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Summer 2006

L.N. (Larrie) Happy

Larrie has been a valuable member of CASARA Manitoba for approximately 18 years. During this time, he has served as Provincial Training Officer, Vice-President of CASARA Manitoba's executive team (while retaining the Provincial Training Officer function) as well as the CASARA Chief Judge for the Integrated Search Event jointly held with the DND SAR Squadrons during the National SAREx.

On many occasions he has demonstrated his dedication and love for our CASARA organization. Through his dedicated involvement over this time period, he has been able to influence the evolution of CASARA to where we are today in the SAR world.

In his work life as a Province of Manitoba Senior Mechanical & Engineering Inspector and Investigator, he was responsible for all fuel oils, all gases (natural, propane, butane, hydrogen, etc.), electrical equipment and commercial installations, biomedical equipment, fire and accident investigations, and Chief Troubleshooter. In this capacity, Larrie travelled the province and CASARA Manitoba was able to use this to good advantage. During his trips, he was able to look in on the training and to attend meetings that were being held by the Zones, and leave them with some of his pearls of wisdom (and also to take a few with him as well).



Larrie left home at an early age and enlisted in the army. His potential was recognized and he was assigned a role in intelligence gathering. This resulted in him being stationed in the Middle East at the time of hostilities starting in Cyprus and was to shape him for the rest of his life. Upon his return, he resumed his education. This included on the job training and qualified him for four trade licences (Journeyman Electrician's Licence, "A" Gas Fitter's Licence, Oil Burner's Licence, and a Radio and TV Licence). He also completed studies for a Diploma in Industrial Electronics. All of these accomplishments were achieved prior to joining the government, where he has worked for the last 31 years.

Larrie has decided that Manitoba winters are getting too hard and he has purchased a home in Comox, BC, adjacent to the home of 442 (Search and Rescue) Squadron. He will be departing shortly to take up residence in the land of milk and honey and little sunshine. Unfortunately, Manitoba's loss is BC's gain.

We wish Larrie and Olga all the best in their new home and look forward to seeing him join our counterparts in BC. All the best Larrie.

Western Canada SAREx

By Maurija Skansen
Brandon Zone

“Call me *Maurija*. Some *weeks* ago – never mind how long precisely – having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on *land*, I thought I would *fly* about a little and see the *ethereal* part of the world.”

The opening lines to Moby Dick seemed somehow appropriate as I undertake to tell the story of a fantastic and arduous search, not for that great white whale, but for several mysterious, diverse, and sometimes elusive targets. By the way, I have taken grave and terrible liberties with the prose of Herman Melville for which I hope to be forgiven. If I were to carry on this comparison and I am Ishmael, then I suppose someone, Murray, would have to be deemed Captain Ahab. Well, Murray Harvey and his zone members at The Pas were certainly in charge, but there was no tyranny involved. Alas, and I am very delighted, that this is where my analogy breaks down.

I first signed on with Zone 2 Brandon CASARA in January of this year. I was recruited by Mary Ritchie (Mary on the Prairie) who is Zone 2 Chief Spotter. Although, I was initially somewhat intimidated by the prospect of joining Search & Rescue, I was very enthusiastic and hopeful that I could be a part of something so worthwhile and rewarding. Upon arrival at the first exercise I was greeted warmly and welcomed as a new member. Mary had said this was a great group of people, and she is no liar, that one. I found that this very same experience was repeated when I participated in the Western Canada SAREx at The Pas. Again, I felt some initial sense of intimidation, which soon vanished as I began to get to know my fellow participants in the search exercise.



Brandon Zone crew Kevin Choy, pilot, Gordon Foot, spotter, Ken Fox, nav, Mary Ritchie, spotter

Photo via Maurija Skansen

Early on in the year we were told about the forthcoming WC SAREx at The Pas. Kevin Choy (Zone Commander and pilot), Ken Fox (navigator) and Gord Foote (spotter) of Brandon zone had been on the winning team last year in BC so their participation was certain this year. Mary was to later round out this crew as the original fourth member was unavailable. We only had approval for one plane from our zone so any additional participants would likely be helping out on the ground. I was still keen on going to participate and learn, especially since Kevin was encouraging anyone interested to take part. As it turned out I was told later that I would probably be a spotter with the Swan River team.

