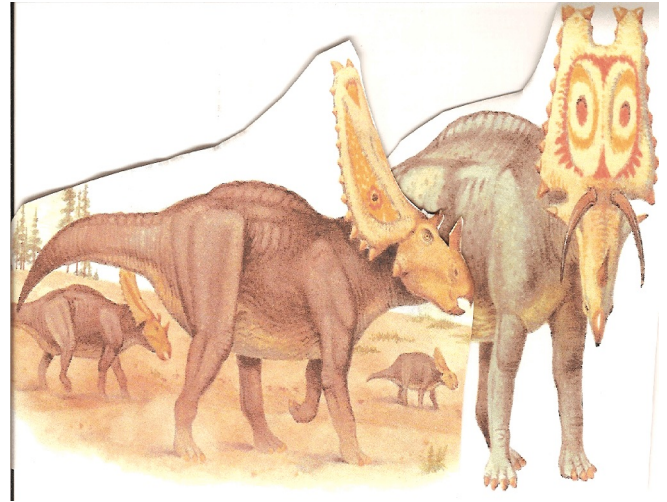


971 RCAF Air Marshal Slemon Wing

Air Force Association Newsletter

January 2007



Albertans visit a Colorado cousin - a little while ago
Chasmosaurus Pentaceratops
Late Cretaceous

Social Calendar

- Oct 28 It was another great party of Judy and Lew Lomas's as 43 of us can testify.
- Nov 11 It was a chilly morning, but we had a good turnout - over 60 from the Regular Force (the largest contingent there) and 18 retired Wing members. Darrell Levitt did his usual fine job as master of ceremonies. LGen Findley, never at a loss for words, was again the guest speaker, and our Padre Greenwood also officiated. Art Nielsen and Miles McMillan laid the wreath for the 971 Wing. Sam Swancutt was again the piper. After the ceremonies a number of us retired to the Retired Enlisted Club .
- Nov 19 Susan Lynch entertained 44 of us. Great food, great company, great host
- Dec 02 There were 21 Wing members in attendance at the CF Christmas Party at the Peterson AFB Enlisted Club. We enjoyed good food and drink along with pleasant company in a festive holiday environment. New members Peter & Susan Dunda joined us all the way from Gunnison. Bill Schick & Patti cut quite a swath on the dance floor. Larry Best won a contest for "The Most Festive Tie" (some people will do anything to get attention). Overall, it was truly a fun-filled evening.
- Jan 13 1730 at Yvonne and Gerry Robitaille's for our annual belated Christmas party. 7345 Buckeye Court, 260-9976. Take Woodmen Road west of I-25 to Buckeye Drive, then south and east to Buckeye Court. No gift exchange this year - but bring an item to donate to Silver Key.

SICK PARADE: 3 stalwarts bounce back:

Larry Berst: suffered a life-threatening heart dysfunction that demanded immediate attention. The operation was successful and the condition is unlikely to reoccur.

Bill Edwards: On 6 Nov had surgery for repair of three arteries leading to his heart. All went well and he is recovering nicely. He sends thanks for the scarf, candy and card delivered by Paul Ellis.

Peter Rallis; is looking hale and hearty after his August operation.

The Editor's Corner

THE FRENCH IN NORTH AMERICA - and all that: Recently unearthed in the suburbs of Quebec City are artifacts and remnants of **Charlesbourg-Royal** established by Jacques Cartier in 1541. It lasted two years. Next was the short-lived settlement at Port Royal, Nova Scotia, then the permanent settlement of Quebec in 1608, the same year that the British established Jamestown. Other than for cold winters, Geography favoured the French. While the British were confined by the Appalachians/Alleghenies to the eastern seaboard, the French had a highway via the St. Lawrence, Great Lakes, Mississippi, and Saskatchewan Rivers into the heart of the continent. For the benefit of her settlers, Britain went to considerable expense to conquer Canada in 1759 and at first, annoyed by the continued resistance of the 65,000 population, did burn numerous farmhouses along the St. Lawrence. It then relented under two successive governors who liked the French Canadians. It permitted Quebec to retain its language, customs, religion, and land including Ohio, Ontario, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and as far west as St. Louis. This irked a British officer, by the name of George Washington, who had hoped to acquire a very large section of land in Ohio. This was a main cause of the civil war that some call the American Revolution which, in the end, cost Quebec dearly as British settlers, who stole the name *Americans*, continued to eat away at French-Canadian and native lands. They also ate away at western Canada, taking the state of Washington from Canada (or the Hudson Bay Company), and huge swaths of land from Mexico.

In settling North America the British brought their families with them whereas the French and Spanish did not, so many French intermarried with natives which made them much better liked. But slow immigration from France, and Champlain's mistake in alienating the Iroquois, kept their numbers low while the British were multiplying east of the mountains and soon outnumbered the French ten to one.

