

# Climbers on recovery trail from mountain ordeal

Two men caught in snowstorm to leave hospital in a few days; one will have fingers amputated

BY GLENDA LUYMES  
CanWest News Service

VANCOUVER — Two of the three men trapped in a fierce snowstorm on Mount Logan over the weekend will be released from hospital in a few days, while their friend, Eric Bjarnason, undergoes surgery to amputate his frostbitten fingers.

"I may lose my hands, but I can still hold my kids," he said from his hospital bed in Anchorage, Alaska, on Sunday. "I'm doing pretty good, considering I didn't think I was going to live."

Bjarnason and two other members

of the North Shore Search and Rescue team, Don Jardine and Alex Snigurowicz, were airlifted to safety on Saturday after being trapped at 5,500 metres on Yukon's Mount Logan.

The experienced mountaineers were climbing Canada's highest mountain to celebrate the team's 40th anniversary when a storm trapped them on an exposed ridge. In the 48 hours before they were rescued, temperatures dropped to -30 C while 100 kilometre-per-hour winds blasted away their tent and supplies.

"My over-mitts were carried away when we lost the tent, and that was kind of it for me," said Bjarnason.

The 40-year-old North Vancouver firefighter said he's glad his three children were in Disneyland with their mother when the ordeal took place.

"I'm grateful they didn't have to worry while it was happening," he said.

Bjarnason's parents, on the other hand, spent the weekend waiting for news.

"We're just so happy he's alive," said Christine Bjarnason from her home in Maple Ridge.

"Now I'm waiting to see him and give him a big hug."

Bjarnason's two companions also expressed concern for him Sunday.

"I'm most worried about Eric," said Snigurowicz. "He had the worst frostbite. He had huge blisters on his hands. He was losing his fingernails."

Snigurowicz, a 45-year-old ambulance paramedic, has had plenty of time to think

about the mountain rescue. He's received an epidural to increase circulation to his toes and fingers and must wait for the medication to run its course before returning home.

"It was different being on the other end of a rescue," he said. "Honestly, I never thought it would happen to me."

On Saturday morning, after the storm had subsided, Snigurowicz and his companions left the snow cave where they spent the night and made radio contact with two climbers up the mountain. They performed first aid on themselves by pitching a tent, eating hot soup and drying their frozen feet, until a high-altitude Llama helicopter airlifted them, one by one, from the ridge.

"There's only a few machines that can fly that high," said Snigurowicz. "It was pretty amazing."

West Vancouver building contractor Jardine said he also has a new appreciation for search and rescue work.

"We had gotten warmed up ourselves, but when I got into the basket of the helicopter I was just so grateful," he said. "This was a learning experience in more ways than one."

Jardine, 51, said he regrets the decision to climb the ridge.

"We should have stopped earlier," he said. "We were in the worst place when the storm hit. But we just wanted to get down, and from the best information we had, that seemed possible."

Both Jardine and Snigurowicz said they'll continue to climb mountains, while Bjarnason isn't sure.

"I have to see if my children will let me," he said. "But even so, I don't know if I'll be able to swing an ice axe again."

## FREE CHOICE WITH ARMED BACKUP



Lebanese army officers stand on guard as a man reads a list of electoral candidates before casting his ballot in a polling station in Beirut on Sunday. Voting is underway in Lebanon's first free parliamentary polls without heavy-handed Syrian meddling. The balloting was clearly a show of loyalty for Rafik Hariri, whose assassination in February catalyzed the political turmoil that drove the Syrian forces out.  
Mahmoud Tawil/Associated Press

## Sea Kings set dubious record for breakdowns

OTTAWA (CP) — The troublesome Sea King helicopter has apparently hit a new low.

In a high-seas operation earlier this year, the chopper aboard HMCS Ville de Quebec was available only about one day in every five because of frequent malfunctions. It's believed to be the worst-ever performance aboard a ship.

"As a result of exceptionally poor serviceability, in the region of 20 per cent . . . few training opportunities were completed," says an internal report obtained under the Access to Information Act.

"Aircraft serviceability and availability issues had a severe impact upon the aviation aspects of the . . . program."

The Sea King problems occurred during an annual exercise to test the navy's combat readiness. The three-ship deployment ran from Jan. 31 to March 11 off the U.S. east coast and in the Caribbean.

Things got off to a bad start when the first Sea King assigned to HMCS Ville de Quebec broke down just before it was to be flown aboard the frigate in Halifax.

A second working Sea King soon arrived but the chopper had to be turned over to the lead ship, HMCS Halifax, because Halifax's own Sea King broke down.