Sean Currie and I hit the road on Friday June 30, with Darryl (Flyboy) Childerhose, our Treasurer and past Commander, who was the Ozzie Explorer Operator for the exercise. It was a bit of a drive but it gave me the opportunity to review the ops order and CASARA manual as suggested by our Grand Umpah. We arrived at The Pas, located our hotel and headed out to Clearwater Lake Airport with directions from a friendly local. By the time we got out to the airport, supper was over, and the search and competition briefing had already begun. Bill from The Pas made sure to throw a few more burgers on for us so we didn't go hungry. Rob Mason, the exercise search co-ordinator, whom I recognized along with a few others from the AGM earlier this year, was going over the exercise scenario as we took our seats near our fellow zone members. As quickly as possible, I started taking notes. It's really too bad that I can't find any of them now but they did come in handy at the time. ("If in doubt, take notes and try not to lose them!" Maurija Skansen). Additional information, as well as welcoming words, came from Larrie Happy, the competition judge, and Murray Harvey, the exercise commander, in the course of the evening.

The exercise included four distinct tasks: a multi-target track crawl; an in-flight electronic homing; a message drop; and a vehicle homing. As it turned out there were 9 teams participating in the exercise, originally to depart in the following order: Saskatoon, SK; Brandon, MB; Yorkton, SK; Regina, SK; Prince Albert / Laronge, SK; Winnipeg, MB; Vernon, BC; Alberta, and "Team Manitoba". The order of departure was to undergo several modifications over the course of the next day. I had been told that I would be a spotter with the Swan River Team. Hey, what about Swan River? This is why you should always get to the briefing on time. As it turned out, Swan River pilot/navigator, Ray Dzikowski, had amalgamated with Winnipeg pilot Chuck Wilson, and had arranged through Kevin to recruit 2 Brandon spotters (Sean and me). I was pretty near flying with one of the Saskatchewan teams before I got straightened out! Next on the agenda was navigation and search preparation. Using the waypoint list, maps and navigational tools, we (and by we, I mean Chuck and Ray), plotted the search course for the multi-target track

crawl which involved 7 legs. Ray had Sean and I participate by double-checking the numbers and calculations; always a good idea, but in this case only confirmed Chuck to be spotted as far as we could see. (You can tell he's done this a few times before!)

"Right then, on the bus you scurvy lot, and try to get some sleep before I see your mugs back here at 1200 hrs Zulu sharp." (Nobody actually said this. I'm just trying to inject a little Captain Ahab for effect.) Since my team was scheduled to fly last we were the first on Saturday to undertake, and successfully complete I might add, the vehicle homing portion of the exercise. Zone 2 Ground Leader Fred Eshpeter had prepared Sean and me well for this exercise and Chuck and Ray, as with everything, were perfectly competent. We were even initially issued faulty equipment, but our pre-exercise instrument check revealed the malfunction and we continued on unflustered. (Well, most of us, I hope Ray doesn't fly like he drives! Just kidding, Ray.) Well, as I mentioned earlier, there were a few changes to the order of departure. In the end we queued up 8th of the 9 teams to depart on the air search out of Clearwater Lake. Before we could depart, 435 Sqn rep Rod Lanning and Provincial Training Officer Darlene Searcy gave us a short pre-flight quiz and we were off.



The Manitoba crew in front of John Hall's C172
Photo via Maurija Skansen

Soon, our team was flying in a Cessna 172 Skyhawk belonging to John Hall of Winnipeg, who was the Chief Pilot for the exercise (and the guy taking all the pictures). All we knew as spotters was that there were more than 5 and less than 20 targets and no points would be deducted for false targets, so game on! I was pretty nervous starting out because I wanted to do well. Take off was great, a quick fly around and distance check and we were on SAR and flying en route over beautiful Clearwater Lake. We started seeing things right away. I think the visibility was better for us than for some of the other crews. That certainly helped with spotting and probably helped us stay on track without the aid of a GPS. Other tasking specifications included: no call arounds and ops normal at the middle of each leg. We ended up identifying correctly 7 out of the actual 10 targets on the search. Targets included brightly coloured rafts in the water, reflected light from a mirror, two survival markings, an ultralight parked on the edge of a lake, and

airplane wreckage. Our list may have included a few extra, which luckily didn't count against us.

