

“North of 60” How It All Began

By Larry Busch S/Sgt. (ret)

(All writings and terminology used in this article reflect the terminology of the day.)

December, 2017 marked the 25th anniversary of CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) TV’s “North of 60”. It aired on Thursday nights from 1992 to 1997 with a rating of 1.2 to 1.4 million viewers. It was syndicated around the world and was seen in over 100 countries.

North of 60 was a television mini-series which followed the daily policing activities of a white male RCMP officer and a native female RCMP officer set in a small, predominantly native community north of Canada’s 60th parallel. It was comprised of 90 one-hour episodes shown over a period of six years, after which there were five television movies. It was set in the fictional native community of Lynx River in the North West Territories.

Tina Keeper played the RCMP native constable, John Oliver initially played the Corporal and Tom Jackson played the band chief and the native constable’s brother.

“Lynx River North West Territories, 150 people, 33 dogs, a great looking nurse and a lousy motel.”

North of 60, Episode One, (Pilot) “North of 60”, Dec 1992

Its fan base was not just indigenous peoples and northern communities, it also enjoyed a large police following as well.

North of 60’s six seasons garnered 50 Gemini nominations and 5 awards. For a complete list these of nominations and awards, as well as complete list of all episodes, cast and photos, I recommend you visit Patti Winter’s North of 60 website, www.wintertime.com/OH/nof60.html

The television series was a joint venture with Alberta Filmworks and Alliance and later Atlantis Alliance.

The television series ended when in 1998 the province of Alberta ended tax credits for movie and television production. The province later restored these credits which helped Alberta Filmworks finance the North of 60 movies.

“The show re-defined how people saw indigenous people.” “...one of the most popular stories ever on CBC TV.” “Band meetings went unattended...and bingo rescheduled.”

Rosanna Deerchild, “Unreserved”, CBC Radio One. Dec 17, 2017.

Like so many of our favourite police stories, told over a cup of coffee or a cold beverage, “North of 60” began with an incoming phone call to my office early in 1992.

“Good Morning Media Relations, Larry Busch speaking.”

A female voice on the other end replied,

“Good morning, my name is Barbara Samuels; I work with Wayne Grigsby; we write and produce shows for television.”

I replied with a hesitant and noncommittal **“OK”**.

Ms. Samuels said she and Mr. Grigsby wanted to write a television series about RCMP policing in a small native community in Canada’s north. Of course, I knew that all things RCMP, its name and all of its uniforms etc. are protected by copyright, so I replied with the same noncommittal **“OK”**.

Ms. Samuels then said,

“We would like to buy you lunch and talk about it.”

Well, I thought to myself, I’m in charge of “O” Division Media Relations, the least I can do is meet with these people, **“I can do lunch”** I said.

Ms. Samuels said there was a nice oyster bar a few blocks from my office and asked if we could meet there. I replied now with a very committed,

“Sure, that would be fine.” We agreed on the time and place details and I hung up the phone.

I swung my chair around and looked out the window of my office at 225 Jarvis Street, “O” Division’s RCMP Headquarters in downtown Toronto and gazed across the iconic skyline of office towers and high-rise condominiums. I wondered if I was taking advantage of these nice people given the likelihood of them ever obtaining permission from the RCMP for such an adventure and, if I was the best person to give them any advice. But I had done six years of uniform contract policing in “H” Division (Nova Scotia). I served on Rural Detachment policing, Municipal policing and Highway Patrol, during which time I had policed a number of small native communities; I also served four years in “M” Division (Yukon Territory) in the Drug Section, GIS (General Investigation Section) and Special “T” (technical surveillance) and finished off with another six months in uniform with Whitehorse Detachment. During my years in the North, I had been involved in investigations that to most every community in the Yukon plus they took me to Hay River, Pine Point and Fort Resolution in the NWT. I had even flown into Old Crow Detachment along with my wife and two-year old son for a short relief of the detachment NCO.

Old Crow is not just north of 60, it is 100s of miles north of the Arctic Circle. It is the Yukon’s most northerly detachment and, for all intents and purposes, a fully native community of approximately 250 people. The RCMP detachment is the only two-story building in town and its tall front steps serve as a great spot to sit and enjoy your morning coffee. Old Crow sits on the shores of the Porcupine River, where it is about 100 yards wide, and is the site of the RCMP’s infamous “The Last Patrol”.

