

I am a "Brat", An "Army Brat"

By Art Connolly

I can make this claim, as my father proudly served 26 years in the Canadian Armed Forces. My childhood years were spent at CFB Gagetown, New Brunswick.

Childhood memories of Gagetown are wonderful. I recall that the sun shone brighter and the sky was a more vibrant blue. The scent of the surrounding forest is etched in my mind. I was a Gagetown "brat" from 1961 to 1969.

Those "baby boom" years meant that my childhood friends and I had large families. A family of 9 or more was not that unusual. There was always an abundance of other children to "play" with.

In my adult years, I often felt lost when others spoke of television programs that they had watched as children. I seldom was familiar with the programs mentioned and I would receive a look of pity when I explained that I grew up with only one television channel. The look of pity always came after I mentioned that the one channel was the CBC.

I now realize how fortunate I was to have had only one television channel. Why? It's simple. We kids were never in the house. We were constantly outside doing what kids should be doing. We were being kids. Camping, hiking, biking, building "forts", skating on ice rinks that we had made ourselves, tobogganing, tree climbing, berry picking, and swimming were just a few of my childhood memories.

CFB Gagetown was simply the best place to spend one's childhood. I believed that to be a fact until May of 2005.

In May of 2005 the Canadian media reported that the deadly defoliant Agent Orange had been sprayed at CFB Gagetown. As I watched one of those news broadcasts my sister called to tell me that our father was dying. I returned home to be at his side.

Late into the night I would sit at my father's hospital bedside, watching him sleep, watching him gasp for air, watching him die.

Late into the night I would sit trying to be a brave man for my father while also trying to comfort the little boy within me.

Late into the night I would sit watching the 24-hour news channel report that Agent Orange had been sprayed at CFB Gagetown.

Late into the night I would reflect on my family's medical history.

My 7-year-old brother died of Reyes Syndrome. My 28-year-old pregnant sister died of a pulmonary embolism. The baby was lost as well. Another sister suffered from endometriosis and during her first pregnancy miscarried. My mother was diagnosed with stomach cancer and had her stomach surgically removed. I believe defoliant sprayings at CFB Gagetown contributed to their deaths and illnesses.

In response to the media reports the

Department of National Defence (DND) stated that 2 1/2 barrels of the deadly chemical mixture of 2,4,D and 2,4,5 T (Agent Orange) had been sprayed for a total of 7 days during 1966 and 1967 by the U.S military. Documents obtained through the Access to Information Act show that DND was less than forthcoming in their response. Many refer to the spraying as the "Gagetown Atrocity".

There were over 315,000 troops at CFB Gagetown from 1956 to 1984. This does not include the wives, widows, and children of our veterans and civilians.

Many individuals have stated that they believe their health has been affected by these defoliant sprayings. In response to public uproar DND has created the Base Gagetown and Area Factfinder Project (BGAFP). There has been much criticism of this project.

Victims of the "Gagetown Atrocity" are organizing. They are asking questions of DND and the federal government. They are conducting research. A civil action lawsuit has been instigated with over 1500 plaintiffs. The Agent Orange Association of Canada (AOAC) is organizing its members to become

politically active and ensure that the truth regarding this injustice is revealed.

AOAC has an online petition (HYPERLINK "http://www.petitiononline.com/aolert/"http://www.petitiononline.com/aolert) as well as its own Internet website (www.agentorangealert.com)

More information can be obtained by writing AOAC PO Box 8120 London ON N6G 2B0.

Do I wish I had lived my years as a child somewhere other than CFB Gagetown? No. My childhood at CFB Gagetown has made me who I am today. A man who along with thousands of other "brats", veterans, widows and spouses seeks the truth and justice.

I am a "Brat", An "Army Brat".

DND trained their soldiers, our fathers well. They trained them to never give up in the face of adversity. Our fathers taught the same virtue to us.

Art Connolly is the Vice President of the Agent Orange Association of Canada.

Up-Date On Canadian Forces Superannuation Surplus Annuity Funds

Recently the Government of Canada released to the Armed Forces Pensioners/Annuitants Association of Canada (AFP-AAC) the annual reports of the Canadian Forces Superannuation 2003-2005. Note that, despite the previous withdrawal of 16.5 billion dollars from Military Annuity funds, the depletion of our retirement Annuity surplus funds continues.

In the 2003-2004 report, it is noted that \$630,000,000.00 was retired from the CFS A surplus account. The 2004-2005 report indicates that no funds were "withdrawn" from the accounts and that there was a surplus of \$1,099,013,000.00 that year.

The Government of Canada continues to mismanage the economy of our country on the backs of the Military Pensioners, by depleting their Annuity surplus account. It's time for the Prime Minister to step-up to the plate and take a bold, decisive stand to put a stop to the injustice of claw backs to the Military Personnel Annuity when we attain age 65.

Sincerely,
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