The Quebec motto, *Je me souviens*, while remembering the greed of British settlers, should include gratitude to the British government that tried to allow a much greater French footprint in North America. After the loss of so much land the French Canadians went to, and won, the Battle of the Cradle, increasing their 65,000 to today's 8 million. Yet, now, they have one of the world's lowest birthrates which has triggered intense (annoying?) safeguards for the French language.

The British dominance over the French and Spanish in North America was due to more factors than the consolidation and build-up of a strong base east of the mountains. The British government took a much stronger interest in the welfare of their colonists especially George III who is often erroneously depicted otherwise. The Royal Navy gave needed protection. All this cost Britain many lives and huge expenses to which militant colonists objected contributing. France was more interested in furs, Spain in gold and silver, both in sugarcane and converting the natives.

The factors that give us the world we live in today are numerous and give rise to controversy. It is still interesting to try to imagine what might have been and would any of the other scenarios be better or worse? *Je ne sais pas*.

REVISIONISM: Nationalism, that taught history selectively, is giving way, in western nations at least, to more honest accounts and to self criticisms. Even Israelis have published books decrying their ethnic cleansing and forced evacuation of 800,000 Palestinians in 1948 (2006, Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, and 1988, Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*). Books abound by authors critical of their own countries including Canada, Germany, Israel, the UK, and the US. This was healthy until the pendulum swung far enough to embrace untruths. I have attacked trigger-happy friendly fire, the inhumane treatment of POWs, flimsy excuses for conflict, and various immoral military decisions. On the other hand I have written over 200 articles countering revisionists who make false claims to enhance their arguments, poison the views of younger generations, and slur our own good values. Why should Truth be so hard for so many to accept and so hidden by Untruths? The recent US elections are a prime example. Canadians and Britons criticize their elections as dull compared to the US, but at least they are over with in 6 weeks. In the US months of negative advertisements, lacking anything of substance, and costing a fortune, makes the voter convinced votes should go to the candidate who collects the most negative criticisms for, surely, that candidate must be doing something right. Such campaigning does shatter one's trust in politicians. Do we not deserve statesmen and stateswomen rather than politicians? And, we still need to exert some control over film makers. Sex and violence attract more movie-goers but Truth can be just as interesting if presented properly. The Canadian series *The Valour and the Horror* depicts brave boys at war led by repulsive leaders directing inhumane warfare. It contains dozens of falsehoods. Hollywood depicts Santa Anna's ragtime army of Mexican farmers at the Alamo as an elite army in magnificent uniforms. It often turns British and Canadian heroes into US heroes, ignoring the fact that the US has plenty of its own. *The Great Escape* contains 12 major inaccuracies. *The Search for Private Ryan* gave an honest view of war's horrors but left the impression that D-Day was solely a US-German confrontation. The excellent current PBS series on Airpower calls Canada's Billy Bishop Britain's top WWI ace and contains several errors in describing Bomber Command and the B-17. What can we believe? History & Geography are poorly understood by today's youths. Film makers do have responsibilities.

And, now we call Quebec a Nation within a Nation. Inuit and First Nations next? A new Switzerland?

CANADIAN IMPERIALISM: Not to be left out of the Imperialist Club, Canada tried to start an empire in 1921. It all commenced 11 Jan 1914 when Vilhjalmur Stefansson's flagship, *Karluk*, was crushed in ice off Wrangell Island in the east Siberian sea. The 17 crew members took refuge on the barren 7,300 square-kilometre island where they managed to survive until rescued six months later.

In 1921 Stefansson, who saw the island as a good place for a weather station and for a landing strip for future trans-polar flights, decided to claim it for Canada in spite of it being only 60 km north of the Russian mainland. He landed a party of four white men and one Inuit woman, Ada Blackjack, on the island for a 2-year stay. Running low on food three of the men took off to try to reach the Siberian coast for help. They were never heard from again. The remaining man died of scurvy, leaving Ada to fend for herself and fight off polar bears. She was alone for two months when Stefansson's ship, *Donaldson*, arrived with more settlers, one white man and 13 Inuit men, women, and children he had recruited in Alaska.

In 1924 the Russian gunship, *Red October*, arrived, and removed the settlers to Vladivostok. Not willing to spend money on this group, the Russians tried to hand them over to the Chinese in Manchuria who did not want them. A US State Department official in Harbin used Red Cross money to ship them out via Darien, Kobe, and Seattle to Nome, Alaska.

Canadian imperialism did not end there. To get even with the US for the mess they left after their various invasions of Canada, Canada sent flocks of Canada Geese to mess up US parks and golf courses.