March 1969, was the RCMP’s last patrol by dog team. It left from Old Crow Yukon Territory to Fort McPherson and Arctic Red River NWT and back. A total of about 800 miles, it took 25 days to complete; two dog teams with a total of 21 dogs. I fondly remembered sitting at a desk in the Old Crow detachment with a window that overlooked the Porcupine River while reading the hand-written

detachment report of the famous patrol. It detailed the two officers' backgrounds, one an RCMP Special Constable and a native of the community, the other a three-year RCMP constable, how many dogs, food and such. I have never felt so close to the history of the Force as I did that day.

While relieving in Old Crow, the only RCMP officer for many hundreds of miles and where police back-up was by aircraft only, I remembered vaccinating some of the community's dogs, (didn't know we did that); collecting a fee on muskrat pelts shipped south, (didn't know we did that) and served as the interim ticket agent and baggage handler for the once-a-week commercial flight out of Old Crow to Whitehorse, didn't know we did that either.

There were only three vehicles in Old Crow then, the RCMP pickup truck, the Yukon government's maintenance pickup, as well as an old tractor pulling a multi-purpose hay wagon that served as the airplane baggage handling vehicle and the grocery store's delivery vehicle from the airport to the store, a quarter of a mile away. But, there were four STOP signs in Old Crow. Like many northern communities, Old Crow is only half as long as the gravel airport runway you fly in on.

I fondly remembered the warm June day I was walking around town with my son and pregnant wife. I was dressed in a long-sleeved uniform shirt, blue jeans and hiking boots. Of course everybody knew who I was but I didn't know a soul. With my young son holding my hand, my expectant wife and I wandered around town. We stopped to watch an elderly native woman stirring a large pot which sat on an outside fire pit. I leaned over and looked into the pot. It was at a rolling boil and full of animal bones. I politely asked the lady what she was cooking. She explained that she had crushed caribou bones and joints and was now boiling them in order to release the fat within the marrow. As she skimmed the fat off the top and into a coffee can, she explained that when the men go "out on the land" they take dried caribou meat, which lasts for many weeks without refrigeration, and a can of fat. She said the men first dip the meat into the fat and then eat it. She explained how the meat provided substantial protein but, without the necessary added fat they would eventually starve to death. She then gave my son a six-inch piece of dried caribou meat to chew. He walked and chewed on that piece of meat for hours. Eventually it looked like one of those leathery doggie treats that end up looking all white, mushy and gooey.

Later that afternoon, as I sat in the warm sunshine on the detachment steps, I saw a lazy town erupt into a flurry of activity. Townspeople were running towards the river with rifles. I looked toward the river and saw that an enormous herd of caribou had descended the opposite river bank and had begun to swim across the river, directly towards the town. The herd was so large that it looked like a living carpet that had unrolled down the bank and across the river. There were easily thousands of caribou instantly within my view. What a sight! The locals jumped into their boats, which were pulled up on the northern shore of the river, and quickly headed across the river, directly for the swimming herd.

Law enforcement personnel will immediately recognize that it is illegal to shoot most wildlife while it is in the water, it's no different for caribou. Of course, every hunter in Old Crow knows this and, they all saw the Mountie sitting on the detachment steps. Well, as the caribou herd saw the boats headed directly towards them, they realized the enormity of their mistake and they turned around and swam back towards the river bank they had just descended. As the hunters neared the far shore, they opened fire. Of course, they only shot at animals which were on the river bank or descending or climbing the twenty-foot bank, but there were hundreds of animals within easy range.

I jumped into the detachment skiff and I too headed to the opposite side of the river. Dead caribou littered the shoreline as the men began the monumental task of cleaning the animals. I noticed that the first thing done was to cut off the head of the caribou. I asked why this was done and was told that one of the first rules of these hunters was that removing the head proved ownership. I suppose this rule had come from many years of arguing over just whose animal is whose. Another curious thing I noticed was the men were coiling the intestines like rope in one hand, then cutting the bottom side of the coil and cleaning the intestines out in the river. Of course I asked why. I was told that the intestinal lining was an excellent source of fat and while out on the land it is often fried up like bacon. Quite a treat I was told.

