

**Royal Swiss Navy Gazette**

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## Colophon

*The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette* #19 (September 2009) is the work of Garth Spencer, who goes on living in Vancouver, BC, Canada. Please send comments, subscriptions, suggestions, and/or submissions to Garth Spencer (the Editor), at garthspencer@shaw.ca or via P.O. Box 74122, Hillcrest Park, Vancouver, BC, CANADA V5V 3P0. *The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette* solicits electronic submissions, and black and white line illustrations in JPG or GIF format, and offers contributor's copies.

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## Changes of Address

Taral Wayne: taral@teksavvy.com

People I can't contact now – email or postal address needed: Lilian Edwards; Tim Hammell; Karen Johnson; Bob Vaughn



## Garth: The Continuing Adventures

Continuing my flagrant denial of thematic unity, this issue is partly about travel writing and partly about leisure pursuits, with a brief discourse on fannish inactivity in the Vancouver area, and a meditation on Remembrance Day. Unlike every other publication from the Vancouver area, this fanzine is entirely free of Olympic promotions.

Mundane and fannish stuff I've been putting off: getting at least short-term part-time work. Putting my living space and paper records and possessions into order. Getting the BCSFA website more or less up to date and accurate. Planning and setting up a small business to formalize my freelance work. Planning a semi-monthly independent zine, to apply the fanzine concept to mundane news and citizenship issues. Starting up a Discordian meetup group in Vancouver. Organizing my next personalzine. Figuring out what a contemporary life manual should include, and working up an edition for my own guidance. Working up an official Crank Theory for my amusement and the amazement of others.

One piece of silliness I thought of is the RSN Corps of Engineers. This Corps of Engineers, if I can get anyone interested, should consist of people who start out with *no* mechanical aptitude, *no* idea of how to calculate stresses and forces, and a tendency to charge into things with more enthusiasm than plans or materials.

Like the RSN Marines (a number of guys chosen for looking completely harmless, incapable and out of shape) and the Marines Chorus (so many guys chosen for tone-deafness), this is by way of a satire, if you can guess what I'm pointing fun at.

Do you remember my talking about the RSN Intelligence Branch? From time to time I daydream about how to format intelligence files. Either personal dossiers, or reports on groups, institutions and events. Sometimes I have surfed the Web for materials and found a surprising amount available from various intelligence organizations. If there's an intelligence community, don't they *need* some people to play village idiot for them?

## Arguments for Living in a Selected Fantasy World

In summer 2009 I read a few different futurist polemics: *The Next 100 Years*, by George Friedman; *Climate Wars*, by Gwynne Dyer; and *The Future in Plain Sight*, by Eugene Linden. The fact that Vancouver was simultaneously experiencing a heat wave, with over a week of temperatures exceeding 30° Centigrade, sort of riveted my attention.

It is interesting that *The Next 100 Years*, written from the viewpoint of geopolitics, pays *no* attention to climate change or its implications: only to the relative fortunes and maneuverings of nation-states. Friedman also pays scant attention to the Peak Oil issue. I wondered if he were any relation to Milton Friedman.

*Climate Wars*, on the other hand, takes in economic, geopolitical and military consequences of climate change. I should point out that Gwynne Dyer is an international affairs analyst, with a military background, and I find his dry, unsentimental delivery to be convincing. He comes to conclusions more daunting than David Brin's novel *Earth*, even more horrifying than a recent issue of *New Scientist*, which anticipated habitable climates receding to the circumpolar regions. If we're *really* unlucky, the usual circulation of worldwide ocean currents will be disturbed, and the depths of the major oceans will accumulate hydrogen sulfides as the Black Sea does ... and *then* ...

It's stories like this that remind me why I didn't start a family. Or put serious effort into a career. I spent too much of my formative years reading disaster novels.

Given the apparent trend of southern British Columbia's climate, I'm starting to think of moving north anyway. WAY north.

## Letters of Comment

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Lloyd Penney, 1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON M9C 2B2, July 29, 2009,  
[penneys@allstream.net](mailto:penneys@allstream.net)

Things to do to send up social conventions or dysfunction institutions... well, I remember the Rhinoceros Party of Canada used to do that rather well. Start your own political party and run for office. Do odd

things in Vancouver, like a zombie walk or one of those gatherings where everyone strikes a still pose for 15 seconds or so. Part of this is to make the surrounding bovine populace take notice, and make their day just a little more surreal.

