

C+91: Jam

A long day



Yesterday was the perfect opportunity to take a picture of the first daughters in four generations, but I did not get one. This morning, I found one in my messenger. Don't they look nice?

This morning is early although it is Sunday. I have to drive more than an hour to the K9 training. This time without Seighin. He has decided to not go on every training anymore, as he may not handle Stone. Understandable, but a pity.

I make coffee for breakfast and in the car, after which I load everything in the car. Stone is awake and ready. We make it just on time for the start.

The first hour is spent on debriefing two recent searches and some administrative issues. The weather is nice. We are in a State Park, no fee to pay, near a boat ramp. The wind is blowing from the water and cools things. The tasks are distributed.

I have to make a trail for a bloodhound. Because it has to 'age' for almost two hours, I must get in one way, exit another, and find my way back two hours later. I think this is easy, but it turns into a lesson in humility. Luckily, I remember some things from the orientation exercises in the military and the skills in underwater navigation to find my way back. And two hours later, although I walk in a different section of the forest, I find the exact spot back. But part is luck, so I surely need to practice my land navigation.

It is a long session and only at the end, I can work with Stone. Cheese is his thing. He is getting more excited about it and that is good. Before the end, he has a second run. The next step is that he runs to the person who is hiding, comes back to me, and then again to the person before he gets his cheese. We have to build up to that complexity.

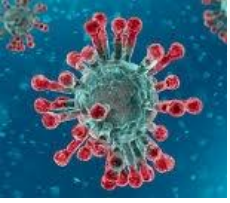
Before I hit the road, we take a walk in the forest. During setting out a track, I lost my first aid kit because my backpack opened. Normally, I make sure that the zippers are linked together, but this time I forgot. Gone kit. I do not find it back. Someday somebody will stumble on it. Now it is bad luck for me.

On our way back, we are stopped in a traffic jam for almost an hour. An accident further ahead and because we are in a road work area, there is no way out. We arrive very late

home. While dinner is in the oven, I take a shower. But before that, I have to remove three ticks. The joy of walking in the wild.

The rest of father's day is a calm evening.





C+92: Nothing Special

Another Monday

A grey and rainy day, but warm. That is my assessment when I look out of the window. Well, at least the Airco will not be needed today. As nobody is rushing for the morning walk, I decide to go through my mail first and go walking after the branch meeting. Less stress.

The branch meeting is the day setter with a lot of 'nothing special's. It is just another Monday in corona times, although today most European nations are spooling down their corona measures. People will enjoy their summer holiday, the economy will get some oxygen and then we will sit out the second wave.

During the walk after the meeting, I stumble on a decorated garden. This is the second time I see such signs from the same company. This one is for somebody who turns 70 and the signs are adapted. Well, somebody saw profit in the niche of missed birthday parties.



When I read the website for summer school, I see that the deadline is Wednesday and that the school counselor needs to introduce a request. Well, she did not tell me that last Friday. I hope, she can arrange it on time. Yes, she answers my questions but is completely not proactive like the first ones we worked with. A pity.

Back home from the walk, I have some time to go through e-mails before the next meeting about the virtual conference starts. Organizing a virtual conference with break-out sessions is still an art in uncertainty. There must be a company out there that can help us with organizing this. The rest of the workday is filled with reading papers. It is a slow but steady process.

During my breaks, I teach Stone to touch a ball before he gets the cheese. That is our task for the week. Once he gets that he first has to touch the ball before he gets the reward, we will increase the distance between those two with the goal that he finds the person, comes back to me to indicate that he found somebody by touching the ball, and

then run back to the person to get his cheese. That way, we train him to find and indicate. Interesting to see how it is done. By the evening, he almost gets it. Smart dog.

In the early evening, I succeed in my second online test on the basics in the US Incident Command System. 4 courses to go.

That is all about this day. Unless something happens during our late walk – but you will have to wait till Wednesday morning to read about that – nothing special happened today.



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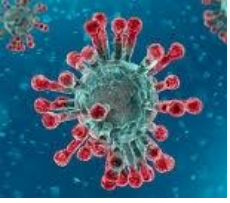


C+93: Broken

Here comes the rain again

I have the feeling that I have already written this page. Déjà vu, écrit? Oh, yes, I have. When I wanted to upload today's two-pager, I did not find it anymore. Whatever search I did, the document had vanished. Only not working shortcuts proofed me that I was not insane. But that was all. No more text. I have to rewrite it all again as I was ready to go to bed. No luck, you are waiting for this and so I have to do it all over again. It will not be the same, but I will give it a try.

This morning I am the winner in the contest against the alarm. Nothing to be proud of, just a fact. I have the feeling that I did not sleep well, but my App tells me that I did. Well, my App being the expert in this matter, I trust its judgment. I had a good night's rest.

I hear the rain falling. Without consulting the forecast of the day, I follow the simple but quite reliable assumption that today will be the same weather as yesterday: a rainy day.

When I arrive downstairs and greet the sleepy dog, I see it is still wet outside. I decide to have my early meetings first and postpone the walk hoping it will stop raining. The early meeting is with a colleague about the simulation of a field experiment for the course. What I have seen yesterday, the approach is right. We think together how to improve the product. It is a cooperation that is rare, because most of the times people are discussing why things cannot work, or what paperwork has to be done before they even start. Now, we just discuss how to make a better product. I like that.

Halfway through our meeting, he is kicked out. Virtuality does not work as we hope it would. It is a struggle to get in contact again and we lose valuable time. When we get in touch again, he has to attend another meeting and brake off. Bad luck.

The branch meeting follows a few minutes later. I am a bit early in the virtual room and take the time to chat with the colleagues already logged in. There is not much news to gather in the 20 minutes. Everybody is fine and that is good news.

A walk with Stone who knows I will leave him soon because I have my uniform on. He is wary of my movements. I check if he still remembers yesterday's training and he does. I can escape to the garage and can leave the house without too much trouble. Halfway my drive I notice I forgot my lunch. I hope it will be a short stay in the HQ and decide to drive on.

A stop at my colleague's place to drop off the stuff we have borrowed for our hiking weekend. All minus his first aid kit that I have lost in the woods during Sunday's training. We have a quick look at a replacement kit.

I complete my commute to work and arrive a few minutes late for the next meeting. At that moment, my computer decides it needs to update windows adding more delay. I can only wait. When I arrive at the meeting, I hear that there is nothing new going on. I go into multitasking mode with one ear listening to the conversation. 30 minutes later, it goes wrong again. Attendees are kicked out by the software while the briefer is unaware of what is happening. Confusion when everybody has connected again because they all thought it went wrong on the other side.

Meeting three is followed by meeting four, but in the flesh now. A meeting about a proposal to change the handbook and the policy. It should be a short one, but I see the hours passing. We get interrupted many times and that does not help to speed up the discussion. A bit after 0500 p.m. I leave the building in the rain.

Luckily, Ciaran will prepare dinner because he wanted to have tacos. He did a good job. They are tasty although I do not like Mexican food.

In my inbox, I find a mail from the responsible of the K9 training telling that one of the members, a police officer present on last Sunday's session, was exposed to an inmate that has since tested positive for COVID-19. He follows safety protocols and wears PPE while in contact with inmates, however, he is going through testing today and was informed results will be back within 24-48 hours. He is not showing any signs or symptoms. If I recall it well, I did not come within 6 ft of him and on Sunday there was a good wind. Anyhow, if he should be tested positive I will have to minimize contact the coming two weeks, meaning no visits to the HQ. We will know more within one or two days.

Another mail, this time from the Grassfield counselor, tells me that the forms are OK and that she introduced Seighin's names in the application for Summer school. That means that Seighin can follow Spanish 3 in July and that I have to fill out the form to recuperate part of the costs form Defense.

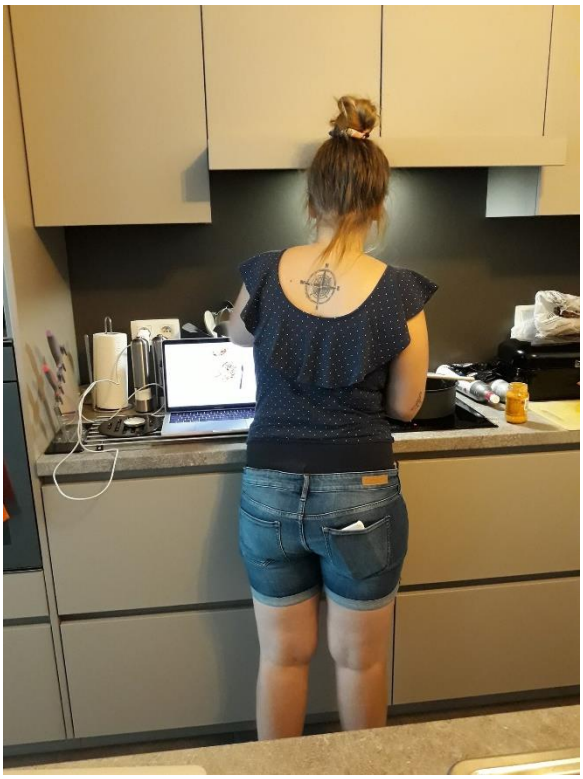
Tomorrow will be less broken up although it will be a busy day again. After dinner, the walk, and finishing the two-pager, I want to go to bed (that is the moment I lost my first edition and I hope it does not crash during my second attempt), but then I remember I have to change the sheets. I am already one day behind Calle's schedule, so no excuse.

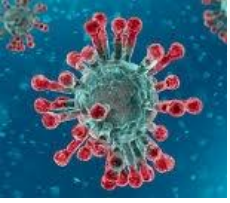
Life on the other side











C+94: Connection

Another day of rain

You can guess today's weather when I got up early this morning. Again the alarm was too late to wake me up. There is something unusual with sleeping alone in a big bed. I still have not figured it out. By the time I am downstairs, the rain stops. Our four-legged friend and I go for a very early walk before it starts raining again.

I take my time to prepare breakfast for the rest of the household and to enjoy mine. I start my workday at a decent hour with writing the request for information for the virtualization of my educational board game. I still find it strange that because of administrative rules, we have more work and will spend more money than we need too. Somewhere the rules have surpassed their purpose and should be questioned. I have seen spend more money with less effort.

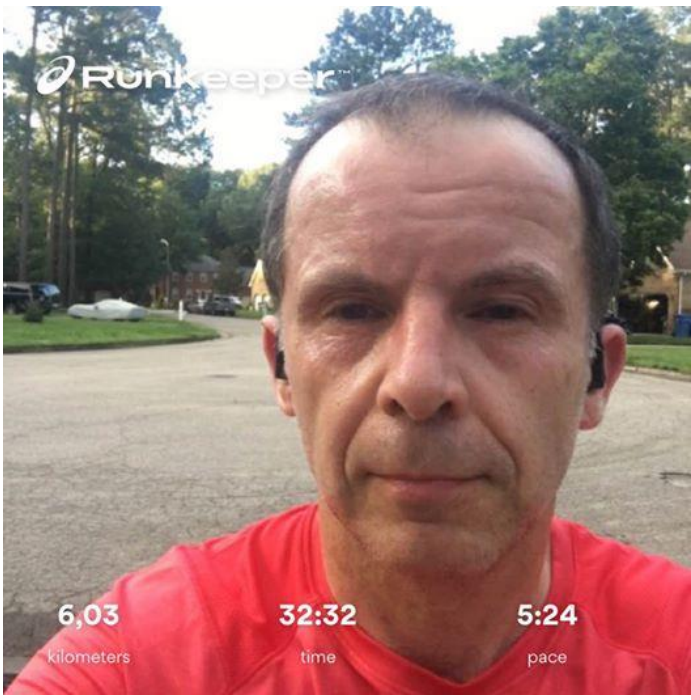
When I want to connect to Skype for the daily brief, I see I have no connection. My inbox is not updated either. Even after three times logging out and back in, there is no connection. Via WhatsApp, I see that other colleagues have the same issue. I choose for the backdoor and join the meeting just on time. It took me longer to get connected than the daily meeting itself. I cannot work through my e-mail and thus I decide to do other stuff.

Around 0930 a.m. I wake Ciaran and go with Stone to the vet for a general check. I need a paper from the vet that he is fit to be trained as a search dog and she wants to check him completely. Although we have an appointment, we have to wait a long time before they come to get him. I am not allowed to enter the building, it is a kind of curbside appointment. A few moments later, my cell phone dies. No more connection and I know they will try to call me to give me an update. It takes ages to charge it and by that time a nurse comes by to tell me the vet tries to contact me. Well, she will have to come to me. And she does, only to tell me that everything is OK. Ten minutes and 80 USD later, I get Stone.

Back home even though I am too late for my next meeting. We postpone it to Friday. Luckily, my connection with the server is restored and my inbox is filling up. On my personal laptop, I wait for Calle to contact me. The 15 minutes turn into 60. At lunch, we have a Skype session. She is holding Lily-Rose and is glowing. She likes to be with her daughter and granddaughter. Watching her, I find it great that she is there and a pity I cannot be there too. I will have to wait some months before I can see and hold our new family member.

We discuss the second wave, or not. There is now a discussion going on if there will be a second wave. I am skeptical about the new theory that it will be limited to some local outbursts. Also, clinical tests prove that steroids decrease the lethality of the virus in the critical stage. Are pumped-up bodybuilders better armed against corona? Will the

International Olympic Committee refuse a Russian athlete who tells it that he or she has taken steroids in the fight against corona?



Next break is a visit to the Great Clips for a haircut for Ciaran and Seighin. They prefer going to the real thing instead of another DIY session. I wonder why. In the back of the car is Stone. He managed to slip in the garage and we could get him back in the house. He knows when I take the car keys that we will drive, and he enjoys sitting in the back. He could come because I stay in the car waiting on the boys. We drop Ciaran and Stone off at the house and drive to Dick's Sporting Goods for soccer cleats. Seighin likes two pair, but they do not have these in his size. The solution is to buy them online. We have to order both pairs and see which pair fits well. The other one we will have to return.

After ordering the cleats and other materials like the lost first aid kit, paying the summer school fee, and thick protection for Stone, I continue with my work. In the early evening, I drive with the big car to the garage and drop the key in the lobby. I run the 6 kilometers back home. Being the only driver in the house, that is the best solution to leave the car in the garage for inspection and maintenance. Tomorrow, I will run to the garage to pay the bill and to get the car. It is a nice run through some communities, we rarely come. Some parts of the run are on the road because there is no sidewalk.

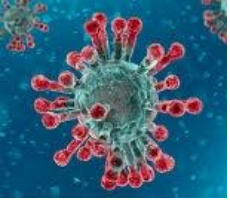


It was more than two weeks since my last run and I enjoy this one. It was warm and humid, but still doable. Nothing a good shower cannot solve.



I must remember to call the pest control service. Yesterday and this morning I had to chase very lively cockroaches. Big ones. They look nice in movies like 'Wall-E' but chasing one is not an easy task. Squashing them is not a preferred course of action.

With dinner, the daily evening routine starts. I wonder where the day has gone. I still have some unfinished business on my list. Things I have to push over the midnight line. Tomorrow will bring more time and meetings.



C+95: Sunshine

Missing a turn

A strange start of the day. I am beaten by the alarm in the race of the start and outside I do not hear the rain. Although it is wet in the street, the sun has started her daily travel through the sky. She hides from time to time after a cloud, so the temperature will not be that hot. No need for Airco, nor heating. That is how I like it.

But first the start routine of every day. The agenda tells me it will a day with one meeting and one webinar, ideal for reading. While the sun continues her travel, I prepare myself for another workday@home. When I open my mail, my inbox fills up with replies to my question about the use of the online version of the handbook on the protected site. We want to move the handbook to a publicly accessible site, no longer embedded in the semi-closed environment of our headquarters net, with the possibility to subscribe to an alert service. The idea of this site was to be able to quickly integrate experience with the method and distribute it to users. The strange thing is that the online version now slows down the updates. Because of the formats 'doc', 'pdf, and SharePoint are not directly transferrable, we have to change two different files. This of course leads to a deviation between the two. I want to change that by concentrating on the printable format and for that, I had to know if somebody uses the HTML-version. Well, it seems nobody.

During the morning huddle, I mention these reactions confirming what we thought. Also, I ask people to check the branch calendar and update it, so that we can plan a 'party' for those who will leave us. I have to look for a big area so that people can keep their distance, although it will be outside.

After a walk with Stone, I thank the responders and start reading papers on participative action research and deontology. Two areas wherein I am a newbie. Interesting stuff and it is up to me to make sense out of it. The webinar is about deontology in research. Well, I did learn some things.

During the small breaks, I increase the difficulty of Stone's training by a nudge. He knows that he has to touch the chuck-it ball to get cheese. The next step is to touch the ball and get cheese from somebody else. Or told in another way, somebody else holds the cheese he wants, but he has to walk to me to touch the ball before he will get it. At first, he is startled, but after a while, he understands the new play. I hope he will good at it by Saturday.

It is interesting to understand training a dog. You have to analyze what you want to accomplish and divide into trainable small pieces that are an evolution from simple to complicate. It reminds me to train youth on how to dive. Certainly, if they cannot do something obvious. The trick is then to divide it into small doable parts.

After contact with the garage, I know it is going to be an expensive overhaul. Much more than anticipated, but there are some essential inspections and replacements to be done and I do not like to put safety in jeopardy. It is the car we travel farthest in. Ciaran decided yesterday that he would run the + 5 K to the garage with me. When we start at around 0500 p.m. it is warm with a light breeze. Halfway I miss a turn and we end up running 8.66 km. My mistake is that running the one way does not guarantee you know the route the other way. Ciaran holds up 5 fingers to tell we would run 5K.

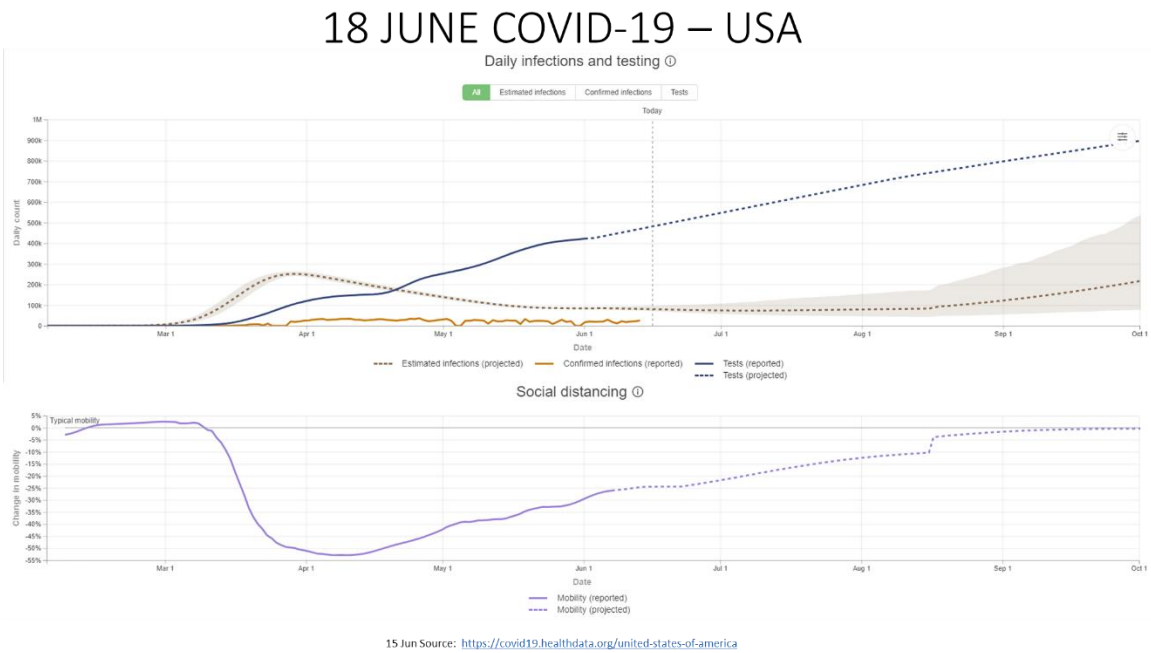


Preparing dinner and a shower are the next tasks on the daily list. The weather is nice and we move outside for dinner. We have to take the opportunity while it is still doable without the heat and the bugs.

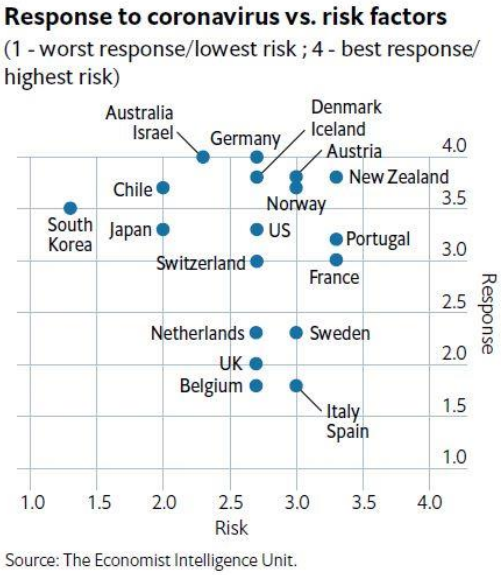


No second wave?

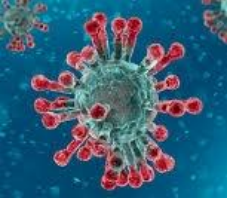
Yesterday, Calle and I discussed the second wave. Today I find in the daily COVID brief form the HQ the following statement by the American quantitative epidemiologist Ali Mokdad: "Increased mobility and premature relaxation of social distancing led to more infections and we see it in Florida, Arizona, and other states. This means more projected deaths. The second part is that we are now projecting to October 1st, which means that an increase in this wave will results in our starting point for the second wave (more seeding), so the second wave will be higher and we are capturing parts of that. Remember the second wave starts at the end of August, early September."



15 Jun Source: https://covid19.healthdata.org/united-states-of-america



The Economist published on Wednesday a report on the quality of countries' response to the pandemic (https://www.eiu.com/n/quality-of-oecd-countries-response-to-the-pandemic/). They concluded that the governments of Australia, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Israel, New Zealand, and Norway have performed best in managing the public health emergency caused by the pandemic. At the other end of the spectrum, **Belgium**, Italy, Spain, and the UK record the lowest scores in the index. Their report provides answers as to what went well, or wrong, for all of these countries. Maybe I should read the whole report as background information?



C+96: Juneteenth

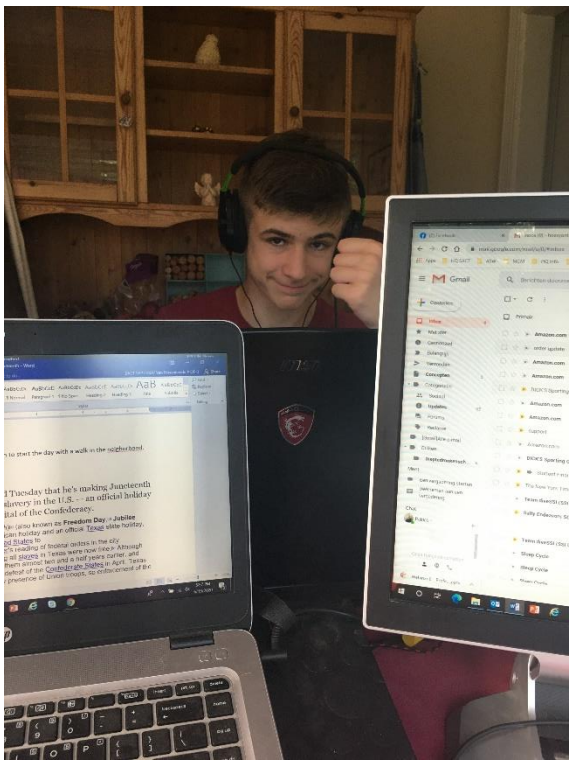
Normal

Sun in the morning means hot at noon. A good reason to start the day with a walk in the neighborhood. Normally, Friday is a meeting day, but this one has only three. The first is short because the branch head is not leading it. A simple update and the meeting is adjourned. Next the meeting with the Belgians. Oops, that is on my personal laptop. While I start it up, messages in WhatsApp tell me that my colleagues have issues logging in. Five minutes past ten, I get in, but it is a 'coming and going'. People are kicked out while others cannot get it. Again, a quick update and done with the meeting.

The third one lasts longer because we are only two. A chat with my mentor for the doctoral paper. I finally have a better idea of what is expected of me. Having not canvas to write gives one freedom, but if after the effort you get corrected with unclear guidance then it turns into something frustrating. I think I have it now. We will see one I send it for comments.

Directly after the meeting, I have a video call from a Belgian colleague. He calls me for quick information about hiking in the Shenandoah, but all I see is his printer. Seems he has trouble configuring his camera. When I find out that he tries to change the settings in Windows, I guide him to the settings for Skype and that solves the problem.

I send a request to get new official passports for Loic and Ciaran. Their current ones are only valid till mid-August this year. We have to find out how we can get the passports while Loic is in Belgium and Ciaran here. Luckily, Loic may travel with two passports, otherwise, we had to arrange a new visa too.



My time for work is divided between making corrections in the handbook and the policy, sending an invitation for speakers for the conference in October, and replying to emails. Nothing mindboggling, but it is Friday and it has to be done.

Seighin has started his first lesson of online Spanish. He was not motivated to start, but he has a deadline set at midnight, so he had no choice but to start. In the meantime, I have received a mail telling me that I am his mentor. No idea what the mentor's job is, but a reply to my question explained it. I have the code to open his test and I have to make sure that he does not cheat during tests. Does not sound like a foolproof method.