The malfunctioning Sea King from HMCS Halifax was repaired and given to HMCS Ville de Quebec, but the aircraft was plagued by glitches throughout the deployment.

Despite an "astounding amount of engineering work carried out" at sea, the chopper was unavailable most of the time. Mechanical problems were so severe that shore-based repairs had to be performed at Norfolk, Va., and Mayport, Fla.

On March 1, while docked at Freeport, Grand Bahama, HMCS Ville de Quebec swapped its cranky Sea King for HMCS Halifax's functioning aircraft to try to squeeze in some training — but the newly acquired aircraft promptly broke down.

The military had to send one helicopter pilot back to Halifax early since there were virtually no training opportunities.

Asked whether he had ever seen such a poor performance in a Sea King, the man in charge of all Sea King maintenance said: "I can't say that I have."

Lt.-Col. Bruce Ploughman, commanding officer of 423 Squadron, said repair crews "had to deal with issues that I, quite frankly, have never encountered in my time at sea."

"It was a phenomenal effort on their part to rectify some of the snags they did have."

Ploughman acknowledged that the entire Sea King fleet, purchased in the 1960s and based on 1950s-era technology, has an average availability rate of only 40 per cent.

But the problems encountered by HMCS Ville de Quebec had more to do with bad luck than bad aircraft, he said.

The aircraft that HMCS Halifax finally sailed with was much more reliable, Ploughman said, available more than 80 per cent of the time.

And HMCS Montreal, which is on a six-month overseas training operation that ends in July, has found its Sea King also to be available more than 80 per cent of the time.

# THESE TOYS LOVE YOU BACK

BY MISTY HARRIS  
CanWest News Service

Everyone knows kids love toys. Now a New York design collective suggests what would happen if children's toys loved them back.

Needies are a trio of interactive plush dolls inspired by co-dependent, high-maintenance relationships. Like their human counterparts, they'll not only trade shameless flattery for love but also compete with each other for attention — sometimes going so far as to plot physical attacks against fellow Needies — in a bid to be their owner's favourite companion.

It's *Toy Story* meets *The O.C.*, with a dash of *Lord of the Flies* to keep things interesting.

"Needies are satires of personal relationships, but can also be construed as satire of technology in a larger sense," says Brett Schultz, who along with Amos Bloomberg and Daniel Perlin designed Needies for an interactive telecommunications class at New York University.

The limited-production dolls, only available through Needies.com, boast electronic "nervous systems" that allow them to talk, sing, feel hugs and conspire against each other when necessary. They complain when left alone, coo when cuddled and, thanks to embedded radio transceivers, react to another Needie's presence in the room.



Needies, a trio of interactive plush dolls, have electronic "nervous systems" that allow them to talk, sing and feel hugs. They also complain when left alone.  
CanWest News Service

The ones who receive the most affection, for example, might taunt or mockingly console a neglected Needie. The most paranoid of the dolls — one that worries the other Needies will "steal his humans" — will jealously demand his plush brethren be thrown across the room. And when all three Needies are placed together and given equal attention, they burst into song.

"You're in a position of constantly trying to satisfy the needs of your Needies," says Perlin, who considers the dolls a "post-ironic" reflection of the trio's past relationships.

"They're much more like pets than regular toys."

According to Douglas Rushkoff, an associate teacher at New York University, Needies may represent an emerging trend of networked toys that combine the essence of plush with interactive technology. By design, he says the dolls serve as proxies for their owners who may be too young to network on their own.

"Your toy actually changes depending on what other toys are around it, and that sets up a more advanced form of play," he says. "Kids actually have a reason to play with one another. It's the same way

Gameboys or videogames are more exciting if you go online and play against other people."

Parents, however, shouldn't hold their breath for a toddler-friendly version of Needies.

Because of the cheeky nature of the dolls, Needies' creators are marketing them toward the demographic known as Millennials — those born in or after 1982. Consumer analysts at Iconoculture, a trend research firm that describes Needies as "big, soft Furbies raised on soap operas," say it's the right move.

"These are the kids who've been caring for eggs and flour-sack babies in high school for sex-ed classes; the older ones were part of the first wave of Tamagotchis (virtual pets), and Tamagotchis are back in a big way; they do videogames with each other in networks; and it's hard to come up with something more needy than instant messaging and text messaging," says Nancy Robinson, Iconoculture's Millennials research analyst. "It's Millennials' need for touch and contact."

While Needies appear to fit into the macro-trend of comfort toys, which react to their owner's presence in calming ways, Robinson says the dolls are taking the technology to a whole other plane.

"Needies are, in a way, just the opposite (of comfort toys)," she muses, laughing. "It's like bringing real-world roommates into your home."

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