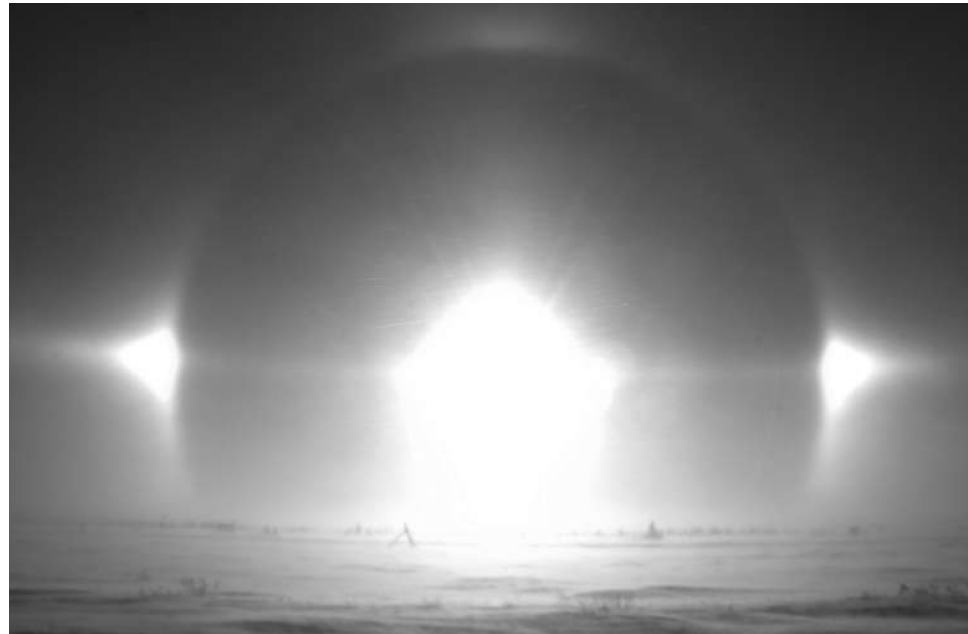


# BUSINESS AS USUAL

## FALLOUT BEAR

### See the Bears Before Churchill is Gone!



From a submission by Gary Rice, a retired Canadian colonel, to Defence Requirements for Canada's Arctic... (ed. note: Unlike much of the rest of this paper, this is not fiction. Honest.)

August 21, 2008, 2:00 a.m.: At Churchill, Manitoba the local weather is clear: temperature 8.7°, visibility 24.1 km, wind speed 19 km/hr.

The Murmansk-Churchill Arctic Bridge between Churchill and the port of Murmansk is in full operation. The voyage from Murmansk to Churchill is only eight days, and Russian container ships arrive daily. Nine days before, on August 12, the Russian Arctic container vessel, Norsk Nova, departed from Murmansk. Four days out of Churchill, on August 16, its Captain, in compliance with Transport Canada's regulations, forwarded the required details of his cargo and his route.

Since it is not classified as a major port, Churchill has no radiation detection devices for screening containers for it is reasoned that, compared to ports such as Halifax, and Vancouver, such a large investment at the low volume port of Churchill would yield little in return. The government's routine target and risk assessment process for identifying containers to be checked concluded that the owner of the vessel was a trusted shipper. Shortly after its arrival at 8:00

p.m. on August 19, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) staff at Churchill carried out only a pro forma inspection of the ship and its cargo. By 9:00 p.m. the Captain had received the OK to unload. By midnight the ship's cargo of containers were safely secured aboard the rail cars on the HBRW siding. At 1:20 a.m. on August 20, with his ship refuelled, the Captain headed his ship back out to sea, and set a return course to Murmansk.

Three weeks before, on July 31, a Chechen terrorist cell affiliated with al Qaeda bribed the drug-addicted and poorly paid commander of a badly secured storage unit at the Sevморпг naval shipyard near Murmansk, and received an early model of a trunksize, man-portable, low yield nuclear device (a "suitcase bomb") which had been recently rebuilt with new radioactive

elements whose "half-life" made it operable for ~four months. It was not equipped with a modern electronic lock.

The theft was not discovered by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), and the International Atomic Energy Agency was not alerted to what had taken place. The terrorist group's plan was to surreptitiously transfer the stolen device to fellow travellers in the United States by concealing it in a cargo container earmarked for trans-shipment to Chicago via the HBRV and its interconnected Canadian and American railways.

For reasons unknown, however, the device spontaneously detonated at 2:00 a.m., between the grain elevators and the "tank farm." Measured from its epicentre at the Port of Churchill's railway siding the immediate damage inflicted by the 1-kiloton ground level explosion is significant.

Fireball. All matter within the 150-metre diameter fireball was vaporized.

Blast. Out to 500 metres from the explosion the blast wave over pressure of 5 pounds per square inch, followed by winds of around 150 miles per hour, destroyed all wood-frame buildings, and caused severe damage to brick

buildings. Destruction and damage of the power-grid nodes in the vicinity of the port caused widespread power outages throughout the area. In addition to the blast effects, the electromagnetic pulse (EMP) from the explosion destroyed most electronic equipment in the vicinity. Containers from a cargo ship in the port were scattered at high velocity. Two ships, including a crude-oil tanker waiting off loading, suffered hull ruptures at the waterline on the side facing the explosion. Oil from the tanker began to flow rapidly into the harbour and is ablaze.

Heat. Out to about 600 metres, the fireball energy in infrared, visible, and ultraviolet wavelengths has burned exposed skin, and charred or ignited flammable materials.