Friday, 19 June 2020

Although we had planned fish sticks for dinner, that had moved to yesterday because I forgot to make an extra loaf of bread. This evening it will be 2 pizzas from Domino's, just because Calle sends us a mail with extra pizza points. The boys did not need more arguments to go for Friday, pizza day. After that a movie and a walk. Tomorrow it is K9 training. Luckily not far away.

A new state holiday?

Juneteenth, a portmanteau – that is a nice English word - of June and nineteenth, is an unofficial American holiday celebrated annually on the 19th of June to commemorate Union army general Gordon Granger's reading of federal orders in the city of Galveston, Texas, on June 19, 1865, proclaiming all slaves in Texas were free. The day is also known as Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, and Liberation Day. Although the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln had formally freed them – not all - almost two and a half years earlier, and the American Civil War had largely ended with the defeat of the Confederate States in April, Texas was the most remote of the slave states, with a low presence of Union troops, so enforcement of the proclamation had been slow and inconsistent.

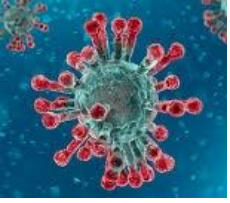
A common misconception is that this day marks the end of slavery in the United States, although this day marks the emancipation of all slaves in the Confederacy, the institution of slavery was still legal and existed in the Union border states after June 19, 1865. Slavery in the United States did not officially end until the ratification of the 13th amendment on December 6, 1865, which had abolished slavery entirely in all of the states and territories.

Why do I tell you this? Well, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam announced last Tuesday that he is making Juneteenth an official holiday in a state that was once home to the capital of the Confederacy and this in the light of the recent Black Lives Matter protests. He will also support the effort to make it a national holiday.

But corona does not care about the color of lives. I read the disturbing news that, according to a study published yesterday, antibodies to the virus may last only two to three months in the body, especially in people who never showed symptoms while they were infected. This is bad news because that would mean that the number of people naturally protected against corona will be decreased when the second wave hits. Also, it could mean that you are only protected if you had (serious) symptoms.

Twenty-one American states are reporting an upward trend in new cases over the past week with the eight states reporting the highest 7-day average since the pandemic began (i.e. Arizona, California, Florida, Nevada, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah). It is not clear if this is a result of easing of restrictions, increased social mixing (failing to adhere to rules or from the recent protests), or some other sociological factor. Eight states continue reporting steady daily new cases and another twenty-one states continue

reporting a downward trend. However, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has cautioned that you cannot truly forecast a second wave and the increases observed in those states are still a continuation of the first wave.

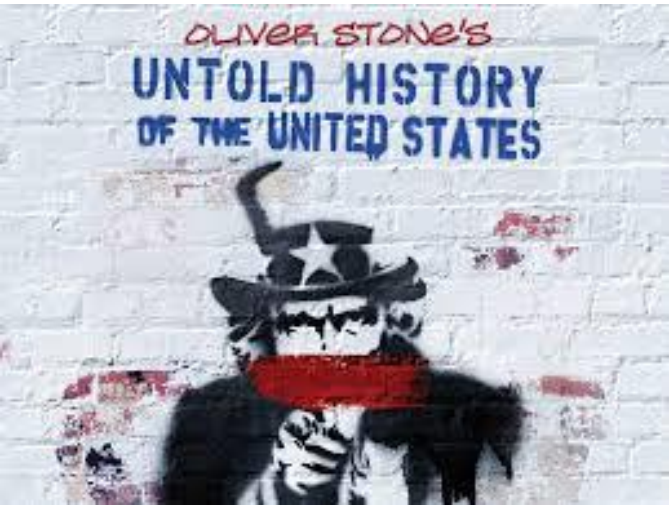


C+97: Thunder

Training

This morning I hear a different sound. It is not rain, a kind of far rumble. Oh, it is thunder. I look out of the window and the dark clouds confirm my suspicion. There is a K9 training planned for this morning. Although it is in Chesapeake, I rather not drive up there to hear that it is canceled. I check the mail. Nothing. I open WeatherBug to read the forecast. Oh, only thunderstorms between 0800 and 0900 a.m. Not a problem because the training starts at 0900 a.m.

It is still early. Time enough to enjoy a coffee and prepare the rest. Yesterday evening, I have prepared the car by fixing the crate in the back and loading everything that did not be kept cool in it. Water, lunch, and cheese in the cooler go in this morning just before we leave.



While having breakfast, I watch an interesting series on the untold history of the USA. It is a 2012 documentary series produced and narrated by Oliver Stone and shown on Netflix. An interesting series that sheds another light on history. Certainly, a series I recommend watching if you are interested in history and world politics.

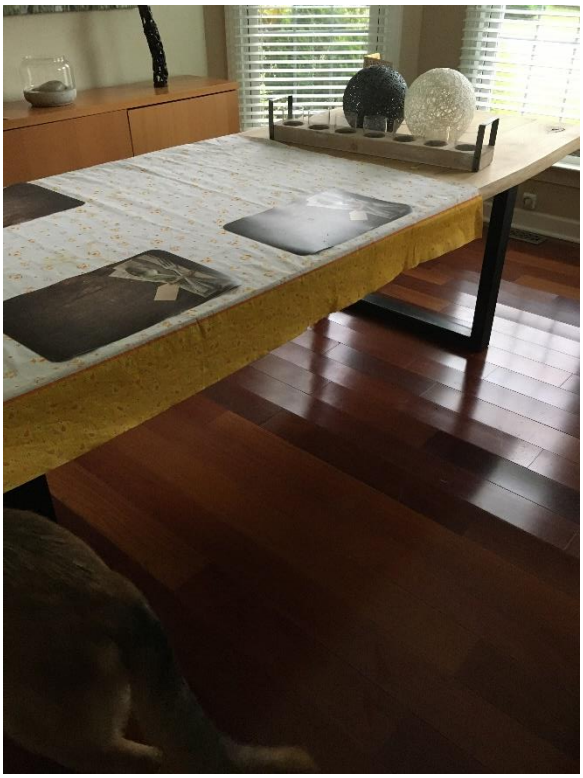
A short drive to another state park that I did not know. When we arrive, it is still raining a bit and the place is swampy. The worst is over. There are only six of us. It will not be a long session as the one last weekend. Stone and I get the chance to exercise four times. He surprised the others when I told them that he already knows that he must touch the ball I hold while getting cheese from the other person. They expected that he would just have figured out the link between touching the ball and getting the cheese from me, not the extra step of another person. OK. That surprises me. Next week, we must train that he touches the ball without me giving that command.

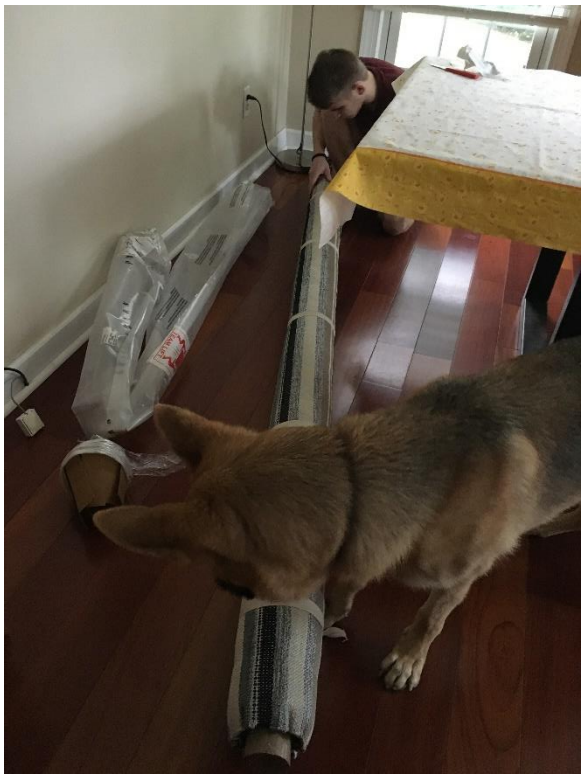
Midway the session, they decide to hold an obedience exercise. I thought it would be for the experienced dogs, but no, it is for all dogs. Well, I never saw how Stone reacts with more than one dog and he is not specially trained in obedience. But he is doing much better than I thought he would do. Maybe he does well because he sees what the other dogs do. Anyhow, I have a better idea of what I need to train him in this area.

By 0100 o'clock, we call it a day. I take Stone out for a free run while the others leave. After 10 minutes we drive home too.

I eat my lunchbox with the boys. After that, Seighin and I drive to Walmart for our weekly grocery trip. We start doing it efficiently, although we missed some things. It is bizarre to notice that wearing a mask does not feel that weird anymore. A few months ago, I would have told you that it was a crazy thing to do, now it is the new normal, although only 50 % is wearing one.

I want to delete one task on my list and give the floor in the dining room a good cleaning job. Ciaran and I - Stone 'helps' too – install the new carpet that has been standing in the garage for a few weeks. Stone already like to new rug.





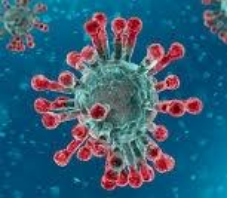




After the hard work, we go for an easy 5K, A real 5K this time. My muscles are still hurting a bit from our overshoot to the garage. It is warm and humid, but kind of nice weather. It is a nice run.



For dinner, we have croques monsieurs and Hawaii. A simple but nice meal while watching an easy-going movie. I finish the day by writing the two-pager and a walk in the night.



C+98: US Father's Day

Sunny rain

Even on Sundays, I am awake early. I force myself to stay a little longer in bed, but not for long. Better enjoy breakfast than wondering why I stay in bed.

I look outside and am greeting by a morning sun. Let's go walking because it promises to be Belgian weather today: a mix of rain and sunshine. No breakfast outside, the deck, table, and chairs are too wet. I sprinkle my oatmeal with some untold American history. Ciaran asked me to wake him up around 0830 a.m., which I do. He wants to get up early, to go sleep early. He has an exam on tomorrow at 0600 a.m. Although he told me he was awake, he stumbles down around 10 o'clock.

My initial plan was to mow the garden today, but the rain is not cooperative. I will have to postpone it. I decide to write my last article in the series 'My Buddy'. After this one, I am out of material and have to put the series on hold till I am back in Belgium. After I finish it, I think there is another one possible. I could write one on me as a diver-journalist. I can let my alter ego follow me and write about me. It will be something of a mind-boggling exercise, but I can at least give it a try.

In the morning I bake 'pistolets' and make cornbread muffins. Being busy in the kitchen, I decide to make vanilla pudding too. Another FEMA online course and a successful test as a conclusion. While I am busy, I also take an online dive course and test.





Late afternoon, I keep busy with some household tasks. Yep, dirty laundry needs washing and I install Loic's toilet rack in Seighin's bathroom. While the two boys enjoy their high-intensity interval training, I go outside to enjoy a small aperitif. Stone guards me against brave rabbits looking to attack the house.

Sunday, 21 June 2020

We have home-made fast food for dinner: bison hamburger with fries. Cleaning up and watching a strange comedy 'Jojo Rabbit' about a Hitler Youth member who has a fanciful version of Adolf Hitler as an imaginary friend and finds out his mother is hiding a Jewish girl in their attic.



'Beeldenstorm'

Well, this kind of protest is going too far. On Facebook I find a post with an article about toppling the statue of Grant in San Francisco. The poster writes "My response to a friend who shared this article with me: No, it is not ok. Specifically the Grant statue. […] What was the reason for tearing down the Grant statue? If it was because he owned 1 slave before the Civil War that is ridiculous. What is next? The Washington monument or Jefferson memorial? Where does it end? Under Grant's leadership, we won the Civil War and ended slavery. There should be a massive monument in D.C. to him. I wouldn't be surprised if the people involved in tearing down his statue didn't even know who he was and what he stood for." His last phrase says it all. I think people just icons without knowing why the statue is there or even who the person was. Or are they just using the current climate to do things that otherwise would not be tolerated?



Ulysses S. Grant is the most successful general of the Civil War, leading brilliant battles and campaigns on a national scale. more »

Print

By Andrew Blake - *The Washington Times - Saturday, June 20, 2020*

Protesters toppled a statue in San Francisco of former President Ulysses S. Grant, who famously led the Union Army to victories that crippled and ultimately brought down the Confederacy.

The statue of Grant, who also served as the nation's eighteenth president, was among three monuments in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park knocked down during the evening by a group of protesters.

Other monuments toppled on Friday include a statue of Junípero Serra, an 18th century missionary recently declared a saint in the Catholic Church, and Francis Scott Key, the author of "The Star-Spangled Banner," the national anthem.

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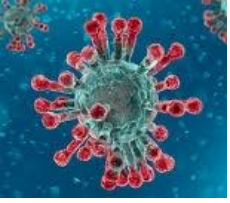

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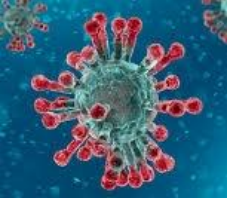


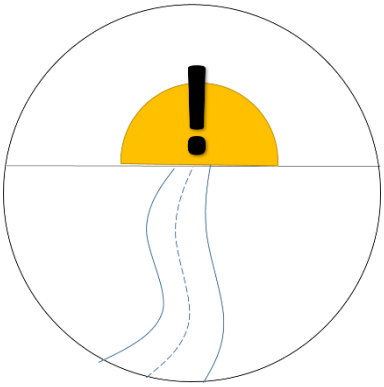
C+99: Tax

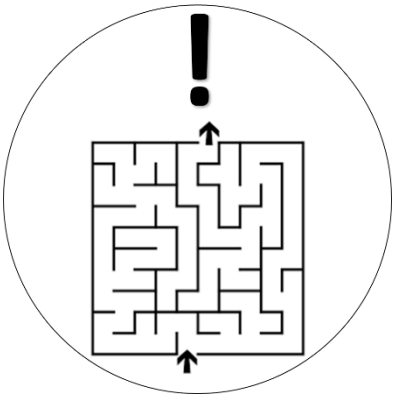
Not much to write about

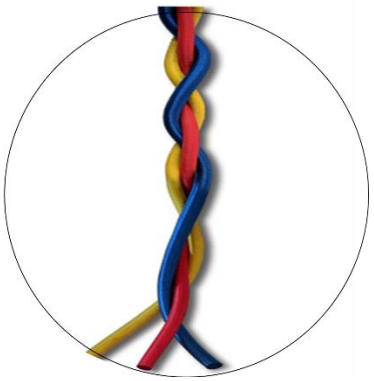
Early in the morning, I hear Ciaran going down. He has an exam at 0600 a.m. A little later, I hear him talking. My cell phone tells me it is a few minutes past 6. I decide to stay in bed and not go down, just to give him a calm environment for his oral test. Almost an hour later, I hear him coming up. His exam must be finished, so I ask him for a quick debrief. When I go down, I see he is talking with Calle about the exam.

The rest of the day fits the usual routine. Nothing special to report on that. Although I have only one meeting planned today, around 0100 p.m., after I had a walk with Ciaran and Stone, I have a meeting on the logo for the conference. I commented that the current design does not tell what the conference is about and now I have to propose a new design. What will be the final design?









I check our prepared tax form and detect a strange mistake: we lost one dependent-child. Ciaran has dropped off our list. No idea where the ministry of finance did come up with that idea. Luckily, I can correct this easily. Other costs are left blank. We have some work to get it right and with the two parties 5000 miles apart, this is not an easy thing.

Because Seighin wants to join a competitive team of online gamers, he asked us if he was allowed to make noise around 4 o'clock. Ciaran and I decide to go for a run to get out of the house. However, around that time dark clouds are gathering above us. We decide to go anyway. In the beginning, it is a good thing. The water in the clouds and the wind cool down the air, but we know there is rain coming. Rain here is most of the time not cold, sometimes even warm. The first drop indicates that it will be cold. After 2.5 K it starts raining. Luckily, it is not that cold. It continues like that for the next 5 K. Although there is lightning, the biggest danger is the drivers. Or they do not see well in the rain, or they consider it impossible to meet people running in this kind of weather. We are almost hit by the side mirrors of a big 4 x 4.

Monday, 22 June 2020

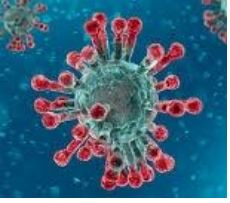


Just before we turn in our cul de sac, it stops. On the picture for RunKeeper, you can barely see that it had been raining and that we are drenched. Our pace is not bad for that bad weather.

After our run, I have a chat with Calle. We update each other on our situation and the things we have to arrange. The return flight is canceled again. Tomorrow, she must contact Aer Lingus to find out how they will get back to the USA.

When she asks how Stone reacts to the thunderstorm, I say he does not care. A few moments later, there is lighting and hard thunder. Of course, he reacts now. We have to calm him down.

The evening is as routine as the morning was. As this is a Monday, I change the beddings and the towels of the boys. After I hit the 'schedule' button of Mailchimp, I turn off the computers and go outside to see the stars. Clearing my head before I hit the deck.



C+100: No News

Jubilee

This morning did not feel different than others. Going in history of as the 100th day of the quarantine, I hoped it would be festive, but no. It is just early. I have prepared everything yesterday evening, so my stay in the early hours is limited to a shave, a quick breakfast, and a walk with Stone, although that is strictly speaking not in the house. A normal drive to the base, although there is less traffic than before the corona crisis, it becomes dense.

Filling up the tank in the MCX gas station at 1.79 USD per gallon followed by queuing at the gate. The parking is not full. I expected more cars. When entering the building there is a checkpoint. An infrared camera checks your body temperature. Mine is OK, so I may enter.

I went to the HQ today – originally I would go tomorrow, but Ciaran has an exam tomorrow and I prefer to be at home when that is the case – to read and comment a paper on maritime operations. The naval coordinator in the HQ is afraid that we two will be the only ones providing comments. Strange. Anyhow, I have some. One thing that hits me is that four of the maritime warfare areas have the prefix 'anti'. Not an active approach to fighting. There may something wrong with our sailors.

During breaks from reading the document, I read my mails and comment on other issues. One is the request for information on virtual games. This request is now published on the internet so that industry/academia/students can react to it. Will I get interesting replies to it? I hope so, otherwise, I will not be able to make a virtual version of the board game. If you know somebody who is in developing serious games, send me an e-mail!

After I have finished on the classified site and enjoyed my lunch – I did not forget it this time – I leave the building. The first stop is my German colleague. I want to give him the new first aid kit to replace the one I have lost a few weeks ago. We talk about the future of our branch and work.



The next stop is to pick up a second-hand crate for Stone. The current crate is rather clumsy to install in the car, it also makes noise while driving because it is all metal, and it is not for air transport. I found a hard plastic one via Facebook market for 40 USD. Outside the house hangs a British/American flag. I did not know that existed. I asked why that flag, expecting a fellow-officer working in the HQ. I am not far off: she is American, ex-Navy, he is a British officer working with the US Navy. They will move to Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany. They do not need the crate, not because the dog is gone, but because he may not travel in it. Pets cannot fly for the moment – I was not aware of that –



but they found a loophole in the exemption for service dogs. They trained their dog to become a service dog and now it may travel in the cabin. No need for an air travel crate.

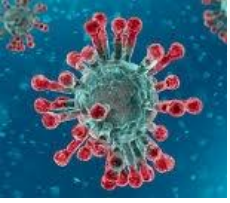
Stop number three is the PetSmart store in Greenbrier. I have to pick up a nail clipper for big dogs. Stone's nails are too long and need clipping. The first time I will do that. A few kilometers before I arrive there, my cell phone dies – and with it, the guidance from Waze - and I have no clue where I must go. With pure luck, I find the store.

Last stop before arriving home, the UPS store to return the second pair of soccer cleats. Get it, drop off, and get out.

Back home, a walk with the dog and the installation of the crate in the car. I am not satisfied with the current solution. The configuration is not safe in case of an accident. I need to think about how to fix that.

As anticipated, Stone jumps in the car to go to Seighin's soccer training. The season has started and he is with the same team, although there are some new faces.

2 hours later, we are back home. Dinner on the deck. It is nice outside. While Ciaran studies and goes to bed early, Seighin is struggling with the quizzes and test for Spanish 3. He is complaining it is too much work for a holiday period. He will still have 5 weeks of no work summer holiday after his summer school.



C+101: Keyboard

Five years ago

I lost track of the days. They all look alike. I know only what day it is thanks to my agenda. The first thing I see after the morning ritual is some strange remarks on a Facebook memory that did not go through. Well, my text was published, but not the picture. It was one form five years ago taken the day we left for our first road trip. Unfortunately, we will not have one this year.





There is no branch meeting because too many are involved in other activities. At nine, I have a meeting on the simulation for the course followed by a webinar on quantum technology. Ciaran has an exam at ten. It did not last long, as planned, and he has a good feeling about it.

Around noon, I prepare dinner in the slow cooker. Stone gets a treat. When he finishes it, we go for a walk. It is hot! Normally, Seighin would go to play soccer with friends, but he cancels it.

In the afternoon, somebody rings the doorbell. Stone goes to the wrong door



barking. It a driver from UPS delivering the keyboard Seighin has ordered some weeks ago. The thing is big, much bigger than I thought. Will he have the tenacity to learn how to play it?



We have fixed a day to hold the departure party of the branch. We have two that will leave us this summer and we have to wish them farewell. Not an easy task to organize such a gathering when you do not want to be the cause of a mass-infection. First, I had to look for a garden big enough so that everybody can keep a safe distance. Second, the use of the restroom must not be an issue for the couple offering their garden. Third, I must find a way to make sure that drinks and food are not a source of unintentional infection. I think we have solved all those issues. Of course, there will always be a residual risk, but a zero risk means no 'party'.



Because his running shoes are still wet from Monday, Ciaran decides not to join me for a run. Alone is less fun. I decide to stay home and mow the grass. It is warm but not too hot. After a shower, we have dinner on the deck.

Tomorrow promises to be a bit different

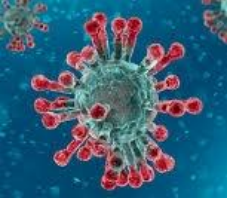
And the corona news?

Europe is thinking of not allowing American travelers. If confirmed that would be a blow to President Trump's handling of the virus. Dr.

Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert, said at a congressional hearing that the next two weeks will be critical in the country's disease-fighting efforts, as he warned of a "disturbing surge" in cases.

The situation in South America is bad and the worst is still to come. Inequality, densely packed cities, weak health care systems, and fumbled government responses have contributed to the spread. While in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia announced that only about 1,000 people will be allowed to perform the annual hajj pilgrimage. This decision effectively cancels one of the world's largest gatherings of Muslims.

For Calle: Novak Djokovic, No. 1 in men's tennis, is the fourth player to be infected with the coronavirus after he organized an exhibition series in Croatia and Serbia.



C+102: No Title

Lost count



Yesterday, I wrote that I lost track of days, but it seems that it is worse: I lost track of the years too. The first picture in yesterday's two-pager was five years old. I thought 2019 -5 = 2014. Nothing wrong with the math, only that we are already halfway 2020. So, the picture was from 2015 and that is the start of our second road trip.

Today, nothing special again. Just another day. With two meetings and a webinar. The webinar is about biotechnology and is interesting. This is of course a very broad topic with interesting applications. The second meeting is short. After the launch of the RFI for the game, I asked about the next step. The reply from Budget was that they did not understand what I asked. Well, it seems that the RFI was not the right approach. Now, I have to launch another request. The good news is that it may be quicker to get a solution. Well, if that is true, it is worth my investment. When my meeting partner tells me how much she thinks such a contract would cost, I blink. That kind of money is just too much. Certainly for a fairly simple thing. I hope she is wrong.

The replacement bag I bought for my German colleague is a little bit smaller than anticipated. He had to come up with a completely new configuration, but he managed to get everything in. Tight! Now, he likes it more, because it is compact. I have to follow the same packing plan. Not sure I will succeed that well.

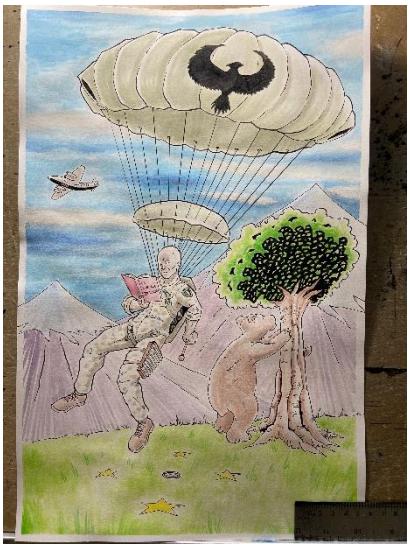




The third and last cartoon is ready. They look nice. Our departing colleagues will be pleased. I just have to put them in a cheap frame and explain the different elements on it, but that is a quick fix. Next week I have to pick them up, ready for the party the week after.

Thursday, 25 June 2020







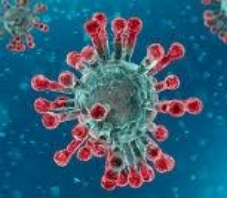
The rest of the afternoon is reading and writing. Nothing to write about. Although it is raining in the later afternoon and we both think that the soccer practice will be canceled, we receive a message that the training is on. While Sieghin plays soccer, I clean the second-hand crate to make sure that there is no transfer of disease to Stone. One never knows.

When I return with Sieghin, he asks if we can have pizza today instead of tomorrow. Why not? We start watching a movie, but it is not a great one, so we stop it. Better spend time taking Stone on a long walk.