Then in 1946, before we had the Falkland Islands invasion as an excuse, we sent 50 Canadian beavers to Tierra del Fuego to colonize an Argentinian national park. With no predators, the beaver multiplied, chewing their way through large areas of forest, building dams, and flooding lands and roads, creating hundreds of lakes. Beavers have now crossed the Strait of Magellan and are taking over the mainland. Tourists like them and they do look good on postcards, but they are giving Argentinians immense headaches.

LANGUAGES: The UK International Linguistic Centre estimates that, by 2050, first-language speakers will number in millions: Chinese 1,384, Hindu/Urdu 556, English 508, Spanish 486, Arabic 482, Portugese 248, Bengali 229, Russian 132, Japanese 108, German 91, Malay 80, French 76.

MULTIBEAM BATHYMETRIC MAPPING: This new technique, developed by Canadian, Norwegian, and US scientists, now used by the Bedford Institute of Oceanography, Dartmouth, NS, has vastly improved the mapping of the Canadian coastal Atlantic. Over 40 shipwrecks have been discovered in Halifax harbour alone with another 50 possibles, plus several a few kilometres out, some sunk by Kriegsmarine U-boats during WWII. In 2003 a survivor was taken down in a submersible to the wreck of the *HMCS Clayoquot* that was torpedoed 24 Dec 1944, drowning 8 of the crew. The previously-uncharted *HMS British Freedom*, torpedoed in 1945, was found sufficiently close to the surface to be a shipping hazard.

PALEO-DNA LABORATORY, THUNDER BAY: This unique lab at Lakehead University has been successful in a number of areas. By studying 250-year-old Hungarian human remains they discovered a TB-resistant gene; they identified an unknown child buried in Halifax after the Titanic disaster; studied diets and diseases of ancient Egyptians; identified the remains of WWI soldiers; traced migration routes of First Nations; and discovered ancient pathogens.

OUT OF THIS WORLD SEX: For a mere \$63 million the Russians can offer couples sex in space. There could be witnesses to verify your accomplishments.

NOT AIRFORCE OR MACLEAN'S? The most successful Canadian magazine in the US is *Shambhala Sun*, a voice of Buddhist wisdom, published by the Buddhist community of Halifax, one of the largest in North America.

CANADA - WHY SO NAMED? Many are the tales of the naming of what we know as Canada and Germans know as Kanada.

(1) In 1535 Jacques Cartier returned to the St. Lawrence with the two sons of the Iroquois chief Donnacona whom he had taken to France. Seeing a familiar landmark the sons exclaimed "*Chemin de kanata*" (route to the village). Cartier heard this as Canada - the name of the land. It appeared as such on the 1547 Harleian world map.

(2) After the rich treasures of Mexico, the Spaniards explored the Baie des Chaleurs and reported *ca nada* (nothing here). As this discouraged the Spaniards, the natives thought it would also discourage the French, so told them *aca nada* which the French interpreted as the name of the land.

(3) The inhabitants of New France were permitted one can of spruce beer per day, so they termed the land *can a day*.

(4) The British preferred the name *Quebec* over *Canada*, and named it such. The French objected and eventually the British relented to name Upper and Lower Canada. The French then embraced the name *Quebec*.

(5) During confederation discussions, the name *Efsga* was proposed to show a union of England, France, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, and Aborigines.

(6) Other proposed names included: Albertsland, Albionara, Borealia, Britannia, Cabotia, Mesoplagia, Norland, Superior, Transatlantia, Tupona (The United Provinces of North America), and Victorialand.

GOPHER RACING by Darrell Levitt. There was not much to do in CFS Alsask so the military members were always looking for things to do to liven up the place. In August 1979, some of the radar personnel came up with the concept of holding gopher races. This concept was undoubtedly hatched in the NCO club! With the rules conceived, the track built, and all the different sections on the station and radar site notified of the date, the time came for the Inaugural CFS Alsask Gopher Open. The folks at the station woodworking shop had constructed a wooden track with three foot high side walls (this was necessary to prevent the race participants from jumping over the side and being disqualified). The track was strategically placed on one of the fairways of the station golf course and all participating organizations were present with their furry racers. The rules were simple (or so we thought at the time). Each section was to capture their own racer and be at the starting gates five minutes before each race. The start of the first race was at hand, but the participant from the Radar Technician section was not on site. We waited and indeed postponed the start time by about five minutes hoping that the radar techs would show. Five or six minutes late the radar techs showed with their gopher being led on a rope leash. There was no time for protocol. The entrants were simply placed in the starting gate. The gun was sounded and the race was on. The first race was won by the Radar Tech Section however, not without controversy. It seems that in all the confusion nobody noticed that the Radar Section contestant was not breathing and in fact was quite dead. When the race started, they simply pulled the gopher by the rope leash and subsequently won the race. There was an official inquiry, and the judges combed over the very scant rules inevitably proclaimed the Radar Section the winners. It seems that nowhere in the rules did it state that the gopher had to be alive. This shortcoming was rectified the following year.