Sitting in my Toronto office, my mind returned to my original lunch meeting question. OK, I told myself, I'm qualified to do this lunch.

First Lunch

Of course, true to their profession Barbara and Wayne were friendly and engaging. Over an excellent lunch, they outlined their thoughts on how they were going to approach the topic of televising northern policing in Canada. They had already decided on a working title, “North of 60.”

Well, you bet I was skeptical. Here were another couple of “southern” civilians who figured they knew enough about RCMP policing practices in northern native communities and actually had the courage, or the audacity, to want to put it out on Canadian television. As police officers, we have all cringed at Hollywood’s portrayal of policing as we listened to their foul language, endured their wanton disregard for most every police regulation in the book as well as any number of criminal laws; their mistreatment of minorities, breaking into residences without a search warrant and smacking the bad guys around who, of course, always deserved it. But I heard an honest commitment to reality as Barbara and Wayne laid out their idea.

Of course, my responsibilities demanded that I advise them that all things RCMP were copyrighted. They understood but they didn’t seem overly concerned. We chuckled about some of the older television shows, which I assume had RCMP approval, such as Sargent Preston and his loyal dog King. As I recall that show, Sgt Preston canoed, fought bad guys and rescued the damsel all while in Red Serge 24/7, so much for reality. Then there was the cartoon feature Dudley Do Right. You have to admit, with or without RCMP permission, those shows made history and they made us look good.

As our lunch ended, I gave them the address of Supt. Jim Walker who was the Officer In Charge of RCMP Media Relations in Ottawa. They had to convince Jim of their professionalism and honest determination to do justice to both the northern native communities and to the RCMP. In order to present a complete explanation and overview, I suggested they ask for a face-to-face meeting.

We lunched for a good while and parted feeling the meeting went well for all concerned. They learned and I learned. We planned a follow-up lunch because, “Hey, I do lunch.”

*Barbara enjoys telling the story of that initial phone call by prefacing it with the discussion she and Wayne were having about neither of them knowing anything about police procedures and how approach the RCMP with their idea. Barbara says she suggested to Wayne that they call the RCMP and ask them for information. To which Wayne replied, “**You forget, it’s the RCMP’s job NOT to give you information.**”*

Later, back at my office, I sent an email to Supt. Walker. I knew Jim had a degree in journalism and an open ear so, I figured he would be interested in what Barbara and Wayne had to say. I summarized the details of my meeting which included my full support. I also told Jim I had suggested they write him a letter and ask for a meeting, a ‘Heads Up’.

A week or so later, a very excited Barbara called me and confirmed they had sent the introductory letter and they had just received an invitation to Ottawa for a meeting. Well I thought, step one completed.

Second Lunch

A couple of months passed and the whole idea of a television show had wandered off my mental list of pending or potential events, until another phone call. It was Barbara. She said they had a great meeting with Jim and he told them the whole idea would have to be discussed with the Commissioner and he’d get back to them. Well, Supt Walker had indeed gotten back to them. Barbara had just received a letter advising them they had been granted permission to use RCMP copyright material. Furthermore, the letter identified me as the official RCMP Technical Advisor. OK, that part was a surprise! Time for another lunch.

A few days later, Barbara, Wayne and I met. Our discussions were no longer hypothetical and we had a lot to talk about. I needed a clearer picture of what they have planned and they needed an understanding of Community Based policing. This is gonna take a while.

Our discussion opened with Barbara saying they had potential access to a recently-vacated movie set where the series “Bordertown” had been shot and that using this site would certainly make things easier, and cheaper. I had seen a few

episodes of Bordertown and knew the show had been shot somewhere in British Columbia. I didn't know exactly where but I remembered the set was surrounded by deep forests, rolling hills and mountains. It was time to step up and be the technical advisor Ottawa expected me to be.

I told Barbara and Wayne that anyone who was familiar with northern Canada would immediately know this was not north of the 60 th parallel and therefore the show would immediately lose credibility. Neither of them had been North so I strongly recommended they visit such northern settlements as Carcross and Carmacks in the Yukon; Fort Liard, Fort Simpson, Pine Point or Fort Resolution in the NWT and pretty much anywhere along the Mackenzie River Delta in the North West Territories. Barbara and Wayne were taking written notes; this was a good sign.