Things were going quite swimmingly, as they say, until about the middle of the 4th leg. Ray had asked me earlier if I ever got airsick, to which I truthfully and emphatically replied "Never". Well there is always a first time for everything. I felt compelled to let Chuck and Ray know, since I felt it may affect my ability to spot. Chuck and Ray, (chivalry is not dead) immediately offered to return to base but I insisted that the situation was not quite that dire. After all, I was just queasy, no airsick bags necessary, but I kept the one proffered by Sean close by, just in case. Spotting over The Pas is much different to spotting in southwestern Manitoba and concentrating on this dense terrain for an extended period was having a definite effect on my general state. As we were approaching the middle of the 6th leg, and I was thinking I just might make it, we encountered some weather and had to divert to Grace Lake airport to avoid a storm. (Now I can say that I've been to both airports in The Pas.) This gave me some time to rehydrate and recuperate. Once again, Chuck and Ray gave me the option of calling off the search, but I really didn't want to and they wouldn't leave me behind, so on I must go. The weather had cleared and we were okay to go back to the search, but when we checked in, we were instructed to go directly to the last waypoint, and begin the airborne electronic homing. So much for the rest of the targets. Once again we experienced instrument problems, but unlike the ground search, we were unable to trade out our malfunctioning equipment. I think the installed antennae are preferable to the ones that attach to the struts. Hey, that's my story, and I'm sticking to it. One more task and we're done. On to the message drop. Sorry to say we didn't hit the bucket and John Hall didn't have to buy everyone a round, damn it!



The Manitoba crew – Sean Currie, Ray Dzikowski, Maurija Skansen, Chuck Wilson

Photo via Maurija Skansen

Back inside the hangar we had a debriefing with Jim Bell (Base Commander, Zone 1, Winnipeg). By this time, I was pretty much ready for some rest or at least some kind of alcoholic beverage, but wait, the bus that I'm supposed to be on, to get back to the hotel is leaving without me. Ahhhh! Luckily, some sympathetic soul told them to wait and I made it back to the hotel. Whew! Have you noticed that there is a common theme of me running late all weekend? The rest of the Brandon crew was already gone when I got back to the room so I rushed to get ready and join them. Just when I was feeling a bit abandoned, the fellows from across the hall proffered a drink and even escorted me to the banquet. I think I could get used to this! The banquet was most enjoyable and gave us a chance to socialize with more of the search participants. After the meal, Rob Mason went over the results of the competition. Congratulations to the Regina team: Keith Bjorndahl (pilot and fellow Norwegian), Clarence Demchuk (navigator), Pat Hume and Rick Barks (spotters), came in first, having successfully identified 8 of the 10 targets. I feel very privileged to have been part of "Team Manitoba", who despite what went wrong, placed second overall, not too shabby. Things wrapped up Sunday morning with breakfast at the hotel followed by a brief gathering where we heard again from Larrie Happy and CASARA President John Davidson.

I applaud CASARA and the professionalism of the organizers and participants of the 2006 Western Canada SAREx. I feel privileged to have been a part of this event and to be associated with this organization. Seeing people with integrity working together as volunteers and showing absolute respect for each other is unbelievably reassuring and heartening.



Manitoba SAREx participants, including Maurija Skansen, Kevin Choy, Ken Rigaux, Bill Karras, John Hall, and Tim Spiece

Photo via Maurija Skansen

As a last note, guess who almost missed the bus to get back to the airport. Thanks for not leaving without us, Kevin.

CASARA SAREx flies through The Pas

Opasquia Times, Fri., July 7, 2006

By Trent Allen

Staff Reporter

The Pas, or rather the skies above, served as host for the CASARA Western SAREx during Canada Day weekend, with crews from all over the west coming to The Pas to test their search and rescue abilities.

Several teams, one from as far away as Vernon, British Columbia, took part in the SAREx. Crews of four, comprised of a pilot, navigator and two spotters, were asked to locate 10 different targets. They were also timed and had to stick to a flight pattern. The ten different targets were things common for search crews to find, and included looking for an airplane crash site, spotting a floatation device in the water, picking up on someone using a flashing mirror as a signal, and picking up on ground markers.

Team Regina flew away with first place in the event, and continued the tradition of having a different team each year win the event.

"To me, that shows that we are pretty equal across the board," said Larrie Happy, Vice-President of CASARA for Manitoba.

Terry Lumb, the Chief Navigator for the SAREx, stated flying the route given was important.

"If they accurately flew that route, they would be within visible range of every one of the targets," Lumb said, adding the height for most flights was 1,000 feet. "At that height, you should be able to see for two miles, one mile in either direction of the search plane."

While the crews were sent to fly in a sort of circle-square route to hit all the targets in the time required, searches of a particular area would be done in a different manner, such as a swath search, where the plane would go back and forth, searching an area from one end of the search area to the other back and forth in swathes.

