

Father of the jet stream

By ROB COOKE

John Vink was first introduced to ships and the sea by his father and uncles who were trawler fishermen. Vink grew up in his native country of Holland, with an interest in electronics and a passion for the sea. He wanted to combine both his interest and his passion in some kind of a career. He heard, at the time, that the Dutch government needed people to work on its weather ships and he volunteered for service. Vink was accepted and became the senior electronics officer aboard his ship.

This was a new service in operation. Due to the increased air traffic after the Second World War, a need for precise information on the weather

arose. "The planes during the late 40s and early 50s were mostly propeller driven," he said, "They had little navigation equipment and it took the planes 14 to 16 hours to cross the ocean. Therefore, they needed accurate weather information for their long trips."

The weather ship's duties weren't confined to just gathering information on the weather. They also acted as sea rescue ships, to be called upon in case of emergency. One such time was during the Blockade of Berlin in 1948. The Americans were then flying large squadrons of jet fighters to their bases in Germany. These fighters couldn't navigate across the Atlantic so they had to "hop" from base to base across the ocean to Germany. One of the fighters

developed engine trouble and had to ditch in the sea.

"This turned out to be rather tragic due to the fact that the pilot wasn't wearing his survival suit at the time," Vink recalled. "He radioed our ship and a lifeboat with a rescue crew was sent out. However, when we reached him, the first thing that we found in the water was his survival suit that had automatically inflated. Due to the fact that he wasn't wearing the suit, the weight of his automatic radio transmitter had pulled him under and he had drowned."

After such an episode or after being at sea for four to six weeks, the crew needed to unwind. They were sometimes allowed to go on shore leave at their port of call. Vink remembers one such occasion

which turned out to be the last time he and his fellow crew members were allowed shore leave. "Yeah, we got into some trouble and we were thrown in jail. The Captain had to come down and bail us out. He was mad as hell and he put an end to shore leave."

A more serious aspect of life at sea was Vink's work with radar and tracking weather balloons.

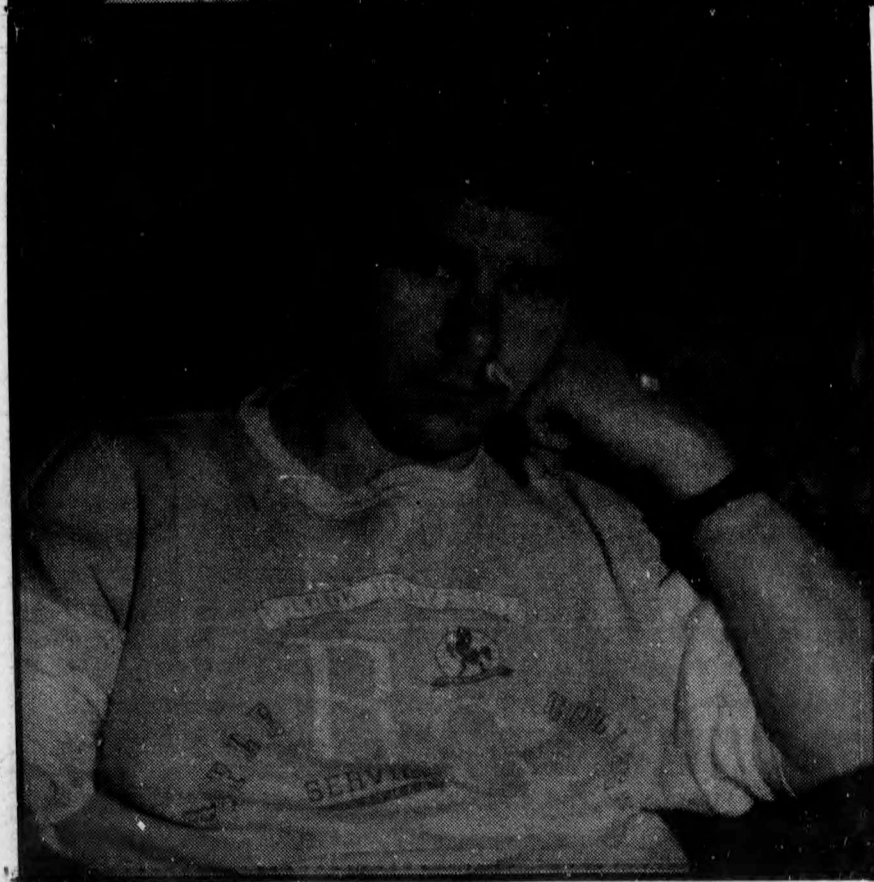
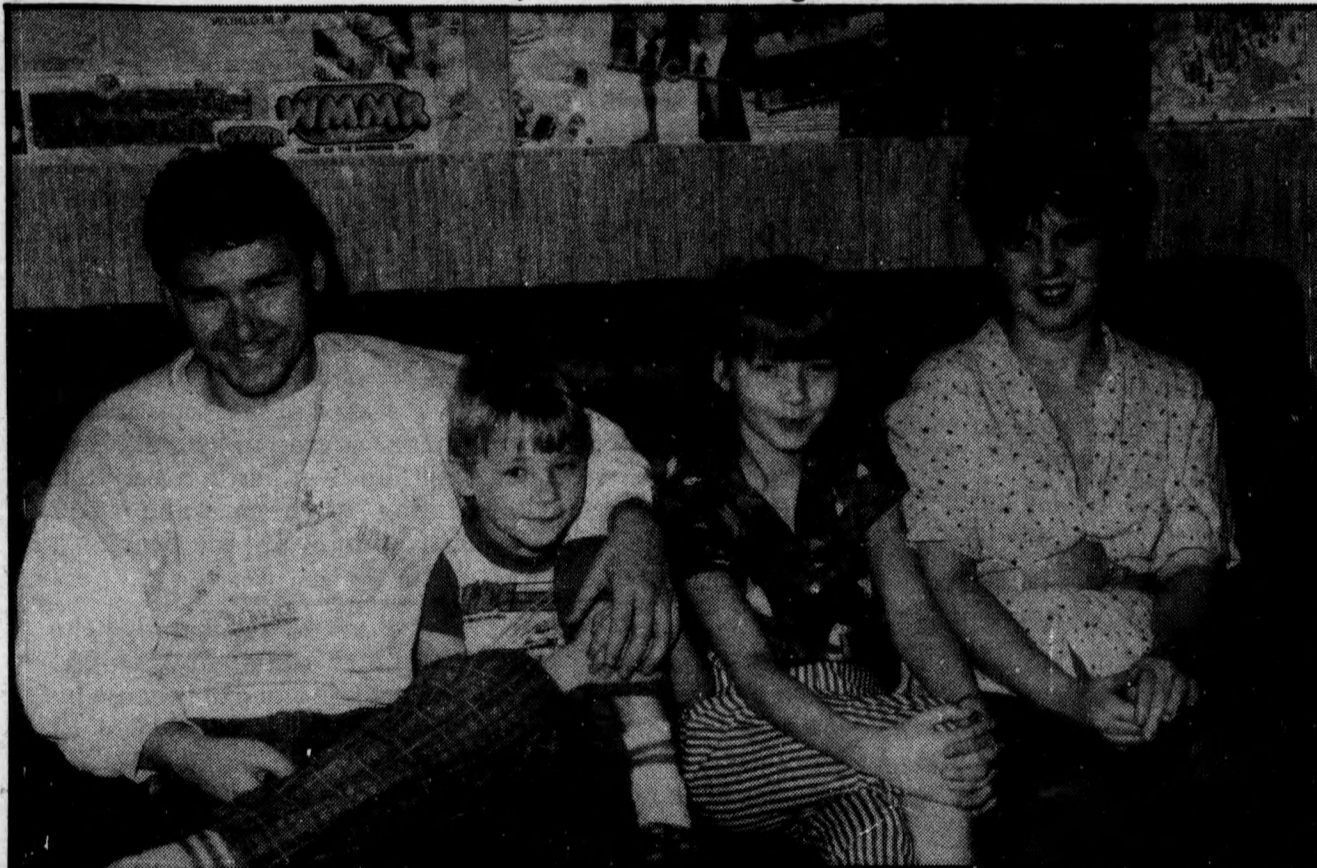
The balloons had a radio transmitter and using radar, Vink was able to track the balloon's ascent before it burst.