Forever

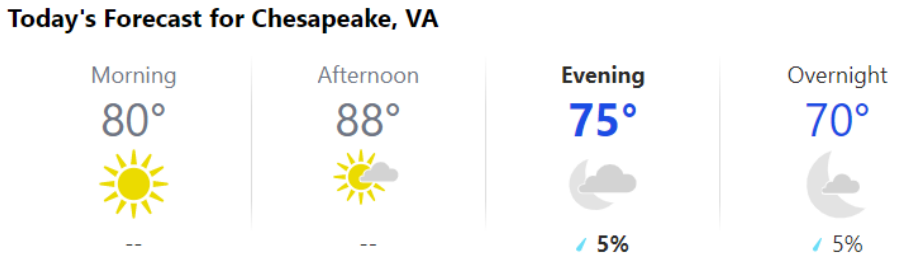
We do not talk about the second, third, or x^{th} wave anymore. "It's always going to be with us," said Simon James Thornley, an epidemiologist from New Zealand. "I don't think we can eliminate the virus long term. We are going to need to learn to live with the virus."

So, I need an exit strategy because I do not see how I can keep writing these two-pagers forever.



C+103: Italy

Hot again



The forecast is hot. It is going to be more than 32°C, Stine will not like the noon walk. I cannot blame him.

When I want to make my cappuccino, I discover that I used the last drop of mil to make bread. Ciaran probably took the last carton and did not tell. This morning and tomorrow, it will be just black coffee. I do not have the urge to go to the store just for milk. The shopping trip is planned for tomorrow and it will stay that way. We will see a few creative ways to carry a mouth mask. Maybe I should make a t-shirt with the sign I saw on Facebook?



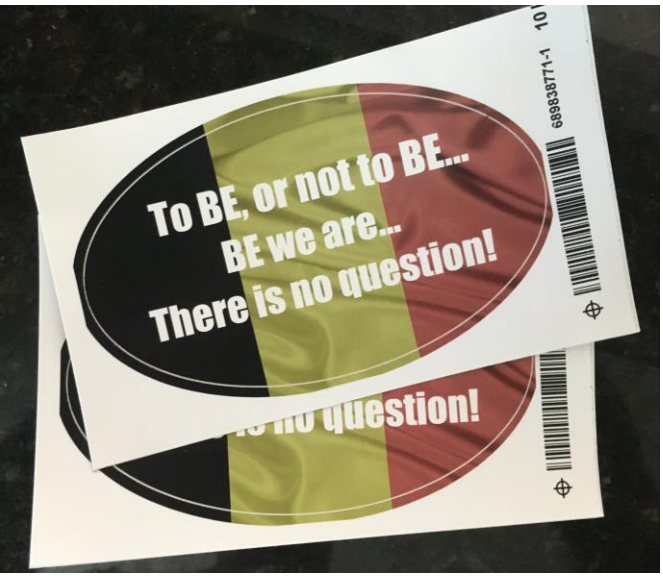
And things are not going well at the start of this day. Although the terrace table is wet, the wooden chairs are dry enough to sit on. Halfway my breakfast, the chair gives in. That was an accident waiting to happen as the wooden pins had their best time. Today, they decided to stop doing their work. Luckily, it was not a shock as the frame held together.

Two meetings with almost no interesting facts to collect. There is some confusion about the work regime starting from 01 July. Well, they need to clear that one out. Anyhow, I will spend most of the time working from home, unless there is a real need to go to the HQ. That is my plan.

In the afternoon, the branch head contacts me. There are 4 risk groups related to the potential consequences when you get infected. It goes from A, severe, to D, very low. When you are in A, you have a severe health condition. The gap with C, the one I am in because of high blood pressure, is quite big. Anyhow, my branch head had to check in with me. He also proposed to get a kind of routine with our four cubicles that I call Area 51 so that people know when we are in. I understand that a kind of regularity is wished for and I am sure we can work something out. If every one of us picks a day in the week that we come to the HQ, we have covered 4 days. The one day left, we can use as an extra day if somebody needs it.

Seighin is practicing on his keyboard. After an hour playing, he has a sour right wrist. That was expected.

Friday, 26 June 2020

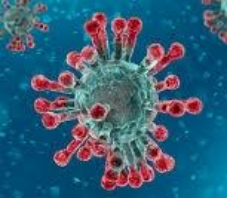


Ciaran tells me he will not go running today. I think about running on my own, but Stone volunteers to go with me. I give it a try. He is doing is better. He understands that it will be a run and does not take off like a rocket. He runs slightly in front of me. Is he getting smart about it? Or is it just too hot to sprint? Midway our run he gets a bit crazy but that does not last long. Well, a few more like these and he can run with us.

Calle has ordered some stickers form the 'Belgians in the USA' Facebook group. They arrived today. We just have to find some magnetic sheet so that we can take the stickers with us to Belgium.

Dinner outside. It is again a nice evening without the mosquitos. Nice.

Oh yes, you wonder by now why the title is 'Italy'. A few weeks ago, Loic has received a message that he was selected to participate in an MBA in Torino, Italy. It is a sponsored MBA study organized by the 'Collège des Ingénieurs' focused on international, young engineers. There were hundreds of candidates for 18 spots, end he made it. We were not allowed to tell it because his girlfriend Elizabeth did not want to know before her last exam. Well, she knows it now even when her exams are not over yet. He told her. Another year of study in an international environment ahead. Enjoy it Loic.



C+104: Diving

Hotter



Around 0630 a.m. I hear Ciaran walking down. He has an exam at eight and wants to be ready. I decide to stay a little longer in bed, but after 45 minutes I had enough. Time to start the Saturday. No fixed time for a briefing. Time is mine. Stone and I go on the deck to enjoy breakfast. Hello world.

When I enter the house, I hear Ciaran sighing. Something is not going as planned. Later, he tells me that they had to use a limited version of LaTex without they were informed of it. The limited version had no shortcuts and it was not easy to write formulas. He claims he has lost valuable time and sends a complaint to the ombudsman.

I limit my computer time today to writing an article in the series 'My Buddy' and later in the evening this two-pager. I work too much on the laptop during the week and want to limit screen time during the weekend. I try to find some diving spots from the shore in Virginia or even North-Carolina. In the Facebook group of divers of Virginia, I have asked people if they know such spots. There are none, or very limited. Most divers go with a charter on sea or dive in some exotic country. To dive in a lake 2 hours driving from here, they ask 40 USD. Belgian divers are spoiled with all those lakes to dive in and the Oosterschelde nearby. Now, I understand better why dive centers ask for a test dive. People do not have the opportunity to dive around here unless you own a boat or have a lot of money.

I still looking for an easy software package with a kind of text editor that can produce different output formats. The idea is to type a text once and save it as a pdf, docx, html, epub… and other formats. I found some promising ones, but they ask too much effort to set up. I know my ex-colleague Paul would enjoy doing that, but I do not have the patience for it.

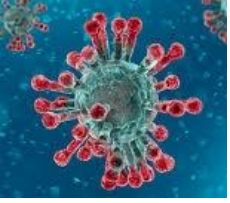
After lunch, Seighin and I drive to Walmart for groceries for the next week. Within the hour we are out again and have found everything we need. We are getting good at this. Unloading and putting everything that needs cooling away. The rest may stay in the garage as a kind of precaution.

Calle, Amber and Loic are calling me via Messenger. They have received a notification that my Father's Day gift has arrived. A bit late, but it is there. I had found it in the mailbox, but because I had not ordered anything, I guessed it was their gift. Seighin promised to

check it but forgot doing that. Well, now I know for sure. It is a new Fitbit. Not an unexpected gift as my former one – a TomTom - was flattened by a car after it had dropped out of its band during a morning walk. It is a nice, small one. I start tracking my steps again.

After an early evening walk with Stone - it is still hot – I prepare dinner. Again on the deck while it is still doable. Stone wants to be with us, but he finds it too hot to his liking. Tomorrow will be another hot day and he will have to work. I will make sure to take plenty of water with me.

This evening I plan to get in bed a bit earlier than the days before. Will I succeed in that?



C+105: A 'No-Start'

K9



Today, Stone has to work because we are going to the K9 training. It is an early day. The outside temperature feels nice because there is a bit of overcast. It will not be that hot today, I hope. I have time to start calm. While Stone keeps the garden squirrel free, I load the car. It does take that long because I have prepared everything last evening. When we are ready, Stone jumps full of anticipation in the back of the car. Does he feels we are going to the training, or does he just likes to travel?

But where are the car keys? I look for them in every possible spot. Nowhere to find. When was the last time I drove the car? A few days ago, it was in the garage for maintenance. Yes, I remember, I did use it to drive to work and pick up the second-hand crate. The keys must still be in my uniform! No, not there either. Maybe in the bag of the laptop? Yes. I lost time, but we still can make it on time.

No, the car does not start. The starter motor turns, but no ignition. I had a similar problem Tuesday, but it started the third time. Not today. Well, they did not do a good job in the garage when they replaced the spark plugs. I quit trying. It is of no use. It is a 'no-star' and it will stay that way. Tomorrow I will call the garage and see how they will fix it, and if I need to call AAA to tow it to the AAA garage.

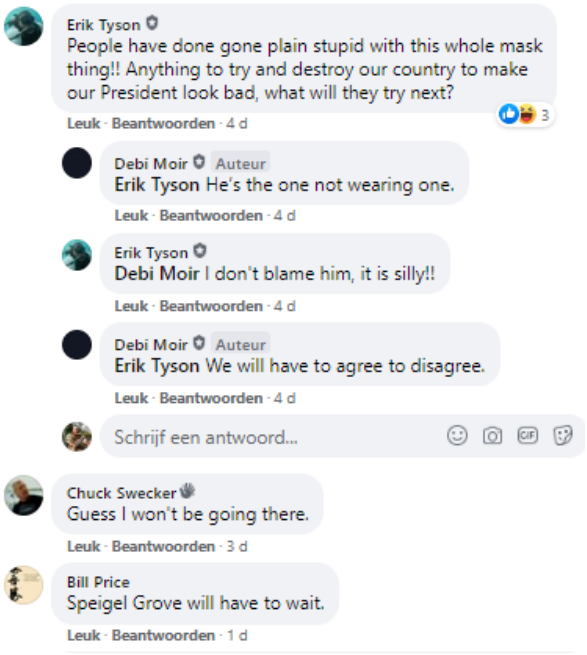


A text to the head of the K9 team that we will not show up. A pity. Stone does not get it why he has to get out. He thinks it is a trick to leave him behind while I will drive away. No, we just have to walk.



I have now suddenly 8 hours with no plan to fill these. First unloading and then making pistolets for lunch. Fixing the Belgian flag that is hanging half-mast. Followed by finishing the 'last' article in the series 'My Buddy'. It has the title the 'journalist-diver' with myself as journalist and buddy. It is a

bit a twisted approach and a fun challenge to write about myself as if I were somebody else. I hope they will like it.

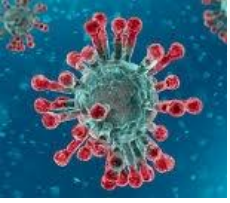


On Facebook, I see a post about dive centers demanding face masks and the reaction of a few divers surprises me. But after I see a clip on the hearings of the anti-mask movement in California, I must say I am no longer surprised. We should be open to debate every decision having an impact on our lives, but please people use valid arguments, not stupid ones and keep it civilized.

Well, I was wrong, it is hot today. The clouds dissipated and the sun is shining in full glory. The noon walk was going from one shadow to another, it is too warm to stay in the sun.

The afternoon is a bit relaxing. Reading JJ Cousteau's first but 'Silent World' in French. Trying to play Jingle Bells on Seighin's keyboard. I will not become a very good player, but that is not news. I played or rather tried to play the piano when I was a teenager and gave up because I could bring my hands to play different tones. After that, I have never tried it again.

Around 0700 p.m. a thunderstorm passes over Chesapeake. Everything is wet again. It is only a short burst without must lighting or thunder. For dinner, I prepare an Indian potato salad with mixed success.



C+106: Request

E-games



I forgot to tell it a few days ago that Seighin has made it in a team playing in competitive e-games. Well, one game 'Overwatch'. I hear you asking what a kind of game that is. I had to look it up too. Overwatch is a team-based multiplayer first-person shooter developed and published by Blizzard Entertainment. Described as a "hero shooter", Overwatch assigns players into two teams of six, with each player selecting from a roster of over 30 characters, known as "heroes", each with a unique style of play that is divided into three general roles that fit their purpose. Players on a team work together to secure and defend control points on a map or escort a payload across the map in a limited amount of time. The game was initially launched with only casual play, but a competitive ranked mode was added. I did not play it (yet), but the good thing is that it seems to be at least a team effort based on tactics. Without a good team, no fun play.

After the branch briefing, the first task on my list is to get the Chrysler to the garage. An AAA road assistance truck has to pick it up and bring it to the garage. I cannot drive it there because it does not start. A few hours later, I get a call from the garage telling me that there is something wrong with the computer and that they cannot repair it. The car needs to be towed to an official dealership. That sounds expensive. They claim that the trouble has nothing to do with the replaced spark plugs. I have my doubts. They change the plugs and I have an issue with no ignition. A bit too much of coincidence. I will ask the dealer if there could be a link, but I doubt if they can/will tell.

Around noon, somebody rings the front door. Stone starts barking. Oh, he guards. I expected the pest control guy. He is talkative and tells me that keeping spiders is illegal in Virginia. Must be a joke. When he enters the house, Stone restarts barking even when the man gives him cookies. He goes around the house to spray in the corners. It strikes me as odd that he does not even ask where we have cockroaches and ants. He just sprays. OK, I trust he knows what he is doing. Wasn't he here for termite check too? He disappears through the garage. Was that it? Later, I found out that he has set some traps in the garage, but I have no idea how long they have to stay there. Not enough information.

Today was a series of smaller things to do for work. Nothing big, just things that had to be done some time. Of course, that eliminates many tasks on my to-do list and let it shrink to acceptable proportions. It also means sending out emails, running the risk that people will answer those by asking questions.

Monday, 29 June 2020

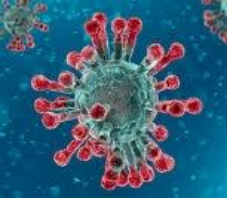
Today is also the day that the list of international posts for 2021 would be published. In the morning I find that list and thus I need to introduce a request according to the new procedure. It is a strange procedure and I am not sure if it is an improvement. I am not even sure if I did it right, but a reply to my mail asking confirmation tells me that it is OK. Now I have to wait months before I get a decision. At some point in time, I might have to ask our HR department for their decision to prevent signing a NATO contract while they intend to keep me another year.

At the end of the day, I get a typical administrative reply on my question on how to lay my hands on a software that could produce different outputs from one central file. It is just sad that there are people in our HQ that only think as administrators. No leeway to think in solutions, only rules. Frustrating. Well, we will have to live with those, I just do not want to meet them too often.



None of the boys want to go running with me and I want to exercise this evening. No other solution than to run solo. After a +5 K run, I want to take Stone for a 1 K run. It is a quick, but a doable start. Do not mind the pace as we did not start immediately and I did not stop the timer directly after we stopped either. Halfway we have to stop for an urgent dog business. Luckily, I had my long run.

Dinner, cleaning up and a little bit relaxing closes the day.



C+107: Lost Car

It is again an early day for Ciaran. He has his last exam for this period and is worrying about it. There are some combinations of theory and exercises that he does feel comfortable with, while others will go just fine. It is a bit of a gamble. However, he appreciates the fact the two professors make time just for his exam. That makes it a bit awkward too as failing would not be seen as appreciative for their efforts and adds extra stress.

After more than an hour, I hear him talking with the first prof and the tone is happy. It is going good. A bit later, while going into the kitchen to get some water, he tells he has luck with the questions and that it is going well. At the end of the exam, the second prof tells him that he can have a little party this evening. A success?!

After the branch meeting, I call the dealership because I did not hear from them yet. They have computer issues, but my car is not there. That strange, because it should have been towed there yesterday afternoon. I call AAA and first they do not find a request for towing. They transfer me to the Virginia department and they tell me that the tow job was executed. Conclusion: my car is lost. For the moment and I have to find it. Instead of trying to solve the mystery, I get the job number and the name of the tow company.

I call that company and they tell me that they did not find the car at the garage. They had tried to call me to ask were it was, but I did not answer. If they were at the garage, why did they not ask somebody inside? Later, I check my phone and indeed some unknown number tried to reach me, but I get so many unsolicited calls from people trying to sell something. So, no tow yesterday afternoon.

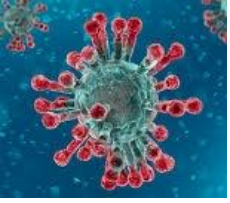
Before I ask a new tow, I check with the AAA Car Center if our car is still there. Yes, it is. Another request for towing and a few hours later, the dealer confirms the car is there, but they still have computer issues. It will not be ready soon.

While doing the car investigation, I attend a webinar on hypersonic vehicles, try to answer emails, write a point paper on the handbook, and reading messengers from the family. When I ask Loic for some clarifications, he is surprised and tells me to read the messages. Well, in multitasking mode, I have no urge to go back and try to find the one message with the Info.

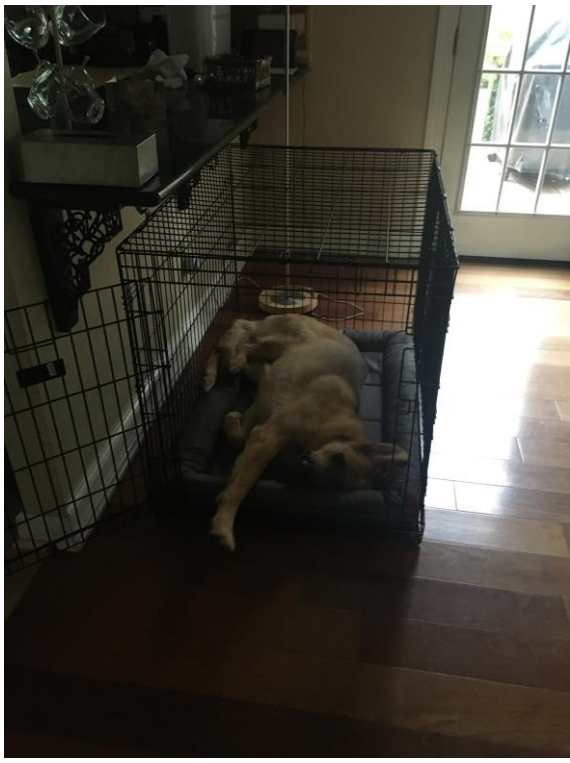
In the afternoon, I start writing vignettes, a kind of short story illustrating a situation. They want some vignettes to illustrate the potential outcomes of the combination of new technologies. Of course, the deadline is short.

When I drive Seighin to soccer practice, we run into a thunderstorm with lots of rain. At the soccer field there is a bit of rain, but not the intensity that we have passed and back home it is dry.

Normally, Ruie, Josh's mom would drive the boys to practice and I would bring them back, but Seighin 'forgot' to tell me that Josh will not go. He is not feeling well. That turns my whole evening planning upside-down resulting in a late dinner. Late dinner results in a late evening walk. A late evening walk into a late two-pager. A few minutes before midnight I kick it out. Tomorrow will be early. HQ again.



C+108: Bill



Infrared camera

Yesterday ended late. It ended today. After not even two hours, my cell phone pings. A message from Calle, nothing urgent. While normally all messages and calls are blocked during my silent hours, Calle's number is in favorites and favorites have the privilege to go through, even when other numbers are blocked. Half-awake, I assess that this is a one-time event and leave it. Unfortunately, one does not make good assessments without the full capacity of one's brain. Not long thereafter, my phone starts singing. Some messages from Loic. Also, in favorites. The need for sleep wins and I drop my phone on the nightstand.

Next time I look at my phone, it is a few minutes before 0600 a.m. Not time yet to get up, but too late to stay in bed and have even a power nap. Out for a shave because it is HQ-day. It is too early for Stone. He looks at me with sleepy eyes. Having more time than planned, I treat Stone on a big morning walk. He has his amount of steps and stops to wait until Seighin gets up in a few hours. Before I leave, I give him a bone to keep him busy while the two boys are sleeping.

On my drive to work, the dealer contacts me. They found the faulty part, and that is the good news. The bill for the repair is estimated at 1600 USD, but the piece is in backorder. Current estimation of arrival is the end of June. That could be trouble. How will I get Stone in the Prius? How will we go on our hiking trip? How to clean out Loic's room in Newark? But nothing to do, we must live with that situation.

I feel the lack of sleep and have some trouble to keep my mind focused. When entering the headquarters, I must stand before an infrared camera to check my temperature. The funny thing is that one of the operators is not wearing a face mask. I am OK and may enter.

There is nothing on the classified site, so my presence today was not necessary, but I am here now. I get different guidance on the vignettes making writing them not easier. During the branch meeting, I get a call from Brussels, the HR department. My counterpart wants to guide me through the system to complete the second part of the request. I take the opportunity to explain the situation and ask him to get a decision as early as possible. I did not tell him yet about my back-up plan, but I will do that next time he contacts me. And he will because I did everything right. The problem is that my screen does not has all the choices. The one I need is not present. Why that happens with me, I have no clue, but this is a technical problem. Thanks, I do not feel stupid anymore.

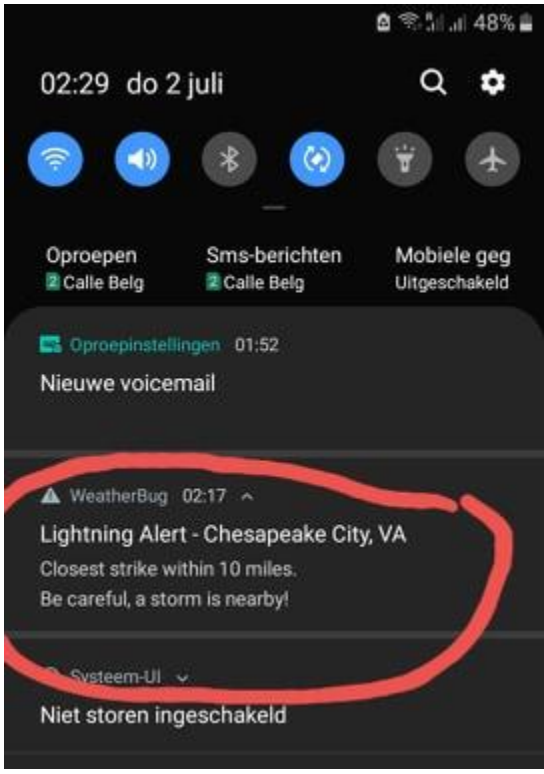
Wednesday, 01 July 2020

Soon after I finish the help-call, I get a message from a Belgian colleague with a proposal to stay. He wants to start in Florida next summer and asks if I want to replace him in his current post, mine during the first tour. Because he mentions that our NLR is aware of his request and I do not see what the advantage of this maneuver would be for Defense, I contact the colonel to chat about it. As the NLR tells his side of the story, it seems that the chance of success is very slim and certainly not a horse to bet on.

Around noon, we have a virtual meeting with the company that sells a conference software package. The package is quite powerful and user-friendly, but their biggest trump is that the UN used it for their big conference last month. And the costs seem to be acceptable. A promising evolution.

Before heading home, I stop by the artist who has made the artworks for the people who are leaving us. The work looks nicer than in the picture. Great gifts!

Back home, Seighin did not walk the dog yet. He tried, but Stone refused to get up. He did even not touch his bone. Ciaran and Seighin tell me Stone was sad that I was gone without him. They could be right because moments after I am back, he picks up his bone and starts munching it.



After lunch, I write a few more vignettes and go walking. Just before we leave the garage, I detect movement in one of the traps the pest control guy has put in the garage. I see that these are sticky boxes able to glue insects and small animals. One victim is a lizard and it is still alive. The poor thing. I have no idea how to help it. I am not able to set him free without dismembering it and I do not know how to get it out of its misery. Smashing its head with a hammer seems messy. During the walk, I try to come up with a humane solution.

Stone has no issue with walking now. I have, however, because dark clouds are gathering above our heads. Not a good sign.



There is some rumbling far ahead. I estimate that we do not have much time before the doors of the sky will be wide open. A few minutes after we are back in, the phone rings announcing a severe thunderstorm warning. As to proof the validity of the call, it starts pouring and we get a nice demonstration of lightning and thunder. One flash comes close. Stone starts barking and I must calm him. It is a short-lived storm. It seems that we did not get the worst part. A colleague sends us a picture of him in his canoe. Nice.

Back to the lizard. I plan to asphyxiate it by enclosing is and let a candle burn all the oxygen. I discover that these little animals are quite resistant and can survive a long time in a low oxygen environment. The second try is successful.

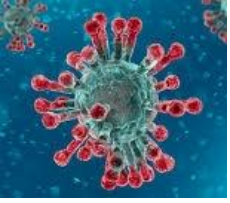
Europe reopens, but not for U.S., Russia or Brazil

Today, many COVID measures would be spooled down. In the USA, some states have halted this, while others have reversed some. In Europe, it is going the right way, although there might be political pressure to safe tourism and the national economy. Travelers are welcome again in Europe, except those coming from risk nations like the USA.

King Philippe of Belgium has expressed his "deepest regrets" for his country's brutal past in a letter to the president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the first public acknowledgement from a member of the Belgian royal family of the devastating toll of eight decades of colonization. I hope that his letter underlines the responsibility of King Leopold II and less to our country, but the letter is a sign of goodwill.

