

# Monday's Commentary

## Polar Bear veteran kept history in his memory

Alfred M. Larsen was laid to rest Friday afternoon. The news of his death was just another tidbit worth paragraph in the obituary columns but it leapt out at me as I scanned the classified last week.

Because I know that with Larsen went a bit of history that will be denied us.

But I will remember the bits and pieces of his memory that he shared with me.

I first met him several years ago when I was a free-lance writer. I was asked to interview the president of the Polar Bear Association.

When I arrived at Larsen's Farmington Hills home he was more than willing to talk to me about his experiences in World War I, fighting little known battles against the Russian revolutionaries in the Arctic.

What other, younger generations would regard as history, Larsen remembered as the times of his youth. And he unknowingly passed on history from that personal rather than scholarly standpoint.

Larsen was among a group of young men who left Battle Creek to take their place in the Great War under the banner of the 339th Infantry. When they left they were known as Detroit's own.

BY THE TIME they returned, they had survived a war and had earned the nickname the Polar Bears.

History will tell you the Polar Bears were the only United States military units to fight in Russia. History will testify the group helped the Czar's forces in the Russian Revolution.

But Larsen remembered what a

scholar has difficulty conveying within the confines of a textbook. He remembered the cold, the uncertainty and the homesickness.

He remembered his troop's homecoming. He remembered where the dead were carried by the survivors.

"I don't think we did a bit of good," he said last May.

"We just lost a lot of good American lives. There were more who died than the 186 bodies they brought back."

The men who braved the Arctic cold weren't told of their destination by the army. In accord with military policy, they were put onto a troop ship from London and sent to the area near Archangel. Their original mission was to prevent the Germans from establishing submarine bases in the area after the Russians had withdrawn from the war.

No one was aware of the 339th division's destination but Larsen saw in retrospect that even the army throws out a lot of "us."

"WE SHOULD HAVE been tipped off when they gave us heavy underwear before we left England," he said.

When they saw icebergs around their troop carrier, they knew they were headed away from the main battles of the war.

Living in the cold along with the Russian villagers made them sympathetic

to the hardships of that life. While Larsen condemned the communist movement, he saw a need for change.

"I believe they did need some change. The mode of living was very poor with the peasants," he said.

As the troops became acquainted with the villagers they billeted for the night in the settlements.

Larsen hauled out old photos and long out of print books depicting the soldiers trying to get a good night's sleep while lying on the floor of a small native house with about 11 other lodgers.

Village life remained in the 19th century. Sometimes, to help the villagers, the soldiers would throw a grenade into the river and watch as it rained fish. Villagers would scramble for the easy catch.

In their homes, the villagers retained their allegiance to Christ and the czar. "There would be a picture of Christ and a picture of the czar," Larsen remembered. "And the czar would be the one on top."

Few of the villagers could count. One day a villager would claim to be 65-years-old and the next day he'd claim to be 80-years-old.

During their time in the Arctic the battle they were fighting changed. As the communists disappeared, they were replaced by another adversary—the

Russian revolutionaries.

As the Polar Bears fought their own war, they heard news from the outside world about the ending of the Great War. By Christmas 1918 they were sure the armistice had been signed. But news of the pact reached them three months after the actual event.

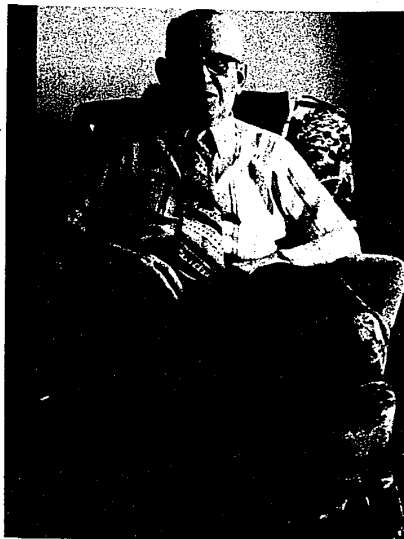
Outnumbered by the opposing forces, they retreated to a bay north of Archangel where ships were waiting to take them to Brest, France.

While other units stationed in Europe were being sent home, the Polar Bears found themselves continuing to fight and continuing to die.

"Our casualties grew after the Armistice," Larsen remembered. But once they were sent home from the Arctic, the survivors found a treat waiting for them. Letters from home had piled up in the months of their absence. Larsen remembers receiving 45 letters in one day.

"I never got so much mail in my life," he said, sitting in his winged chair and spreading his hands to indicate a huge pile of letters.

