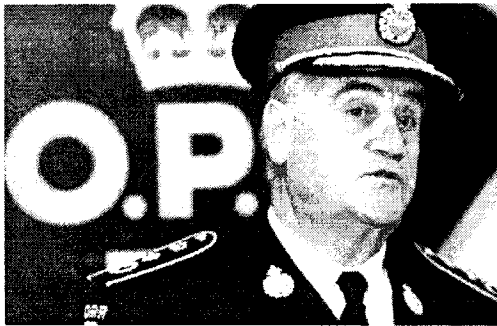


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Christie Blatchford: The place in Ontario where the police dare not go

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The following is the third of four excerpts the National Post is running from Christie Blatchford's new book on the Caledonia crisis, *Helpless*.

In the spring of 2008, at its semi-annual board meeting held on this occasion at the Nottawasaga Inn in the resort country north of Toronto, the Ontario Provincial Police Association (OPPA) finally got an answer or two from the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) brass. By this time, it had been more than two years since the occupation of Douglas Creek Estates (DCE) had started.

According to the minutes of the meeting, Detective Sergeant Roger Geysons, president of No. 3 Branch, which takes in Haldimand County, said the following, in part:

“Our members have experienced several occurrences over the last few months involving First Nations persons observed committing a criminal act and subsequently fleeing onto the Douglas Creek Estates in their vehicles. Many of these members are unaware of the status of current agreements put in place regarding policing the DCE and the Sixth Line.

“To date, our members have not followed persons on these lands in order to apprehend.

“Given that the DCE is owned by the Province of Ontario and is not, as of yet, part of the Six Nations Reserve, what written order are our members to follow? Has there been a written agreement between the OPP and Six Nations as well as an SOP [standard operating procedure] in dealing with occurrences on these lands?

“Are OPP members allowed on DCE? Can you provide to our members written direction?”

OPP deputy chief Chris Lewis answered.

“We’ll address that,” he said. “This is actually news to me that this was still an issue. There is obviously a communication issue.”

Then Lewis delivered a bombshell: “Short of somebody having a kid kidnapped and running onto the DCE, we’re not going to go onto that property. It’s just a recipe for disaster, and it will set things back there.”

Lewis also confirmed that the Aboriginal Relations Team (ART) was still calling the shots — which meant, to those in the know, that the occupiers were still running the show.

“There may be times that we have to go on there,” Lewis said, “but at the same time, we’ll do it and negotiate that through ART [to] the leaders in the First Nations community.”

He also said that the OPP would respond to calls — meaning emergencies — on the Sixth and Seventh lines, but general patrols would not take place in that area because “they [Six Nations] can’t control all the people in their community ... So it’s a commonsense issue, and certainly, we’re not saying we will never go on there, but we really have to be very selective of when we do and how we go about it.”

OPP commissioner Julian Fantino chimed in at this point, saying, “So enforce the law absolutely. We don’t stand by and allow violence and that to occur, but at the end of the day, if we can do it in a more strategic way, that’s the way to go.” Fantino also acknowledged the earlier incidents “when officers have either accidentally or otherwise gone on there [DCE]. It’s pretty difficult to

extricate them once they get in there and they are surrounded and we've got hundreds of people on speed dial that converge on the area."

Lewis, unable to resist describing what sounds like a little boys-will-be-boys hot-dogging then said, "Just for the record, the commissioner and I went on the DCE and that was quite a day."

"We were swarmed," Fantino said.

"Yes," Lewis added. "We were swarmed. We were driving by in uniform and the commissioner told the driver, 'Pull in there,' and he said, 'Like on the DCE?' And the commissioner said, 'Yeah, I want to talk to those people.' So in we went.

"Well, you can imagine all the roadblocks radioing in to the command post saying the commissioner and the deputy are on the DCE, they are out of the car, talking to people with guns on."

When first I read this, I wondered who was wearing the guns, but it was apparently clear that Lewis was referring to himself and Fantino. Still, since Fantino didn't take over the OPP until the end of October of 2006, it means that at some point between late in 2006 and April of 2008, the two most senior officials of the OPP had gone onto the DCE and been swarmed by native occupiers, just like everyone else. That ought to really comfort the residents of Caledonia, particularly those on the Sixth Line, and in the Thistlemoor subdivision.

And nothing can remove the shock of the bottom line of Lewis's message: Short of what cops call a "fresh" kidnapping, the OPP were not to venture upon DCE.

"Do your guys boo when they hear this BS?" I ask OPPA boss Karl Walsh.

"No, they don't," Walsh says, "because they're good soldiers. We've got a whole group — even though policing, by far, is a group of type A personalities, very strong personalities — there's also a very strong paramilitary ribbon that runs through the OPP. So when the deputy commissioner stands up and says, 'Okay, guys, if it's a homicide or a sexual assault and you're in fresh pursuit, you can go there. Otherwise, stay the fuck away,' they stay the fuck away.

"They all leave the meeting, and then they all yell at me, right, and then I go and yell at them [the brass], and they go, 'Too bad. This is an operational decision, the association has no business in the operations of the OPP, so butt the fuck out.'"

Still, the belated acknowledgement is the first and only official admission on the part of the OPP that, 90 minutes from Toronto, there is a slice of Ontario where their officers dare not and do not go.

"And just think about that," Walsh rages. "The only clarity they get on it [the DCE question] is through their union. What the fuck is that?"

Of course, neither Lewis nor Fantino ever answered Geysons' other questions: Were there written agreements? Was there an SOP? The only clarity the association got was that the OPP is not allowed on DCE.

And it took more than two years to get that.

"That's how long it took to get a succinct answer to a pointed question," Walsh says. "And that wasn't until the branch president — and that's the branch president who's responsible for that area, so Roger Geysons would have spent a significant amount of time on the ground, dealing with all the members and the issues down there — and then he finally came to the meeting and somebody asked the pointed question."

So, it was something; it was more than the OPPA had ever had before. But it didn't provide the rationale for how the force handled Caledonia.

"I still don't understand why we took different approaches to law enforcement in Caledonia," Walsh says. "I don't think I ever will understand it. I've never been given an adequate explanation as to why that occurred."

He is still furious. "I can't forgive them for a lot of the approaches they took to this," he says, "and I think numerous officers got unnecessarily injured, I think people from the general public got unnecessarily injured, I think everybody that was involved in this suffered injuries that could have been avoid had they just stuck to their training, stuck to their policies and stuck to the law. You know, the law doesn't discern colour of skin or ethnic background, and it's not supposed to. Justice is supposed to be blind."

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