We could have a wave of swine flu while riding the second corona wave. A study warns that a new strain of the H1N1 virus, common on pig farms in China since 2016, should be "urgently" controlled to avoid another pandemic.

Since a few days, there are talks about Russian bounties after soldiers found money during a raid in Afghanistan. American officials have intercepted data showing financial transfers from a bank account controlled by Russia's military intelligence agency to a Taliban-linked account — evidence supporting their conclusion that Russia offered bounties for killing U.S. and coalition troops in Afghanistan. Offering bounties is not new and should not surprise us in a dirty war – although I do not like this approach -, but what was the thought behind it in Russia?



C+109: Steak

Last exam

It is again an early day for Ciaran. Today he has his last exam. It is a practical one wherein he has to demonstrate his ability to use a kind of technical modelling software by solving problems. He felt well-prepared as he used the software extensively during group work. After a little bit more than an hour, he leaves the home office smiling. It went well.

After the branch meeting, I have a meeting with a potential speaker of the RAND Corporation. RAND is a nonprofit research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges. Its publications are high-level and they work for the military too. I have sent an e-mail to their public affairs office and they replied with a proposal for a speaker. It felt like as reeling in a big fish. After he explained what his topics are, I am assured that his brief will be a good fit for our conference. My colleague likes it when he tells us that he will do it for free.

In the meantime, I reply to e-mails and arrange the last details for next Friday's departure party. It is a bit of a challenge to organize a party for 30 people while trying to minimize the risk of infection. I lack the experience in doing this and I have to keep it simple but effective. Quite a challenge.

I can attend the last part of the professional doctorate webinar. It is the last one before the summer break. I ask for an overview of the four paper we have to write and how they are related. Also, I wonder what the best approach is when you have to research while changing the environment.

While we have lunch a truck stops in front of our house. Two men get out and start spraying. First, we think it is in the neighbor's front yard, but it is in ours. We are a bit puzzled because we do not have such a service contract. Is this a mistake? Before we can react, they are almost done. They leave without saying a word. I hope it is not some kind of herbicide.

In the afternoon, Ciaran and I drive to the dealer to pick up some stuff that is still in the Chrysler. While nobody wears a mask in the showroom, the people in the service area do. It is a huge garage. We get everything out and put it in the Prius. I wonder how I will get the crate in the Prius and how we will mover the things form Loic's room in Delaware to Chesapeake if do not have the Chrysler. Tomorrow, I will have to figure out the crate problem and maybe I have to check the costs of renting a U-Haul van.

To celebrate Ciaran's last exam, we go for dinner to the LongHorn Steakhouse. Although I preferred a terrace, we eat inside. We are in a box surrounded by other occupied boxes. Not sure if that this practice is conform to the 6 feet rule. All waiters wear masks, but I doubt if the tables and seats are disinfected after the customers have left. The steaks, however, are great. We have a great evening. We skip the Dairy Queen for dessert although that was the plan. We had too much to eat.

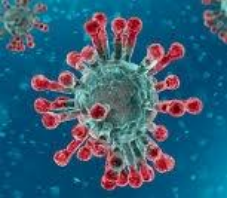
Thursday, 02 July 2020





After Stone has finished his late dinner, he runs up the stairs. There is a strange noise in his walking rhythm. I go to check him and see that he has stepped with his rear leg into one of the bug traps. It sticks on his paw. I try to take it off gently, but it is too sticky. There is only one option and that is to tear it off quickly and with enough force. Stone will not like that, but that is the best way. Luckily, I succeed in my first try, because I do not think I would get another.

After our late walk, I feel too tired to write today's two-pager. Sorry, you will have to wait till tomorrow evening to read it. Yes, I feel a bit guilty, but not enough to skip my first hour of sleep.



C+110: Off

Puzzle

Today is a day off because the US Independence Day falls on a Saturday. So, this Friday is a kind of pre 4th of July. Although it is a no workday for all nationalities working in the HQs, I check my e-mail and reply to some. There is a grey zone between home and work if you have your work laptop set up as your principal machine. Turning that laptop on means that all your work-related applications open and that you see what is coming in. It is hard to resist the urge to reply because the other side does not know we have an off day. However, I keep it short.

The first task on today's list is to write yesterday's two-pager. The revenge of postponing things. Then I go in the garage – yes, I had breakfast on the deck and a walk with Stone – to try to fit the crate in the Prius. Being many times smaller in space than the van, it is a challenging puzzle. The only way I can get it in is on the back seat in two pieces. Once these pieces are in, I have to assemble it in the car. Not that easy, but doable. Good news is that we can go to the K9 training this Sunday.

When we get out of the garage for the noon walk, the heat hits me like a heavy blanket. We have to get out, but it is going to be a very short one. It is just too hot for a long walk and the shadows are sparse. We will have a longer one later in the evening.

I put the pest traps in the trash can after the incident with Stone yesterday and that I detect another lizard trapped. This is not a humane, indiscriminative way of pest control. Gone with it.

After lunch, Ciaran leaves with an old high school friend for a fast-food lunch and a chat. It is dinner time when he returns.

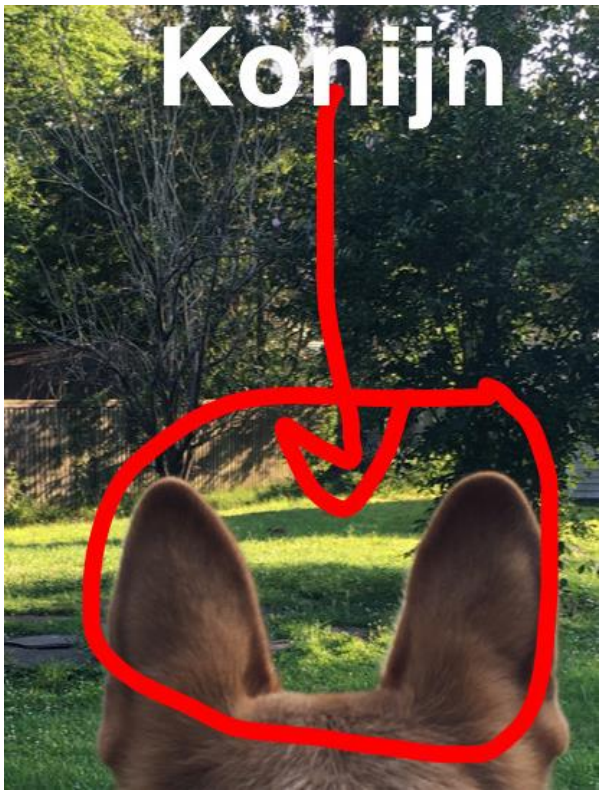
In the afternoon, I work on the – hopefully - final draft of the first doctoral paper. There were some remarks, but nothing substantial. Correcting that level of details is not my cup of tea, but it has to be done.

I enjoy my apero in the shadow on the deck while Stone watches over the garden, although he misses the rabbit 10 meters in front of him. Rabbits are a bit smarter than squirrels, they stay put as not to attract predators while squirrels are continuously moving.

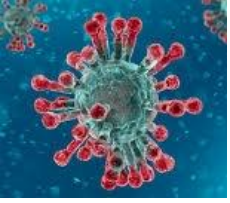
After dinner, somebody sets off fireworks and Stone does not like that. He barks. The strange thing is that once he is outside, he does not seem to care any longer. I take him for the long walk with the idea that if there is more firework, he will stay calm because we are outside. A hypothesis that proofs to be correct. Although the sun is set for some hours, it is still very warm and humid. I do not like summers in Virginia. Not my kind of weather.

Friday, 03 July 2020





I do like being late outside here. The fairy-like ballet of light performed by fireflies has something magic. I will try to take a picture or make a video of it, but I am afraid that it will not reflect the magic. But maybe it does.



C+111: Independence Day

Beach





Yesterday at the Matapanonine – a long word for the moms, aunts, dads, uncles, nephews, and nieces – Lily-Rose went from one set of hands to another.

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The second, less risky, task is a deep clean of the oven. Another hour spent, but no cracks. It shines. Baking some 'pistolets' and preparing the stuff for tomorrow.

After lunch, Ciaran and I go shopping in the Walmart. The run through the aisle takes a little longer, but we have luck at the cashier, no queue. Unloading and a walk with Stone.

Saturday, 04 July 2020

Our plan is to drive to the beach for a swim. It is the first time this year. We arrive at the seafront at a moment people start leaving. That was on purpose because it is too hot and risky to get in the full sun between 1000 a.m. and 0400 p.m. It is also nicer at the beach if there are fewer people. The waves are great and we have a good time.





A bit before we plan to leave, a group of dolphins passes by. Or are it porpoises? Looking at the difference below, I think they were porpoises. It is always nice to watch these animals on their evening journey along the coast.

<u>What's the difference between dolphins and porpoises?</u>



Dolphins have longer noses, bigger mouths, more curved dorsal fins, and longer, leaner bodies than porpoises.



The harbor porpoise has small pointed flippers and no beak. The dorsal fin is small and triangle-shaped.



We stay longer at the beach than intended, but that is no problem. On route, we order pizza to be ready the moment we arrive at Domino's. Back home we watch a movie the boys pick. No not Independence Day, but Sonic. A videogame turned movie. It is a no-brainer and a bit amusing.

For some odd reason, there is a little bit of firework. Not enough to bother Stone. I do not complain. Ciaran joins us for the late evening walk while Seighin vacuums the house. Ciaran tries to film the ballet of the fireflies. As expected, he does not succeed. It is just too dark to film and the light is too dim. A pity.

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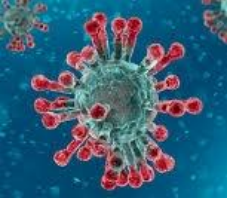

C+111: Independence Day

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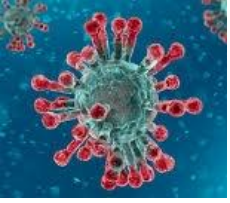


C+112: Another Group



Full day

Because most members are in a 4th of July long weekend mode with plans, there are only three of us driving to the K9 training. Because of that, our lead-trainer has arranged that we can join another group of search and rescue dog handlers. This comes with two advantages. One is that I do not have to drive 2 hours, but only 1 hour and 10 minutes. Two is that this group 'invented' the training method Stone is now following. It will be nice to hear the basics and the whys of this method.

The place is known because we have visited a few weeks ago, so I drive to the boat landing parking. While I drive down the state park road, I see a sign 'K9 ALERT training'. Was that not the group we were supposed to meet? I check my mail on the parking and yes, that is the group. Back up the road and on the dirt road. Before me drives a jeep and I start wondering if it a good idea to drive a small Prius C through on the road. What about the way back, after a rainfall? The small nightmare in the Shenandoah is still fresh in my mind.

When we arrive without troubles, there are about ten cars in the loop. It is a nice group. They happily explain the basics and the whys of the training method. I learn about the old methods and why this one is better. It makes sense, but I also understand the difficulty in devising such a method.

I understand it better now. The disadvantage is that we have to take a step back in training Stone. Their advice is that he needs to do a better tug before taking the next step, otherwise I risk that I will not be sure if it is for playing or an indication. After the third training session, they give me a bigger tug toy. I prefer that to the ball because Stone's aim is not that good. It seems he likes it too.

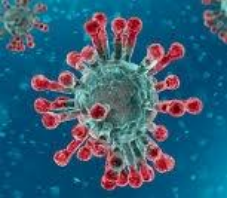
I also learn how to learn a dog to go the direction you point. Very interesting.

Around 0330 p.m., the training is over. I am a bit afraid of the way back, but it goes well. We had some rain during the training, but not enough to wet the road much. Around 0500 p.m., we are back in Chesapeake. A walk in the neighborhood, getting our stuff out, disassembling the crate and vacuuming the car before I can start dinner.

Sunday, 05 July 2020

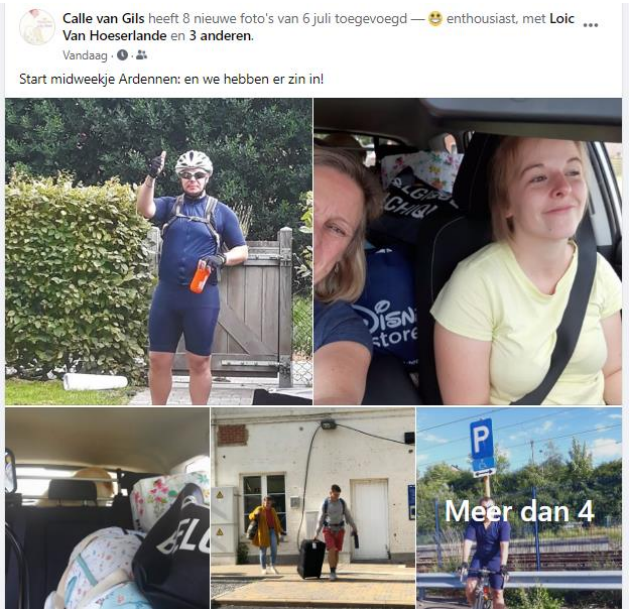


I am not the only one feeling tired, it seems.

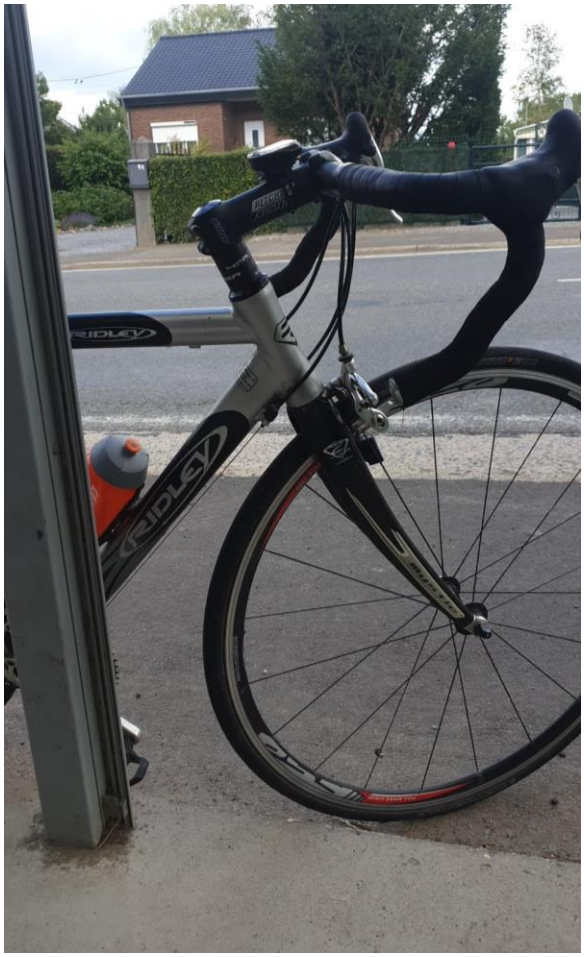


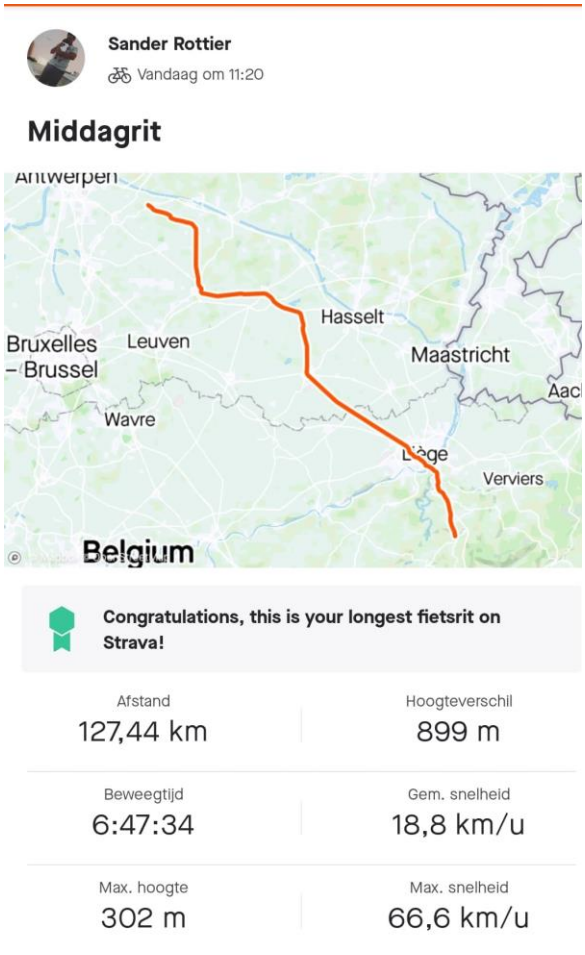
C+113: Ardennes

A silent day



While we are asleep, the other half of the family leaves for a midweek in the Ardennes, the 'higher' part of Belgium. Calle and Amber take the car, while Loic and Elizabeth go with the train. Loic must stop in Evere to arrange for a new official passport because his current one is only valid till the beginning of August. Sander is the bravest of all, he will cover the 160 km distance by bike. That is the plan, but 30 km before the finish he has to stop. Nothing wrong with the bike, but he has no clue where to ride because his GPS has given up. Where is the time when we had to use a map or ask people for directions?





Our, that is Ciaran and I, plan was to go running this morning before the heat. When I wake up, I do not hear any noise. I check the security camera in the living and see no

Monday, 06 July 2020

motion. I activated the camera yesterday evening after Ciaran told us that he detected Stone laying on the sofa. We did not find any evidence of that. I want to see if that was a one-time event, or if he does it more. He did not sleep on the sofa last evening.

Without movement downstairs and no noise upstairs, I conclude that Ciaran did not get out of bed and decide to take a shower. However, when I enter the living, Ciaran is sitting on the sofa. Back to my room to get my running clothes on. After 500 m, I must admit that my legs are not used to morning runs anymore. The lower half of my body protests. The planned easygoing run turns into a fight to get the 5 K, but there is no intention to quit.

After the run, there is no time to stretch as another family member waits for his morning walk. I am barely on time back for the morning brief. There is nothing special to brief. I think that NATO is in summer holiday mode. The two low effort months have arrived. A great time to do other things.

After my second shower of the day, I start killing unanswered e-mails and ticking off some small work-related tasks. The rest of the day consists of reading and correcting texts.

Sea Kings krijgen tweede leven in de lucht: bod van Brits bedrijf goedgekeurd door legertop en minister

Bart Boterman | 06 juli 2020 | 07u49

DEEL 94



© Bart Leye - Archieffoto. De Sea King RS04 en de Sea King RS02 in de achtergrond.

KOKSIJDE **De twee laatste uit onbruik geraakte Sea Kings RS02 en RS04 van de Belgische luchtmacht gaan opnieuw de lucht in. Niet voor militaire doeleinden, wel op airshows. De legertop en defensieminister Philippe Goffin (MR) keurden een bod goed van het Brits bedrijf Historic Helicopters. Cabin operator Brecht Vandecasteele (43) van de Koksijdse basis, 122 rescues en 2.200 vlieguren met de Sea King op de teller, was drijvende kracht achter de aankoop. "Dat de Sea King nooit meer zou**

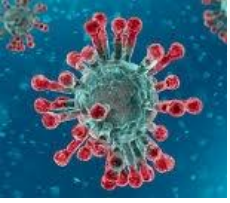
Stone fighting with the vacuum is about the most exciting thing that happened in the afternoon. Unless you find some conspiracy theory behind 113, today's number of crisis days equals the number of junk mails in my mailbox.

The day goes silently and eventless over in the evening and the night.

The Sea King will fly again

Being a bit nostalgic about the first helicopter I have maintained. It was the first aircraft that I was involved in because while my colleague went for the parachute brevet B I did an internship in Koksijde SAR Base, I am happy to read that they will fly again. More than a year ago, these magnificent beasts were decommissioned and now a British company has received the agreement of the Belgian Defense to buy them and make them flightworthy again. Great news!

Yes, I am getting old =;-)

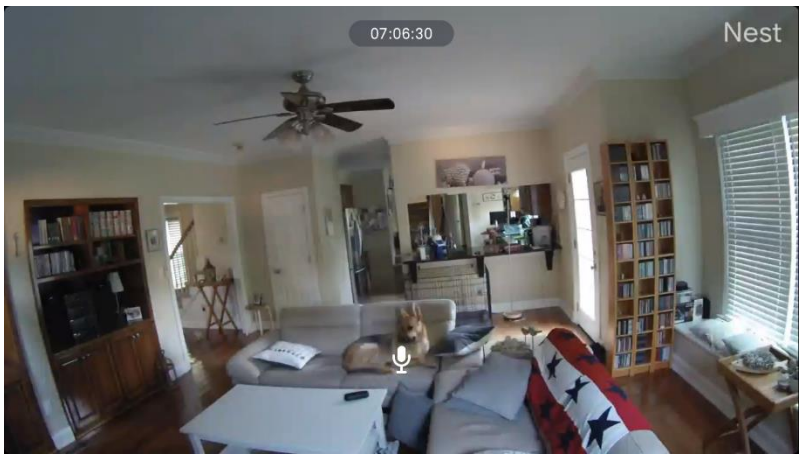


C+114: Bagels

Busted!



As told yesterday, I have activated our in-house security camera to check if Stone was indeed sleeping in sofa. When I checked the App this morning, I found him lying in it. When I use the speaker to say that he was not allowed to do that, he was warned. Now we must find a method to prevent him from continuing this habit.



No branch meeting today, because most of us are attending, watching sounds so passive, a NATO webinar on autonomous systems.

The mystery of Ciaran disappearance from our family list is solved. He figures on the family list of Sander and Amber. A strange administrative, but a comprehensible mistake that needs correcting.

Ciaran had planned to get up early to mow the grass before the heat, but he is too late. He walks around and gets back in bed.

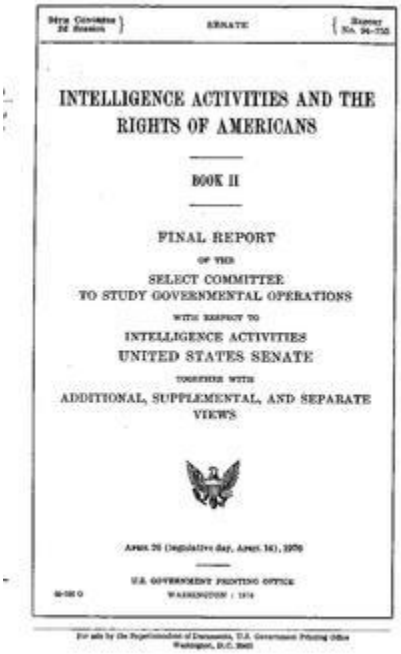
After a normal work@home morning, Seighin and I drive to the Harris Teeter store to buy some Mascarpone and goat cheese. Things they do not sell at Walmart. Seighin tells me he never visited a Harris Teeter and is pleasantly surprised by the nice layout of the store. He understands that it is a bit more expensive.

From cheese to bagels. A bit a Tuesday tradition to go for a Baker's dozen curbside pickup at Panera Bread. They offer their excuses because there are no more sprouted grains bagels. What do we want as a substitute? Who did want such a bagel? Not me. Me neither. A plain one will do. We get four bagels for one missing. Nice deal. During lunch, we discover that there is a sprouted bagel in the box. So, 17 bagels for the 50% price of 13. Tomorrow bagels too.

About two hours after the deadline, Ciaran gets the results of this series of exams. He passed them all! It was his best series till now. A splendid result. Let us hope that he

passes the majority of his second series in September. He starts thinking about taking some master classes next year.

In the afternoon, a few colleagues and I are testing the virtual environment we plan to use for our conference. It is a good system, but there are some strange features in it that we need to figure out why these are like they are.


INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES AND THE RIGHTS OF AMERICANS

BOOK II

FINAL REPORT

OF THE

SELECT COMMITTEE

TO STUDY GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

WITH RESPECT TO

INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES

UNITED STATES SENATE

TOGETHER WITH

ADDITIONAL, SUPPLEMENTAL, AND SEPARATE VIEWS

In the early evening, Ciaran starts mowing the grass. When he is halfway the job, it starts raining. It is a short burst, but the grass is too wet to continue. Tomorrow, he will finish the job.



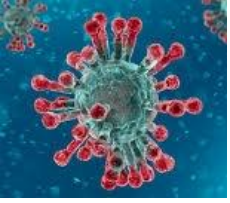
After a Mexican dinner prepared by Ciaran, we go for a walk. Halfway our walk, a mosquito control car passes us while spraying a mist of chemicals. The sight reminds me of stories about CIA experiments in using all kinds of drugs to study the social effects on communities.

We close the evening with a Black label whiskey to celebrate Ciaran's exam results.

In coronavirus news

When talking about the second or third wave, we are talking about the rest of the world, not the USA. The U.S. is still in the pandemic's first wave, its top infectious disease expert warned on Monday, with more than 250,000 new cases announced nationwide in the first five days of July alone. Deaths have surpassed 130,000.

There is a nice site to see the status in every county: https://globalepidemics.org/key-metrics-for-covid-suppression/ and a similar one for the Belgian communities: http://www.coronafacts.be/.



C+115: Hopin

Virtual conference

To keep Stone of the sofa, I have put some rags with a pet repellent smell on the pillows. This morning the camera did show him in his crate and there was no evidence that he has slept on the fauteuil. I think that by applying this a few days in a row, his desire to sleep on the sofa will be gone.

This morning, a normal morning, although a meeting at 0800 a.m. with a potential speaker. She is quite enthusiastically and full of ideas. We might adopt some suggestions, although these add an extra challenge to the way we do things. We will see if others will be that daring to try something new.