Radiation. Out to around 1,100 metres, all persons in the open receive an immediate neutron and gamma ray dose of 5001 rem, (the dose that will prove fatal within 30 days to about half the people receiving it)

Fallout. A radiation dose of 500 rem will be received by all unprotected persons who remain for over 48-hours in the three square kilometres downwind elliptical area exposed to radioactive fallout in the form of deposited fission products and neutronactivation products. (Ed.note: Real estate prices at Camp Nanuq soar!!!)

*Pretty scary, however, I suggest a slightly more realistic scenario: Norsk Nova approaches Churchill. Rumor about the nuclear bomb spreads wildly before ship has docked. On shore, Chechen gets drunk at the Seaport, cannot remember where he left bomb. Louise Lavrie fights to have device declared an historic artifact once found. Omnitrax demands its return so it can be sent to their Denver head office. Nuclear device mysteriously ends up as an interesting coffee table at North River cabin...*

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800-220-0005  
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# BIRDS AND THE BEES

## GREAT WHITE BIRD

### There's Other White Stuff Than Bears

While polar bears steal the show around this time of year, they are not the only wildlife to be found around Churchill. One of these visitors, and one of the most striking to witness, is the Gyrfalcon.

The Gyrfalcon (jer-falcon) is the world's largest falcon, measuring around 50-63 cm with a 63" wingspan. Also known as the Iceland Falcon or Greenland Falcon, their proper name likely descends from old High German, roughly 'Vulture Falcon', probably due to its size, coming in at almost 5 lbs. Their latin name, *Falco rusticolus*, lends a slightly different slant, translating to 'Falcon that lives in the country'. So, take your pick.

Researchers believe that the gyrfalcon developed as a distinct species during the Intra-Eemian cooling phase of the Eemian Interglacial warming period, approximately 122,000 years ago. The Eemian Interglacial was a time of rapid climate change with global temperatures slightly warmer than today. The cooling trend likely resulted in more suitable habitat for falcons, and the greater population eventually spread into new environs. But then again, I wasn't there, so its hard to say.

Gyrfalcons have a wide range of colour morphs but the white-phase falcons are the most easily identified and probably as much of an icon of the arctic as the polar bear. In fact, the gyrfalcon is the national bird of Iceland and the official bird of Canada's Northwest Territories. While this phase is more common in the high arctic, white gyrfalcons are fairly common annual sights in Churchill's bear season and winter.



*This is not a Gyrfalcon... this is a Ptarmigan hiding from a Gyrfalcon.*

Other phases range from dark gray, almost brown, to light gray. These birds closely resemble peregrine falcons, identifiable primarily through the dramatic 'moustache' of the peregrine, and spotted instead of barred chest of the gyrfalcon. It is not an easy difference to identify.

A better option is identification through behaviour. Gyrfalcons, for the most part, are low-flying hunters, cruising fast over the tundra, using subterfuge and surprise to catch ptarmigan unaware. They have been known to use willow bushes, gravel ridges and even tundra vehicles as camouflage.

As the gyrfalcon speeds towards its intended victim, it also tries to anticipate the ptarmigan's flight path. Surprised, the bird will panic, with good reason, and try to fly away.

The gyrfalcons tries to calculate its approach so that it hammers full speed into the ptarmigan about two or three feet off the ground, usually resulting in an explosion of white feathers (mostly the ptarmigan's) and a broken breastbone

(definitely the ptarmigan's). It is a spectacular display. Peregrines prefer the classic stoop attack, plummeting at speeds up to 200km/hr from significant height.

And, of course, rough-legged hawks, another seasonal visitor, bear a passing resemblance to dark-phase gyrfalcons. They, however, often stop and hover while they are hunting, scanning the ground for rodents. Naturally, gyrfalcons do this occasionally as well, trying to push their prey out of the willows.

Other hunting methods include a drawn-out airborne chase, relentlessly harassing birds, keeping them aloft until they finally reach the point of exhaustion, or a stealth attack from below, suddenly sweeping upwards to stun a bird flying overhead.

Gyrfalcons focus on ptarmigan, in fact, they rely on ptarmigan to as much of a degree as polar bears rely on seals. About 95% of their diet comes from the cerebrally challenged 'arctic chicken' and as ptarmigan populations fluctuate so do gyrfalcon numbers. Occasionally,

gyrfalcons fall prey to Golden Eagles, however, predation is rare.

They inhabit the circumpolar arctic, nesting on cliffs or rocky outcrops, usually occupying an abandoned eagle or raven nest instead of building its own.

Gyrfalcons do not commonly nest in Churchill but fly down to the treeline for the winter. Gyrfalcons are fairly regular winter sights at Spruce Ridge and Camp Nanuq cottage areas.

Some of these birds will even venture into the northern United States. It is likely that the gyrfalcons in Churchill come down from northern Hudson Bay, around Roes Welcome Sound and Southampton Island.

Gyrfalcons reach breeding age around two or three years and will form life pairs. They are not annual breeders, producing only three out of every five years. They lay three to four eggs in May, often while temperatures are still below zero Celsius (32F).

About thirty days after hatching, the young are able to feed themselves, and fledge about two or three weeks after that. By mid to late August, they have become fully independent.

Juveniles appear slightly darker than adults, however, the difference is minimal. The only real difference between Gyrfalcons is the slightly larger appearance of the females, otherwise, age and sex are pretty much a 'best guess'.

Groupings of Gyrfalcons have been referred to as a 'bazaar', 'eyrie' and 'tower' of Gyrfalcons.

- prepared by Kelsey Eliasson

Sources: A whole bunch of them

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