Somewhere during this discussion, they asked about some juicy ideas for story lines and plots. So, now I had to come up with some half-truths, rumours and wild unproven tales of policing in the north. I confess, many of these stories were heard over camp fires and during various social events while consuming alcohol so there was little hope of any truth or accuracy. But, Barbara and Wayne needed some flavour of life and policing in the north, so I embellished the truth. You can never let the truth get in the way of a good story. I began with tales of cabin fever. Tales of RCMP officers who, during long weeks and months of isolation, heard voices or saw visions which led to odd behaviour, like taking apart the detachment truck looking for source of the "voices" or nailing fried eggs to the kitchen wall.

We talked about the daily routine of the two officers and that of the native community. We spoke of how the Chief and Band Councils operated; where the only white people were likely the RCMP officers, the nurse at the local community health centre, the Hudson's Bay store clerk and maybe a bank or government clerk. Of course, we talked about policing. We talked about how in small communities, everyone knows everyone else; everyone is likely related to most everyone else; there are grudges, community hunting parties, community feasts, loves and hates and of course crimes. And there is a community history; a history of life, a history of death, of spirits, elders and teaching.

I strongly recommended that when Barbara and Wayne visit some northern communities to get a sense of common construction practices, a town's physical layout and general topography, they should also visit with RCMP officers and ask them for their stories.

Over the next few months, Barbara and Wayne were busy. Wayne and an Alberta Filmworks co-producer and set design person visited a number of communities north of 60. Barbara and an Alliance's supervising producer took a separate trip at the end of April 1992. They met with many RCMP officers through whom they gathered more valuable stories. Just as importantly, they had secured a vacant site 45 kilometers southwest of Calgary in a provincial park near Bragg Creek on the Elbow River with the understanding that they return the land to its original condition. The area was initially vacant but the set was designed and built by their production crew. This confirmed for me that they had seen what they needed to see up north and had chosen an appropriate site which would provide the essential visual backdrop.

To their credit, and in keeping with their commitment to accuracy and fairness, they had also signed Dene (native) advisors who would provide direction on cultural norms, folklore, and history plus how native spiritual beliefs interpret signs from the land and from animals. It was time for me to step up my game.

I phoned my old partner from "O" Division Special "I", Yvan Courtois. Yvan is a proud member of the Montagnias of Lake St John Band in Quebec, now known as Pekuakamiulnuatsh First Nation. We had spent many hours discussing all things native, federal governance, land claims, education, economics, self-government and of course, policing. Yvan had since transferred to Aboriginal Policing Branch in Ottawa and was up to date on all things native, vis-a-vis the RCMP. He and I spoke often, as I needed to remain current on the good and the bad from native communities policed by the Force and what initiatives the Force planned with respect to native concerns. Also, because it had been about 10 years since I was in uniform in the Yukon, I had to be current on native policing from an RCMP Contract perspective. I called my old Whitehorse Detachment buddy Glen MacRae who was then stationed in Prince George B.C., and as I recall, was later the Sub Division NCO. This is what all the transfers, travel and training afford RCMP members...a network of talent, expertise and friendship.

Now, as I sat in my office chair and gazed across the Toronto skyline, I felt fully qualified. Good, because things were about to get a lot busier.

“We need an RCMP truck”

Phone calls between Barbara and I were now an almost daily occurrence. How big is an RCMP detachment building in Lynx River, what kind of furniture is in it, what about telephones and radio contact, would they have a computer, what does the CPIC (Canadian Police Information Computer) screen look like? Difficult to provide accurate answers about a fictional place, but I prevailed.

One of these phone calls was a little more difficult wherein Barbara said, **“We need an RCMP Truck...and fast.”** Well, it seems that my lunchtime story about a northern member’s cabin fever which caused him to take apart the detachment truck in order to find the source of the “voices” was now a key story point in the series premiere. They needed an RCMP truck and filming would begin in a matter of days. Damn.