After that, I take Stone for a walk. It is hot and dry. After 1 kilometer, it starts raining. It is very little and soft, more a soft spray. But the ground is that hot, that the rain vaporizes the moment it hit it. The soil is not getting wet. A strange observation.

Back home, I log in to test the virtual environment Hopin. We try various things and find some bugs. We also have a list of questions, because sometimes there are strange things. Of course, we still in the mindset of organizing the virtual conference like an in-person one. This needs to change. We have to approach this opportunity in a different way to get the maximum out of it. Can we make the shift?

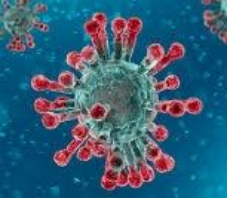
The list with speakers is getting longer, but I remark that the majority are Americans. We must find European speakers to correct this situation. I send out a few e-mails hoping to catch one or two.

In the afternoon, Ciaran and I go to the IKEA for 3 frames for the departure drawings and some smaller things. The parking is fuller than I expected, but inside there almost nobody. Is everybody enjoying 'Zweedse balletjes' in the restaurant on the second floor? 30 minutes later, we are out again.

A quick stop at Harris Teeter for a missing ingredient and because Ciaran thought he did not visit this store either. He did.

After dinner, the two-pager and a walk. That's it for today.

Wednesday, 08 July 2020



C+116: Infection

To run or to rum

The morning starts nice when I look outside, but I have the feeling that I better get for a walk now and not wait. When we get outside, I see why: dark clouds are drifting towards our community. They are packed with rain. We do not make it back on time and are treated with a light, warm drizzle transforming into something more drastic.

Making coffee and preparing breakfast that will be eaten a few hours later. Yep, the youth is sleeping in, as most of the days. I take 20 minutes to enjoy mine and a cappuccino while watching America's unspoken history.

At 0830 a.m. starts the first meeting with little news, followed by a meeting with an author as a potential speaker for the conference, another meeting with a speaker, and then some testing with the virtual platform. We get our way around and our list with questions and suggestions is long, however without assurance that we will be allowed to use this platform, there is no use to explore further. We have to start pushing paperwork to get the support on time. There is some urgency because there is a lot of work ahead to make a successful virtual conference that looks professional.

We write a point paper for our generals about what we need. I also, based on Info found on the internet write a document with things we have to keep in mind. I think too many people consider a virtual conference as a digital version of a normal conference or such a string of webinars, but it can be much more. It may be a nice project if they give us the resources, less than an in-person conference, and the freedom to experiment.

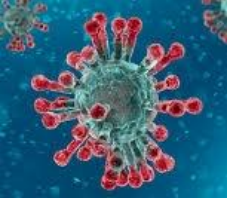
Today, I got hope that the virtual game will be a reality within a few months. I have some work to do, but it may happen. Additionally, I get access to revise the online course. It took us months to find the right person and now it just happens. I think people have less work and do not go on holidays, so they start tackling things that they normally would leave untouched. The COS too, in less than three days, I get his agreement to lower the classification of the handbook. We can now publish it on a public site. I must think on other projects that I can push through. There is a window opening.

The news of the day, however, is not the fast track of projects, but the confirmed corona victim in our HQ, and that while they start asking people to came back to work in the HQ. This is now tuned down again. Our NLR decides that we may only visit the HQ if absolutely necessary. Tomorrow my planned day at the HQ will be a hit and run visit, just for checking the classified site and prepare the departure gifts. The cozy get-together with the Belgians is cancelled.



In the evening, after dropping of Seighin at the soccer practice, I go for a 5 K run. It is hot and sweaty, but the run is nice and clears my head. Running alone with music tends to set down a faster time, although that was not my plan.

Ciaran makes some bread pudding. It is not bad for his first time. I think something is missing. The taste is not the same when I make it. Oh yes, he asked if he needed to add some rum and I said no. But now I remember that I indeed do not add rum in the mixture, but I let the raisins swim for a night in it. That might explain the difference in taste.



C+117: Departure

Not as planned

Today's plan was simple. Ok, I had to change it because of the minimal presence 'order' by the NLR, but the basic idea is still in. Get up, attend the branch meeting, drive to the HQ, prepare the departure presents, check the classified site, drive to our colleague's house for the farewell gathering, and drive back home. The first step goes well.

When I light up my computer for step number two, I see that I have a meeting with a speaker right after the meeting. OK, I will have to stay a bit longer. I also see the confirmation that the Skype for Business has migrated and we have to change all the links. I test the link for the branch meeting and indeed it does not work. I do the same for the meeting with the speaker, and it works. That is strange. I decide to change all the link even the one that works. Just hope I did not miss one in the next week.

During the branch meeting, I hear that there is a demo of the virtual conference platform and that they want me to stay home because the work computers do not allow video, nor audio. OK, that add extra time at home. Also, our Italian colleagues will not be at the party this afternoon because they have to stay in quarantine. Our second in command, an Italian general, is possibly infected with corona.

Zut, the new Skype link does not work. I should not have changed it, but now it is too late. Quickly asking a Go-To-Meeting session. Just on time. But the speaker is not showing up on the screen. I call him. Answering machine. I tell my colleague to leave the meeting while I wait. Later I get a reply to my mail telling that he had technical issues. Well, we had those too.

A mail telling the demo will be later. Will I have enough time in the HQ to do what needs to be done? A bit after 1100 a.m. I can drive to Norfolk. I am almost out of gas and plan to fill it up at the MCX at the entrance. Bad luck, the gas stations credit cards machine does not work. I hope I will have enough fuel to reach the next station this afternoon.

When I arrive the branch head takes me to a civilian working on the technology document. My vignettes are fine, but the admiral wants them more like stories and wants one of my unwritten vignettes too. OK, we had decided not to write stories but keep it descriptive. That has changed now. Work for Monday.

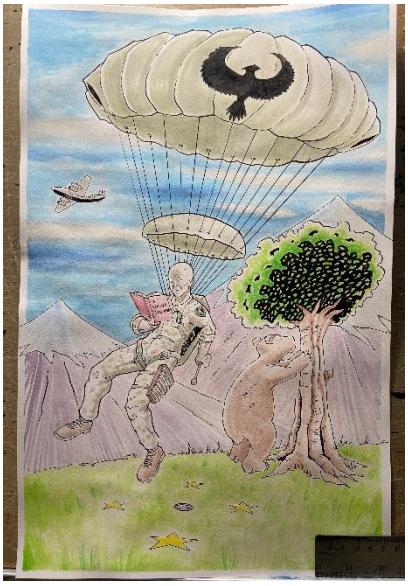
As expected nothing special on the classified site. Full attention for the departure gifts. Oh, I need to prepare the official frames too. No problem, although I have to look for the pictures for that. While all branch members are gone to the party I reckon, I am still wrapping up the gifts.

Friday, 10 July 2020

Luckily the gas station at the gate is again functional. No driving on fumes. Heading to the party house. When I arrive, I am one of the first there. Where is everybody else? The garden is indeed big enough to keep the distance. Although it is better than no party, it still feels a bit strange interacting socially while minding the 6 feet rule. Looking around and assessing the place, there are some potential sources of cross-contamination, but these are minimal.

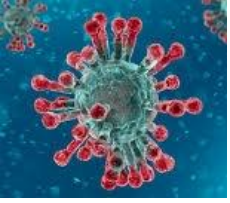
The drawings are well-appreciated. These are a unique and personal gift. Of course, I think some colleagues are wondering what I will come up with when they leave.







Around 07.00 p.m., an hour later than planned, I drive back home. A simple dinner ends the day. Tomorrow, only two things planned: picking up the Chrysler, the car is already finished, much sooner than expected, and the nightly K9 training. I think there will be no two-pager in the mail on Sunday morning. Sorry.



C+118: Nightly Training

Day of the Flemish Community



The Day of the Flemish Community of Belgium (Dutch: Feestdag van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap) is an annual commemoration in the Flemish Community in Belgium on 11 July which marks the anniversary of the Battle of the Golden Spurs (Guldensporenslag) in 1302.



A bit of history for the non-Belgian readers:
On 18 May 1302, after two years of French military occupation and several years of unrest, many cities in Flanders revolted against French rule and massacred many Frenchmen in the city of Bruges. King Philip IV of France immediately organized an expedition of 8,000 troops, including 2,500 men-at-arms, under Count Robert II of Artois to put down the rebellion. Meanwhile, 9,400 men from the civic militias of several Flemish cities were assembled to counter the expected French attack.

When the two armies met on the battlefield, the Groeningekouter, outside the city of Kortrijk on 11 July, the cavalry charges of the mounted French men-at-arms proved unable to defeat the mail-armored and well-trained Flemish militia infantry's pike formation on the battlefield. The result was a rout of the French nobles, who suffered heavy losses at the hands of the Flemish. The 500 pairs of spurs that were captured from the French horsemen gave the battle its popular name.

The battle was a famous early example of an all-infantry army overcoming an army that depended on the shock attacks of heavy cavalry. Other versions of the story on the battle



tell that these infantrymen were not that well-trained but fought from an area with no way to retreat. It was to win or die. The battlefield was chosen because of the soft soil around the creek that broke the power of shock of the cavalry. The militia did not follow the rules of the knights. One of those rules was that a fallen knight could pay to spare his life.



It is also the battle that made the 'goedendag' (it name comes from the bowing movement of the adversary when struck by the weapon) famous as an infantry weapon. The 'goedendag' (Dutch for "good day") was essentially a combination of a club with a spear. Its body was a wooden staff roughly three to five feet (92 cm to 150 cm) long with a diameter of roughly two to four inches (5 cm to 10 cm). It was wider at one end, and at this end, a sharp metal spike was inserted by a tang.



During the 19th and 20th centuries, the Battle of the Golden Spurs became an important cultural reference point for the Flemish Movement. The battle was romanticized in 1838 by Flemish writer Hendrik Conscience (known as the man who learned his people how to read) in his book 'De Leeuw van Vlaanderen' (English: The Lion of Flanders). In 1973, the date of the battle was chosen to be the date of the official holiday of the Flemish Community (I will not try to explain the Belgian political system) in Belgium.



Not much of a celebration here. Just a normal Saturday. Stone is getting nervous, luckily, we have a training event this evening. Because I have some time, I go playing with him in the garden, trying to teach him to bring the ball back. No luck so far and his play is still powerful and brute.

A bit afternoon, I am picked up for a drive to the dealership to pick up the car. All seems fine, but when I use the direction indicators the left bulb seems broken, and a few moments later the right one. This is not normal. The bill states that they have checked the car but how can that be done when the two bulbs are not working. I suspect it is an electrical issue because two at the same time is too coincidental. Monday I have to contact the dealership.

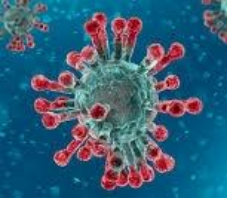
Back home, I put the 'pannenkoekentaart' in the oven and 15 minutes later we can have lunch. In the meantime, I load the car with the stuff for the coming training. After lunch, I leave for New Quarter Park in Williamsburg.

As planned, I arrive early and there is nobody there yet. I know the training will not be held where there are people because the dogs look for people whomever they are. I drive back and stumble on the first cars. I have time to let Stone out so that he can sniff out this environment.

My first task is to walk in the forest while a search dog tries to find me. She finds me but starts walking with me. That is not the purpose, she has to turn back to indicate that she has found me. After a minute, she turns away but comes back. I keep walking back and forth, till she runs away to indicate. Not good. We do it over, but now she stays with me, goes cooling down in the river, and only returns when called. Not a good exercise and I feel guilty. Not sure why.

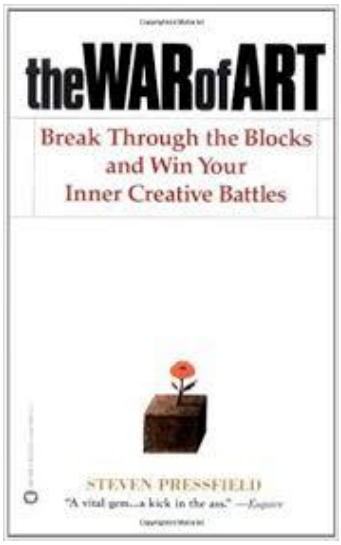
The rest of the training is a mix between training Stone, who is improving and setting out trails for a tracker dog. At the beginning it is hot, more than 95°F (35°C), and the dogs are less enthusiastic about working - can you blame them? - but the dark cools it all down but brings other difficulties with it. I observe it with Stone too. With the cooler temperature, he is more active but the dark distract him. The challenge is to train him while he is having fun and to stop at a high point before he gets bored or too distracted. Anyhow, I feel more and more comfortable to let him run without a leash or long line.

Around 1100 p.m., although two of us are still on a night navigation trip in the woods, the training session is over. Time to head back home. An after midnight walk with Stone followed by unloading the car. The vacuum part will be for tomorrow. Around 0100 a.m. I am ready to get in bed.



C+119: Groceries

Let there be light



For the first time in a while, I get out of bed after 0800 a.m. Yes, I was awake earlier, but only for a short time. Stone gives the impression of being still tired because he is still laying on his cushion. OK, we will wait for the walk till after breakfast. When I get outside to enjoy the 'cool' morning air, he joins me to safeguard the garden. It is nice outside. I take one Seighin's new book, 'The War of Art'. Interesting title. Curious if the content is as interesting.

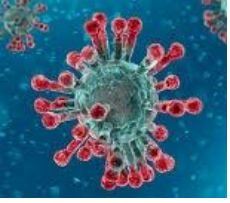
When finished, with breakfast, not the book, we go for a walk. Stone wants to return home after five minutes. I do not know because it is too hot – and it is already very warm – or because he thinks we are going to drive somewhere – I have been unloading the car. I am the boss and decides to go for the full circle. Although not agreeing with my decision, he leads the way.

Writing yesterday's two-pager to get it out of the door before noon. After that, I take the manual to see how to replace the indicator bulbs, but it is not in. YouTube comes to the rescue. But before starting to replace the bulb, first, check if the problem still exists after I have pushed the circuit breakers in their fitting. Most of them were loose. Could that be the problem? I check the indicators and they all work fine. There is no need for a trip to the store. For a few minutes, things go fine, but after a short period the rhythm speeds up indicating a problem. Well, it is not the lights. Guess I have to return to the repair shop.

In the afternoon, Ciaran and I go hunting for groceries in the Walmart. It is good hunting. The Walmart is almost empty because it is a Sunday, or maybe too hot to go outside. That is good for us. We are back in less than 90 minutes.

A long video chat with Loic and Elisabeth after which I start making dinner. Josh and Alex knock on the door to talk with Seighin. He had not seen Alex for more than a year. Stone starts guarding the house as he barks when somebody is at the front door. Now I have to teach him that he may stop barking once we answer the door.

After dinner, I drive Seighin to a friend's house. Pick-up time around 1100 p.m.



C+120: Morning Run



First swim in the sea

Today started at 0130 a.m. when a noisy Ciaran playing some game woke me up. I have to go down to tell him that he is shouting and yelling while playing. The interruption destroyed my sleeping sequence.

It is hard to get up before 0700 a.m., the time Ciaran and I had agreed to go running. Of course, I am the only one downstairs. Being on a tight schedule and wanting to go for a run, I get out the door and go for it. With a good beat and lots of self-motivation, I run a decent time. Instead of taking a selfie, I decide to shoot Stone who is waiting for me for his morning walk. No, he did not run the 6 K with me. He is not ready for that.

I just have enough time to take a shower, prepare coffee and breakfast before the start of the morning brief. When the computer is ready to go, I find a message that the meeting is postponed to 0900 a.m. OK, time enough for enjoying my breakfast. It feels like I have time enough to revise the vignettes, but the computer is not working along. The software does strange things and slows me down.

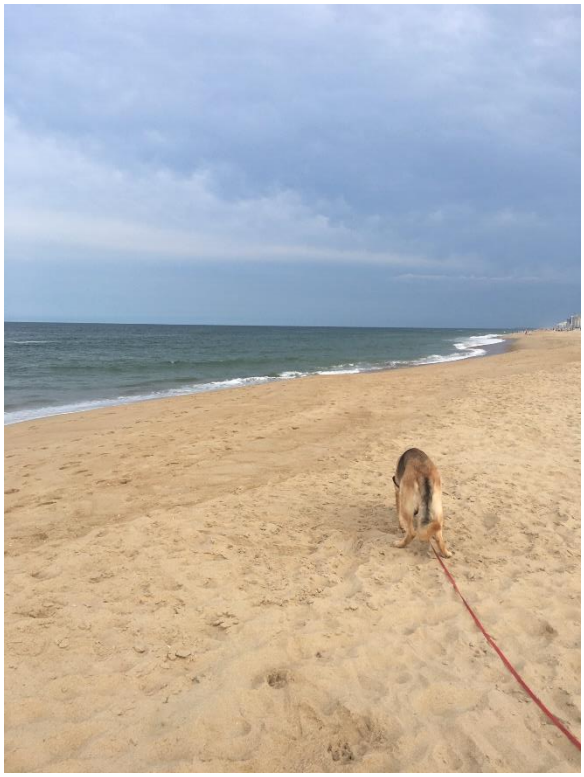
A second meeting about the virtual conference seems to go nowhere. There is too much discussion and not enough decisions. With only a few months before the event and nothing fixed yet, I think we are losing time. A commodity we will need lots of to set everything up. I stumbled into the organization of this virtual conference because I suggested some improvements, but I will not stay in if I think this will lead to a truckload of frustrations. It is almost time for a decision on how this will be run, if not, I will be gone.

At 1100 we have a meeting with a potential speaker, but the god of virtual meeting software is not very cooperative today. It takes us almost 20 minutes to connect 4 people. Yes, everything is possible in software, but you do not always get what you want when you want it. Three meetings with connection issues further, I pass the deadline for the vignettes. I did some multitasking, but that did not help. The vignettes must be ready tomorrow morning. I will have to work on it this evening.

Around 0430 p.m., Ciaran and I drive to a computer shop in Virginia Beach. Ciaran wants his computer cleaned to beef up its performance, but after more than 30 minutes in the shop, he returns with his laptop in his hands. The store owner had a thorough look at it and advised against doing something. The computer is working fine, and any work or modification would be a waste of money. He asked no money for his advice and half hour of his time. Great service!

Monday, 13 July 2020

We brought Stone with us in the car because the plan is to drive to the beach and let him run on the beach and introduce him to the sea. He is happy to be on the beach, on a very long leash, but strangely enough, he does not start digging. The sea and certainly the waves are another story. He is not sure what to do. After five minutes or so, he risks it and walks in the sea. A wave washes over him and suddenly he is in the 'deep'. That means swimming. He does it well but does not like the waves rolling over him and decides to swim back. After this first experience, we cannot convince him to try it again. At least, he tried.






Back home, making mac & cheese for dinner and then working again. The vignettes go out the door around 1030 p.m., followed by the two-pager. The day finishes with a walk and a shower. Tomorrow another day.

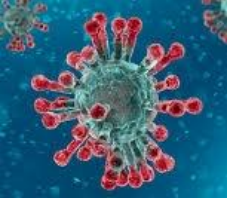
Because I have been talking about vignettes the last day, I have attached the most recent one below as an illustration.

Vignette: Invisible operators

After the successful implementation of their holodeck to train SOF-operators, the NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ) took the experiment a step further by using the same approach to let things disappear. Understanding the operational potential of this disappearing act, the project led to a portable version by combining micro-energy production cells, high-performance batteries, and nano-projectors. Initially developed to make vehicles imperceptible in the visible and IR range, nanotization made it possible to integrate this technology into a suit. A live, blind test demonstrated that an operator could stand next to a group of people without being detected. However, the weight was too heavy to be of any practical use.

The evolution of the suit intersected with the development of a lightweight exoskeleton with a pair of artificial arms. The system is controlled by an artificial intelligence 'reading' the operator's instructions via an interface implant in the spine. After intensive training, the operator can command the extra robotic arms by just thinking about it, just as natural as using his or her arms.

The operational suit turns a trained operator into an invisible super soldier able to operate solo behind the lines giving new meaning to 'special operations'. Operators can infiltrate almost any place to execute their mission in it with near-impunity and get out without leaving a trace. This capability makes them a powerful, strategic asset. The knowledge that these soldiers can operate wherever they want without being detected, has a strategic effect on itself by creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and paranoia with the adversary.



C+121: Boring

Everything is possible

Not sure if I want to start this day. It does not look inviting from where I am laying. But, one has to step into the day, even when the motivation is not high. After an early walk and a good coffee/breakfast, things are looking a bit better.

Last evening, a young officer proclaimed the wisdom that you first must define what you need and then find a tool that supports it. Everything is possible. One cannot contradict this, because, in essence, it is true. Unfortunately, not everything, even the most common, works as planned, we do not know everything that is out there, and we may not have the resources to obtain it. Today, the IT is not working as it should resulting in wait and wasted time. A simple test to see how easy it is to convert a word file into an epub format took me three hours for five pages. I could speed it up with experience, but it is dull work and it needs to be done with every revision.

My problem with the Belgian HR software is not solved either. My contact in the department writes to me that the general himself has ordered to solve the issue. I hope they fix it before the deadline. Anyhow, I have mentally prepared my plan B.

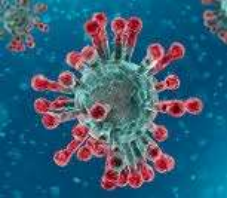
The sky is grey with some rain today, not helping to lift the mood. But every cloud has a silver lining and the lucky guy is Stone. With the overcast, the temperature is lower and we can walk four times today. Longer walks to stretch our legs and clean the cobwebs out our mind.

After reaching the target Q+90 and not stopping the production of the two-pager, I considered spooling down at Q+120, yesterday. The new has turned normal and I felt like there was nothing new left to write, but this evening it feels like I was premature. Maybe, the wear of limited social interactions is beginning to show. Or perhaps, the void created by cancelling our annual road trip is hitting me. Or could my time under (water) hit an absolute messing me up? Who is to tell? Well, I have to write about it.

Time to call it a day otherwise you as a reader might get the wrong idea. Rest me to close this two-pager. Stone is already waiting for me for his evening walk. Being outside watching the fireflies light up the darkness will clear my head. Tomorrow is another day.

[Of course, just before I want to save this edition the whole system slows down to a snail's pace.]

Tuesday, 14 July 2020



C+122: Meetings Day

A high pace

A morning like another. A new, hot day. First thing before it is getting too hot, a walk with Stone. Although the sun is hardly up, it is already very warm. This morning's t-shirt does not look that fresh anymore when we return to the house.

I have about 15 minutes to make coffee and breakfast and to fill the bread machine. When I pour my first coffee it looks very transparent. I like my coffee weak, but this is more like water. I detect that the coffee filter has collapsed. I open it and pour my coffee through it. A double brew. Better.

With breakfast and a hot cappuccino next to my laptop, I start the machine up. Directly in the meeting, but we are only two. Where are the others? It takes us 20 minutes and a transfer to Zoom before we can start. If we lose that much time for a meeting with 4 people, imagine what that could give with a conference of 400?

Following is a meeting on the idea to turn the concept development methodology into a standardization agreement. I want to talk with our experts to know if that is a good idea. It is an interesting discussion in which I learn quite a few things. Not sure, if this approach is the right one, but it is worth exploring it.

More meetings about the conference. As expected, the other two branches are bailing out. Too much work is their excuse, but I think that they just have no drive to support the event. The fact that our three branches are now organizational spread out for reasons of 'span of control', better known 'a general needs that many people under his command otherwise he does not feel important'. It is going to get worse when they will move to other floors to be closer to their generals. Within a few years, somebody will come up with the suggestion to put the three branches together to increase efficiency. It is not the first time that happens.

With a little bit of time to spend before the next meeting, I go for a walk with Stone. He finds it too hot to go far and after 300 meters he indicates he has gone far enough. No argue against that.

The last meeting before lunch is about the conference platform. The company is very happy with the results of our deep tests. We discovered some potential improvements and bugs. Unfortunately, we cannot decide if we are going to use their system. There is a long way to go.

In the afternoon, Ciaran leaves the house to get out with Joey Pisoni. I work a bit on the program of the conference. I conclude that we have enough speakers, now we have to knot them together in a challenging agenda.

Wednesday, 15 July 2020

Before dinner, while the boys do their fitness training, I go running. The start feels good and I decide to try to get under the 5 min/kilometer over the 5 K. I did it and it felt good. Tomorrow, dog run!



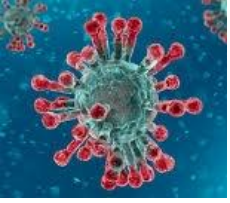
A quick shower and some food.

Corona again



There is some news on the corona situation. Yesterday, researchers said a baby born in a Paris hospital in March to a mother with Covid-19 tested positive for the virus, strongly suggesting that coronavirus can be transmitted in utero. Not so good news for future mothers as the belief that there was no transfer was comforting. That bell has now burst. Luckily, Amber did not know that otherwise, she would have worried for a few months.

But here is good news too. An experimental coronavirus vaccine made by the biotech company Moderna provoked promising immune responses and appeared safe in the first 45 people who received it, researchers said. Of course, even if we have a vaccine by the end of this year, producing it is large enough quantities will be a challenge.



C+123: In-Person Meeting

Goodbye

Just before 0600 a.m., I am awake. Perfect timing as that is the moment my alarm goes off. This is of course not a coincidence, as the alarm is designed to do just that. I stroll to the bathroom for my weekly shave. Yes, it is headquarters day.