TIME HAD WHITTLED away at the number of men who remember this country's involvement in the Russian revolution. When Alfred Larson died on Jan. 15, another memory was silenced, to be replaced by what other men will write in history texts.



Alfred M. Larsen sat back in a comfortable chair near his front window, for this photo taken in 1976. (Photo by Louise Okrutsky)

## Tinkering Around

by LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Jackie Klein writes

## Despotic cults trap the willing

Devoted followers of religious cults are young, beautiful, intelligent searchers looking for loving families and security umbrellas.

Young, susceptible minds are brainwashed and controlled by greedy leaders of "religious" movements who claim to spread the word of truth in a decadent, materialistic society. Members forsake all possessions and family ties while despots like Rev. Sun Myung Moon extract millions of dollars from gullible, trusting converts.

Youthful minds are controlled to believe it's a black and white world. One is the God-like cult and the other is invaded by Satan. There's an all or nothing commitment to the Unification Church, to Moon and his henchmen in this exclusive cult.

Disciples of deception are protected by freedom of religion and groups such as Alliance for the Preservation of Religious Liberty. Cults thrive in this liberal atmosphere and, under the guise of religion, pay no taxes for enslaving members and recruiting them under false pretenses.

The courts recognize the right of religious diversity in this country. And so the historic, though, conflict-ridden phenomenon of religious cults continues. But it's tough for parents of cultists to buy the freedom of religion argument.

ED AND RUTH SCHNEE are concerned about their son Jeremy, 27, who has been a member of Moon's Unification Church for more than eight years. Jeremy, a product of the militant 1960s, has a potential for violence in a controlled situation, his parents say.

The Schnees came to Southfield last week to tell of their experiences. But the audience was sparse. It appears persons are no longer fascinated with the subject of cults in the wake of all the publicity on the mass suicide in Guyana. Unless your child has been involved with false cult prophets, you cannot empathize with distraught parents who need all the help they can get in order to stop the panders who turn trusting converts into robots.

The Schnees have experienced years of frustration and despairation. Their son Danny, 24, was a Moonie for a year, but he was one of the lucky few who walked away. "Jeremy's character has been totally changed," said Schnee of his son who didn't get away from Moon's clutches. "And as parents, what do we do? We feel a sense of failure and guilt."

Someone in the audience kept asking Danny Schnee if kids in the cult smoke pot. The man couldn't believe that the Unification Church forbids drugs and wasn't convinced there are worse pitfalls than smoking marijuana.

MONEY IS the same of the cult game. The Unification Church mobile fund raising team of 10 kids to a van

are expected to solicit a total of \$2,000 in an 18-hour day. This is part of the \$30 million Moon gets for himself and his temple in New York, where the church is prohibited from soliciting funds.

Can you imagine a bio-chemistry major with a Magna Cum Laude degree from Harvard scrubbing toilets and saving the world for Rev. Moon? Believe it, it's true.

Danny Schnee shampooed carpets in chain stores when he was in the Moon movement. He scrubbed restaurant kitchens and turned his hands with indignity Adam and Eve's original sin. He solicited for maintenance jobs in Berkeley Hills, Calif. Then he collapsed for three full hours of shut-eye.

He was afraid to complain because his leader would call him selfish and unwilling to sacrifice for noble causes. If he slept through a lecture, he'd be loaded with guilt.

Can you visualize 10 Moonies between the ages of 18 and 25 standing around a drum containing a solvent stronger than nail polish remover? Cultists sniff the substance and start to see Jesus on every face around them.

Moonies must abstain from sex to imitate Adam and Eve's original sin. They can marry after three years in the church if they've raised \$100 a day in three months and brought in three new members.

Moon picks out the spouse, but the marriage can't be consummated for 40 days. Then the couple is separated for three years. Only when the man and wife reach perfection in the cult can their marriage be blessed.

Sometimes Moonies cry when they're being raised funds in the freezing rain and doing chores their parents would never dream of asking them to do at home. They've seen kind, sensitive persons transformed into drill sergeants who have been taught techniques to undermine characters.

But these disciples of deception continue to be willing victims despite the misery around them. Moon's mesmerism has taken hold. The movement thrives on the apathy of those who make no attempt to stop it. What price religious freedom?

## Area C-Cs will join

A number of local Chambers of Commerce have joined to form the West Suburban Area Council of Chambers.

The purpose of the council is to promote chamber unity in the west suburban area.

Chambers which have become a part of the new council include Livonia, Plymouth, Farmington, Westland, Redford, Garden City, Wayne, Northville, Romulus, Belleville and Novi.

## Neighbors address council on Pasadena Park subdivision

Editor: After attending the Jan. 8 meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council, we felt compelled to address this letter to the council and are hoping you will see fit to publish it in the Observer.

