

# The Communicator

A newsletter by and for AFFSC members

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## Editors ramble

by David Smith

Lucky people we are ! What other group has given themselves the opportunities to share the memories we experienced during all those years with External . Using the web site and this newsletter, we are now sharing our lives past and present with those with whom we shared such a common bond. Reading these stories serves to remind us that life was damn good and we are well-served to remind ourselves of that fact. These reminiscences accomplish that in spades. *Don't you agree?*

## Memories of Paris - Part II

by George Levasseur

I should include one additional part to this story. When returning to Paris from Zweibrocken Germany, we ran out of gas on the autobahn. It's dark, we have no German money, we can't speak German, we have no American dollars, basically we were in terrible shape. Not far from where we were, I noticed that we had just gone by an overpass so I walked over there while my friend stayed with the car. When I got to the overpass, there was a small country road running underneath and there were lights not far away. I went down the embankment and started to walk in the direction of the lights where I came to an old farmhouse, a typical German farm. Reaching the door, I could hear the people inside chatting away in German. A knock on the door brought an older lady who seemed rather stunned when she saw me. I used my limited German vocabulary, - Autobahn, - benzine. A man inside understood right away and after saying something to his wife, put on a jacket, came outside and got a jerry can which he filled with gas. With hand signals, I lead him to

where we were, all the while not saying a word. He climbed the embankment and saw our car, put the gas in the tank, extended his hand and.....left.

Back to hockey. The five of us played together until one night one of us, because of shift work, could not make it to the arena. We had a large list of spares so a new member would go and the week after, everyone went. Rather than say anything, we simply showed up with six players. This plan worked until the coach took me aside to explain that he had been told that this was not good. I asked why not.....he said that it had something to do with insurance.

Apparently, they were worried about someone getting hurt and the requirements of the league required us to pay insurance which we agreed to. People that played with us were the aforementioned plus other communicators and officers of the Embassy and consequently, we ended up having our own team. Moe Routhier who was one of the originals, used to reinforce the French national team . Their team often played against Liege in Belgium and would get beaten more than their share. The press used to interview the players in the dressing room and would pick on the one Canadian player, Moe Routhier. One day he approached me to suggest that we go over there and play them ourselves. We would be a totally Canadian hockey team which was hardly ever seen over there. Moe let the press know that he would soon come with a Canadian team to play the Belgian National team. The press were happy about that. Incidentally, we had given ourselves the name of "Les Professionnel le Canadien de Paris". Arrangements were made to go and play but we needed a Friday off. The Admin

officer at the time, Mr Courchesne, allowed us to leave by train on the Friday to go to Liege.

Well, needless to say that when we got to Liege, the beer salesman on the train had run dry !!! We arrived and much to our surprise, they made a big fuss of that hockey game. All the papers on Saturday morning had headlines about the famous game that night. We all got to feel what it is to be a hockey star ! They had built up this game to such a degree that we were constantly followed at the hotel by the press and beautiful gals. It was like being a member of the Montreal Canadiens ! We had never experienced anything like it I have never seen such enthusiasm from the crowd --- firecrackers, horns, --- better than two small Quebec towns competing against each other. It was great but .... WE LOST ! "No excuse" but perhaps it was the Beer !! When we showed up, we discovered they had called upon hockey players from Zoest Germany to come and re-enforce their team ! Yes, army lads, tough and ready to play.

All of those who remember this, will remember that it was a great time in Paris. Incidentally, we also played against the bases like Marville and Metz - an interdepartmental league for the 3 and some years I was over there. I'm sure there are others who share these memories.

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## RAMBLING THRU RIO Part 1

by Leigh Shankland

By the end of June 1970 I had been a Diplomatic Courier for six months - halfway through my year tour. I was having a great time, had run the gambit (silver, green, red, brown, jade and orange- as I recall) of the 1970 courier runs, and was looking forward to my second trip to Rio.

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On my June 30<sup>th</sup> arrival I was met by Gerry Langelier - himself starting a posting in Rio - having relieved Ron Kaiser six weeks or so earlier. After securing the diplo bags at the embassy (still located in Rio) Gerry and I repaired to Ipanema for a couple of drinks. I passed a very pleasant evening, watching the beautiful female Cariocas sauntering by in the setting sun.

After a short but sound sleep it was time to return to the airport and fly on to Sao Paulo and Montevideo, the next stops on my Latin American itinerary. At the airport the check-in on the Brazilian carrier Cruzeiro Do Sol proceeded normally. As I had only a small working bag I would be taking it aboard the aircraft with me. Even though two Brazilian aircraft hijackings had taken place in late 1969 (both, I later found out, involving the very aircraft I was now boarding) only very rudimentary airport security procedures were in place. Looking back it was quite laughable when compared to today's stringent airport security. A perfunctory body search, carried out by nonchalant security personnel, was performed on the passengers boarding the flight. Those ahead of me in the security line included a chap with a massive cast on his arm as well as a very pregnant lady. The expectant mother was not (for proprieties sake?) searched at all and the Casted Man only received a few minor pats by the security agent before he was allowed to board.

I took leave of my escort and boarded the aircraft - a French Caravelle. The aircraft was configured economy and was about two-thirds full. Tucking my small working bag beside me on my front row seat I buckled my seat belt and away we went. Once airborne I noticed, before catching a power nap, the seat on the opposite side of the first row was occupied by Mr plaster cast.