TEXEL: FORGOTTEN WARS: This forgotten tale caught my eye as the Dutch island of Texel used to greet me on many a night with a tremendous display of fireworks as I flew by in both Wellingtons and Halifaxes.

Over a week after V-E Day, 100 Canadian soldiers were ordered to Texel being told only that there were some Germans there with a problem.

The Canadians found the problem: A bloody war was raging between two large groups of men, both in German uniforms. Several years earlier the Nazis had persuaded a thousand or so Georgian prisoners of war that they would be spared execution if they agreed to don German uniforms and help in the defence of the Atlantic Wall. Reluctantly, they did but, as Canadian troops were advancing in the mainland, the Georgians were ordered to move out the following morning to combat them. That night the Georgians used their shaving knives to slaughter

246 sleeping Germans. The enraged German survivors fought back, firing 2,000 shells into Georgian-occupied areas. By the time the Canadians arrived 20 May, 572 Georgians and 430 Germans were dead. German survivors agreed to surrender peacefully to the Canadians provided they would provide safe passage out. Thus ended the last battle on the Western Front.

In May 2005, the Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili joined a few Canadian veterans in the cemetery to remember the dead. The Dutch also remember. Canadians have forgotten.

SABOTAGE and the ARADO B-2 BLITZ; 274 of these sleek twin-engined jet bombers that could carry a 1,000-pound bomb at 460 mph were built in 1944-45 in German underground factories by slave labour. USAAF General "Hap" Arnold ordered the last one shipped to the US for study, but it sat in storage in Illinois for ten years, then it was moved and sat outside for 20 years.

In the 1980s a Smithsonian team started to restore it. The Nov-Dec issue of Archaeology magazine describes finding a rock wedged into the doors for the parachute that slowed the jet on landing as runway lengths were inadequate. This act of sabotage by a slave labourer would have wrecked one Blitz bomber.

THE COMOX WING is now close to 700 members - and they have built an extension to their club house. Do you think we could persuade them to add another extension long enough to include Colorado Springs?

ZIRCONS and CANADIAN GEOLOGY: Crystals of translucent zirconium oxide, that make convincing diamond substitutes, have been around for 4.5 billion years. Their clocks start ticking the moment they rise from molten depths. Some, now being zapped by lasers, heated, and ground, reveal to Rob Rainbird of the National Resources Canada in Ottawa that the 'Wilson Cycles' of plate tectonics (named for the Canadian geophysicist. J. Tuzo Wilson, who first envisioned them) created, a billion years ago, a huge mountain chain along the eastern continental rim and rivers that would dwarf today's Amazon. Zircons of this era from Nova Scotia were carried and deposited in the Arctic Archipelago.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: When Moses descended Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, there were only a few million people in this world and a handful of occupations, including: prostitute, hunter, gatherer, farmer, merchant, warrior, scribe, carpenter, metal worker, and baker. Today the dictionary of professions describes over 200,000. Even back then taxes had been invented, but there was no great need to include laws on the environment or to order camels to obey traffic signs. Recently, knowledge has been expanding a thousand times a century, but our brains remain the same so knowledge is not balanced with wisdom.

Barry Simpson's Family Closet and the Churchill Railway

Barry was reminiscing about his grandfather, **Charles Myron Simpson**, a talented and fascinating individual **who** was a member of 'The Bay Association' and many other organizations in Manitoba with the Liberal Party. He was the founder and president of Fidelity Trust and Empire Loan and Simpson and Mitchel. These companies were wholly owned by the family. Barry was relating how his grandfather was one of the originals in promoting the Churchill railway to get supplies to the UK during the first world war. He asked if we could dwell into this history. So far, I have discovered Major MacLachlan's Memoirs, so here is an extract:

"It was with mixed feelings that I took over the Hudson Bay Railway, as that line had been a political football, and no work had been done for some ten years. The track had been laid to Kettle Rapids but had been allowed to return to nature - ties all rotten, brush grown up between the rails until the track settled out of sight in many places.

When I took over the line, it was possible to operate a train as far as Mile 214 only and, on the first trip over it, I was off the track six times. A train was run every two weeks and the section gang travelled with the train crew. Our appropriation that year was three million dollars, and I had to organize some 2,500 men to start work in a hurry.