I know that Stone knows that I will drive with the car when I have my uniform on and that he refuses to go for a walk, I put my short and shirt on. A nice walk in a deserted neighborhood. A simple breakfast and back up to get dressed for work.

A new uniform. With new, I mean new, not just washed. It is the first time that I get one of the new uniforms on after we have changed from desert camouflage to summer woodlands. Pajamas as I call them. A little lighter in fabric, but all the gain from that is destroyed by the dark color of the pattern. I find the lighter pattern with the heavier fabric better, but as I am not working in Brussels, I have no clue about the Virginia weather.

The moment Stone sees me, he runs in the garage. He waits at the trunk of the van but runs away when I want to grab him. I do not want to chase him in the garage and gets his harness. I can catch him by letting him think that he can get in the car. He struggles against me getting him back inside. I know he will now lay down and do nothing till I am back from work.

A normal drive to the HQ. Temperature check at the entrance. Starting up the computers and the coffee machine. A morning chat with my Dutch colleague that makes us miss the 0830 start of the branch meeting. Luckily, we are not the last ones to check in. Nothing to report. Checking mails on both systems and doing some minor work.

Next meeting, nobody on the other side. Technical issues? No, my mistake. It is not a 6 hours difference, but only 5 with Great-Britain. I joke that the Brits have really left Europe. For the third meeting, the other side is missing. OK, I head to meeting number 4.

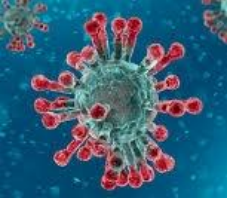
Not a virtual this time, but in-person with enough distance. With the small number of Belgian military in the HQ, we meet in the open. A bench for everybody. First, the weekly information meeting followed by a small farewell ceremony for the one who leaves the coming month. It is nicer to meet in-person, but the distance makes it a bit awkward. It is not the same.

Back to my cubicle to get my stuff and out of the building. A quick check to confirm that the military gym is still closed until further notice before I drive off. Lunch and work@home in Chesapeake. While I walk with Stone in the evening heat, Seighin vacuums the house. A drive to the soccer field, because Josh, Seighin's friend, is not going to the

training, again. We think he is giving up on soccer as he missed the majority of the first sessions. That would be a pity.

Between the two rides, I make dinner and do the dishes. Halfway the dishes, Calle calls. It is nice to talk with her. With the six hours difference, it is not easy to find a moment to chat.

While I write the two-pager, I reply to some work emails. The overlap between work and home has become a grey zone. A zone I need to watch to limit its expansion.



C+124: High Tension

Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins

A small forcing to let the alarm win today, just to make sure that it keeps doing its duty and not give up on me. When getting out of bed, I take my time towards the branch meeting. I have to enjoy that one because it is the only event on my agenda. Contrary to what I expect it is a short one.

I have to stick a little longer because there is a call for an innovation facilitator for every branch and the branch head is looking at me. The task description is very broad and may be a carte blanch for many things. My feeling is that the innovation movement is looking for more people but produces little for the moment. There are a few instances wherein I offered help, but nothing came from it. Old projects are placed under the heading 'innovation', but nothing new. Old wines in new bottles? I just hope I will not be dragged in a swamp.

Finalizing the Statement of Work for the virtual version of the board game. Now it is up to the budget people to make it happen. The whole administration, even for simple things, is so slow and time-consuming.

After yesterday's meeting on my first doctoral paper, I try to finish that one too. Almost there. Still, a few hours left before I consider it done.

I want to slow cook today's dinner. Not paying full attention to what I am doing, I put the converter in and connect the slow cooker. Bang. The control panel fires up and the fuse is blown. It seems that the American slow cooker did not like to be powered with 220 Volt. Why can I put a 110 V power plug in a 220 V slot? And not the other way around? I do not see the sense, but have to live with the mistake. Now I have to come up with an alternate solution to prepare dinner.

After a series of successful sessions, I have stepped up Stone's training. He is back at training between two persons. It takes him a few seconds to figure out what is expected but he does. Next step is to increase the distance between the two.

In the evening, my German colleague Alex drops by. He has made a prototype harness for Stone and wants to try it on. I think it is an excuse to get out of his apartment and drive his Mustang on a longer distance than once a week to the HQ. Stone finds it puzzling as this is the first time that somebody stays longer than 30 minutes. The harness looks fine and sturdy. It needs some adjustments, but it will do well.

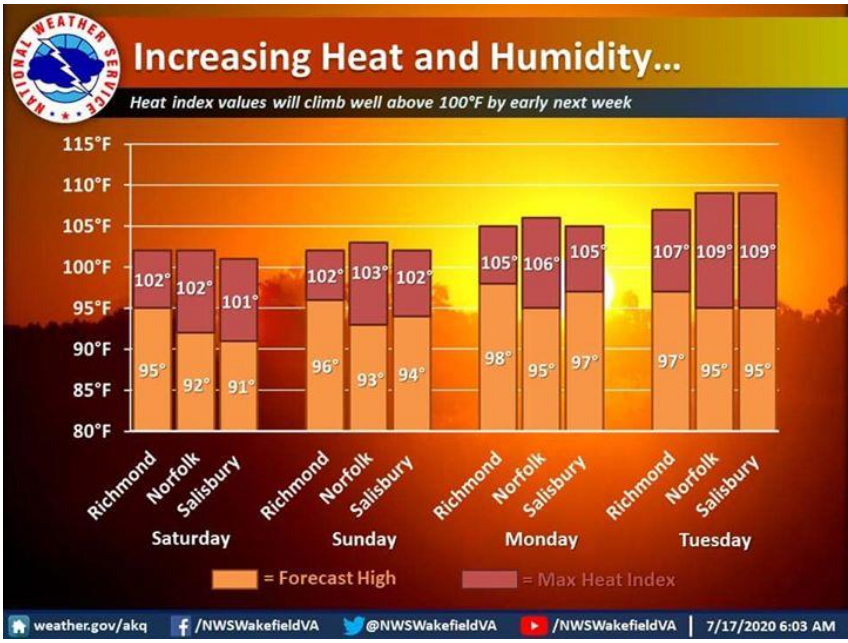


Friday, 17 July 2020

A beer to talk about dogs and work followed by a simple dinner and coffee. It is nice to have a visitor, even if I see him every day during the branch meeting.

Tomorrow, the last day without Calle. Maybe, I will do some extra cleaning.

By the way, the forecast for next week is simple: extremely hot. Good against corona as most people will stay home in the Airco.



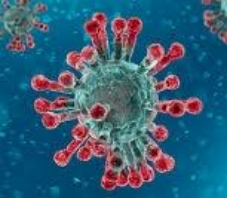
Now that we mentioned corona

Two-thirds of the 230,000 new coronavirus cases reported worldwide on Wednesday came from just four countries — the United States, Brazil, India and South Africa — which are all failing to contain fast-moving epidemics.



One country seems to do a great job: Thailand. No one knows exactly why Thailand has been spared. Is it the social distancing embedded in Thai culture? The habit of greeting others with a 'wai', a prayer-like motion, rather than an embrace? Did Thailand's early adoption of face masks help blunt the impact of the coronavirus pandemic? Is it genetics? Or some amalgamation of all these factors?

Whatever it is, it's working. Despite an influx of foreign visitors early in the year, Thailand has recorded fewer than 3,240 cases and 58 deaths. As of Thursday, there had been no reported cases of local transmission for about seven weeks.



C+125: Cleaning Day

Turkish steam bath

This is the last day of our kingdom. Tomorrow will be a travel day and Monday the queen is back. We better prepare our castle for her arrival to show we were good occupants and masters. In short: the day to clean the house a bit more than usual.

I am the only one awake, so my options are limited. Doing the dishes, washing the dirty laundry, and baking pistolets for the two coming days. All while the first floor is filled with classical music. Stone is not a big fan of Trajkovski or Grieg. Seems there are elements in their music that sounds like a knock on the door or the doorbell. Anyhow, Stone suddenly starts barking looking around for an intruder. I guess these composers did not have a dog.

After the first part is done, I clean out my doctorate paper. When all remarks are taken care off, I check the use of abbreviations and the links between the different sections. The last thing I must do is a read-through to make sure that the text reads fluently. The paper should soon be finished.

During lunch, we discuss our plan for the afternoon and the coming days. Seighin will vacuum the house and I will do the floor mobbing. Stone thinks something is going on and want to get in the garage for a ride in the car. We go for a walk instead so that Seighin can vacuum. It is too hot for a long one. We keep it short. I let him in the garage and start my part.



A bit of relaxing time. Around 0300 p.m. clouds are gathering above and 90 minutes later there is thunder and rain. Good for the grass that started to look dried out and to cool the air. Around 0600 p.m. the boys go for fitness in the FROG and I for a run. Thinking the rain caused the temperature to drop, I am in for a surprise. A tropical shower after a very hot day turns the whole environment into a Turkish steam bath on the lowest setting, but still a steam bath. Running in it means sweating from the start till finish. After 6 K my hands feel and look like I was soaking in a hot tub. Not normal. A dense cloud of warm vapor was hanging a few feet above some parts of my route. A strange sight.

After a shower that only brought temporary relief and freshness, Ciaran and I go for groceries to the Aldi. Only for the coming days until Monday evening. I reckon Calle will want to go to the store on Tuesday and we have Loic again with us. That means we will have to adjust the quantities of food we buy.

Saturday, 18 July 2020

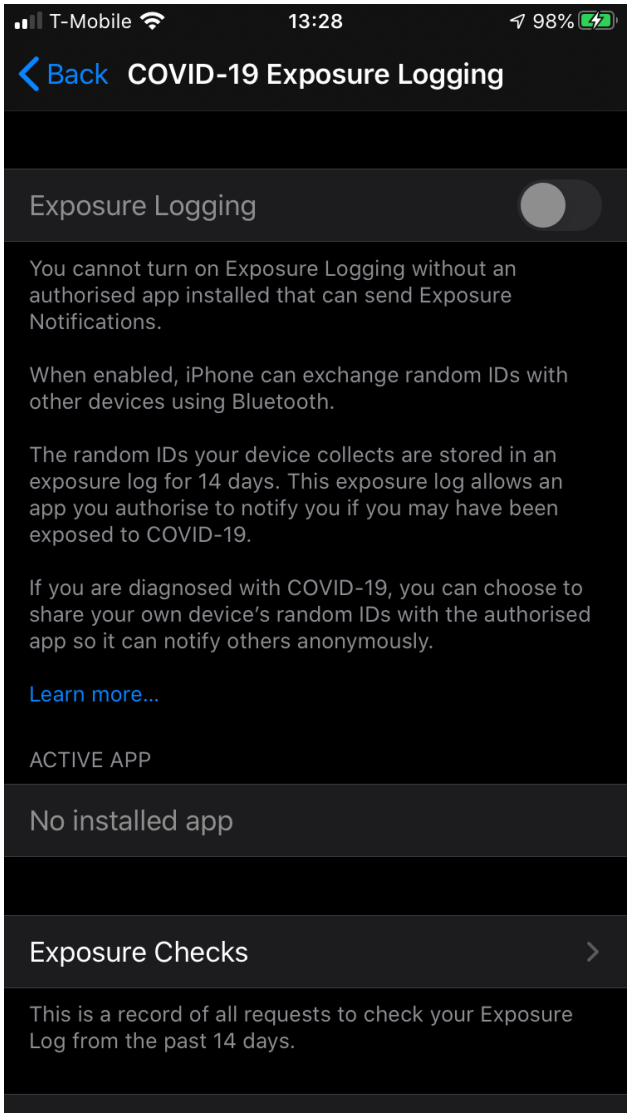
Although the plan was to have sushi for dinner, we switch to pizza for our movie evening.



Corona tracking App?

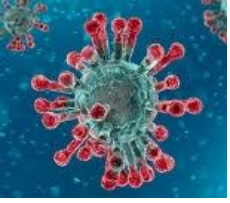
Did you find it too on your smartphone? A recent update probably added a feature on your phone like the one on mine. No panic, neither Apple nor Google have uploaded an app to your smartphone without your permission; no stealthy and automatic tracking app installation has taken place.

Yes, there is now an entry at the top of the settings that states: "COVID-19 exposure notifications." No, that does not mean an app has been installed.



So, what has been installed? This is a case of nothing to see here as all that's happened in the last Android or iOS update is that the application programming interface (API) that will enable exposure notifications to work has been added. It's not an app; it's the framework within the operating system that will allow such an app to function once it becomes available and if you decide to install it.

On May 20, Apple and Google published a joint statement about this API. Nobody can or will install a COVID-19 tracking app on your phone but you. At that point, you will have to agree to the various permissions the application requires to work effectively. But these Apps are not available yet.



C+126: Flight Back

Ready, steady …





A few hours before I get up Calle and Loic have started their travel back to the USA. First, they have to drive to Schiphol and say goodbye to family and friends. Loic will soon return, but Calle does not know when. A flight to Dublin with an arrival time not very different from mine getting up.

I do not give the alarm the chance to do its work. Getting out and down for a walk with Stone who feels something is up. I guess the cooler box gives it away. Waking up Ciaran to make sure we can leave on time. Some oatmeal and a cappuccino as breakfast. The last check before we leave. My iPhone announces a call with Messenger. Great, an update on the travelers.

The first sentence by Calle is "do not leave". I do not understand it because that is not the message I expected. It takes some time before I understand and acknowledge it. They are stranded in Dublin. My first thought is that there is something wrong with Loic's passport and visa as he travels with a double set. No, the flight from Schiphol had a delay too big to catch the flight in Dublin. Aer Lingus knew that before they took off, but nobody cared to tell them. The initial contact in the Irish capital's airport was not helpful but has changed.

Sunday, 19 July 2020

They get a hotel and meals but must wait for tomorrow's flight to JFK. A day in Ireland paid by the company, not bad. This means that we have to drive to NY on a Monday. I expect extra drive time due to the density of the traffic.

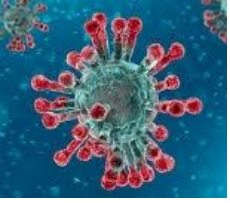
Well, the whole plan for today went down the drain. I must see what we are going to do for dinner, but first a bit of relaxing with a book on the deck. After that, I decide to play a bit with Stone to assure that his energy level is reduced. As expected he plays rough, but I am prepared for it.

Ciaran comes outside and hands his phone to me. Loic. He has a problem. In the rush to catch the plane, he has left his headphone and passport with visa in the bin at the security check. What does he need to do know? A quick mental check tells me that there is nothing to do. Without a visa, no entry in the USA and I cannot get one before tomorrow. Returning to Belgium? Or make sure that they find it back. While on the phone, airport security has found both items. Ouf.

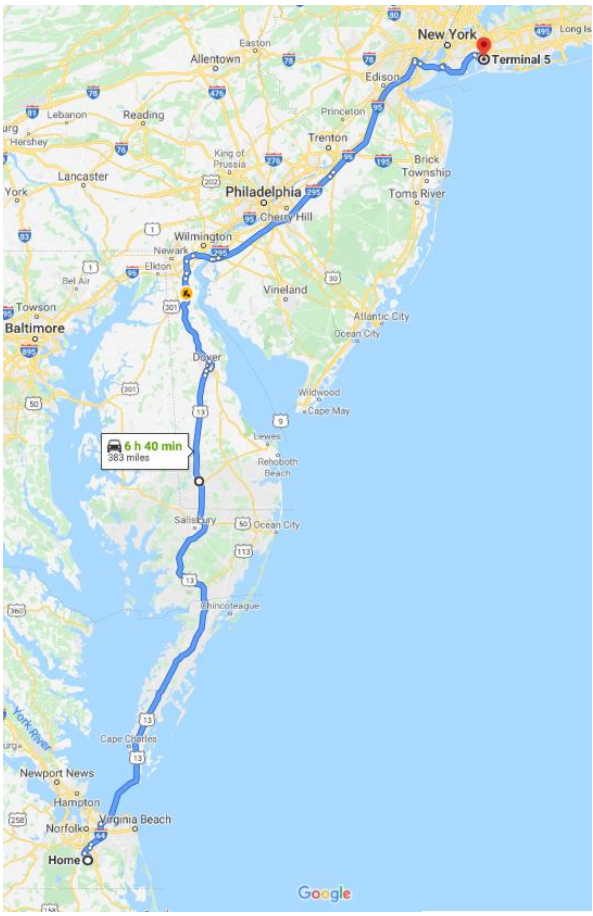
With some unplanned hours to kill, I decide to have the final revision of my paper and finish it. It is detailed work and I do not like that kind, but it has to be done. When finished, I mail it to my mentor for his final round.

For lunch, we eat the pistolets I had prepared this morning and that we would eat on our trip to the Big Apple. I will have to bake a new bread for tomorrow's travel.

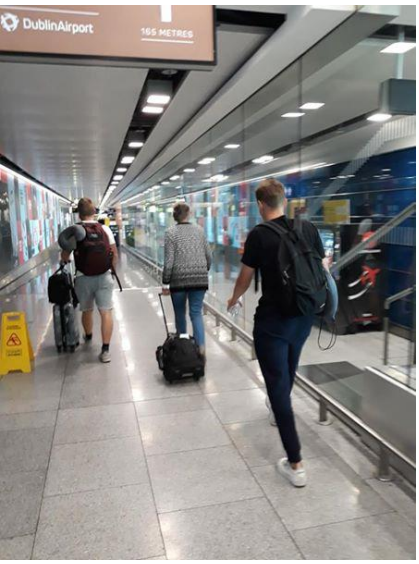
I take it easy in the afternoon and do some PC maintenance. My work laptop is running slow. Not that I can do much except trying to reduce the number of files on it. Late afternoon, I go reading on the deck, but it is too hot and humid to stay long. Stone has joined me but indicates before me that the weather is not good to stay outside. The last had of tidying up the place and early to bed. Tomorrow, I have to be ready to challenge the traffic to New York and back.



C+127: Flight Back Two



Ready, steady, go … again



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The expected, increased traffic density is there, but it does not lead to the huge traffic jam I was afraid of. Nothing special on our almost seven hours drive to the Big Apple. One thing is not working as expected and that is the computer-controlled radio. It freezes. Maybe it is too hot for the computer? We must stop and pull the fuse to reset it. Strange.





When we arrive at the airport, Calle calls to tell us that they are already at the conveyor belt. That is sooner than expected. They are indeed there happy to see us. They had a good flight with only one incident in the beginning when a couple had taken their seats telling a story that the crew had told them to sit there.

Ciaran and I drive the car to the arrival hall where there is quite some traffic. The airport does not breathe the apocalyptic atmosphere as it did seven weeks ago. There are more travelers, not that many but just enough to give it a look of 'normality'. Will that be the same in about two weeks?

Monday, 20 July 2020

There is a bit more mobility trouble on our way out of New York, but nothing major. We arrive around 07.00 p.m. in Newark. On the way to Delaware, I remember that I forgot to take the key of Loic's room with us, so we cannot take already some of his things with us, nor can the two boys sleep there. We all must sleep with Mark and Alex.

The couple has ordered some take-out to celebrate Loic's graduation. It is the first time I see his 'Delaware fathers', but it is a fun evening, with a bit too much booze.



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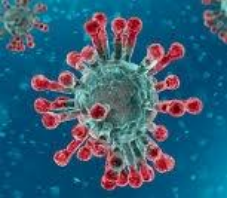

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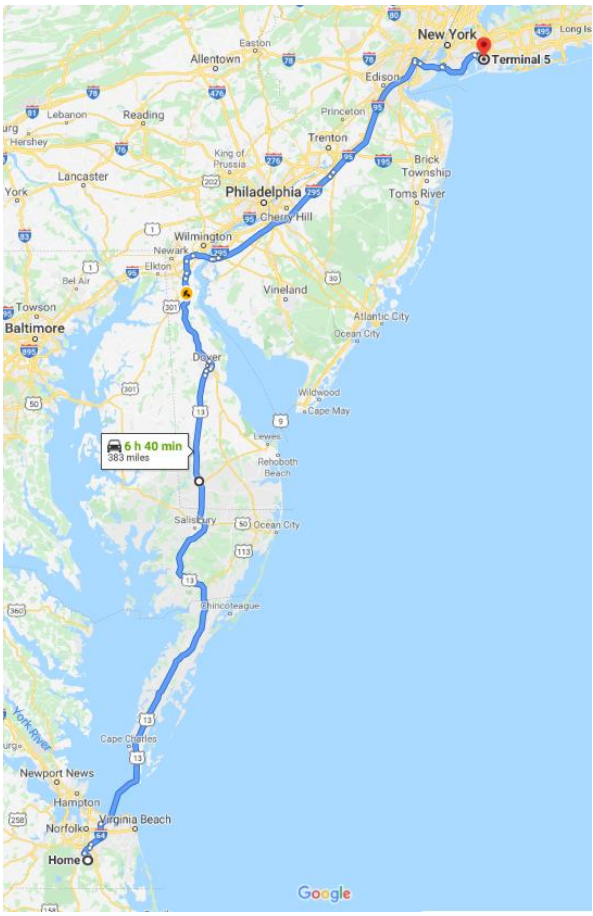

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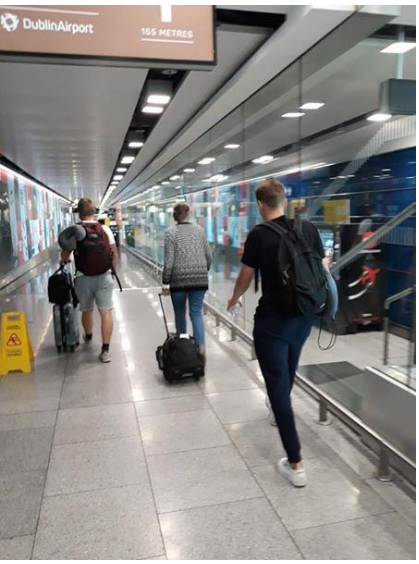

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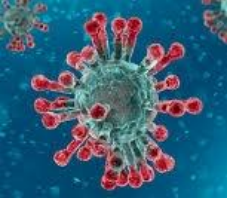


C+128: Belgium!

National holiday

A little bit thirsty this morning. No, no headache. We are all up and ready around 08.30 a.m. because we will go for breakfast. Only Alex will join us because Mark has an urgent appointment for a client. Alex takes us to 'Eggspectation', a Canadian chain of restaurants focused on, but not only breakfast. The food is fine, but the cappuccino less. Personally, the setting still feels very American to me although they promise something special. As it is the Belgian national day, I order Belgian waffles. The taste is good, but I do not feel Belgian when eating them.



I have put on my Belgian t-shirt that Calle has bought for me.

We pay the bill and go back to their house to load the luggage in our car. A goodbye and we are on the road again. Waze proposes us to drive via Washington DC because we can use the HOV 3+. Why not?

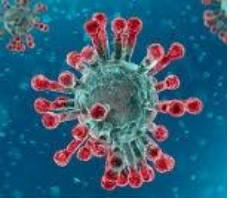
We stop at the Virginia visitors' center to switch sides. Calle and I move to the back and the boys to the front. An hour before we reach our destination, Ciaran decides he wants something to eat and guides us to a Panera Bread. The boys order a Baker's Dozen of bagels. "We can eat the rest tomorrow."



After our quick stop, we continue our travel. Back home, Seighin and Stone are happy to see us. As I expected, Stone recognizes Calle and Loic, at least he does not act as if they are strangers.

As we are all tired, after dinner and unloading the car, we go to bed early.

Tuesday, 21 July 2020



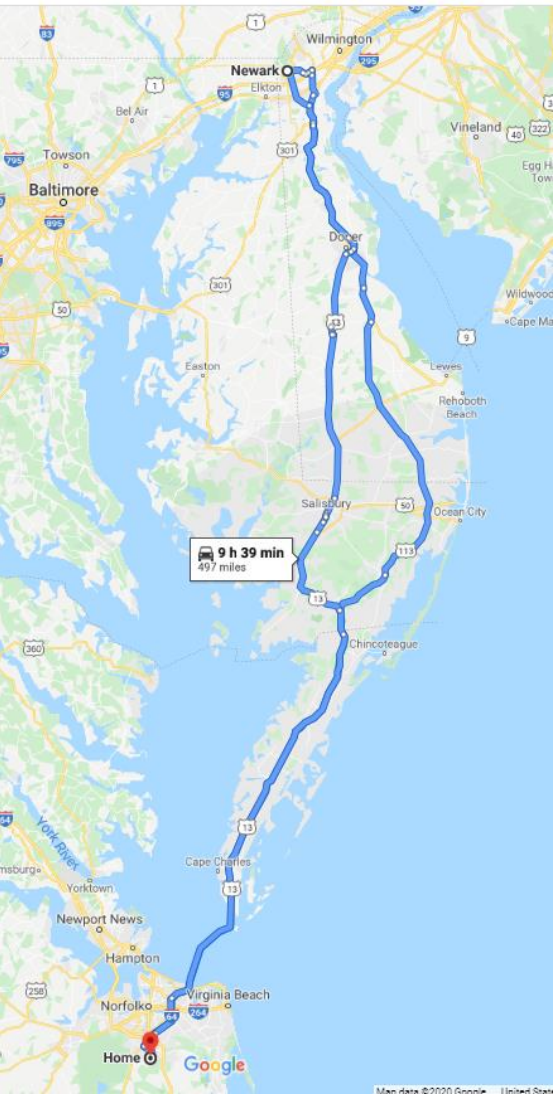
C+129: To and Back

A leave start

After the long rides, today is the first day of leave. It is, although yesterday and the day before were normal workdays for the HQ, they were holidays in Belgium, thus I needed to tell that I was on leave but did not take leave days. Today, however, my leave starts.