*((Someone else is doing the zombie walks – there was one scheduled for August – and I’m seriously wondering whether I can organize any events, I haven’t even successfully motivated small events for the Royal Swiss Navy.))*



I seem to remember Colin Upton when I was a neofan in Victoria. Either I met him, or was introduced to his work. Years ago, I chaired Smofcon 9 in Toronto, which was also a conrunners’ convention. One thing we found was that while most conrunning methods were kinda subjective, the successful ones should

make the con attendance experience as enjoyable and seamless as possible, for those good folks who give us money to attend. You’d think that would be a given, but there were some who just didn’t understand that; I think most convention committee have someone like that for whom customer service is a foreign concept.

Work...I am looking, Yvonne is looking, and there is more to find. I think the economy is turning around, and when there are more jobs out there that I might suit, there’s more of the likelihood that I might find a job for myself. Good luck to all of us veteran jobhunters...go forth and bag the big one.

Ben Indick is right, there is no gafiation. He knows only too well how many old faneds are returning to the fold with letters and articles and new fanzines. Death shall not release you, so why should fandom? Stay well, Ben, 85 is quite an achievement.

“Core Fandom” seems to be an arbitrary construct. Who says you’re in or out? Some of my fan activities would put me in Core Fandom, and others would keep me out entirely. I think I know Arnie Katz’s purposes in this idea, but there’s just too many ways to misinterpret it. I prefer my own smorgasbord idea...sample from a variety of interests, or chow down at one plate; it’s up to you. Fandom must be fun, or why bother? Taral probably knows that local furry fen are taking the big step and staging a furry convention in Toronto next year called Furnal Equinox. Should be sometime in the spring.

Hello, Allan Burrows! It’s been a while since I’ve seen you anywhere in local fandom. Gafiation is a state of mind, and I hope you’ll come back for another visit. Your solution for Middle East peace sounds

fairly good... “sense”, for us, doesn’t even come close to “sense” for the Middle East, though. And, to be honest, I wouldn’t trust any government in that region not to act in their own most selfish interests to the disadvantage of others.

Allan, why aren’t you writing papers on the commercial use of space? Sounds like you’ve got a lot of this thought out; you’d need a peer group to bounce these ideas onto, and see what they say. Something useful could come out of it. We need to go beyond the idea of a space station, and start the idea of space factories, in orbit or on the Moon, to start using the resources we ship up to orbit or find on the Moon to start manufacturing fuels, building materials...once again, science fiction is becoming science fact, but only if we have the political will to do it.

Those new commandments [*of Taral’s – GS*] are so common sense...I wish they could be presented on stones with a burning bush nearby. Then some of this common sense might actually become common.

Ah, finally members of the RSG, illustrated so that we can watch for their arrival...and hide. They choose not to use their powers for good or evil, but for fandom. Bless ‘em all.

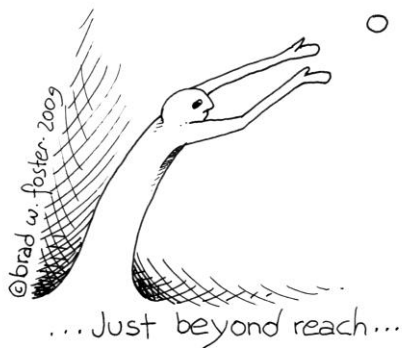
Filk [about] the Vancouver Westercon...is this a good thing or a bad thing? I know the stories, the heartbreak, the money lost. When you add up the Vancouver Westercon, the Toronto Worldcon, the Winnipeg World Horror Con, and other big events that didn’t work, and put them against the Winnipeg Worldcon, the Montreal and Calgary World Fantasies, and other cons that *did* work, our record is spotty at best. The Montreal Worldcon arrives in about 8 days as I type; let’s hope for the best.

*((When you say “our record”, you imply a “we”. Who’s “we”? Canadians? Fandom at large? Canadian fans? Which subfandom?*

*((If we were honest we would admit that holding large complex events is an art, but there is no “professional” peer group to enforce standards of service, or even standards of artistic performance. I think we’re not prepared to be that honest, for any values of “we”.)*

All done for the moment, and I am completing this in the morning, which is the crack of stupid your time. 4am should not exist anywhere. As the thunderclouds gather here, and the heat waves gather where you are (we seem to have traded weather patterns), take care, and with some luck I may return with stories of our exploits in Montréal.