The point of this search was to create a gathering point for various CASARA crews to come together and meet while testing their skills. The gathering gives members an opportunity to gain experience as well.

"It's all about the experience," said Lumb. "The more skills we can develop the better."

Lumb added while the reputation for CASARA is to be involved in searches for airplane crashes, the fact is airplane searches are the minority of what they tend to look for. In fact, once in the search area, the goal is get spotters to accurately identify everything they see that could be related to the search. Experience gained over time and through opportunities such as the SAREx are invaluable.

“That’s part of the problem, getting them confident enough to say, ‘let’s check that out.’ Sometimes they think, ‘that can’t be it,’ but aren’t completely sure. They need to be confident enough to tell the pilot, hey we need to go back and have another look, or lift your wing so I can get a better look,” Lumb assessed. While the SAREx was an important learning experience, CASARA also lost a valuable resource, as Happy announced he was stepping down from the organization and this was his last SAREx with CASARA.

“I’ve enjoyed it. You get to meet a lot of people,” said Happy. “A lot of these people give a lot of themselves. People can feel very good that people like us are up there.”

Happy is moving on due to some health problems he’s suffered recently, and is moving to British Columbia. While saying he’s looking forward to the move, he’s also going to miss what he’s been doing with CASARA.

“I’ve been here so long and it’s the people (which I’ll miss the most),” Happy said. “Age isn’t an obstacle here. You look around, what do you see. You see the age differences here, but does that matter. No it doesn’t. It’s nice when we get together.”

“It’s very, very important (what we do),” Happy continued. “You can see these people beam with pride; they are proud of what they do.”

Looking back, Happy was most pleased with what he’s seen CASARA turn into.

“Just seeing the evolution of CASARA,” Happy said when asked what changes have happened over the years which he’s been excited to see. “It was incorporated in 1986 and we started with nothing. Now look at it today, we are a well oiled machine; a Swiss watch.”

While Happy won’t be a part of next year’s Western SAREx, one will be taking place, with each province taking turns hosting the event. Next year Prince Albert, Saskatchewan will serve as the host community.

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New Provincial Training Officer for Manitoba

By Darlene Searcy



Yes, that is Perry Oxford and I, standing outside the Brandon Flying Club, squinting at the camera. This photo puts faces to our names – the passing of the torch in a way. Perry Oxford has worked many volunteer hours fulfilling the role for CASARA Manitoba and passed his responsibilities to me on May 27, 2006.

I am building the training program for Manitoba on the shoulders of others who have contributed their expertise and time previously. Having said that, I am delighted by the confidence placed in me, and the new opportunities for CASARA to expand and fulfill our National Training mandate. My job is to make sure that those who volunteer their time for our organisation in Manitoba receive as wide and comprehensive a skill and knowledge based training program as can be provided with the resources we have available.

CASARA members require continual training to maintain our operational status and hone our skills. We are required to be ready at a few minutes notice; in any number of roles, from flying aircraft to providing first aid; all the while practising aviation safety, air search support services and general assistance to those in distress. Pilots are required to keep their flight endorsements current. We train for effective electronic communications and search specialties. And we have to be on top of our game.

As a federally incorporated non-profit volunteer association, we have provided cost-effective air search and rescue services throughout Canada since 1986. Volunteers are the key element in maximizing our effectiveness of SAR Operations, prevention and safety-related activities. Did you know that a few years ago (2003) CASARA responded to 25% of all aeronautical SAR incidents in Canada? We have more than 2,600 trained members and over 390 privately owned fixed wing aircraft ready to provide service to our community, province, and country.

Our recently renewed contribution agreement with the government is providing 13 million dollars over five years for operational funding. Training for the 2006-2007 year, across Canada has been allotted \$1.7 million.

I think we can make good use of the money, with your active co-operation, varied talents, drive and sense of responsibility for others.

My email address is dsearcy@mts.net, my home phone number is 204 831 5372. Your input, questions, and ideas are appreciated; we are in the service of others together.

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Winnipeg Zone Commander – Jim Bell

Opasquia Times photo, the SAREx winning team, with John Davidson and Larrie Happy. Photo by Trent Allen.



Larrie Happy (holding trophy), Manitoba Vice-President and John Davidson, National President (far left) present winning Regina team with Western SAREX trophy. Team Regina consists of Keith Bjorndahl, pilot, Clarence Demchuk, navigator, Pat Hume, spotter, Rick Parks, spotter. Photo by Trent Allen.