A bit longer than normal in bed, but still up early enough to beat the heat for the morning walk with three. Calle complains about mild back pain. The flights and the long drive may be the cause of that. The walk is followed by breakfast and a bit of relaxing on the deck.

Loic has a virtual interview. Companies need to select the student for their project as part of the MBA next year. The interview is going well. Loic has in the meantime lots of experience with virtual interviews and knows the kind of questions that will be asked. After that session, he is tutoring a student.



Considering the things that are planned, I think it would be better to drive to Newark today instead of tomorrow. We can still drive up and down, and be back around midnight. The rest of the days will be more relaxed that way. Loic agrees to leave as soon as his tutoring is over.

Around noon, we leave Chesapeake for an almost 5-hours drive north. The drive itself is without specials. Only one minor issue and that is finding fuel and a restroom. At the first gas station, the keypad does not work. With a credit card, you must type in the zip code, but that is not possible. Next gas station, the pay machine works fine, but there is a row in front of the restroom. Filling the car up and then drive to the Delaware rest area for the restrooms.

We first stop at the university to drop off the computer Loic has been using for his thesis. Nobody in. We have to take the PC and screen back to Chesapeake. I hope that this will not create a space issue.

When we arrive at his room, a thunderstorm with rain starts. Bad luck. Alex has joined us. He will take some furniture we do not need anymore and brings some special tools we need to disassemble the bed. In less than two hours, we load the van and clean the room. Every space available in the car is filled with stuff. We pass by Alex and Mark to microwave a meal of spaghetti before we hit the road again. Back to Chesapeake.

Wednesday, 22 July 2020

We start in the rain, but after 30 minutes, whit the nightfall, it stays dry. Again nothing special during the drive. After midnight we arrive home. Tired.

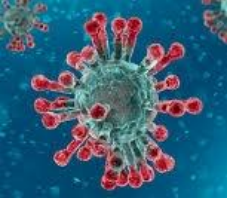
Stone is happy to see us but does not want to go out for a walk. Let's go to bed.

A change in handling the corona crisis?

President Trump departed from his rosy projections about the coronavirus on Tuesday, warning Americans in his first virus-focused news conference in weeks that the recovery would be bumpy.

"It will probably, unfortunately, get worse before it gets better," Mr. Trump said at the White House. "Something I don't like saying about things, but that's the way it is."

It came as the U.S. neared four million cases and the C.D.C. said the true number could be much higher.



C+130: Leave in Chesapeake

An administrative bulwark

No long drive today. A normal wake-up pattern: walk with Stone and breakfast on the deck. After that, a bit enjoying the tranquility and the morning sun, till it gets too hot to stay outside without being sunburn. No strange last-minute plan that I have come up with.

As you will have guessed, the morning passes with writing the two-pagers of the last days and partly unloading the Chrysler. Stone is a bit nervous. I think he needs to adapt to the full house again with lots of interaction and maybe less of my attention. Freshly baked pistolets for lunch, although Loic could not join us because of tutoring.

Loic's MBA regime is a bit crazy. He will be a student and while he has a course, he will not get paid. If the course is outside Italy, the school will take care of the travel and the lodging. In Italy, all that is his problem. However, when he has to do work as an intern, the travel will be paid too, but he has to take care of the lodging. But, because of Italian law, he will get a minimum pay. This creates some strange situations, we have to monitor closely. One example: by Belgian law, you are still considered a student and a dependent if you earn less than 3.330 EUR in that fiscal year. If he has less than 3 months intern in 2020, he will not earn that much. However, in 2021 he will earn more than that. Being no longer considered as a dependent has of course consequences. We will need to get well-informed.



I get a message from our renter in Belgium, that the neighbor has used some product to get rid of the weed. I thought that was no longer allowed in Belgium? As collateral damage, our first Christmas tree, now 25 feet high, is completely dead. RIP. It has to be pulled down. A real pity.

Defense gave its informal agreement to book Loic's flight to Belgium. Of course, we have to pay first and then ask for a reimbursement. Our two sons will leave us on August 06 with a flight from JFK to Brussels, together. Again a long voyage to the Big Apple, and back for me.

In the afternoon, I have to drive Seighin to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). That is a bastion of administration. I have all my paperwork with me because experience tells me there is no way to predict what they will ask. The unfriendly lady takes her time to get through everything I give her. She asks what paper I was missing when we visited that last time. I explain to

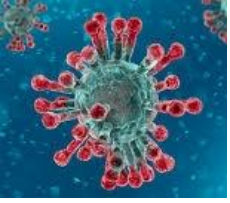
her that we had everything she has now, but that Richmond needed to agree. After a while, she turns friendly, no clue why she was not in the beginning and seems pleased with all my stuff. Seighin may take the theoretical test for his learner's permit.

While I am here, I ask if she can look for my driver's license. Because they did a mistake when I asked my license the first time, it is no longer valid now. She looks it up, a wonder!, and tells me that everything is OK. My license is valid until August 21, as it should be. Can I get my new license now? No, not possible. I have to make a new appointment and bring everything with me. But that is not before mid-October? No luck.

While Seighin takes his test, I have to return to the car. A few minutes later, he calls me that I need to return. He has passed his test, only 2 mistakes in the general part. 38/40. Excellent score. But, he will not get his permit yet because Richmond, DMV central office, needs to confirm the validity of our papers, again. They will send us an e-mail when we can pick up his permit.

After our visit to the DMV, I pick Ciaran up for a visit to the Walmart. There is almost nobody in. Great. In less than 60 minutes we are out. Ready for our hiking trip tomorrow.

Dinner followed by further unloading the car. Where to put all that stuff? Some we will need to ship to Belgium, but not yet as there is no more storage space in our house. Also, many things to clean before we can put these away.



C+131: To the Shenandoah

Back to nature

The plan for today is simple: get in our lodge on time for the preparations for the night and diner. However, there are some things to do before we can even consider leaving the house direction Shenandoah National Park. Although Loic has changed some of his appointments, he still has some to handle. If I am not mistaken, that is a tutoring appointment and an interview. Seighin wants to review his Spanish course material before he takes the exam.

We need to collect all the luggage and load it in the car. Make sure everybody fits in it. Stone feeling something is in the making keeps a close eye on me to make sure he does not miss the departure. Preparing a family for a hiking weekend can be a bit stressful, certainly if some members give the impression that they are not focused on the preparations.



30 minutes after the set deadline to leave, I drive the car out of the garage. Just around the block, we have to return. Calle forgot her glasses. The second try is the good one.

It is a three-and-a-half-hour drive with a sanitary stop at the visitor's center and one at the Walmart close by the national park. Some smaller, pleasant things of life we forgot and with the store on our route we can rectify that. A quick chat with the ranger at the entrance followed by a short drive brings us at the fire lane towards our home for the coming nights. After a 0.3 miles walk on the fire lane we arrive at the primitive lodge.

A quick check makes us conclude that it is in good condition and much bigger than the last lodge. The three boys need a few trips to the car and back to get all our stuff. Who is going to sleep where? When all is a bit organized, Loic

and Seighin start sawing and splitting wood. Well, Seighin is trying while Loic is producing wood. Ciaran takes care of the fire to heat up the water. Before we start using the utensils and cookware, we want to wash it. In a primitive setting, that means collecting water from the spring and warm it up on a wood fire.



Stone finds it interesting to discover new places and running around without a leash. It is not allowed to let your dog run free in a national park, but we are isolated here, and he stays close by. We have of course retain him if somebody is chopping wood. He is too curious to be safe.

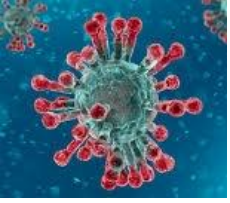




Aperitif in the woods followed by a dinner we have prepared this evening. We play a card game until it is too dark to read the signs on the cards. Ciaran is a bit afraid of bears. He thinks one will smell the food and come visit us. I think the chances are much higher that some mice will steal our food.



The night falls and the noises of the forest come alive. It is warm and damp in the cabin, which makes it hard to catch some sleep. After midnight, I decide to open the windows. No worries, the blinds are still closed and the screen are in. The breeze makes it bearable for the rest of the night (no relation with the animal).



C+132: Riverwalks

Two hikes



Although I am not sure that we were all asleep, I know that we are awake at the same moment. Sleeping was not so easy with the heat, even after opening the windows, and the rigidness of the mattress. But, when Stone starts barking, everybody is awake. Is there somebody or something outside? I am the first one out of bed – are the rest faking morning fatigue because of what they imagine that is outside? – and open the door for Stone. He walks outside but stays put in front of the door. Our hero! Only when I get outside, he ventures a bit further from the lodge. There is nothing to see. Maybe a hiker passed nearby, although there is no trail in the vicinity. We will never know why he barked this early.

With everybody awake, we can start the day. I prepare a fire to heat the water for coffee and doing the dishes. Because I did not find my mixture of French instant cappuccino from the last time, I planned to make coffee the Turkish way by putting ground coffee in a mug and add hot water to it. After a few minutes, you can drink it, although slowly to prevent swallowing the black powder. Calle has opted for a less risky kind: instant coffee. It does not taste that good, but it is coffee.



After a bread-based breakfast, we start the preparations for today hikes. Calle takes care of our lunch while we fill the backpacks and collect water. Although we will be walking in the forest following rivers, we know from experience that this can be a thirsty undertaking. Better have too much water than too less. Although I carry a collapsible bowl for Stone, I doubt that we will need it. He will drink whenever he is thirsty and near water.

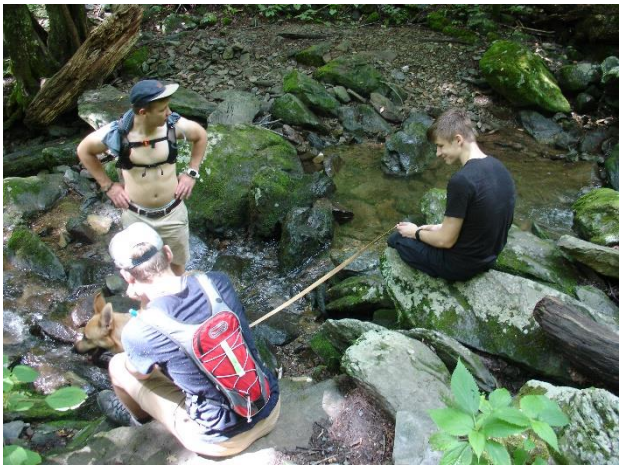


Fully packed, we drive to the parking area for the trailhead of the South River Falls Trail. The parking is nearly full. Lessons learned from the last time is that it is better to walk it

Saturday, 25 July 2020

'backwards'. It is better to follow the fire road when the temperature is low with the sun not directly above it. That is what we will do.

It is a nice walk and we encounter fewer people than expected. Some hikers have their face mask on. A bit surprised to see that. Yes, when you cross others, you cannot keep the 6 feet for a short period. With a very short time and being in the open air, the risk of infection is very, very small. But a face mask will certainly not harm. I think that a minority wear the mask during the whole hike. An overkill.

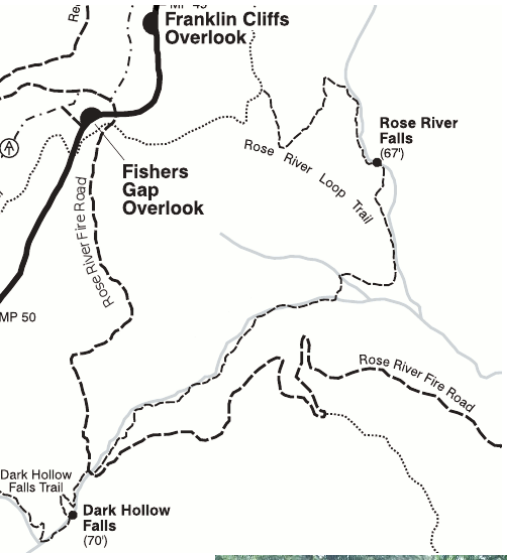





While the boys and Stone lead the way, we take our time to enjoy the environment and the quietness. Loic wants to swim in the small basin of the upper falls, but he finds no private place to switch to his bathing suit. No luck.

When we start our ascend, warmth and humidity are making it more difficult. I feel sweat running down my spine. Luckily, we do not have to worry about drinking water. We have plenty.

Back at the picnic area where our car is parked, I go to the car for our sandwiches and enjoy a peaceful lunch around one of the tables in the grass.



Next walk is the Rose River Loop Trail, again the other way around. The parking lot is full, but we find an open spot. We cross groups of people on the way down on the fire road until we reach the first falls. The side trip to the Dark Hollow Falls is not allowed for pets, so we go further to the Rose River Falls. Then up again. It is a nice, but tiresome hike. Again, the youth beats us, but we do not care.

When we are almost at our starting pint, two families ask for directions. Both are at the wrong trailhead. One family does not even have water with them. They are not the only one. We have passed wanderers not prepared or properly dressed for a hike, and no water whatsoever. Strange.









It starts raining when we reach the parking area and it gets worse. We have finished our hike just on time. We were not prepared for rain.





Back at the cabin, Loic and Seighin start chopping woods. Ciaran starts a fire with the small wood we had laid to dry. Luckily, there was no rain in our lodging area. Today, we have chicken noodle soup and ravioli. Nothing special, but easy and tasty after a day of walking. Calle and I enjoy a simple wine with our dinner. We did not bring a corkscrew and there is no one in the cabin. Calle proposes to 'saber' the bottle with an axe, but I have a more mundane solution. With a screw from the cabin's window, I pull the cork out. Stone is tired and stays very calm.







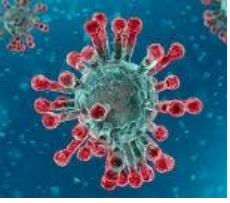
C+135: Breakfast

We vote on tomorrow's plan and the decision is to get up early to enjoy the sunrise. After that, we will go for an early hike. We do not intend to return to the cabin. We want to move as many things as possible to the car so that we need only one trip in the morning.

After cleaning up as much as possible, we prepare for the night. I have opened all the windows to make sure that there is a bit of ventilation. We sleep better, probably because we are tired.





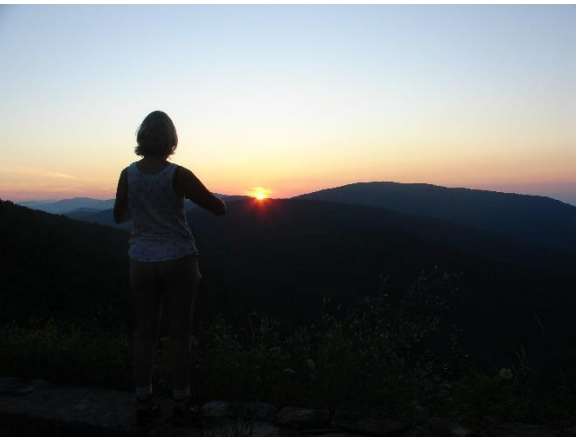


C+133: Sunrise

The early worms



No Stone barking us awake. This time it is Seighin that calls us to get up. Like last time he had proposed that we would get up early to enjoy the sunrise. We figured out that we could collect the rest of our things and clean out the cabin in less than 30 minutes. The time of the sunrise is 0615 a.m. and we have a 20-minute drive to reach a good spot. During our first hiking weekend, Seighin and I scouted 20 overlooks to find one that was oriented to the East and had a good view. No reason to go to another one.



We walk to the car in the dark, although first light is already present. Everybody in the car and there we go. No deer on the road. When we arrive at the overlook, there are already people present. I see a drone taking off. I park the car and we all get out. Waiting for the sun to do her morning magic.



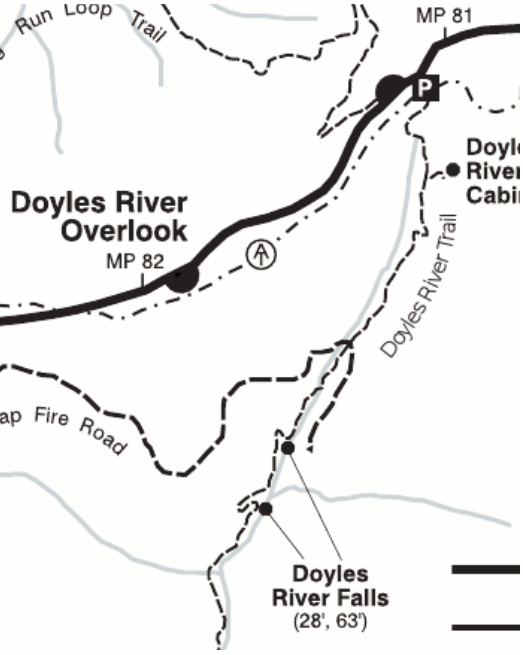


Sunday, 26 July 2020



After enjoying the daily wonder, we take our time for breakfast. No coffee because we do not have a burner with us. Around 0730 a.m., we drive to our next destination.

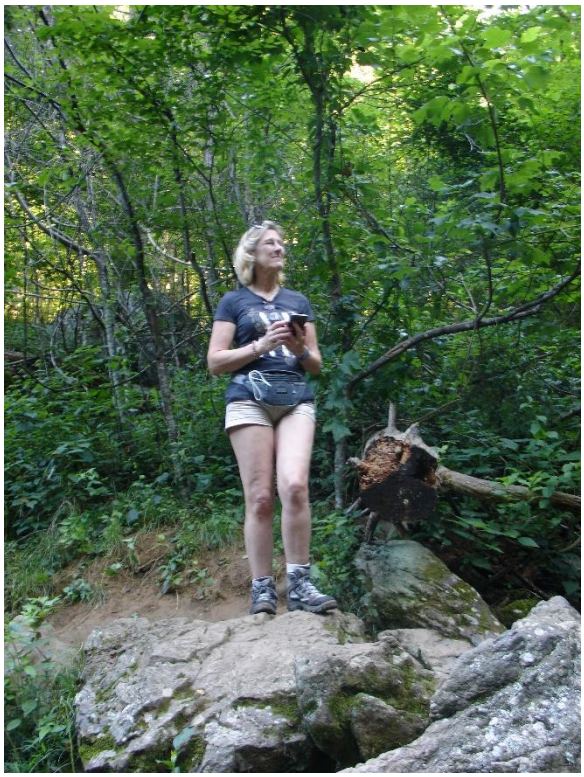
Today's walk is the Doyles River Falls Trail. Although the map tells the start is at the Big Run Overlook, the panel at the overlook name it as 'Doyles River Overlook'. The trailhead assures us we are at the right place. There are a few cars at the parking lot, but I suspect that some of those will be of people renting the Doyles River Cabin. According to the PATC website one of their best cabins, but about 0.5 miles away from the nearest parking.

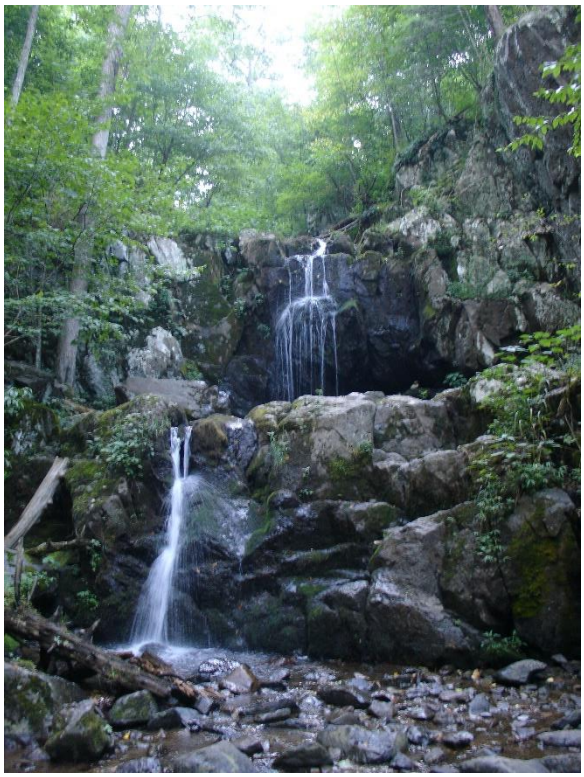


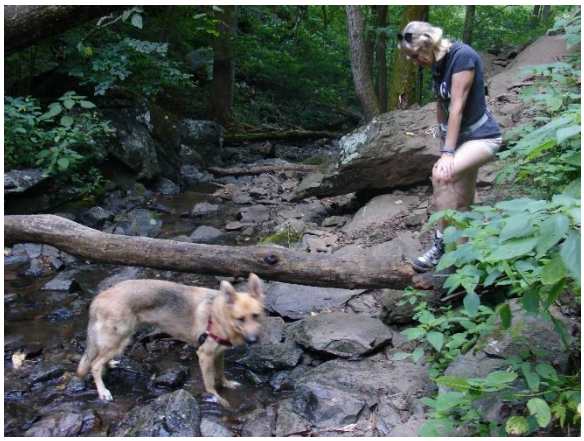
Because of the early hour, it is quiet, and we meet two other hikers. It is nice to walk along the river and a waterfall is always fascinating. When I want to take a picture near the basin, Stone follows me. When he wants to climb on a rock, he slips on the wet moss and gets stuck in the opening between big rocks. For a moment it seems he needs help, but he gets out of his situation. After that, he stays put and wait till I return.

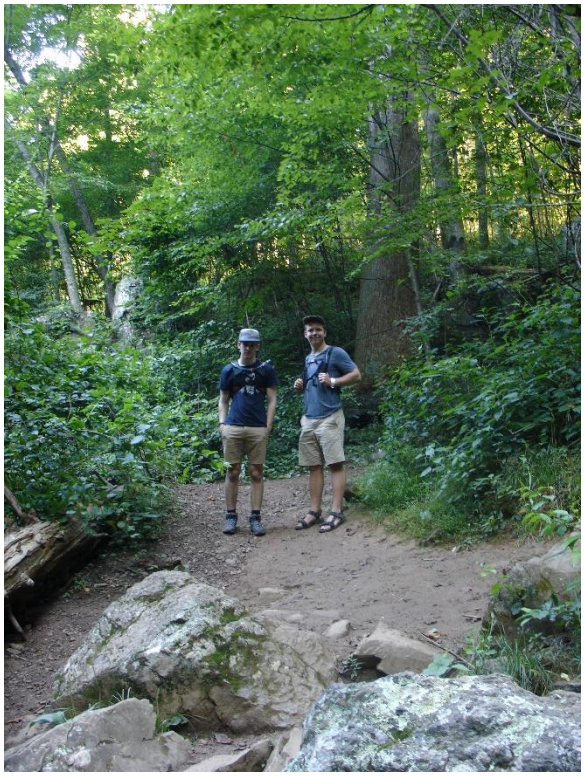
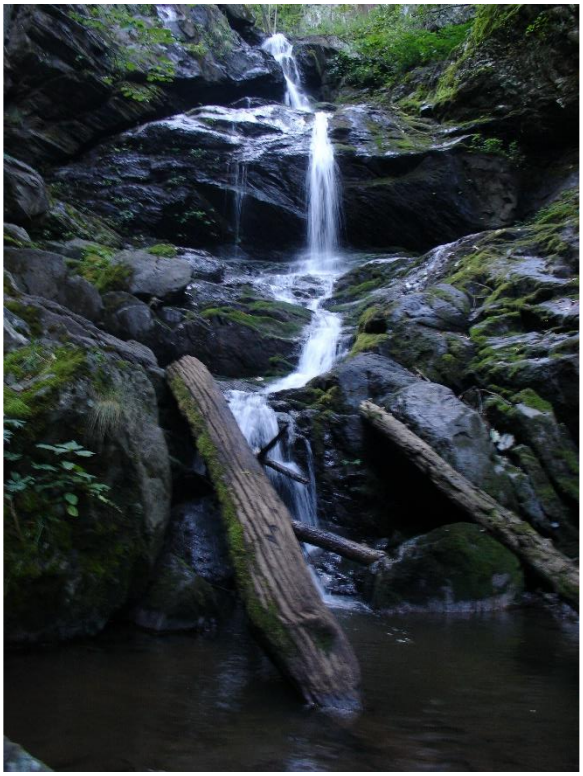


This trail is not a loop – the loop by connecting the Jones Run Falls is about 9 miles long – and thus we must return on the same dirt road as we came. The climb is steep and although it is still early day, it is warm and sweaty.









After a very nice hike, we drive down the Skyline drive and stop from time to time to have a look at the splendid views. We leave the national park by the South Entrance, just across the access to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Maybe our destination for the next trip?

Our first stop is a Panera Bread store. We order coffee, but the boys go for more special drinks and some pastries. I take a table on the terrace to make sure that Stone can stay with us. When the enter the establishment, I see he does not like that part of his pack has disappeared. He indicates that he is not

happy being here while the rest is gone. Could a weekend like this increase his binding with the family?



When we are almost home, we hit a long traffic jam caused by an accident. Nothing to do about it, except being part of an enormous caterpillar gliding its way forward.



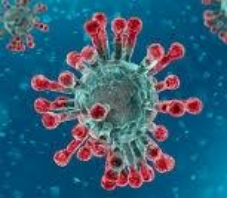
When we arrive home, the first thing is to unload the car and clean all we can. In the meantime, Stone has found a calm place and decided he needs time to recuperate. Too much walking? When everything is unloaded, we take a shower or a bath. You

appreciate the small luxuries in life after a weekend in a primitive cabin.

For dinner, we drive to Virginia Beach to the Cheesecake factory. Stone does not even try to come with us. He stays where he laid down a few hours ago. Dead tired. I drop three members off at the restaurant and go looking for a parking spot. In the parking garage, Seighin calls me that they only do curbside service. Corona! An Italian restaurant does not serve parties of more than four, although it is nearly empty. We decide to try the Italian chain Carrabas. There are only a few people inside, but take-out seems to be working well.

