

Korean War Veteran

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Brave volunteers from the Burnaby Fire Department, the terrible earthquake in Nepal, Yonah Martin in Ottawa, and the wonderful aid called the smartphone

This is an article about some super-super volunteers from Burnaby and Mission, British Columbia, as well as the many faceted achievements and talents of Canada's Senator Yonah Martin, who is the extremely busy deputy government leader of the Canadian Senate and proven champion of all of Canada's Korean War Veterans, and about electronic communications and their remarkable advance from the battery powered wireless days of the Korean War.

I personally recall how a horrid wireless 88 wireless pack added to a soldier's fear as it sputtered and failed to make contact with company headquarters, only 600 or so yards away. On a bone hurting December night in 1952 I had led a standing patrol from the horrible Hook position in Korea, out to the slopes of the Warsaw position. On the way we had spooked a sniper and then sat breathless beneath enemy soldiers holding the Warsaw slopes just above our heads.

I led the team and also had the 88 set – which I finally shut off because its sputtering was causing the enemy to whisper frantically and nobody was answering my reports. We later withdrew in bounds but the wireless kept failing all the way back to the Hook. After two battery changes and three more patrols without communications, we had a complete wireless exchange and went out a fifth time and again had no contact with the company – just 600 yards or so behind us.

Coming back finally at dawn we did receive a signal about 200 yards from the Hook. The transplanted British captain running our company that night called me, “Unknown station,” and told me to remain in position. When I requested permission to return to base he emphatically told “unknown station” to stay put.

But soon there was enough light that I could see Sergeant Bill Lockmanetz (who just passed away in Barrie, Ontario a few weeks ago, well into his 90's). He was standing head and shoulders above the rampart, trying to contact us on his own 88 set. I could hear his voice clearly in the icy air, but

it was not coming through the wireless. I knew he could see us and so disregarded the over cautious captain and brought the team home.

A long way of getting to a night just passed two weeks ago near Kathmandu in Nepal, where more than 7,000 of that nation's kindly people had perished in a colossal 7.2 scale earthquake that devastated the entire nation.

The synergies of good guys here transcends what a movie script writer could come up with and which directors could have plausibly acted out for the cameras. The audience would be leery; the plot would seem so contrived.

But this was no farfetched machination of script writer's minds, nor or directors and producers trying to put an epic on the world's video screens.

Living in Kathmandu these past 13 years is a retired Burnaby fireman, Eoin White, who operates a trekking service. His Nepalese guides and bearers escort climbers and tourists to various parks and base camps, including climbers who assail Mount Everest. White loves the Nepalese people and the great loss of life in his expatriot home was tragic, beyond anyone's description.

So there was that former fireman from Burnaby operating his trekking business at Kathmandu in Nepal.

And in Burnaby itself there was an intrepid team of regular firefighters, who had formed their own unpaid disaster relief volunteer group to move quickly into action in devastated areas, no matter the causes, with the goal of seeking out and rescuing survivors. Though a volunteer team, unpaid and unfunded by any government agency, its members are experts with various high tech sensing equipment, and also with a team of cadaver and rescue dogs.

The fact that it is unfunded by any government agency and is totally independent is a grace that permits it to swing into action like lightning, and avoid the maddening snailscrawl pace of bureaucracies.

In Ottawa there was Senator Yonah Martin, who had just returned from leading a Canadian Parliamentary team to Taiwan to establish better relations between the two governments, which, of course, includes the promotion of trade and various diplomatic process.



Senator Martin, wearing blue, at photo right, shown with other members of the Canadian Parliamentary delegation being greeted by Taiwan's president Ma Ying-jeou in Taipei, Taiwan, on April 10, 2015.

The Senator knows well Jeff Clark, who is the vice president of the Burnaby firefighters union, and also a member of the volunteer rescue team.

None of these guys will accept glory for their work and none tries to be spokesman for the others, so let us name a few players and assume that all are of equal high cut and quality – great volunteers with a sense and a heart for all humanity and a determination to ease suffering and help others – no matter who they might be or where they are located!

We catch a couple of names from Burnaby newspapers and that is how they are identified here. The Korean War Veteran did not interview any of them, but we did speak at some length with Senator Martin – who, like them, is modest and no glory seeker and only praised the volunteers from her own hometown (she moved to Burnaby from a Vancouver location just a week or so ago).

All of the guys are key, but one of them, retired Burnaby firefighter Captain Mark Pullen pulled strings and made initial connections via cell phone. He had served with rescue dogs in Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and also worked with a rescue team following the Haiti earthquake, which similarly had devastated that nation.

His rapport with members of the Canadian Emergency Medical Assistance Team enabled him to quickly obtain United Nations authorization for a volunteer team from Burnaby to fly to Nepal and join in the rescue efforts.

Pullen spoke to Jeff Clark. All that was needed was to put volunteers together and get to Nepal. A very tall order, indeed.

Because the mission was entirely voluntary and the volunteers would do their work on an unpaid off-duty basis, everyone who stepped forward had to make an arrangement to have his own position on the Burnaby Fire Department covered.

It was a scramble, *but within 90 minutes*, according to Clark, they had 17 volunteers all squared away and ready to go. Another two had joined them from the nearby community of Mission.

But the volunteers had to pay all of their own considerable expenses to get to Nepal and survive there – a very tall order.

While Clark and Pullen and others negotiated with Cathay Pacific Airlines, Senator Martin was in contact with the Taiwanese airline her parliamentary team had made contact with just days before. The airline agreed to fly the rescue team to Nepal without cost.

Meanwhile, Cathay Pacific also came through and the firemen accepted its offer joyously. They would fly to Nepal via Hong Kong without cost.