*We also heard from: Allan Burrows, Ruth Fleming, Steve George, Rodney Leighton, Lyn McConchie (a few times), Alyx Shaw, and Taral Wayne*



## On Relaxation

by Phil Paine (Aug.19/09)

I spend most of the day on my feet, walking and carrying things. When I come home, I often put in further hours sitting upright at a computer. So when I

finally relax, I want to be horizontal. When I had a standard couch in the apartment, I often found myself drifting to the floor, where I could "gap and stretch", and feel some freedom.

The couch is no more, chucked into the trash. I now have a futon that is never folded up in sofa position. Instead, it's unfolded in the "bed" position, permanently. My idea of living in a living room takes its cue from classical antiquity. The ancient Greeks had it right: relaxing, entertaining, and socializing are best done horizontally. That position keeps my proprioceptors happy. I don't really need to have slaves plucking grapes and dropping them into my open mouth, but I do want my alone time to be sensuous, self-indulgent, and free of stiff-necked discipline. The Epicurians had it right. None of that Stoic nonsense for me, and go tell the Spartans they're a bunch of goofs.

I'll never be one of those strange creatures who fills every minute with useful labour, and sacrifices pleasure for ambition. I have no more ambition than a daisy does. A little bit of sunshine in a meadow suits me more than standing on a podium and accepting an award (something I now doubt will ever happen). Competition leaves me cold. If I do something, I usually don't care if someone else does it worse or better. I enjoy my own knowledge and abilities, but don't see any point in finding out where they rank in comparison to other people's knowledge and abilities. School bored me to tears, marks meant nothing to me except irritation. Knowledge, from the moment I began to look and read, seemed to me strictly for my own private pleasure. Some nosy boob "evaluating" my knowledge, or urging me to compete with some random bunch of other people for marks or little tinfoil stars just struck me as idiotic. This view was firmly in my mind by at least the first grade. So was the belief that relaxation, the splendid art of doing little or nothing in the most enjoyable way, is a noble pursuit. Cats, nature's greatest masters of relaxation, should be our guides in this. When

cats relax, their bodies dissolving into a semi-liquid state, they purr. Humans can, and should purr. Once a friend remarked that I was the only person she had ever met who really purred. I took this as the most pleasing compliment I have ever received.

Relaxation comes in two main categories: with friends, and alone. Relaxing with friends is subtler, because it needs a special art to maintain its purity and innocence. But I only wish to meditate, right now, on relaxing alone.

I've just finished a nice little bit of relaxation, and while my writing about it presupposes that I'm not actually doing it, I'll write about it in the present tense to evoke its texture:

On this particular occasion, all the elements of fine solitary relaxation have lined up like the planets in grand conjunction. The preceding day was exhausting, with a lot of hustle and bustle done in hot, humid weather. But now, I'm basking in air conditioned bliss. Let those who despise technology contemplate the world before air conditioning. (There's nothing more amusing to look upon than a profusely sweating Luddite.) I'm freshly showered, freed of tormenting shoes and clothes, and gratefully sprawled on the futon. No pilgrim to Lourdes, throwing away his crutches, ever felt the gratefulness that I feel for that futon. If someone were to run into the room screaming that I've won the Nobel Prize, I would tell them "If I have to get up to get it, I don't want it."

Everything in my apartment, by slow evolutionary increments, has come to be in its most convenient place. Things I want practically leap into my hands unbidden. Even the pillows seem to want to fluff themselves. Later, perhaps, I'll watch an old science fiction film, or perhaps a harmless sitcom that a more serious person would sneer at. But at the moment, I'll let music wash over me like an incoming tide, and read something. First, Ralph Vaughan Williams' third symphony, the fine "pastoral" one. Then some old BBC Essential Mix from the golden era of 1993. Then some Ali Farka Touré.

Supper is already made and eaten. It was effortless: a lamb kebab pan fried with tandoori paste and tossed onto some couscous and peas.