Open letter to the Farmington Hills City Council:

You really sold us out this time. By granting a consent judgment to a persistent developer at the city council meeting, you have, in effect, rezoned

part of our subdivision, Pasadena Park, for business purposes. In doing so you not only have agreed to obliterate one of the few remaining pieces of beautiful property in Farmington Hills, you have made a mockery of the city's master plan.

As you know, I am speaking of the entire northwest corner of Eleven Mile and Orchard Lake Road, a part of Pasadena Park. The developer purchased this property knowing very well that it

was zoned residential. He approached the subdivision's Board of Directors to seek their approval of his plans to build an office building on this site and was told "no way."

The Farmington Hills Planning Commission turned down his request for rezoning. At least twice, the city council turned him down. Nevertheless, he persisted and last Monday night, you agreed to a consent judgment. In other words, you agreed to let him build an office building, complete with 190 parking spaces and a spacious retention basin at the rear of the property.

The public hearing obviously was a token gesture and a complete waste of our time. We homeowners in Pasadena Park and Springfield who attended the meeting felt that you had already made

up your minds as to which way you were going to go. How long will it be now before that lovely stretch of land on Orchard Lake Road, between Eleven Mile and the community college, becomes dotted with a string of office buildings?

Our property values are going to plummet with the presence of this building in our subdivision. Moreover, a precedent has been set. We know now that our subdivision restrictions and the city's master plan are meaningless.

Any piece of residential property is fair game for the developer if he wants it badly enough. Just let him approach the Farmington Hills City Council.

MARJORIE SAYLES,  
Pasadena Park Civic Association,  
Farmington Hills

## Homeowners' council gives its stand on zoning issue

Editor: I wish to clarify several points made in your front page article by Mary Gnielaw regarding the recent decision

by the Farmington Hills City Council to put a 60-foot zoning ordinance to an advisory referendum.

First of all, the Council of Homeowners of Farmington Hills did not launch the recall. The recall was initiated by the CURE group, a community action committee formed in the southern part of the city in response to the HUD issue. We supported the recall for reasons related to the 60-foot zoning issue, RCE-1.

Secondly, we as an organization have not yet taken a stand on the bonding proposal for city sponsored senior housing. The candidates we supported in the last elections were in favor of city sponsored housing which gives preferential treatment to residents and parents of residents.

Our objection to the RCE-1 Zone is strictly that it is bad zoning. It was not necessary to accomplish the city's objectives and sets a bad precedent for future zoning cases which will try to go higher than 60 feet. Evidence of this is the recent amendment to the Sisters of Mercy lawsuit regarding property on the southeast corner of Twelve Mile and Middlebelt.

I wish to state loudly we are not against senior citizens. Some of our subdivision representatives are themselves senior citizens. We are only against unnecessary and precedent setting zoning ordinances which are not in the best interests of our city.

ROBERT ANZLOVAR,  
Chairman, Council of Homeowners  
Farmington Hills

## Public transportation slate should be posted in newspaper

Editor: Since 1942 I have commuted to and from my office in Detroit five days a week, and feel I am competent to express an opinion as to bus service.

The first service was operated by a gas station owner at Tuck and Grand River who bought two old buses and ran them between Farmington and Redford. Then at Redford, we transferred to the DSR line.

That was followed by service from the Greyhound, as their buses stopped in Farmington on their way to Lansing. When the expressway was completed, they started to by-pass Farmington.

The DOT has been giving us service from downtown Detroit to Grand River and Farmington Road, three buses in the morning and three returning.

A few years ago, a survey was made of extending the Farmington DOT buses out Grand River to Ten Mile, and the report came back that there was potential. There are thousands of people living in apartments along Grand River who would take the bus and leave their car at home if service was dependable.

This would reduce traffic on Grand

River, eliminate their using passenger cars, cut down on parking downtown and reduce consumption of gas.

I have never heard or seen a reference to Grand River or Farmington bus service in any reports or at meetings regarding transportation. The following is the suggestion of regular riders: Have four instead of three buses, morning and evening, and from Detroit, if feasible have hourly service during the day, pick up all passengers between Ten Mile and Seven Mile on Grand River and then stop only at transfer points to and from Detroit, giving express service.

The DOT between Farmington and Detroit has not received the publicity it deserves, and there are people living in Farmington who do not even know there is such a service. It would be a good idea for the Observer to list a bus schedule.

I feel like a voice crying in the wilderness and hope the subject of transportation for Farmington will receive attention.

JOSEPHINE FINK,  
Farmington

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