Clark recounted that the matter of the rescue dogs posed a problem. The airline asked them to be caged and travel in the hull.

Clark told the Cathay Pacific people that if the dogs traveled that way it would give them considerable stress and they would not be able to do their job on arrival. So Cathay Pacific did the incredible, and let all three of the big pooches ride up front in the passenger compartment along with the firemen.

There's more to getting there than air transportation, of course, as any Korean War Veteran traveler will attest. One would be reckless to travel abroad without health care insurance, especially on a dangerous mission to an earthquake devastated area.

But Pacific Blue Cross kicked in the insurance for the team on a gratis basis, Telus International donated the super important cellphones that would enable them to function as a team, the Associated Fire and Safety company donated protective firefighter gloves and the Burnaby Fire Department loaned them seismic sensing equipment and remote probing cameras.

Their retired colleague, Eoin White, who operates the trekking and guide service in Nepal was there to meet them and had a bus and trekkers and porters ready to assist.

The gang stayed in tents close to the Kathmandu runway and quickly set out to explore ruins in Baharabise and other areas. They were on the ground and in action on day three following the

earthquake, but the devastation was virtually total and no survivors could be found. Only 13 survivors were recovered from the debris in the entire nation, according to official sources.

The Burnaby team went about locating and mapping locations where those killed were buried beneath rubble. Working with hand tools, they could not do the job themselves, but they marked the places for excavation and retrieval for teams that would use heavy equipment to move the debris.



Photo by Shaun Madigan shows Ian Hetherington and retired Captain Mark Pullen of Burnaby Fire Department searching collapsed building area in Bahrabise, 100 kilometres from Kathmandu. *Photo was published in Burnaby TimesLeader newspaper.*

Hey, what about Senator Martin back in Ottawa? Was her role over when the team made their own deal with Cathay Pacific – a most wonderful and magnanimous gesture from that airline?

It happened that Jeff Clark and the others learned that a Canadian hiker from Calgary, Tamara McLeod, was stranded in Langtang National Park. She was with other climbers who could not be rescued because the Nepalese armed forces were focused on those in greatest peril.

What to do? Clark and the others did not know where McLeod was, how she could be rescued. In the middle of the night in Nepal he called Senator Martin on his cell phone.

It was afternoon in Ottawa, 7,200 miles from Clark's location. Senator Martin took the call in her Senate office chamber. Clark asked for assistance.

Senator Martin got on her own smartphone to a government assistance group set up in Canada and obtained information about the hiker, contact coordinates and numbers for Clark to call.

Once he had all the data, Clark took it to a Nepalese army officer the team had been working with. He asked if it was possible for a helicopter to go in and rescue McLeod, when one of its crews was not hard pressed on other missions.

The officer promised he would have it done within a day. In three hours, a helicopter was dispatched and rescued McLeod, as well as Juliann Tempone from Australia and two other climbers from the Netherlands.

The volunteer team from Burnaby and their two colleagues from Mission, BC did not rescue any victims of the earthquake. There were no survivors to rescue. But the relatives and loved ones of those lost gathered around them and watched thankfully as they tried to achieve rescues, and marked the locations where loved ones were buried and lost.

When it came time to leave, the team turned over their tents, sleeping bags and much of their equipment to the members of Eoin White's trekking team who had assisted them so diligently.

The seven families who are involved in his trekking activity have lost everything and are in peril. White is trying to help them.

He is seeking just \$35,000 to build them seven homes.

This is not a solicitation for assistance, but if any Korean War Veteran might consider helping, the link for donating funds to help those families is

www.fundaid.ca/nepal

Senator Yonah Martin's thoughts on all of this?

The firefighter volunteers terrific, remarkable people. When there is a problem they don't only talk, they do something about it. They take action.

She is enormously, enormously proud of them.



Some of the Burnaby firefighters with their three rescue dogs arrive home at the Vancouver airport on Monday, April 4, after spending six days on their rescue mission in Nepal. Like their Korean War Veteran predecessors six decades before, they did not arrive to a hero's welcome. *Photograph by Larry Wright, reprinted from Burnaby Now.*

Of note: without the smartphones that connected them and got UN approval for their mission, and through which most of the intricacies of speedy preparation were planned, including negotiations with Cathay Pacific airlines and contact with Eoin White in Nepal, and then with each other on the ground there, and, as noted, with Senator Martin at the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa, none of it could have happened.

It also could not have happened without their so brave and noble hearts and their care for all others.

Below is an extract from the special website that Eoin White has established:



My name is Eoin White. I am a retired Burnaby Firefighter and have spent the last 12 years taking trekkers to the Nepal Himalaya's and Mount Everest base camp. In that time I have developed deep personal friendships and bonds with many Nepali and Sherpa families. To them I am Pappa. I have sons and daughters and now grandchildren. (by virtue of their belief in re-incarnation, they feel that I have treated them like their fathers would have had they been alive) This picture is of Ngima Yangjee and her two younger sisters and her daughter Pasang Chutin. Two years ago Ngima Yangjees mother passed away leaving 21-year-old Ngima Yangjee to care for her two younger sisters. Although she is now married, her husband makes an average salary of \$15.00 a day. Their single room house is destroyed and they are living a tent. They have no where to go. She is one of the 7 families who have lost everything and have little hope of replacing their homes in the near future. I intend to build them new homes. It costs about \$5000.00 to build a modest home in Nepal so I'm hoping to raise \$35,000.

Here is a [story about the campaign](#) in Burnaby Now.

<http://www.burnabynow.com/news/retired-burnaby-captain-fundraising-for-nepal-1.1925222>