The animals have tired of chasing each other back and forth, and have come to join me. The larger cat has curled up on the pillow to the left of my head. The smaller cat and the rabbit are stretched out beside each other next to my right lower leg. The bong and the stash are empty, and there's no alcohol in the house, but I'm in the mood for reading with a clear mind. Another time, a toke or a shot of scotch would hit the spot, but this time, a home-made malted milkshake it more to my liking.



Now, a situation like this needs the right book to make it perfect. I'm not in the mood for fiction, and definitely not in the mood for anything related to the article I'm writing. Fortunately, I have the perfect thing at hand, found in a small town bookshop: Aubrey Burl's *Prehistoric Avebury*. This allows me slip into a gentle reverie.

I'm very fond of Avebury, that most delightful of all prehistoric monuments. I've been there twice, but on neither occasion had the time or money to take it in properly. For Avebury is the focus of one of my best relaxation fantasies. If I could swing it, I would spend a week there. Every day, I would take my breakfasts in the bay window of the Red Lion Pub, which sits right in the middle of the great circle of sarsen stones. That's the special charm of Avebury. There's an English village right on top of it, mingling with the stones and avenues and the circular trench and embankment. Oh, it's all very fine for Stonehenge to loom mysteriously on the empty stage-set of Salisbury Plain, looking all spooky and oozing mystical oompah-pah. The hippies love it. But Avebury's magic is subtler, and appeals to me more. The domestic setting, with cottages, a pub, high street shops, and a church superimposed on the five-thousand year old megalithic monument, like an accidentally double-exposed film negative, makes for a powerful evocation of the depths of time. Perhaps human sacrifices were performed at the post office, and who knows what orgiastic, Pan-like rites were performed where now the Anglican communion is held. The wonderment is, like the Purloined Letter, hidden in plain sight, and all the more wondrous for that.

After each daily breakfast, I would amble casually to some of the archaeological items that lie scattered within a mile or two of the village. They are quite varied, and most of them are rarely visited by anyone but local farmers and archaeologists. Without background knowledge to give them meaning, most have little appeal to the day trippers and New Age innocents who are drawn to the big stones. Anyway, I would probably do this in the off-season. I'm Canadian — I don't mind a little chilly weather, and don't enjoy crowds. When the sun goes down, I'll retreat to the pub for a pint of best bitter, and enjoy the pleasant talk of an English country pub.

Come to think of it, such a week of relaxation would be all the sweeter if I came to Avebury, not by bus (like the last time) or hitch-hiking (like the first time), but by walking the full length of the Ridgeway. This is the oldest known "road" in England. Actually, it's a humble foot-path that winds for 85 miles (137 km) from Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire, through the Chiltern and Berkshire hills, past the Iron Age fort at Uffington and the Vale of Whitehorse, and ends just to the south of Avebury, near

Silbury Hill, the most mysterious of all British prehistoric monuments. Such a distance is nothing, for me, especially with regular opportunities for a ploughman's lunch along the way.

That little fantasy is in the spirit of some of my finest moments of relaxation. I have some real-life ones under my belt that equal it.

One I especially cherish in memory occurred in the desert and mesa country of northern Arizona. There was a hidden box canyon, well off any well-trodden trail, where was hid, at least for a brief season, a pool of crystal clear water under the shade of a red-rock cliff. Not orangey-brown, not sandstone red, but blood red, the cliff was. I spent two carefree days there, nursing a sprain and a broken toe. The splendid setting made the pain seem trivial. I did absolutely nothing except take dips in the cool water, tend the fire, and look at the stars. No wasted time was ever less of a waste. The solitude ended only when two Navaho shepherd boys arrived. This occurred at the precise moment when it seemed right to break the spell of solitude. Since I was a trained shepherd myself, there was a commonality to ease acquaintance. I followed them out of the canyon, and up the mesa. But that starts another, irrelevant story.

Forests and mountains figure prominently in my catalog of Great Relaxations. One can be as snug and comfortable out of doors as in the coziest of apartments, if the conditions are right. One British Columbia mountain meadow, with a breathtaking view of rainforest, glaciers, mist and sea, was so esthetically overwhelming that it often pops up in my dreams. The climb to it was exhausting, and I don't take well to thin air. Rest was a necessity, so perhaps I shouldn't count it as "relaxation". But I lingered past the strict necessity of recuperation.