I was provided with a private car and a nice cottage to live in. One day I was called into Winnipeg and told I was to build a line from The Pas to Flin Flon which would be done under contract. This was 90 miles long and was to serve a new mine opening up, now a town of many thousands of people. Later, we built a 40 Mile branch to Sherriton to another mine called Sherrit Gordon. Looking after all this construction entailed a great deal of travel by various means - on foot, canoe, speeder, freight train, and sometimes by air. My territory measured nearly 700 miles. At one time we had 165 engineers on our payroll.

There was a large surplus of labour during these early years, and it was not unusual to have several hundred men at the office door looking for work. At one point it was necessary for me to keep two C.N. police constables to protect my person. They threatened to burn up my house and blow up the Saskatchewan River bridge. We paid only 25 cents an hour in those days.

When the line was finished to Kettle Rapids, the government decided to change the terminal from Nelson to Churchill. A contract was let to Stewart and Cameron to do the grading, and work started at once with old method of wheelbarrows and hand labour as the muskeg was frozen to a depth of 18 inches. Engineers were put up in tent camps every ten miles, and dog teams were used for transportation. Supplies were delivered to these camps to last for six months and my inspections were usually made by snowmobile.

By freeze-up the fall of 1928 the grade was finished on the first 100 miles to mile 445, and on a trip with the President and Chief Engineer, I was asked what I was going to do when the steel reached the end of the finished grade. I replied that I was going over the dump end and keep ongoing. (sic) The President looked at me as though I was crazy, but when he reached Jasper on his way west, he announced that we would lay track on the original ground surface and be in Churchill by spring. This was the only time this had ever been done on any railway, but we went ahead and made good our boast. Steel was laid into Churchill on 29 March 1929, and Tommy Jack drove the golden spike made with the tin foil from a pack of cigarettes, no officials being present for such an historic occasion.

The next several years were taken up with bringing the Railway up to standard and building the elevator at Churchill. Our railway forces did all the filling for the docks and our costs were way below the original estimates of Mr. Palmer. This was an around-the-clock operation with every machine double-crewed. Three steam shovels working tandem dug the gravel as fast as it thawed out in the ballast pit.

On the outbreak of the Second World War, I was called to Ottawa and was told by C.D. Howe that the Hudson Bay Railway would be a dead issue for the duration and to cut expenses to the bone. I returned to The Pas and started to use the ax, but in a few days I was again ordered to Ottawa on urgent business. When I arrived, everything seemed very hush hush. The Deputy Minister walked me to the westblock to meet with a number of department officials. In a few minutes I walked about a dozen US Officers - Colonels, Generals etc. who were introduced. The first question asked me was could I handle 300 cars per day over the Hudson Bay Railway starting at once. I said O.K. Could I rent them the Roundhouse at Churchill for storage as well as space in my office at The Pas, all of which I agreed to. And, after being served cocktails at the Embassy on Rideau Street, I rushed back to Winnipeg and The Pas. While in Winnipeg, I was informed that there were 200 cars in The Pas yard waiting to be moved and I had no engines or crews available. I had a few very busy days getting organized but soon had things under control and moving on schedule.

During the war years the US Army had 7,000 troops at points on the Hudson Bay Railway and in camp at Churchill. They established airports at Churchill and over on Southampton Island, but the layout was never used for the purpose for which it was intended - namely an air route to evacuate wounded back to the States from the battle fields of Europe."

Can any of you railway buffs add to this saga?

Jan 2007

Religious Diversity

Sparked by Bob Freimuth whose **thumos** (see the Sep newsletter) was overflowing, we tried to get a good discussion going at the Lomas party but our group of 10 around a table had too much interference from the clatter of merrymakers to permit our ageing hearing to function well enough. The conversation did go from thumos to animism before we had to break up - but it encouraged me to do a little more research and here is a brief summary (I do miss those quiet RAF/RCAF mess lounges with their good magazines, cosy chairs and so many good conversations):

ANIMISM: This earliest religion is still embraced by 40% of the world's people. Like all other religions it has been corrupted by dogma, bureaucracy, and self-aggrandizement. Basic animists are in tune with Nature. Every living thing has a spirit. So do many inanimate objects like streams, rock formations, clouds. In the morning you greet the spirit of the sun, of the forest, and of your canoe. You ask permission of the river spirit before launching your canoe, then, as you paddle along, you greet the spirits of rock formations, river bends, and so on. You ask forgiveness of the spirits of any animals you kill in order to survive. If you are an Inuit and kill a seal, you open its mouth to give it the treat of a drink of fresh water. Shamans, witch doctors, priests, and the like had to invent themselves to exploit these innate beliefs. Abuses led to animal and human sacrifices and the role of women from exaltation to exploitation.

