

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Low-level flying good for caribou?

■ We would like to respond to several points made by Jocelyn Coulon ("This Labrador Business," *Peace&Security*, Autumn 1988); points that are either misleading or erroneous, and which are the standard lines given by the military in any discussion of the [low-level air training] issue. The military is very fond of citing the growth of the George River Caribou herd as proof low-level flying is compatible with caribou, if not good for them. The interesting thing is that the military continues to use the old estimates of the herd size despite concern on the part of some biologists for the past year that the size may be considerably less than the 600,000 cited in Coulon's article. The military knows about the discrepancy but cites the larger figure because it is to its advantage to cloud the issue. We realize that there were problems with the census that revealed a smaller herd; however, the constant use of the larger number is misleading. A census taken in fall 1988, should give a more accurate figure.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the number of the George River caribou herd is misleading. For the past three years, individual caribou from the George River herd have been monitored by satellite. The movements of these collared animals show that the herd appears to avoid the low-level flying zones during the time training is conducted. Scientists don't know why. The ironic aspect of all this is that the George River herd is not subject to a great deal of low-level flying. So for the military to hold this herd up as an example of the caribou's compati-

bility with low-level flying is again misleading. However, any change in migratory routes greatly affects our people's access to caribou during the hunting season, and the caribou is central to our culture and way-of-life.

It is also interesting that the military does not mention the Red Wine herd – the woodland caribou herd situated between the two flying zones and most frequently overflowed. This herd has a very low reproductive rate and has been hovering between 800 to 1,000 animals for years. It has been studied for the past three years to ascertain the effects of low-level flying. The results of this study are not in; it had to be extended for an additional year due to the lack of cooperation by pilots in the first year. The military also does not advertise that as of 1 February 1989, they will be introducing high-level combat training over this herd, thus introducing large numbers of sonic booms to the area. We also fear that the military will gradually lower the present height restrictions for supersonic flight in those zones – prime land-use areas for our people.

The second major issue is that the military likes to suggest that the Innu are divided on the issue of militarization. This is false. In May 1985, a meeting was held at Northwest Point in Labrador, where the Innu of communities in Quebec and Labrador declared: "We, the Innu people of Nitessinan, from St. Augustin, La Romaine, Natasliquan, Mingan, Davis Inlet and Sheshatshiu unambiguously oppose the use of our territory by the military and we will use any peaceful means at our disposal to put an end to the flights and their abuse to our people and our land." On three different occasions during our recent protest against the military occupation of our land, representatives from the

Innu communities of Quebec travelled to Goose Bay to sit in our tents of protest at the end of the runway.

The military also frequently talks about its cooperation with the hunting camps, by ceasing or diminishing flights "in an area as soon as natives are observed." We have documented three occasions when we did give the coordinates of camps to the military, but this did not keep the military from overflying the camps. Furthermore, the coordinates of all our camps are readily available from the company that transports us to the camps. For the military, this information is just a phone call away. This proves that the prime areas for low-level flying, (the river valleys and lake areas), are also the prime hunting areas of our people.

Avoidance of the camps is not the only issue. To have the jets avoid the camps does not lessen the negative impact on the wildlife, on which we depend. Furthermore, regular notification to the military of the location of the camps might legitimize Canada's theft of our land. We have never signed a treaty with Canada. The land is legally ours. The military should be seeking permission from us for any flights over our land. Yet we are not consulted on any flight paths or any escalation of military activities on our land. The military is intent on having its own way.

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"Two-track" article on the wrong track

■ In "Dilemma for the Canadian Peace Movement," (*Peace&Security*, Spring 1988), Tony Rogers, in discussing the original political issue of cruise missile testing in Canada, refers to "the NATO two-track decision to deploy ground-launched cruise missiles and Pershing II missiles in Europe..."

In fact, the "two-track" decision in 1979, in which the Allies made a collective commitment of a strategic response to the Soviet deployment of SS-20 missiles, was an agreement to deploy *and* negotiate a joint end to both NATO and Warsaw Pact deployments.

The high point of this period of negotiation was the 1981 "zero option" disarmament proposal by US President Reagan, that was ultimately adopted on the basis of "mutual benefit," in 1987, at the culmination of the INF talks. The low point was the one-sided mass protest against the NATO response to a clear Soviet strategic challenge, in which the Soviets were able to pass off mobile, multi-warhead, accurate, long-range missiles as merely the technical product of a "modernization" policy.

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Military mind at work

■ I mean no personal disrespect to its author, but the piece "What to do About the Submarines," (by Sharon Hobson, *Peace&Security* Winter 1988–1989) looked like a "plant" from the Department of National Defence: "why we have to go ahead with this purchase even though we now know it's a bad deal." The single item in the article which most strongly suggested this was the repetition of the sum "\$8 billion." Nobody outside DND thinks that Canada is going to get a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines for that price. The theme, insistently repeated, that the country must carry on with plans once made, also suggested to me the operation of the military mind – evinced, for example, in the descent into war in 1914 described by Barbara Tuchman in *The Guns of August*.
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