Among fine acts of relaxation, I would definitely include pauses on journeys on the Canadian Shield. These have been too numerous to keep track of. They all contained the same elements: a lake, or a swimmable river; Precambrian rocks scattered about for furniture; a crackling fire cooking fresh trout; blueberries and raspberries handy for the picking; a well-made teepee; some ragged paperback books stained with sweat and crushed mosquitoes; loons calling; whiskeyjacks singing; and a soft breeze to keep the blackflies at bay. What does civilization have that can compete with it?

Well, there is one form of relaxing that requires quite a bit of civilization to support it, and is hardly ever celebrated by writers and philosophers. I don't think Thoreau would approve of it. It's too mundane to attract the poets. But it's just as "spiritual" in its own way. I don't own a car, and it's been a long time since I have, but this is what I most miss about having one. It's extremely relaxing to drive your car aimlessly along

country roads, with no timetable, no destination, no place where you have to be. Just driving for no reason, following a road because you like the look of it, playing roller-coaster on the badly graded hills and dips, kicking dust and pebbles behind you. That's when a car feels like a home, not a mere transportation machine. Better yet is to drive for hours, late, late at night, on a nearly empty highway, listening to obscure radio stations emerge from static, play some half-forgotten tune from another era, then ebb and fade back into the static sea. This is wasteful of gas, but fulfilling of the spirit. It works best in Canada, where empty highways snake mournfully across shadowy moonlit landscapes, and every Tim Horton's donut shop is an alabaster oasis in the ebon night.

## Camp Sights

by Taral Wayne (May 1983)

Previously published in *Oxytoxic* 12

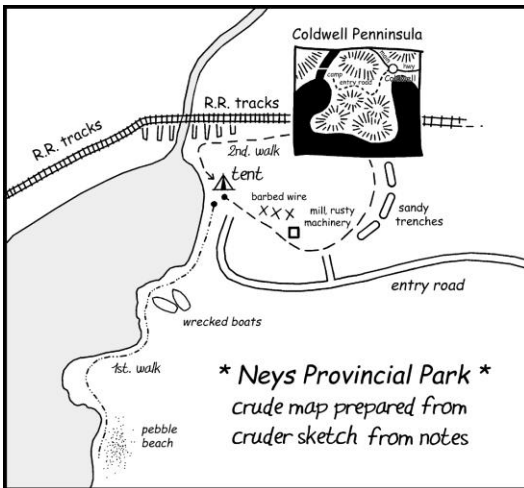
**Preamble, from loc:** *I've been along a part of the Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park, so I have a nodding acquaintance with the land. Victoria Vayne, Bob Wilson, and I were driving back from some con or were just traveling for its own sake... We entered Swift Run Gap, Highway 33, and left by Thornton Gap, Highway 211. Of the several campgrounds available, I believe we put out tent up in Beg Meadows, near a lodge with a spectacular view of the Valley. I remember a number of details. Having a doe nearly walk into the tent in search of scraps. Bear-proof garbage cans. And untrustworthy looking trails. I never ventured along any of them. There seemed too many trails, crossing every hundred yards or so, and all blazed with the same colour plastic ties as if, somehow, the reassurance that his was an "official" trail was enough by itself. Well, according to the map I bought there was nothing to see within a mile of the camp but swamp. And we weren't staying but the night, and leaving next morning. So our stay in Shenandoah National Park was pretty much the usual tourist thing. However...*

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Not all my traveling has been tame. One time Bob Wilson and I drove north, along the shore of Lake Superior, looking for a number of interesting landmarks along the way. It was the same trip on which we climbed to the top of Agawa Rock, and on which I found a quarter on a beach miles from the highway, and untracked by human footprints. But these were events along the east shore.

Another hundred miles north and west, the Nippigon shore juts out into the lake a couple of miles and was given the name Coldwell Peninsula sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup>. century. The tiny hamlet of Coldwell lies a bit east, not actually on the peninsula for some reason. If it weren't so dirty and rundown, the wharfs and fishing gear would make another Peggy's Cove of it, but tourists didn't expect picturesque fishing villages on Lake Superior, so the inhabitants let nature take its course.