North of 60’s debut episode revolved around a white southern male RCMP corporal being hurriedly transferred from a plain-clothes drug squad in Vancouver to being in charge of a uniformed two-man detachment in a northern native community in which the other member is a female native constable policing her own community. So, the writers had to quickly get rid of the incumbent detachment NCO (non-commissioned officer). He was gonna get cabin fever.

The Episode One (the pilot) script called for a few establishing shots of the RCMP truck driving around Lynx River and then scenes of its doors, fenders and such being suspended from the ceiling in the detachment garage. Humm. Sitting in downtown Toronto I didn’t have access to a marked RCMP truck, so I decided to call the Post Garage in Calgary. Well, as luck would have it they had three vehicles going through decommissioning. Decommissioning involves removing all of the emergency equipment, the silent patrolman shield, removing the radio and grinding off the RCMP decals from both doors. Two vehicles were completed but they hadn’t begun work on the third as yet. What luck I thought, a possible vehicle and in Calgary no less. The guy in charge of the Garage said that RCMP policy was

very clear. It required him to physically grind off the decals before the vehicle went out for public auction. I asked him what he would require as “permission” not to remove the decals and how much the vehicle was likely to fetch at auction. He said he needed some kind of official paperwork and the truck was likely to fetch about two thousand dollars. I called Barbara and said I MIGHT be able to get her a truck but it will cost about two thousand five hundred dollars and that she would have to flat-bed it from Calgary because it would still display RCMP decals. She was elated. She said **“Yes, yes, yes.”**

I’d been in the Force long enough to know that obtaining official permission to pull this truck out of the established decommissioning process on the other side of the country and sell it without going through the accepted bidding process would involve a lot of paperwork going through a lot of in-baskets in at least three Divisions (provinces) and likely wouldn’t happen in my lifetime. So, I wrote the “official permission” myself. (I apologise Madame Commissioner and I hope the Statute of Limitations has expired.)

I believe it was two days later Barbara reported they had sent a crew into Calgary; paid the money, taped over the door decals and flat-bedded it to the movie set. She said they didn’t want to get into trouble for having the decals visible anywhere near a public highway.

Throughout the term of North of 60, the directors, writers and the entire staff were extremely vigilant of not offending the RCMP in any way for fear of losing their copyright permission. This reflected what came to be the “North of 60 M.O.” – anything to do with RCMP procedure was handled with care and respect. As a result, the trust between the production and the Force led to years of cooperation on the show and – to the great astonishment of the producers, no editorial interference from the RCMP at all.

Upon arrival on the set, she said the crew noticed there was a smell of vomit and beer inside the truck. No doubt in my mind, this was a real RCMP detachment vehicle.

The Post Garage was kind enough to leave the entire light bar on the roof; the radio function control head, with microphone and the Federal siren control head inside the old truck as they were going to be replaced by a new light bar and

new heads in the replacement truck. These features gave the opening shots of the RCMP Lynx River an early level of authenticity. My thanks again to the Calgary Post Garage.

The Scripts

NORTH OF 60 was the first television drama to portray contemporary indigenous life in Canada. But it came along at a time when indigenous artists had virtually no access to the mainstream television and film industries. So, the pool of established talent was very small.

That was about to change.

From the moment the show was greenlit by the CBC, the series' producers implemented a self-imposed mandate: as non-indigenous storytellers, they were determined to bring as much indigenous talent to the show in as many capacities as possible. That move was most evident onscreen, in the show's large and ever-expanding cast; many of these actors were non-professionals, but went on to become household names and faces in Canada and abroad. It also meant that new opportunities were open to indigenous writers, directors and crew members. (Barbara Samuels' comments to me, 2018)

There were 90 scripts written for North of 60 by many different writers. One of the original intentions of the creators was to hire out many of these episodes to Canadian native writers, known or unknown and hire Canadian native actors, known or unknown. The series also hired several different directors as well, some directed only one episode, some directed many. This meant I had to spend countless hours on the phone with assorted writing teams explaining and re-explaining that, no, the guy in charge of the detachment was not a Lieutenant; no, RCMP members did not salute each other and did not always refer to one another by their rank; the constable did not call the corporal "Sir" and no they didn't approach every house and kick in the door with their guns drawn. Etcetera.