ATHEISM: Disgust with religious differences and increasing doubts over their teachings are causing a marked increase in the number of world atheists. A leading guru, Richard Dawkins of Oxford University is quite eloquent in arguing there is no god, no heaven, no hell, only science. To this scribe, Atheism is the most stupid of all beliefs, unlike

AGNOSTICISM whose motto is "*I do not know and you do not know either.*" In this universe our lilliputian minds can grasp only a minute portion of reality, so an open mind is essential. Science belongs here, not with Atheists.

PAGANISM: I did know of the Druids, a few Witch Associations, and one Pagan magazine when I thought, for the sake of this article, I should do a little more research. After one full day of research I am amazed to be able to list 70 Pagan publications in Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the United States. I have yet to explore the rest of the world. There are far more Pagans about than I had realized.

BUDDHISM: A contemporary of Zoroaster and the Hebrew prophets 2,500 years ago, Siddhartha Gautama voiced 84,000 sermons dwelling on the paths to Enlightenment. Two major divisions developed, Mahayana and Theravada plus various sects as Buddhism spread from India to Tibet, Persia, China, and Japan. Worldwide there are 164 different Buddhist sects. It died out in India but left its mark on Hinduism. Another great teacher, Vardhamana Mahavira, developed **Jainism** but it did not spread beyond India. Both embraced karma, reincarnation, and Nirvana (eventual escape from reincarnations) and both opposed the caste system, blood sacrifices, and the importance of priests. The Canadian magazine with the greatest circulation in the United States is *Shambhala Sun*, a Halifax voice of Buddhist wisdom.

CHRISTIANITY: There are 3,400 distinct Christian Associations, each one of which is the correct version, the others are all flawed. The majority of these are small congregations independent of any of the major sub-divisions..

JUDAISM: For a small territorial religion, Judaism has enjoyed, through Christianity and Islam, immense world influence. The only religion tied to a specific piece of real estate, Israel, it still has deep divisions, the main ones being Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. They range in groups that believe in peace, tolerance, justice, democracy, sustainable development, and care for the environment to those that see humanity divided by a clash of civilizations, competing for power, territory, and resources. Compromise is impossible so maximizing Jewish power is a supreme good wherever Jews settle. The largest concentration of Jews today is in the United States. There are 14 million Jews in today's world while 3.5 billion follow religions directly influenced by Judaism.

ISLAM: While Christianity is in decline, Islam is enjoying a period of resurgence and is infiltrating Christian countries. It has 3 major branches: Sunni, Shi'a, and Sufi. Sunnis have 4 distinct schools of thought, Shi'as 6, Sufi 2. Then there are an additional 26 different schools, orders, movements, faiths, and what-have-you.

HINDUISM: With a billion followers, Hinduism, seemingly a baffling array of spiritual traditions, is a family of four main denominations; Saivism (at over 8,000 years the oldest of all religions after Animism), Shaktism, Smartism, and Vaishnavism. Within Saivism there are six main schools. Shaktism has four, Smartism has 6, and Vaishnavism 5. All have more similarities than differences. All believe in karma, reincarnation, and in a Supreme Being who creates and destroys the universe in regular cycles. Cremation is practised to free the soul quickly to allow it to begin a new life.

ZOROASTRIANISM: An early monotheistic religion that grew and declined from 549 to 330 BC, it has many adherents in Persia (Iran) and India. It has survived many assaults that caused sects to develop. It did emerge healthy from long periods of Muslim occupation. A hereditary priesthood is causing a current decline. Life style changes in a modern world are today more threatening than past persecutions.

Considering all this, would you say it is a wee mite naive to expect any human association, family, town, nation, or even 971 Wing, to speak with a unified voice? Even in happy marriages, there are differences of opinions. Our task is to outlaw the use of violence by any of these associations, to promote tolerance, and to value our own values.

SANTA CRASHES IN THE BLACK FOREST by our roving reporter Tom Budzyna:

The shocking sight of emergency lights on a red sleigh stuck in tree tops while nine reindeer grazed in a nearby field confirmed Santa Claus's crash during a pre-holiday test flight here tonight. Elves In Black held a red cape to shield a stranded Santa from unwelcome photographers. Police at the scene stopped an official spokesperson demanding access to Santa. After asserting, "I'm with the government," a stunned crowd watched as police let the spokesperson pass. This reporter took advantage of this distraction to sneak into the crash site to discover the rest of the story.

The spokesperson climbed a ladder to reach Santa who, except for his pride, was unharmed. Elves In Black swarmed the scene as one worked to free Santa from a mess of sleigh bells, tree branches and his seat belt. With Santa stuck and the press restless, the spokesperson suggested, "Let me handle this. I'm trained for this sort of stuff." Santa agreed and the spokesperson went to meet the press.