The Coldwell was the inspiration of many of the paintings by various Group of Seven artists. It is a long extinct volcanic extrusion with a complicated metamorphic history that delighted the eyes of Canada's paramount painters. It was a tight grouping of dumpling hills clinging together like survivors on a raft, surrounded by the moody waters of Gitcheegoomee. In Autumn, the colours must run riot, as the cliché has it, but Bob and I were too early in the season for that. The hills and the plain that was the neck of the peninsula were green. A sandy beach ran along the west side of the neck, from the mouth of the Little Pick River, where there were campsites.



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neys\\_Provincial\\_Park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neys_Provincial_Park)

Two other peculiarities marked the Coldwell. One was the unexpected development of sand dunes in the middle of the peninsular neck. Vegetation only held the soil loosely, and drifting had denuded the sand in spots. The other peculiarity was that the Colwell peninsula was used during WWII as the site of a prison camp for German officers. Besides hiking the trail around the peninsula, Bob had especially hoped to find this old camp when he drew up the travel plans.

As it happened, hiking the trail proved to be a bust. Bob, after a week of driving and other excursions, didn't feel up to it. We got about two miles through the woods and along the lobate granite beaches when he said he was too tired to go on. I have to admit, it had been arduous and we hadn't made enough progress so far that circumnavigating the entire peninsula was remotely feasible in one day. It hadn't been a total loss, since we were well out of sight of any human despoliation. Moreover, we'd gotten as far as two of the minor landmarks mentioned in the park guide – a pebble beach high up on the shore, left behind by the ancient lake, and a pair of abandoned boats that had been bleaching in the sun for about fifty years, reduced to wreckage.

Finding the officer's camp, however, turned out to be fairly easy. According to the map, it was almost due east of the beach, and the woods weren't thick. There was little underbrush, and the trees tended to be pine. If there were any abandoned buildings, or remnant enclosures, they should be easy to find, we reasoned. But there didn't seem to be anything at all. We were puzzled, until one of us tripped yet again over one of the many tangled vines among the brush. Upon examination, it was obvious why the vines had been such a hazard to footing. It was barbed wire, overgrown. After that we kept our eyes to the ground, and quickly found a mound of moldering shingles and boards that could have been anything – a guard tower perhaps, but more likely a tool shed, or even an outhouse. The remains were disappointing. We were resigned to nothing more when we came to an open space with a built-up embankment of dirt, grown over with grass, and mounted on it several pieces of ruined machinery. We had found the saw mill, or its foundation at least. Rough, squared off timbers, holding back the embankment, had turned black with age. A bit of concrete floor was visible under the sand. Bolted to the broken platform were the skeletal remains of the mill, stripped of all its moving parts after the camp closed. The empty frames and jigs looked more like rock than metal, crusted with layers of rust that had grown over thirty-five years of exposure to the damp and cold so near the arctic watershed.

We trekked further east without finding much more. A new road, in the process of being bulldozed, crossed our path, coming up from the paved park entry road a few hundred yards south. We crossed it, and found a series of shallow, sand filled trenches that looked more like sand bunkers on a golf course than anything else we could think of. The sandy depressions were strung in a line, like sausages, leading north toward the mainland in a discontinuous by-way.

The brush on either side was littered by the rusty shells of old cans, broken glass, and what looked like shreds of an old boot. Possibly the pits

marked the sites of old barracks, although I couldn't see how old wooden shells would collapse into a depression. And it was odd they stretched in a single line half a mile long. This would be implausible for reasons of security. In fact, there was no compelling evidence that the sandy pits were connected with the prison camp at all. In the end, we reached no conclusions.

The "sand traps" stopped nowhere in particular, and we found no more sign of human occupation, not even barbed wire. We hiked west again, along the line of the railroad tracks, until we came to the Little Pic. Our side of the river was relatively low, and lumpy, with the mainland rising in sheer granite walls to five or six hundred feet. The rails jumped the water on breathtaking wooden trestles, and ran away into the northern wilderness, clinging to the skirts of mountains worn down by a billion years. We could go no farther that way, and turned south toward camp. We were soon reminded that we had never been far from human influence. Long before we sighted our tent we came across a number of used condoms in the bushes.

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***Afterword:** Strangely, when Mike Shoemaker published this as a "letter" in his fanzine, he edited out the final detail. Condoms were too distasteful for mention in his well bred fanzine, I believe he said later.*



## Active Measures

By Garth Spencer

You're probably wondering at this point what shenanigans the Royal Swiss Navy got up to, since last issue. Not much. Well, we *talked* about an April Fool's Day march, or participating in the Zombie Walk this summer, but that was about the size of it.