It seemed I had only shut my eyes when I became aware of some sort of

ruckus and shouting toward the rear of the aircraft. My eyes snapped open - to see a very frightened female flight attendant with a revolver pointed to her head. To my great surprise, the no longer expectant female who had been ahead of me in the security line was wielding the pistola. It took me five or ten seconds (a lifetime for a quick thinker like myself) to adjust to this change of circumstance. Assuming we were destined (which had been the case in the few previous Central and Latin America hijackings) for Havana I started contemplating about when we would reach Cuba and exactly how I would contact our embassy on arrival.

My thought process was interrupted by a question from the hijacker to the flight attendant. I had a funny feeling the query was concerning the red diplomatic bag laying on the seat beside me. My intuition proved correct when the Flight Attendant replied to the hijacker with the words Courier Diplomatic. I now had four words in my Portuguese vocabulary, - Chopá, Umbragado and Courier Diplomatic. There was no time to mentally congratulate myself on my newly acquired linguistic skills as the pistol wielder had a further one word question for the flight attendant. American she asked? I could discern disappointment on the hijacker's face to the Flight Attendants reply No, Canada.

#### End of Part I

**Where are they now?** - a new addition to the newsletter.

#### Merv McBride

I retired from External Affairs on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 1990. I had done my 35 years and my wife had just finished a year of chemotherapy and radiation treatment for breast cancer. It was time. Left New York and headed south to visit our daughter who lived in Norman, Oklahoma. Arrived back in Canada around the middle of January 1991 and started my actual retirement. I'm not sure how long that lasted until I heard my wife, Joyce, on the phone, saying "Yes, Merv has retired, but he still thinks he is a Supervisor!"

At that point I decided I was spending a way too much time in the house. Promptly got a job at the local Munster Hamlet Becker's store where I entertained customers for almost a year until I went to Newbridge Communications Networks as a Security Officer. Finding this to be quite a "brain dead" type of job I took an ICS correspondence course in "Animal Science".

So, on my off hours from Newbridge I volunteered to be an "Animal Cruelty Agent" for Lanark Animal Welfare Society" as well as working part-time for the Richmond Veterinary Clinic. Now I was truly busy.

Then, forever being restless, I wrote a competition for the Mailroom Supervisor at Newbridge which I won. Then, with my manager on maternity leave, I was in charge of the mailroom, receptionist and telephone operators. This meant that I was in charge of hiring, firing and training 13 young ladies just out of high school in entry level employment. I just know a lot of my colleagues from External would be saying "Wolf in the hen house" type of stuff - as I certainly did get that from the guys I had worked with in the Security office. Joking aside, I did find it very rewarding to provide guidance to a bunch of new employees who were on their very first job in their life. I even had the opportunity of hiring Paul Shannon's daughter, Laurie.

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I finally got tired of that after three years and retired once more.

Immediately after that I started making my own wine from concentrates and juices and found the hobby so much fun that I went out and got myself another part time job. I worked for Defalco's Brew on premise in Bells's corners for a few months before landing a job at the Almonte Winery. I stayed at the Almonte winery for three years until there was a personality conflict with the owner and I was "Fired" - or unceremoniously let go.

Also at this time it was discovered that Joyce's cancer had returned - this time in her right lung. So the new battle is on with that one. The prognosis is good and we are fighters.

The last year I was at the Almonte Winery we purchased a 30 foot, 1983 Class "A" Motor home from Luxury Motor Homes in Carleton Place. In September I was back to Luxury Motor Homes having my rig serviced for our up-coming trip to Oklahoma when the owner of the place called me into his office. It turned out, after about an hour of chit chat, that he wanted to hire me to take over as his "Service Writer". Like, duh, I know diddley squat about motors, and motor homes ... but he insisted. So, here I am at present - the Service guy at Luxury Motor Homes and learning loads of stuff once more.

So, as I am sure is the experience of a lot of my good friends and colleagues from External days - we have become an encyclopedia of knowledge and skills:

Farmer, Clerk, Communications operator, Locksmith, Security Officer, Mailroom Supervisor, Veterinary Assistant, Winemaker and Motor home service guy amongst a few of the tasks I have taken on.

Would love to hear what my friends have been up to since their retirement. **Merv.**

## Stars

*by Jim Fanning*

The laughter of children,  
The suddenness of Spring,  
Fond memory in an old man's eye,  
A well-worn wedding ring.

The dancing of the Northern Lights,  
The wind upon the sea,  
Comfort of an oft-read book,  
A cup of Ceylon tea.

The lights upon a Christmas tree,  
The scent of new-mown hay,  
Remembrance of an absent friend,  
The moon-path on the bay.

These stars I've used to mark my way  
Home, through soul-dark night:  
These memories that ensure I shall  
Always walk in light.

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## Remembering Kuwait - Part II

*by Brian Friebe*

After the closure of the Danish embassy, our only form of communication was through the American embassy. We had a landline 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 forties. 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 silver ware at the ambassador's 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 on to 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 T72s 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 tarps. 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.

## **End of Part II**

***If you are like me, I can't wait for the next installments of these great stories.***

***And if you enjoyed these tales, why not send an email to the authors telling them so.***

*Editor*