"Santa asked me to speak on his behalf," said the spokesperson, "I have a brief statement then I'll take your questions." The reporters were unimpressed but listened. They knew the routine.

"We're shocked about Santa's mishap here tonight. Thankfully there were no serious injuries. Santa and his reindeer will fly away from this isolated incident and continue with holiday preparations. Santa often flies his sleigh close to tree tops to avoid detection and tonight he obviously entangled with these trees. Thanks to newly installed Flying Reindeer Emergency Ejection (F.R.E.E.) reigns, the reindeer are unharmed. Proof that seatbelts save lives. An investigation is underway. What are your questions?"

"Simon Sleuth from the Mountain Probe Gazette, isn't it true Santa was delivering toys to one of many secret storage sites located worldwide and operated in violation of union labor laws?"

The spokesperson answered, "The premise of your question is unfounded and highly speculative. Remember, Santa works year-round in magical ways to prepare for the most wonderful day of the year."

"Pattie Prier from the Front Range Squeaky Wheel, did the reindeer purposely crash Santa's sleigh to protest the cold working conditions and lousy hours?"

Incensed by this question, the reindeer threatened to stampede the press. Santa burst in and signaled Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer to calm the herd. Santa faced the press and said, "Let me suggest a headline for my mishap here tonight: Stuff happens - even to Santa!" Santa grimaced as nine reindeer nodded their snouts in agreement indicating that this wasn't Santa's first mishap.

"I installed a high-tech GPS guidance system in case Rudolph caught a cold and his nose wouldn't work," explained Santa, visibly shaken by his experiment with technology. Then, bursting in his famous bowl-full-of-jelly way, Santa affirmed, "We certainly learned how important it is to wear seat belts, too! Ho, ho, ho!"

An Elf In Black tugged on Santa's coat and pointed at a sleek new sleigh with the reindeer strapped in and ready to go. Elves In Black towed away the crashed sleigh with a reindeer-guided tow sleigh and disappeared into the northern sky. "I have an idea," Santa said to the press, "Share the headline 'Peace on earth' and spread some good news. Distribute newspapers at no cost and use advertising revenue to cover costs and as tax-deductible charitable contributions. Folks will welcome the seasonal angle. Then again, that's just my opinion. I could be wrong."

Leaving the press to ponder, Santa gave the spokesperson a wink, leaped into his sleigh and magically soared up and away but not before this reporter snuck into Santa's sleigh to get to the bottom of this alleged mishap.

Quietly cruising at first, Santa broke the silence to ask Rudolph, "Do you think the world will ever understand the meaning of Christmas or the holiday season or the winter solstice or whatever you want to call it?"

Good question this reporter thought.

Rudolph, now safe and sound with eight other flying reindeer in their F.R.E.E. reigns replied, "Sure they will. Keep the faith."

"Good answer, eh?" whispered a familiar voice behind this reporter who turned to discover an Elf In Black wearing a cap with "Santa's PR Guy" embroidered on it. "Aren't you the spokes..." this reporter began to ask before hastily handed a cup of hot chocolate, a blanket and a promise to be returned to the press room as soon as operations permitted. This reporter took a sip, instantly felt drowsy and before falling asleep watched Santa turn the high-tech navigation system off. Rudolph and the team took over and, after a white flash, soared off into the night.

Who knows what Santa exclaimed as he flew out of sight, but rest assured that between Rudolph, the Elves In Black and Santa's PR Guy - everything is all right.

A SON'S REMEMBRANCES: On the death of his mother, Barbara, in 2005, Mike McKenna of Mill Bay, BC, took the 2 albums she had cherished and made up an album and a CD for the Trenton RCAF museum and for the Halifax Families Association (founded by Diana DeLuca) on his father, G/C Gerald McKenna, DFC, who was CO of 420 Sqn in 1944 as a W/C, and who died in 1972. Also included are photos of squadron members, clippings on such happenings as raids on submarine pens in Norway, and of members of the Tholthorpe, Yorkshire, civilian community. We encourage more sons and daughters to follow this example.

REPORT FROM THE AFGHANISTAN FIGHTING FRONT: It is a cold morning after an even colder night here on the rugged hills of Afghanistan. Your selfless scribe has gone to no end of trouble in surmounting the problems of time and distance to give you the latest uncensored facts of this conflict to bring order, good government, and civilization to a people who seem not to appreciate the benefits we can shower on them. I am now imbedded with the world's greatest superpower and admiring the loyalty, spirit, modern equipment, and fighting abilities of an army led by a general who is a superb tactician and strategist. Well, yes, he does have a temper, he has killed many enemy without just cause, tortured prisoners, slept many nights with captured women, and has destroyed the careers of those he thinks are incompetent or insufficiently loyal. But, he has had military success after military success. He expects a great deal of his men but they remain loyal to him even though they disagree with him bringing other nationals into this elite army which is so superior to any that other nations can field.

