

GOOSE BAY INVASION



by Tim Doucette

So I'm on my lunch break last Tuesday (Oct. 3) and I'm walking down St. Clair Ave. looking for a decent place to grab a donut only it seems like every donut shop has a cop in it. Now don't get me wrong, I don't hate cops, I'd never kill one or do anything radical like that, I just seem to feel better when they're not around.

So I'm walking past the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) building and I see Macdonald Scott of York University Disarmament (YUD), "a year-old non-aligned peace group that works for disarmament on both sides of the Iron Curtain." We exchange the secret York U handshake and I ask him if he wants to go for a donut. That's when I find out that he and eight other people are about to go up to the fifth-floor INAC offices to protest the Canadian government's militarization of Nitassinan (in the Quebec-Labrador peninsula), home to the Innu (as the NaskapiMontagnais people call themselves) for the past 9,000 years, and the Goose Bay military base for the last forty.

This is a real coincidence because I'd already been thinking about writing an article on this very issue, so I think to myself "screw the donut" and decide to go get an *Excalibur* exclusive.

Meanwhile, somewhere in St. John's, Newfoundland, the government is trying to overturn a landmark ruling that acquitted four Innu charged with mischief for "trespassing" on the Goose Bay base — which is on their land — in an effort to stop the low-level test flights which are being conducted constantly over the "uninhabited" homeland of 10,000 people.

In order to practice radar-evading "Deep Strike" manoeuvres the warplanes travel 100 feet from the ground at speeds as high as 800 miles per hour — faster than the speed of sound. This results in a sonic boom, literally earth-shaking, and a continuous shock wave that is miles wide, causing humans and other animals severe physical and emotional stress. At least one person has died of a heart attack as a direct result of the boom.

The planes also burn the branches off trees, shake and sometimes crack windows and walls, leave oil slicks on the water, and occasionally drop bombs. In 1988 there were 7,500 low-level manoeuvres over Nitassinan; now the government is plotting the construction of an \$800-million NATO Tactical Fighter Weapons Training Centre (ACQUITTED) which could result in 40,000 flights every year until doomsday.

The following is excerpted from Judge James Igloliorte's April 18 ruling of acquittal:

"On Sept. 15, 1988 the four people here were part of a larger group who collectively walked beyond a checkpoint gate leading onto the part of the Goose Bay runway called an 'apron.' Since they hadn't been given permission by any airport authorities, they were arrested, charged and removed by the RCMP . . .

"We are not dealing with land which has been the subject of divestiture through treaties . . . Through their knowledge of ancestry and kinship (the Innu) have showed that none of their people ever gave away rights to the land to Canada, and this is an honest belief each person holds. The provincial and federal statutes do not include as third parties or signatories any Innu people . . .

"These four people have shown me their belief in owner's rights is unshaken by the present (military) occupation.

"All of the legal reasonings are based on the premise that somehow the Crown acquired magically by its own declaration of title to the fee a consequent fiduciary obligation to the original people. It is time this premise based on 17th-century reasoning be questioned in the light of 21st-century reality.

"Canada is a vital part of the global village and must show its maturity not only to the segment of Canadian society that wields great power and authority to summarily affect the lives of minority groups with the flourish of a pen to yet another 'agreement' or 'memorandum of understanding' resulting in great social and economic benefit; but also to its most desperate people . . .

"By declaring these Innu as criminals for crying 'enough!' the Court will have been unable to recognize the fundamental right (of) all persons to be treated equally before the law."

So back in Toronto we get off the elevator in front of the INAC offices and get ready for some serious civil disobedience. Maggie Helwig, a veteran CDer, presents a 500-name petition calling for the end of the low-level flights (which the Innu have made a precondition to any land claims negotiations) and the following list of demands:

"We demand immediate recognition of the full title of the Innu people to the land called Nitassinan.

"As a consequence of this we also demand:

- dropping of all charges against those arrested in protests at CFB Goose Bay
- release of those Innu currently in prison
- an end to low-level flight tests and all military or other invasions of Innu land by the Canadian government."

It is then announced that none of the nine are leaving the office until these demands are met. The receptionist says OK and keeps talking on the phone and staring at the floor, so we stomp into the tactfully decorated antechamber of Mr. Mike Ivanski, Director of Indian Services, sit down on the lush carpet and begin chanting "Stop the boom, stop the tests, NATO out of Nitassinan" and "Canada, you can't hide, we charge you with genocide." Maggie chains herself to the door and Mac swallows the key. After a few more chants of "1 2 3 4, NATO out of Labrador, 5 6 7 8 9 10, NATO out of Nitassinan," someone sends a woman to ask us to keep the noise down, and Maggie yells back, "Tell it to NATO!"