At VCon 34 I hosted a room party with a Discordian/Royal Swiss Navy theme, with RSN promotional flyers and cards, and Stan Rogers/Arrogant Worms music. It was rather a good room party. On the other hand, I did not organize some copies of the RSN *Handbook* or other handouts. In fact, when I was supposed to host a Discordian meetup group a month later, I slept right through it.

The problem here is the tendency to listless lack of energy that I, and others, have witnessed in Vancouver fandom for a few years now. In fact Dave Panchyk of blessed memory witnessed the same thing in Saskatchewan fandom, in the 80s.

It is my considered opinion that the Canadian government has been putting Prozac or Valium in Canada's water supplies. This explains a lot about our state of social rest.

Any suggestions?



## Lest We Remember

Tara Wayne

Remember too well: and the wrong lesson.

A WWI veteran, the last Tommie, said on a Remembrance Day program, ".....remember.....remember the Germans....they died fighting for what they believed, just as we."

No truer words were ever spoken. Myself, I never could understand what brought people from all over the world to fight for King and Country in cold, muddy trenches in Flanders Field.

Of course, I have the advantage of hindsight over them. I can read shelves of books and look into the causes. I've had years to study the battles and reflect on the outcome of the Great War. It's doubtful that many people in 1914 had any idea that they were risking their lives over a personal spat between Crazy Willy and his uncle Eddie, or that a German hegemony in Europe might not have been much worse than the status quo, or that there was no physical threat whatsoever to either England or the Empire, merely to the idea of British hegemony.

(This is rather like America's current belief in the necessity of its own supremacy over all the other powers in the world. Like Whitehall, the Pentagon regards it as essential that the United States could take on any two other superpowers simultaneously.)

The reality of 1914, though, was that Britain's privileged position in respect to other powers was coming to an end. Germany was foremost in catching up with the British in most areas of industrialization, capitalization, and militarization. Other European nations weren't far behind. The process was inevitable, since all nations are cut alike from the Human cloth. Britain could delay what it could not stop, by re-arming and spending ever-



greater sums on maintaining its superiority on the High Seas, but nothing short of calamity would prevent Britain's rivals from eventually achieving parity.

Ironically, it was the mutual calamity of the War to End Wars that paved the way for the United States to assume Britain's mantle of global hegemony, along with all the same burdens and neuroses.

It's become a commonplace notion that a German victory would have been no worse for Europe than the Allied victory. In the greater scheme of things, this may well be true. I doubt very much that the Second Reich could have controlled Europe for long, let alone reshape it in the image of Prussian sensibilities. But in the short run, it's undeniable that German plans for Europe were far from benign. Had the Kaiser's armies overrun France (as Hitler's did 25 years later), the new dynamic would have been more radical than most people realize. Not only would have the unfortunate provinces of Alsace & Lorraine changed hands again, it's doubtful that the nations of Belgium and The Netherlands would have remained independent. Factions in Germany advocated adding the Low Countries to the Reich as a *sine qua non*. France was to be cast permanently in the shadow of German hegemony in Europe, ending a long-standing fear and hatred of the French. Britain, so far as she stood by the French and turned her back on her German cousins, was to be shut out of Europe. The Russians were to be shunned as pariahs of civilization.

Some enthusiasts of German supremacy even talked of forcing the British Empire to cede many of its possessions around the globe. They believed America could be forced not only into acquiescence, but into an agreement of a favorable Naval Treaty – one that allowed Germany to build capital ships one-for-one with the U.S. Navy. But that was probably too much wishful thinking even for the Kaiser.

But it must be noted that the Prussian social fabric was a rigid one, adhering to traditional class divisions, and taut with tensions. The Junker class mentally had one foot still in the middle-ages. It was determined to allow nothing to change, and to relinquish nothing of their absolute control of German society. Nevertheless, changes were happening. The old pastoral life style was passing away, to be replaced by an urban, industrial paradigm that the Junkers neither understood nor liked. Yet for all that they stood it the way, Germany **was** industrializing, and the German way of life was changing. Social progress was snail-paced, though. The Junkers, along with the Kaiser, and leading capitalists such as the Krupp family, were largely successful in obstructing political or social reform. A degree of state paternalism was substituted, but it was never really successful in addressing Labour's needs. Social unrest in Germany was inevitable.