The first script for every episode was delivered to 225 Jarvis Street by courier pretty much every Monday morning. I say “first script” because every episode was re-written two, three or sometimes four times before it was actually shot. This meant Monday morning I would go through the script and check it for terminology, Corporal vs Lieutenant, police officer vs Special Agent, detachment vs Field Office, Felony arrest and so on. I also had to ensure our two officers followed proper arrest procedures and gave the arrestee their “rights”, didn’t roll him down the stairs, didn’t put him the back seat of the police vehicle with the window rolled down so he could wave to his friends or sit without a prisoner shield directly behind the driver and so on. Sometimes the script didn’t elaborate the visual “shot”, and the director would put an arrestee in the police car with a rear window rolled down. I couldn’t correct what visuals weren’t narrated or dialogue that wasn’t written in my script. Inevitably, some errors got through.

I also had to access the storyline to ensure it was realistic. Such as, you’re not going to have an RCMP officer arresting a 12 year-old kid because he called him “pig” or because he gave him the finger; you can’t arrest a kid who’s not in school and take him back to his classroom in handcuffs. This where I had to help the writers find another way to get to their plot without making our members look like idiots. So, we had to explore other story options whereby our members can take this juvenile back to school without offending the RCMP or the entire community. We also had to write more humorous scripts where an officer finds a group of kids drinking or smoking and they all scatter like rabbits or more problematic scripts when can we arrest someone without a charge or for their own good. A cop show has to have people arrested and the cell door slammed shut, its one of those time-held visual traditions.

When finished, I would phone the writers and discuss my changes, and very importantly educate them why the changes were necessary. Usually a day or two later the courier would deliver a second script. Often, this re-write didn’t resemble the Monday script at all; they had changed the storyline all together so let’s start again from the top. If it was a close re-write, I would go over all of it and look for any errors in terminology, policy or police practices that may have been added, or corrected, since the Monday script. I was surprised to find out how often and how drastically scripts and plots changed during the week before the cameras rolled by that weekend. On Thursday or Friday, I would get a “final” script which I hoped

had few errors and the changes I suggested, had been properly made. Sometimes I even got a call during a break in shooting where the writers or the director had come across a situation that needed clarification before they could continue. With sometimes two or three-hour time difference, I was essentially on call for the duration of the series. During my vacation, arrangements were made for these scripts to be delivered to my residence.

I recall speaking with Barbara on one or two of her early scripts; Barbara and Wayne wrote nine episodes. As I expressed concern on her storyline and plot and didn't agree how the two RCMP officers either engaged with one of the native people or how they carried out their investigation, if they broke any RCMP operational practices or administrative rules, if they pushed each other around or just acted as complete jerks, Barbara would explain to me, more than once, **"If there's no drama nobody would watch it."** This line ran through my head many many times over the next six years. I had to understand television screen writing, we know this as "literary license". It took me several months to learn how to let the writers write their story with the objective of entertaining the audience. It took me many months, many scripts and lots of phone calls to learn how to balance policy and practices with reality and authenticity. Barbara loves to tell the story about how she taught me about writing drama. I had learned how to read and appreciate television scripts from a different perspective. We sure didn't get this in Police Media Relations 101. Monday morning another script would arrive and away we went.

The Commissioner Calls

So, I'm only into the second or third script and one day my phone rings. In a rather stern voice, **"Hello, this is Superintendent The Commissioner wants to know WHY the two actors on North of 60 are wearing blue jeans and hiking boots."**

Later, I found out that the production team sent the Commissioner a copy of every episode. THAT, would have been nice to know.

I replied that no small detachment in the north was in or near a town that had dry cleaning services. I said that when all the roads are gravel, long blues (blue

pants with a yellow stripe along the outside of each leg) show the dust and dirt very easily and therefore had to be washed often. But, when you wash them the yellow stripe shrinks and wrinkles more and more and the pants look terrible. I also said that the issued leather boots get dirty very quickly and they don't stand up to the elements. So, members in the northern detachments especially, routinely wear a uniform shirt, blue jeans, hiking boots and Sam Browne (gun belt). That's their everyday working uniform. Thinking that the Commissioner would need more than just my say so, I cautiously added, **"You can call the Commanding Officer of 'M' Division (Yukon) or 'G' Division (North West Territories) and confirm this with them."** I hoped I hadn't gone too far, but this was a fact and I was committed to accuracy. I think all I remember was a **"Hurrumph"** and **"OK Goodbye."** I figured if there was gonna be bad news I'd get a second call pretty soon. It never came.