At first the meteorological people wouldn't believe his readings of wind speeds and altitude. One of the supervisors came with the crew on one trip however and was able to verify Vink's readings. As it turned out, he had discovered what is

commonly known today as the "jet stream," an area between 40,000 and 50,000 feet where the winds are between 500 and 600 miles per hour. That is why jets today fly below 40,000 feet or above 50,000 feet in the air.

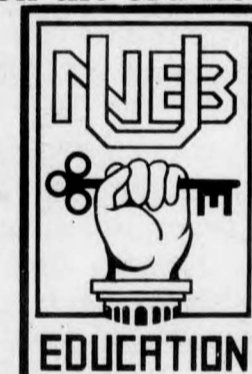
After travelling with the Dutch Weather Service from 48'to 58', Vink learned some important things, some more practical than others. He learned on his very first trip out to sea what side of the ship to get seasick on. "I vividly remember the first time I was seasick. I went out the door on the wrong side, the windward side, and when I went to feed the fish, however, it all blew back in my face."

"That's the most important thing to learn when going to sea."



Hearye, Hearye, Hearye

Let it be known that all ye people should make plans for the 1st Annual Education Classic - to be held Saturday March 14 from 9 to 1pm at the University Faculty Club - on the 3rd floor Old Arts Building.



A Good Time

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To All Present

Tickets available at the Education Society Office (Rm. 357 d'Avray) and at the door.

Polish DJ Writes Back

A recent letter from Jan Pawul- the Polish DJ who keeps writing to us here at the Brunswickan- contained these pictures of his wife and family. From Left to Right are, Pawul, 34, his son Peter, 7 years old, his daughter Eva, 11 years old, and his wife Barbara, 32.

Pawul revealed a little bit more about himself and his life in Poland, and he even described his one and only trip to Canada- a stopover flight at Montreal International Airport where he had a beer in the waiting area on a snowy day in November, 1985.

Having travelled twice to the West, once to Great Britain in 84 and once to New York in 85, Pawul seems to be aware of what is going on here in North America both musically and culturally. This is no little feat in a country which stifles news from Western countries and discourages the average Pole from seeking information that may be unfavourable towards Polish government policy.

Nevertheless, he seems informed. But that is probably due to the web of international contacts ranging from the U.K. to San Francisco, which he has been able to establish since he first began writing to strangers in the West 12 years ago. He told us that since that time he has sent over twenty thousand letters to countless people and organizations, but of all those letters, "thousands never answered."