The odds that the German pattern could have been imposed on Western Europe with any degree of success, or for very long, were negligible. There was likely no great danger of an Era of a Greater Reich, nor, I think, of far-reaching political oppression. While the years immediately after a German victory would have been hard for France and the Low Countries, I think the static situation in Germany was fundamentally too unstable. German dominance over Europe would have broken down when German society itself broke down.

Aside from the likely limited consequences of a German victory, the war might also have been averted by smarter diplomacy. Particularly if Germans been less xenophobic and narrow-minded in their own diplomacy, and hadn't assumed that war was inevitable if Germany were to win its place in the sun. The Kaiser himself must shoulder a lot of the blame for botched relations and for his zeal for manly, militarist solutions.

The War to End All Wars probably didn't have to be fought. I certainly wouldn't have fought in it.

I would rather have shot my draft agent than go to France in 1914 to shoot Germans. It isn't that I love Germans, but because I value my life more than the largely irrelevant issues of WWI.

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Then there's WWII; a different animal. Different Germans too. The issues that arose from the Second World War are all too easy to understand. A Nazi dominated Europe would not have been any more stable, and might not have lasted any longer than a Prussian dominated Europe. But the consequences would have been horrifying several magnitudes more serious. I might not have enlisted to fight the Nazis, but I probably wouldn't have resisted the draft either. (Fighting in the first year of any year, when most of the mistakes are made, is an excellent way to get killed for little useful purpose.) Some threats are real, and *have* to be met, even if you aren't eager to do it.

When I was a kid, we observed Remembrance Day more in the light of WWI -- it was a time to reflect on the tragedy and uselessness of war. Of late, there seems to be an effort to change Canadians' attitudes. Policy Makers and Opinion Shapers are trying to make militarism glorious again. It is presented to the public as a semi-religious sacrifice of heroes. Young men are sent overseas to fight and die, and accomplish goals that seem to have no shape or form, and, most worrisome, no limitation. When they fall, the public is told they will live forever in our memory, or some equally nebulous formula. Empty sound-bites made for the Press subvert

the value of life. Instead of feeling feel saddened by the useless loss of life, we're urged to feel proud.

The effort to sanctify war in false colours is reaching far into our past. WWI has been reshaped into an exhibition of valor, instead of the bath of blood and muck, the hail of high explosives and machine gun bullets, the plagues of fleas and dysentery that it was. Men are imagined to have submitted to all this from love of King and Country, not to mention the Anglo-Saxon eagerness for a good scrap. Perhaps they did. I don't know. But we needn't share their delusions.

Meanwhile, Canadian troops are active in Afghanistan, in an armed conflict that has, at best, half-hearted support from the Canadian public. More and more, people openly call for our soldiers to be brought home. They want to stop the pursuit of ill-defined and unrealizable goals that many suspect were not even fashioned in Ottawa. Instead of listening to us, however, our government does whatever it can to play on our sympathies. In a cloying gesture to create reflex patriotism, the main highway between two major Canadian cities was renamed "The Highway of Heroes." Barely clinging to office, the government encourages us to stand behind its war. It self-servingly confuses our concern for the men in uniform with the decisions that put them at risk in the first place. Their intention is to transfer our support of the troops to support of the government's policies, even though it is those policies that are the only danger. I worry because this agenda will clearly led to more "interventions", more wars, and to a greater surrender of common sense to a militarist state of mind that I despise. Militarism and the open public discourse that is the keystone to democracy cannot co-exist. One will drive out the other.

Let us remember Flanders's Fields, but not the imaginings of besotted war romanticists. Leave glory in the mud of the Somme where it belongs.

## Art Credits

Roy Pounds.....	Cover
Brad Foster.....	p. 5
William Rotsler.....	p. 18
Anonymous.....	everything else

**Postscript:** In order to get this issue out, I've given up pretending I'm going to review fanzines this month. Granted, I *should*. In fact I should engage the subjects and articles, in the publications I receive.

And I simply haven't done so. There's something wrong with my use of time. Maybe I should shoot my TV.