Some members have commented to me since that they think this may have been the genesis of Ottawa getting us cargo pants and combat boots for uniform duties. Maybe, who knows?

Props and Other Stuff

One of the more difficult tasks was finding police props and instructing the writers, and in turn the actors, on how they should be used properly. One such request from a writer was how the police dust for fingerprints because they have a scene where one of our actors dusts for prints and then lifts one from an object and holds it up to the light/camera. If you've never seen it done in real life, it's difficult to explain. So, I went to the "O" Division Forensic Ident guys on my floor and explain to them why I need an old fingerprint brush, a jar of fingerprint powder and a couple of lifts. They were very helpful. I mailed it to Lynx River and spoke with the writer as he examined the brush and powder. I think I recall describing the action as spinning and twirling the brush in a ballerina-like back and forth action across the fingerprint. Then I described how to rub the adhesive lift onto the powdered fingerprint and then how to peel it off. As I recall, it looked pretty good on camera as the director obviously knew how to focus in on what they did know

and pan away from what they didn't know. They shoot multiple scenes and made it look seamless.

I also sent them a UV light, again from Ident, so they could look for bodily fluids and told them how to use alligator clips when they needed a scene where an unknown hand clipped onto a telephone box block for a wiretap.

I recall one writer calling and saying they needed to have somebody shot while in their log cabin; the cabin set ablaze and then the officers examining the burnt-out cabin and although not finding a body but finding evidence that someone having been shot before the fire. This kind of stuff was not unusual as writers often had an idea but needed the proper police procedure to make the story work.

In the burning cabin story, I had our two officers walking gingerly through the burnt-out cabin and, figuring nothing of consequence had happened until they casually lift up an overturned wooden table with the legs badly burnt, to find a large blood pool on the cabin floor which had been protected and preserved under the table top during the fire. You can only learn this kind of stuff in uniformed contract policing.

A North of 60 what?

North of 60 ran seasonally, in the sense that shooting took breaks during the summer and all major holidays because it employed lots of people, often 50-60 persons per episode. During my visits to movie sets in Toronto, I was always surprised about how many people are employed during even a short shoot. It's one reason why the movie industry is often supported by provincial and federal grants and by tax incentives because the industry hires so many people.

With 50-60 people working full-time or part-time, 12-14 hours a day on the North of 60 set, the likelihood of someone letting off a little steam was a given. So much so that Calgary Police actually had a North of 60 cell. I'm told this was handy because there was leniency given to those in that cell in recognition that they had to be back on the set at a given hour. Even within the Calgary police there was a following. My thanks to the Calgary Service.

Oops!

Barbara also likes to remind me of the time she was driving to the set and was pulled over by an RCMP officer and given a ticket for speeding. Not a big deal until just before he let her go, he asked if he could get a tour of the film set. She was not impressed. Oops.

RCMP Jitters

About the second year into North of 60 I received a phone call from one of the senior writers. He said they had received a phone call from RCMP Headquarters in Ottawa and that two officers were coming to the Lynx River set. Everyone out there was concerned because they were afraid they had committed some serious mistake in some form or another which might mean their copyright permission was in jeopardy. They gave me the two names but I didn't recognize either of them. I told them they were probably from HQ Media Relations and were coming for a look see. I told them to be nice, show them around and take pictures with the stars. I never heard back from either side so I assume that's all it was.

HQ Media Relations obtained the RCMP uniforms for the actors, posters for the office, the detachment sign and later on, the decal for the RCMP Detachment Bronco. The television credits on every episode recognized the RCMP Media Relations, Ottawa for their assistance.

In the latter years of North of 60, the television show Due South hit the airways. I later heard Supt Walker engaged in a number of phone calls with North of 60 producers and also with the producers and the legal representatives of Due South, also an Alliance production. The North of 60 crew knew that Due South did not have copyright permission from the RCMP. Therefore, everyone who worked on North of 60 from the writers, camera operators, gaffers, dolly grips, costumers, makeup, set construction and even security personnel were warned never to speak with anyone remotely associated with Due South lest the RCMP pull their permission. It was a pleasure to know that this permission was so precious and appreciated. Mind you, it was their bread and butter.

