mouth of the bottle was almost enough to bring a tear to the eye. Far and away the best beer I have ever had. My respect for the trade section was boosted, and I never did find out where they managed to get two real beers in Kuwait.

The Canadian based staff that was about to be evacuated were collecting private personal objects from their residences and moving them to the embassy. I had made arrangements to store these in the comcenter vault and to label them with the name of the owners. I think this was a factor in saving a lot of personally important things like photographs, family heirlooms, and valuables for the Canadian based staff. The comcenter vault was never broken into, but most residences were looted and vandalized.

There were a number of Canadians in Kuwait at this time that chose to stay for personal or business reasons. Some of these were forced to leave their normal residences for one reason or another, and as the ambassador's residence was unoccupied it was felt that it would be safer to have it occupied by these people rather than leaving it empty and unguarded. There were about five or six Canadians living at the residence.

One of these was an oilfield-worker from Alberta, who had been on a British Airways flight from London to New Delhi. The flight had been scheduled to stop in Kuwait for a 50-minute refueling. Just about the time it touched down the Iraqis captured the airport, and this gentleman became a guest of the Canadian embassy. He stayed in Kuwait until the foreign residents were allowed to leave in December. The British passengers were interned by the Iraqis, and the Boeing 747 that they arrived on was burned to a crisp on the tarmac of Kuwait international airport.

During this period we had a visit from Baghdad by one of the Canadian embassy Baghdad's finest. When we got word that this "bright spark" was arriving, hope rose that he would bring some form of communication or other help for embassy Kuwait. As it turned out this visit was really nothing more than a bit of an adventure for this guy, and all he seemed to be interested in was checking on the silverware at the ambassadors residence, and to see how much computer equipment he could drag back to Baghdad from the embassy in Kuwait.

I will relate a couple of other things that come to mind from this period. It was a time when the city had just been occupied, and the Iraqi army had not got organized enough to stop or restrict our movements. We could pretty much get a vehicle and go anywhere we wanted in Kuwait city. We took advantage of this to check on what was going on, and to gather things that would be needed when and if we were ever forced to stay in the embassy building. (At this time we did not know what the Iraqis had in mind and the stocking of the embassy was more of a contingency plan.). I was off on one of these little tours around the city with one of the embassy drivers. We had just turned on to one of the ring roads which circle Kuwait city. At the time we were there, there were six ring roads starting with number one ring road in downtown Kuwait, and working its way up to number six ring road which covered the outer perimeter of Kuwait city. As I recall we were about to turn onto the fifth ring road when we came face to face with five Iraqi tanks. The tanks were all buttoned up, their hatches were closed and they were on the shoulder of the road facing us, but with their turrets pointing across the road at

what was a conference center complex in the southern section of the city. Just as we got passed, these five T72's opened up on this conference center. I don't think there was anyone in the complex, but the Iraqi army seemed to be under orders to destroy anything that belonged to the ruling family of Kuwait. Anyway, when one has five tanks suddenly open with their big guns right behind you, I can assure you all that it is nearly enough to make one mess ones step-ins. Both the driver and myself thought it would be a good time to get as much distance as possible between us, and those tanks. Which we did!! Further down the fifth ring road we came under an overpass, and in the shade of this overpass, I counted 19 bodies. They were all lined up in the shade wrapped in sheets, blankets, or tamps. What sticks in my mind is that there was a pair of feet sticking out of what looked like a stripped blanket. There was one very white foot, and a black boot on the other. What I wonder about is the story behind how this guy lost his boot, which of course I will never know. What we learned later was that there were points where bodies were collected, and then moved to the Kuwait skating rink, which was being used as a mortuary. No doubt the coldest place in town at the time.

On a lighter note, back at the embassy we had a problem. Our Canadian based secretary's boyfriend was British, and it was common knowledge by this time that the Iraqis were rounding up the British to use them as a sort of "human shield" in strategic areas. Anyway what was decided was that we would hold a wedding for the secretary and her boyfriend, and then issue him a Canadian passport, we hoped at the time the Iraqis would buy this and he would be able to evacuate to Baghdad with the secretary. Bill Bowden our immigration officer, and ranking officer at the embassy was to act as the officiating clergy and marry these two. The whole thing was quite festive with flowers made from available paper and the bride and groom dressed in their very best clothes for the occasion. I do not remember too much of the actual ceremony, but I do recall that there was quite a good reception after. This whole scheme worked and bride and groom were safely evacuated to Baghdad.

The Canadian based staff at the embassy in Kuwait was told to downsize, and the last

evacuation flight out of Kuwait was August the 20th. The flight was from Kuwait to Baghdad, and because the Canadian government had refused to recognize that Kuwait was now the 19th province of Iraq the Canadians evacuated from Kuwait that were members of the embassy were not allowed to leave Iraq. All other Canadian nationals were allowed to leave the country. These were mostly women and children. A great many of the husbands had chosen to stay in Kuwait. The Canadians that chose to stay in Kuwait after the last evacuation flight performed some really heroic deeds as far as I am concerned. They were responsible for getting food and information to a large number of British and Americans citizens who had gone into hiding shortly after the Iraqi invasion.

After the six remaining members of the Embassy had been evacuated to Baghdad on the last flight out of Kuwait there were five of us left in the Embassy. I do not think these five people will mind if I use their names in the telling of the rest of this saga. The people left in the embassy were Bill Bowden (immigration officer and ranking officer), Ron and Sharon Waugh (Embassy administration officer), and my wife Louise (Min) and myself. The locally engaged staff had been leaving in ones and twos up to that point, and by the time the rest of the Canadians were evacuated on the 20th of August the embassy seemed very empty and lonely. We were left alone, and the first thing we did was go through the entire embassy to find things, that would be useful to us. We searched all the offices and gathered anything that would hold water, wastepaper baskets, bottles, and any cleaning pails we could find. We gathered all these up, and proceeded to fill them with water and store them in the entrance way to the immigration section. This was done because we were aware that the Iraqis had threatened to shut off the water and electricity to embassies that refused to close. One of the more important finds we made while sacking the embassy offices, was the ambassadors stash of humbugs (small hard brown and white stripped candies). This did not seem important at the time, but after about a month of eating rice, and tuna fish, to have one of those humbugs for dessert made the world of difference. I think we even managed to make that small jar of humbugs last almost as long as were locked in the embassy.

## *End of Part III*

### **The Mail Bag**

#### **Guy Nadon writes:**

“Perhaps you can mention in the next Communicator Newsletter that I now have another family after I retired ! We have a boy named: Mathieu Nadon Born 23 Sept 1996 and another boy named Nicolas Nadon Born 24 July 2000.

#### ***Well done Guy - you are an inspiration to us all ! Ed.***

A special thanks to Leigh and Brian for these fascinating experiences. Both are rather poignant, given the times we live in. Stay tuned for their next installments and Bucks article in the spring edition.

I am always on the prowl for newsletter articles. Don't be shy. Send them via email to me at: [drdee@sympatico.ca](mailto:drdee@sympatico.ca)

Go for it !  
*D. Smith*