We are fighting a cowardly enemy. They seldom stand and fight. Our general is ruthless in pursuing them which is sometimes reckless because we by-pass caves from which they emerge at night to kill a few of us here and a few there. They also melt into the hills and hit our supply trains when least expected. Our general has started to build a great new fortress near Kabul which he is actually naming after himself. Sometimes he acts like a god, he considers himself so great.

I must try to smuggle this communique out as I have just overheard our general planning to leave Afghanistan to concentrate on Iraq and Iran as he considers them easier opponents with more treasures. Next thing you know he will end up in India.

Ye Olde Scribe with Alexander's forces in Afghanistan, 330 BC

NEWSLETTER CIRCULATION: 130 copies are mailed out each time, implying 260 readers. Twelve of these readers have revealed they pass on the newsletters to friends. Other Wings have re-published to date 26 of our articles. The newsletter, then, reaches over a thousand readers. So, your inputs are important. Get them in early - first come first served. Next deadline 10 Feb 07. gswearor@pcisys.net or 2702 Marilyn Road, 80909.

ON THE SOAPBOX ... by Art Nielsen

I have been Wing president for nearly six years now, and every year I try to impress upon the Wing that there are responsibilities associated with membership that go well beyond merely attending social functions. My efforts have reaped only limited success, and I realize fully that I have not reached the few who occasionally refer to the Wing as "our club". We are much more than a social club, as I will outline hereunder, and we ought to act more in accord with our more important mandate.

By accepting membership in 971 Wing, we have all committed to support the principles and missions of the Air Force Association of Canada. For our American members you have done so to the extent permitted by your status as American citizens. We do have a Business Plan in support of the AFAC missions, but we have lacked the attention to execution in the past that is needed to make it truly effective. I hope to change that in the New Year, supported by the leadership and direction of the Wing Executive. It is patently clear that the actual execution of the plan will require the time, talents, efforts, and legwork of the broader Wing membership. I appreciate that many of you are busy in other areas, but you may still have some skills, interests, and time in reserve to contribute. With these thoughts in mind, here are the five main elements of our Business Plan, along with some related thoughts:

ADVOCATE CANADA'S AIR FORCE: Tough to do to our US audience in Colorado Springs, but a broader approach of advocating the Canada/US defence partnership certainly makes sense for us. I will lead an effort to tell the current NORAD story, probably through the Airforce Magazine. Other initiatives are available.

PERPETUATE RCAF & CAF TRADITIONS: We are active in this area, thanks mainly to the efforts of Darrell Levitt. We will stay the course.

PROMOTE MILITARY & CIVIL AVIATION: We could be more active in this area. We could add more "aviation content" to our meetings. We could participate more in local aviation events.

SUPPORT AIR CADET LEAGUE: Tough to do from here other than through monetary contributions, although we did sponsor and organize an Air Cadet visit to Colorado Springs last year. We could extend our mandate to include support to local Civil Air Patrol units.

PERFORM COMMUNITY SERVICE: We make modest monetary contributions to charity every year, albeit constrained by our limited financial resources. We could expand our community service in a number of ways without involving direct hits on the Wing coffers.

The substance of this article will be the key issue at the next Executive Meeting. In the meantime I offer that Wing members should consider seriously how they can or wish to contribute to this endeavour. Our business Plan can succeed only with the support and involvement of the broader Wing membership. Please call me to get involved 488-8870 or arnielsen@adelphia.net

HEROISM SHATTERED BY TREACHERY - AND HALIFAX RESTORATION: In August 1944 the Soviets were smashing their way through Poland and got word to the 40,000 Poles in the Warsaw ghetto asking them to rise up against their German occupiers in order to speed the Soviet advance. The Poles did, and Bomber Command sent some 40 Halifaxes on 05 and 14 August to drop arms and supplies to the Poles.

The Soviets then stopped their advance for 2 months to give the Germans time to annihilate these Poles who were London-oriented and not desired in a post-war Poland under Soviet occupation. We lost 17 aircraft including six shot down by Soviet fighter aircraft. The dead were 62 British, 40 South Africans, 15 Poles, 7 Canadians, and 1 Australian. There were no POWs.

Two of the Halifaxes shot down were from 148 RAF Squadron and the Poles have now discovered one of them buried under a field near Dabrowa and are trying to put the pieces back together again in a Warsaw museum. This aircraft was crewed by 5 RCAF and 3 RAF, ages 20 to 24.

Of the 6,176 Halifaxes built, only two are now intact: one in the UK and one in the RCAF Museum, Trenton, Ontario. The Poles hope to come up with a third.