The chants get louder.

Although ACT for Disarmament, another non-aligned peace group, had informed all the major media of the action before it began (and it went on for over an hour) only the *Toronto Star* sent a reporter and photographer.

Knowing that the *Star* people were only there for decoration (actually, they did run 64 words on it, if you count "sit-in" as two words), I realized the awesome responsibility that had been invested in me to single-handedly inform thousands of postsecondary students, the future leaders of this great nation, about what the old farts who run it now are up to. I mean goddamn, I felt just like Spiderman right after he got bit by that radioactive spider. So let me give you some background information before I get back to the soap opera.

Up until World War II, when the Goose Bay military base was erected, the Innu followed a traditional subsistence lifestyle as nomadic hunters and fishers, living in tent settlements in the winter and travelling far into the bush in the spring and summer.

In the 1950s the mines opened and dams were constructed, causing flooding and forcing the Innu into permanent settlements built by the government — which to this day have neither running water nor sewage treatment facilities.

As environmental destruction proceeded the Innu became more and more impoverished. Alcoholism became a problem. Typically, the military hired many women to work as "hospitality girls," and the kind of violence against women that is ritualized in many armed forces — remember the US Marines' chant, "This is my penis, this is my gun, one is for killing and one is for fun?" — began to spread. In Sheshashiu, an Innu community near the base, 15 children have been born to single mothers after liaisons with British, American and West German soldiers. In June 1988 an Innu teenager was raped by a member of the Canadian armed forces; she attempted suicide in December.

The suicide rate in Nitassinan is now five times that of Canada.

In 1980 Canada opened the base to Britain, the Netherlands, and West Germany, and the low-level test flights began. Apparently Nitassinan looks just like Russia from a hundred feet up. In 1988 the *Vancouver Sun* reflected, "Following protests by European residents about the environmental effects of low-level NATO flights over their countries, particularly over Germany, NATO governments began to shift aerial manoeuvres away from the European continent. Designed to simulate low-level flights over Soviet terrain, the German Luftwaffe is now increasing its manoeuvres over Innu territory. 'The German people wouldn't put up with it, but the Canadian government expects the Innu to put up with it,' (Sheshashiu Chief Daniel) Ashini said."

According to *Time* magazine, four out of five Germans polled felt the flights should be cut back. Can you blame them? Besides the other health and environmental dangers posed by the machines, since 1980 at least 46 planes have crashed, including one that killed 67 spectators at an air show.

In 1985 the Conservative government pumped \$93-million into NATO to entice the ACQUITTED expansion into Goose Bay. (And last year the Pentagon was calling us wimps for not spending enough and reporting that 'projections for the late 1980s and early 1990s show that real growth in defence spending is expected in Canada!') Can you believe the nerve of those wacky guys? Heck, \$93-million buys a lot of bullets. Governments even.) As you know, a common criticism of NATO is that it is preparing for a nuclear first-strike. Of course this is probably just a paranoid commie fantasy. I mean, just because Raygun used to talk publicly about "us" winning a nuclear war doesn't mean anyone else is seriously thinking about it. Still, some of the planes on the Goose Bay runway right now, for example the British Tornado, do practise nuclear strikes (with blanks I hope), and once the ACQUITTED renovations go through we'll really hit the nuclear jackpot with US planes like the F-111, the B-52, the B-1B . . . I could go on, but I'd like to get back to the protest.

So I take out my note pad and try to collect statements from the office workers but no one wants to talk to me. All the people I talk to refer me to Ivanski, the director, and all he'll say is, "It's a National Defence issue not a Native Affairs issue." This lame dodge almost makes Mac puke; the key to Maggie's chain comes up and he has to swallow it again. "It's a Native Affairs issue because of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which is still a part of the Canadian Constitution, which states that original peoples cannot be deprived of their land if they haven't ceded it, and the Innu never have. Today we're seeing a landmark case overturned in Newfoundland, a case where the courts actually recognized native rights to their land, and it's bloody obvious what's going on."

The chanting resumes. "Innu rights NOW!"

Pretty soon the police show up and I swear to gods I saw half of them in those donut shops this morning, but then again they all look the same to me. I try to count them but they keep making me think of sheep and I'm afraid I'll fall asleep. I know there were four squad cars so I'd guess about eight cops.

The head cop goes through this routine with Ivanski in which Ivanski repeats that this issue is not within his mandate and the cop orders the nine to "leave peacefully