I never knew if Due South ever received copyright permission but the show was becoming popular both national and internationally so maybe some arrangement was eventually made.

These Monday-morning scripts followed me for years through successive transfers and although the writer's need for technical correction diminished somewhat, there were still phone calls asking me how to work their storyline and plot into Lynx River police practices. I was impressed how you could give a writer a small suggestion or an idea and they were off and running with their story. I found the writers professional and eager to listen and learn.

After North of 60 ended, there was a pause of a year or so before the North of 60 movies came around. I was involved as technical advisor for the first and second movie but as I spent the next few years on three successive back-to-back United Nations missions, that responsibility fell to someone else...I guess.

Uh oh, Not Again!

Interestingly enough, after returning from my second mission to East Timor where I had served as the Deputy Commissioner, and in as many years, having a few drinks at Barbara's house, she says **"There's a movie in there somewhere."** Uh oh, not again?

So, it takes almost a year but Barbara convinces the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation to co-fund a made-for-television movie partially inspired upon my UNAMET and UNTAET peacekeeping experiences of establishing the Rule of Law in a South Pacific island-country emerging from 27 years of occupation and war and under UN-imposed martial law. Again, RCMP Ottawa gave their permission and again I was identified as the official technical advisor. Who else?

The movie was shot in Australia and Barbara and the production team hired as many East Timorese as she could find, either in Australia or brought in from East Timor. The lead RCMP officer would be a female actor from Montreal, Ms.

Isabelle Blais. (Barbara is a staunch women's libber hence all her leads are female.) I spoke with Isabelle on the phone and arranged for her to visit the RCMP Headquarters in Ottawa and meet with Media Relations personnel. I picked her up at the Ottawa train station and took her to HQ. I also gave her a bit of a lecture on how a female Mountie wears the uniform, how she should stand, speak with authority and how to act. I sent Isabelle out with some female members with "A" Division EDPS (Ottawa Embassy and Parliament Hill security) for a few hours training. Watch and learn.

As per her previous North of 60 training, Barbara travelled to East Timor along with her co-writer Katherine Thompson and spoke with indigenous Timorese elders as well as many Timorese youth and of course UN Civpol (civilian police) officers. She hired many of the Timorese youth as actors and extras in the movie.

The story line concerned a young and engaged female RCMP officer going on her first UN mission into East Timor and becoming involved with an Australian Federal Police officer and a young East Timorese translator by day while investigating illegal militia activities and seeking out the Timorese freedom fighters in the mountains at night. You'll have to watch the movie to see how it all turns out.

Of course, I spoke often with the writers in Australia and went over all the same things about proper police procedures etc. but this time the script was in need of UN jargon, UN training practices operating under a UN Peacekeeping mandate and set in a jungle on a South Pacific island. How hard can that be? The real-life UN Civpol officers assigned to East Timor were 1640 volunteers from 41 UN member-states around the world and no, I never got to visit this movie set either.

The completed movie, "**Answered by Fire**" had a few showings on television in Canada but received wide acclaim and awards in Australia. As a result of this significant response, the movie has become a regular feature for training Australian police officers going into the UN mission in East Timor.

*"North of 60 was a piece of home", says Rosanna Deerchild,
"Unreserved", CBC Radio One. Dec 17, 2017.*

Don't let anyone tell you any different, North of 60, that's how it all began.

Since retiring in 2007, Larry has been involved as a technical advisor with a number of television series and movies such as “Black Harbour”, “Blackstone” and “Cashing In.”

In 2007, Larry retired as the NCO i/c of “O” Division VIP after 35 yrs of service. He thereafter served as the Vice President of a large security company in Toronto and as a certified Private Investigator, he also served as a security consultant on a number of Ontario provincial and federal elections.

While with the RCMP, Larry was also a qualified hostage negotiator and in 2016 he published a book on hostage survival strategies titled **“Taken Hostage – Stories and Strategies – What Families, Employers, and Governments Should Do”**.

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Larry Busch

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