After dinner, we all go to bed. Tomorrow is a working day.





C+134: At Work, At Home

Pregnant inbox

First day back at work after a short leave of a week. Getting back into the routine after a nice but tiring hiking weekend is not an easy task. Certainly, if the situation has also changed a bit, from an 'empty' house in the morning to a full one. It starts badly when the alarm wins the race for the first one awake. I had opened my eyes around 0600 a.m. but fell asleep again till a bit after 0700 I heard a sound from distant afar.

It is again very warm and damp this morning. A slow walk – I think Stone is experiencing muscles pain from all that walking – results in a sweaty t-shirt as if I went for a long run on a normal day. They forecast the same weather for tomorrow and lower temperatures for the rest of the weekend. Good news because that means I can go running again. There is a heat warning out. Outdoors running is not advised.

Not enough time for breakfast before the branch meeting. After a week of refusing to open my inbox, it looks like it is ready to give birth. I run quickly through it to see if there is a mail that needs my immediate attention. I am drawn to the one about a meeting with the branch head about the conference. I read it and it does not make me happy. He has started to micromanagement it, something we were afraid of.

The meeting does not provide any news but one. We have a new administrative member in our branch. I hope she will stay longer and that she will be allowed to support us. Directly after the meeting, my British colleague contacts me to talk about his 2000 miles road trip. His wife has an idea to create some NATO travel blog. A great idea.

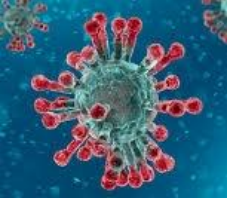
Breakfast with Calle on the deck. Luckily, our deck is in the shadow in the morning and with a little breeze, the temperature is just not too warm. After some work inside, I join Calle again on the deck to start a meeting with some colleagues on the work ahead concerning the conference. After the micromanagement intrusion of the branch head, the ambiance has significantly dropped. I check if I am not projecting my feelings, but they all confirm it. We have received mixed messages and have no clue what is expected now. Strangely, as good military, some try to come up with new proposals although nobody knows what is good. We meet for two hours but with no real advancement. It will be another week wasted.

I plan an in-person meeting with the branch head for Wednesday. We have to talk about my evaluation report, and I want to confront him with his management style. If he keeps following that style, I will consider myself as not involved in the conference anymore. I rolled in it because I wanted to help with finding good speakers, change the focus of the conference, and this virtual thing is a nice challenge, but with a micro-manager, it will come down to frustrations. No, not something I am interested in.

During lunch, we make a list of things the two boys want to do before they return to Belgium. There is not that much time, so we have to plan it otherwise we risk not doing anything.

The rest of the workday goes to changing the unread status of emails. Not a productive day of work, but that is to be expected. There are still some work-related emails that need my attention when I decide it is time to call it a day. A task for tomorrow.

Seighin and I go for groceries. Although the parking lot is filled, there are not that many shoppers in the Walmart. Our shopping experience is fluid. After unloading the numerous of plastic bags at home, we start the new evening routine of preparing dinner, cleaning up, and writing the two-pagers.



C+135: Breakfast

Early start

After waking up, my start of the day is limited to only coffee. I may not have breakfast yet. Everybody is awake early because Seighin promised us to make a full breakfast. The compromise was to have breakfast together after the daily branch meeting, so I have to wait for my first meal.

Seighin assisted by Calle prepares us fresh orange juice, scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, and fruit salad. After the longer than usual branch meeting, we all move to the deck for an outside breakfast. It is not too warm and there is a light breeze making eating outside enjoyable, even around 09.00 a.m. It is great to have breakfast together. That is a rare thing with two twins and one teenager.



After that family time, I have to get back to work. Again a meeting about the conference. Making sure we have something to show the boss on Thursday, although I am not happy with it. This a just a meager, inspiration lacking compromise. Nothing worth defending. After that, I tackle some smaller things that need some attention. When they are all done, I am back on track as if I was not away for a week.

Making Seighin's schedule for next year is still problematic. I have the impression that his counsellor does not get the problem and keeps focusing on the administrative part of it. She seems not to think with us. We still aim at a plan for a three-year high school career without compromising a probable 4 years stay. It is not an easy puzzle to solve with all the

conditions and Seighin's wishes for courses while a counsellor keeps forgetting the broad picture. I hope that with enough e-mails and some phone calls we will eventually succeed.

The necessary virtual paperwork to our HR-department for my request to stay another year is finally complete. The issue with my profile not showing the link to the second part of the request is not solved yet. I checked every week to see if something was changed, in case they solved the issue and forgot to tell me. There was a change, but not the one that was needed. However, that change gave me in a strange way access to the second part. I filled it out and saved it. My contact in HR confirmed the reception of the detailed request after which I launched the last part: an e-mail to the NLR. After that, I send another e-mail to my HR contact to tell him about my bit for a NATO civilian job expressing the hope that they will decide before I have to sign the contract. I did it politely.

After today's work, I make a quick stop in Aldi for some missing things. Seighin's soccer practice is cancelled due to excessive heat warning. It is not safe to do physical training, so no running for me too.

Seighin finally decides for the option for the first semester of the school year 2020-21. He opts for online. He found it difficult to decide between being on the safe side and seeing his friends. In the USA, high school is at the center of social life for teenagers and with corona that center has disappeared. It must be hard for them having no longer school as the glue. Also today, Chesapeake school board decided that for the first 9 weeks it will be online for everybody. I just hope that the students who have opted for online the first semester will not depend on the hybrid option. To fully exploit the possibilities of online learning, they must have dedicated teachers. It should not be that online equals virtual presence.

Even late at night is still hot. Stone does not like walking in hot weather and shows it. He prefers to stay in the air-conditioned house, but that is not an option. It is late when I go to bed, and tomorrow is an early day.

In for the long run

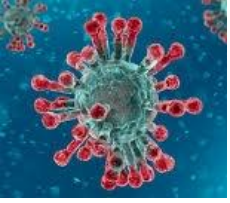
Below some news from the corona front.

Belgium's prime minister reinstated strict social-distancing rules on Monday, saying she was taking aggressive steps to avoid another lockdown. Belgians are not to socialize with more than five people.

Evidence is suggesting that masks protect the people wearing them, lessening the severity of symptoms, or in some instances, staving off infection entirely.

The tech giant Google has told its employees that they would not be expected back at the office until mid-2021, reflecting the reality that no one can be sure how long the pandemic will last in the U.S.A.

Between the coronavirus and the Trump tariffs, the French wine market has collapsed. Winemakers are — sadly — sending their succulent wines off to become hand sanitizer. "We're producing more than we can sell," said Thibaut Specht, a winemaker in the Alsace region. "We have no choice." Marion Borès' family business is sending 30 percent of its production — 19,000 liters — to a distiller for conversion into alcohol for sanitizer. "It's like you are saying goodbye to somebody very dear to you," she said.



C+136: IER

Trick

Very early up, but a bit later than before corona, for the weekly ride to the HQ. With Stone in the family, the half-hour routine of preparing for work has turned into an hour-long one because of the 25 minutes morning walk. I still have to fine-tune the routine because there is a second element involved in it. I have to figure out how I can leave without Stone making it too difficult. The moment he sees me in uniform, he knows I will leave by car and he becomes focused on getting along.

Today I get my uniform first thing on instead of doing after the walk. Of course, that means that I walk in uniform with Stone. I am sweating even if it is early. The combination temperature and uniform results not in better cooling.

When we are back at the house, Stone does not want to enter it. He knows I am going to leave him. In the garage with too many options, I cannot catch him and I do not want to chase him either. The old trick of opening the back door of the car does not work either. He comes closer but stays far enough away that I cannot grab him. I have one more trick in my sleeves. I open the crate in the car. After he gets in the crate, I close it and leave the back door open for ventilation. I take the other car and leave. I know, it is a slimy trick, but he cannot come with me. When I arrive at the HQ, I send Calle a text that he is in the car.

But before I arrive at the gate, I have to join a traffic jam. It is the first time that the queue at the gate is that long. What has happened? Parking the car, passing the temperature check (still wondering what the result would be when it is very hot outside), and walking up the one-way stairs. Making coffee and getting ready for work.

Nothing new on the high side. There is a discussion about the next course in NSO. Will the October session in Oberammergau go on? Although we agreed to decide on August 31st, the chances are slim that we will be allowed to travel to Germany. We are considering to organize a virtual session but are unsure how and if virtual, facilitated workshops will work. More and more I am inclined to just do it and see how it goes. I am afraid that the May session of next year will not be in-person either and then we do not have the luxury to 'test' a setting. Additionally, there are many newcomers in the branch the need training fast.

I introduce a request to repair my laptop. Word is working too slowly and I am running out of memory. According to the IT department, there are a few updates not done and they need to force these. I must turn in my laptop and pick it up tomorrow morning.

Although the Wednesday is the day I have to assure the presence in our set of four cubicles that I have baptized 'Area 51', the main reason for my presence today is the chat

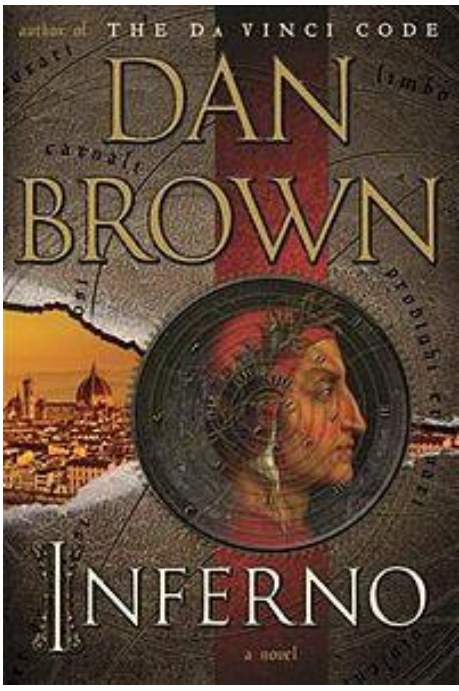
with the branch head about the conference, more specifically, his micro-management style. But first my IER, or International Evaluation Report. Not that I am interested in it, but it has to be done. All excellent and thus not very useful to improve what I am doing.

After treating some other smaller issues, I bring up the effect of his decision on the motivation of the team preparing the conference. He is surprised to hear our reaction. We have a good discussion and I try to provide him with all the information I have telling it from my point of view. The whole thing might be a combination of factors leading to a complete miscommunication. We agree that I will contact the others and come up with a proposal for tomorrow's briefing on how we see it.

Because the discussion took longer than planned, I am 30 minutes late for the sandwich meeting with the Belgians colleagues. It is an informal, social exchange while respecting the 6 feet distance.

Our Bulgarian colleague, Valentin, has left us. He sends us a farewell mail. I am going to miss him. Not only for his family's part in our international dinner club that has ended too soon because of corona but also for his different way of thinking. We sometimes had different opinions, but I appreciate that.

On my way home, I pick up a book Calle has bought. Inferno by Dan Brown. She has seen the movie and wants to read the book. They have waited for me to start lunch. Although I already ate sandwiches, I join them for the family moment.



After lunch, I meet with the others regarding the miscommunication and the meeting tomorrow. It turns out I must prepare something because the others are involved in other business. Because I want this to succeed I agree to prepare the brief, even if it is my opinion. If they do not find the time to review what I will brief, we will discuss it during the briefing.

We cancel our plan to go to the beach and postpone it to Friday. In the time freed up, I take Stone for an evening walk. Followed by a nice and fun dinner outside on the deck.

Administration rules

Today, Seighin received an e-mail from the DMV headquarters in Richmond telling that the paperwork for his Learner's Permit is accepted. He is happy to get that quick and positive response. But his happiness is short-lived. We have to make a new appointment and the earliest possibility is end of October. Because the 'decision' is

only valid for 60 days and thus too short to last till end October I send an e-mail sketching the issue. Below a part of the discussion with an administration:

I wrote:

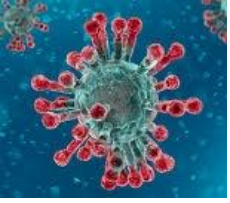
"The earliest possibility [for an appointment] is 26 October, that is 88 days from now.

I am afraid that without an extension of the 60 days limit, we will have to go through the whole process again. This is already the third time my same papers need to be checked."

They replied:

"We are not giving extensions on the approval period. More than likely, the approval will still be honored when he goes back to the DMV office."

Do they really believe that if they as an HQ do not extend the approval period, a local office will do it for them? I am afraid that we will have to go through the whole circus again. The only thing that must be done is to print out his permit.



C+137: Back On Track

I am getting behind in writing these two-pagers. The days are too full and I need to get in bed on time to accumulate enough sleep not to collapse from sleep deprivation. My excuses for not hitting every daily deadline. I try, but some days it is just too much effort to finish the pages. Anyhow, I keep track of the days and will send them as soon as I have written these. I do not give up yet, I hope you will neither.

Meeting

I am up early. Sleep comes in pieces last night. Small pieces. After such a bad night – my sleep analyzing tool gave it a very low score too, so we agree on that one – there is no use in staying in bed. I do not know what is bothering me. Maybe the prospect of doing something extraordinary with the October conference? A walk in the neighborhood followed by coffee and a small breakfast. Calle will get up later and prepare a fruit salad. I do not like working on an empty stomach but want to enjoy Calle's preparation too, on the deck together.

There is no branch meeting because the Skype for Business application does not work. Every time that happens, I reflect on what we would do if that happens during the conference. First, I thought it was because I am working with my personal laptop, but the issue is general.

After finishing the slides, we are going to brief at eleven, I leave for the HQ. I pick up my work laptop. They have only forced the Windows update but my memory issue is not gone. I enter the briefing room just on time to set everything up. The others did not have a look at it, so this meeting may go in all directions although I have tried to capture the fundaments of our discussions. My German colleague is the first one to enter and he is not optimistic about the outcome. He thinks it is going to be a waste of time but is willing to give it a try.

The branch head opens the meeting by explaining that there was a miscommunication and a quick analysis of how this could have happened. He also tells he is open for discussions and review of former decisions. We start with some elements we need a decision today before going to the more debatable elements. The two things we have been lamenting over for weeks are settled in a few minutes. We can push on. The rest of the meeting happens in a critical but constructive atmosphere. We have a better mutual understanding and have the freedom to experiment. Decisions negatively impacting the non-traditional approach are swiped off the table. We can start again. The level of motivation is up again. The branch head thanks us for bringing it up and discussing the issue



openly. We have a new 'go'. Back on track. Now we have to put meat on the bone.

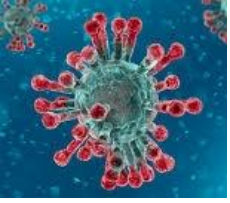
After the meeting, I ask my German colleague for feedback. He tells me he is surprised by the outcome and finds that very positive. He can start with the technical side of the project while we look for themes, speakers, and workshop leaders.

I do a bit of work in my cubicle. One issue I need to solve is to get a safe for classified documents. I am already waiting a year on that and there is no progress. At least, I have worked out an arrangement with a colleague that has a safe, but I want a long-term solution.

I drive home for lunch and work a bit more on the conference. In the late afternoon, the branch head calls me virtually for feedback on the meeting. He wants to make sure that the message came through and that we are back on it.

I prepare lasagna with a few variations for dinner. The family assess the result as one of the best I have made. Unfortunately, I do not work with a precise recipe, so I am not sure if I can copy it.

I feel tired today and go to bed early. The two-pager will be for another day, later.



C+138: Swimming in the Rain

To the beach?

The sky looks grey when I look outside this morning. I hope that the temperature is going to be bearable with the absence of direct sun, but that hope evaporates the moment I open the garage door. Stone's level of activity is descended to the level of a sloth. It is a slow, uninterested walk.

With a big cappuccino next to me, I follow the branch meeting. Nothing special to report, only that the branch head will be on leave next week. The same is true for the two generals in our directorate. There is no captain on the bridge, but the ship and her crew are doing fine. No need for panic or even guidance.

After the meeting, I start by preparing an agenda for the conference. My Dutch colleague does not have much time next week because of a workshop she has to facilitate, we have to go quickly through our list of potential speakers and workshops. There is some work to do and certainly on the workshops. Unfortunately, she will be on three weeks leave, so the coming month it will be all on my shoulders to come up with an interesting proposal. Luckily, she promises to make at least one program.

Next to planning the schedule for Seighin and trying to get the counsellor along with our approach, I have to file a request for early graduation. This has to be done in August and once accepted that request cannot be recalled. For that reason, I aim at a few critical courses in Summer school, because if we stay four years and we do not subscribe him to Summer school, he cannot graduate early and goes to high school as a senior.

There is some news I had to withhold during the last days. A few days ago, Sander had a suspicion he could have been infected with corona. He had some mild symptoms and these were getting worse. When he talks about it with Amber, they decide he should go in solo quarantine to protect Lily-Rose and Amber. He drove to a triage center to get tested and a few days later the test came back negative. Luckily. However, this shows how fast it can enter a bubble.

As we are informed on the result of the test, Amber asks us an odd question. Due to corona, there is an issue to find somebody to care for Lily-Rose while they will go to work again. After her long absence, Amber wants to go to work, but without somebody to care for their daughter, that is a no-go. She asks if Calle could come over for a long period to take care of Lily-Rose. That is a difficult request where we have to think about.

After the medical appointment for Seighin, we head for the beach under a grey sky. I was hoping that the sky would clear up the closer we get to the beach, but that is not the case. When it starts raining and there is no sign that it will soon be over, I propose to the rest of the family to return. They all agree except Loic. He says that because we are almost

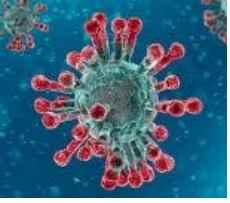
there, he does not mind to go swimming, even in the rain and thunder. The two other boys say they will join him. We agree that we will park close by the seafront and that they have to be back within 15 minutes. They enjoy there 15 minutes alone in the sea. Swimming in the rain. On our way back, we stop by an Aldi to get some groceries.

Back home, I decide to take Stone for a walk. It is going to be bad outside soon and better take him for a walk now while it is still dry here. Calle joins us and we start under a bivalent sky: one part almost clear, the other dark grey. We walk under the dividing line and feel that finishing this walk dry will depend on luck. Lots of luck.

The frequency and intensity of the lightings and the accompanying thunders increase, a sure telltale that our luck is running out. A few thick drops are soon followed by a steady rain transforming in a giant, full cover waterfall. Calle deploys her big umbrella and we decide to stop under a tree. Stone does not like walking in the rain and seeing us under the protection of a living and plastic tree decides to claim his place. He comes between us under the umbrella. With his wet fur against the front of our legs and pushing us outside the protective area, we are getting wet in front and on the back.

Assessing that it will not stop raining soon and observing the water level in the street rising, we decide to head home at a steady pace. Every 20 meter Stone stops to shake his fur dry, making us wet. After a few minutes, there is nothing dry. Luckily, the water is warm and not as cold as it would be in Belgium. Wading through the streets turned brooks, we have to watch out for cars. Most drivers do not expect pedestrians now and their visibility is reduced too. We arrive safe but thoroughly wet at our house.

Stone had enough of walking today and decides to lay down and not move anymore. We take a shower, put on some dry clothes, and start preparing dinner. It has been a special day.



C+139: Another Saturday

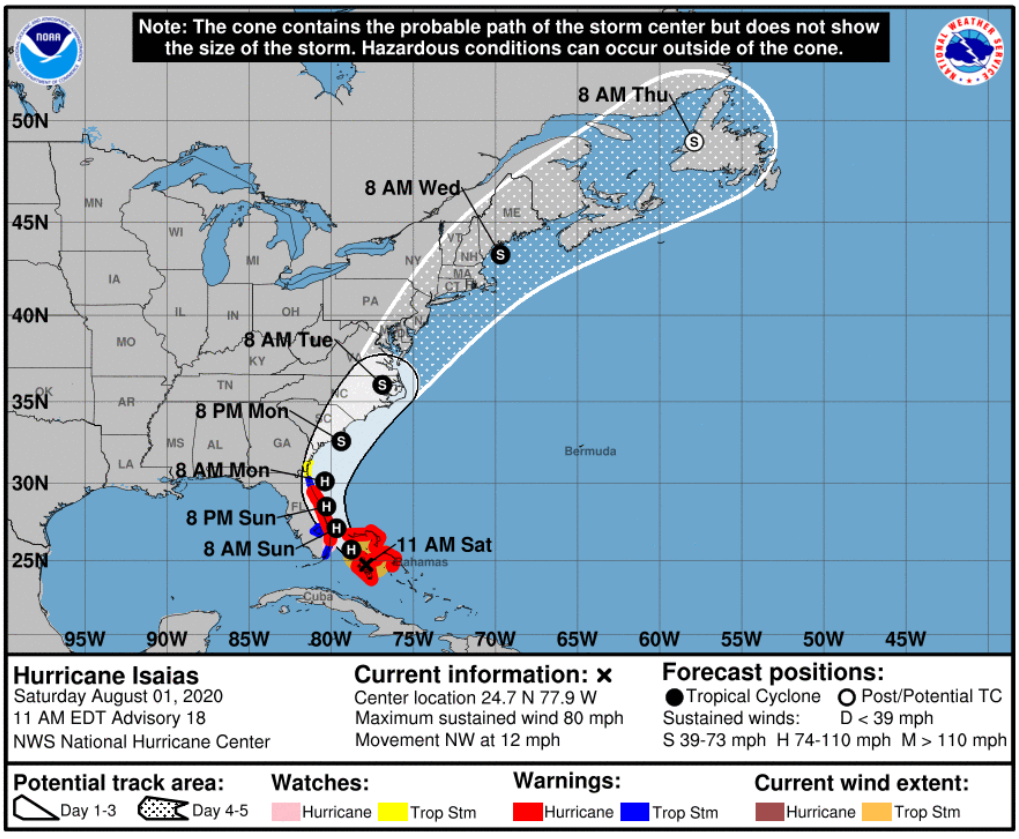
Hurricane

The day starts grey. Not surprising after yesterday's weather. There is more than 50 % chance, and in some places even more than 70 %, that tomorrow's weather will be almost the same as today. Expect today what was yesterday. Maybe today will be a good day to weed the garden?

I get up early again. I never had the tendency to do nothing, but getting early up is quite recent. Calle tells that it is a sign of getting old. Is she right? Delete that Info.

In the morning I keep myself busy with writing two-pagers and searching for a cartoonist for the conference. Whatever I type in Google, I do not find what I am looking for. My searches ending up in graphical storytelling but not in live sketch artists. Yes, sometimes I hit sites of artists who make quick cartoons of attendees but not from discussions, ideas, strange wordings… After some hours of searching, I find three potential candidates and send these an e-mail. Soon, I get a reply. That was fast. The content of the e-mail looks promising. Something to explore further.

There is a tropical storm coming our direction. Normally Hurricane ISAIAS – I pronounced it first as ISIS – would turn into a tropical storm when it hits us. The difference is only the wind speed. In a Tropical Storm (S on the map) the wind speed is between 39 and 73 MPH. I would say a good storm at the Belgian coast. Of course, here the problem is the high number of trees and the flooding.

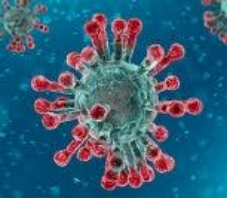


In the afternoon, I go grocery hunting with Seighin. I expect plenty of people collecting food and other stuff in preparation for the storm. On the parking lot there are many cars, but less than expected and inside there is no atmosphere of panic. Some products are out of stock, but not much. We find all we need and are back in record time.

C+139: Another Saturday

My plan to weed after our shopping hit and run does not concretize because soon after our arrival a thunderstorm starts. Stone does not feel at ease and barks from time to time. Does he feel something else is coming? Or does his behavior mean that he feels more at home?

Quarantine day number 139, with a number like that, had all the potential to be a swell day, but unfortunately, it turned out to be just another Saturday.



C+140: Hot Training

Almost late



After the alarm wakes me, I have a look at the time. Oh no, the Sleep Cycle App has gone off at the short limit of the 30 minutes window. Means I have to hurry up to be on time at the training. Luckily, I have planned for such an event, although most of the time the alarm goes off at the beginning of the half-hour window. Everything that could be prepared is ready. A quick breakfast, making coffee and pour it in a thermos. Stone gets in the car without a walk. He does not care and I think he would not want to go for a walk afraid of missing the ride. I will walk with him before we start the training. We are gone at the latest possible moment with the possibility to be on time.

En route, I need to restart Waze. When it tells me that we have reached the destination, I know for sure that we are in the wrong place. It seems that by restarting the route guidance, I must have changed it without noticing it. A safe stop on a parking spot nearby to see what went wrong. Luckily, the right place it not far away. I arrive just in time.

There are not many dogs and that means a short training session but lots of training possibilities for the dogs present. I start to keep a journal to follow up Stone's, and mine, training and to write down lessons identified. I expected him to perform well, but he lacks the drive to do things. Does he not like cheese that much anymore? Or is it too warm to work? The other dogs are also less enthusiastic, so it may be the heat. Anyhow, it is good to observe his attitude when it is hot. Something to keep in mind, if he has to work on a real case in such a temperature.



We do less running. There is an exercise to observe social interaction with the other dogs. Stone has to go first. I have to tie him and disappear out of sight. He starts looking for me. Something he would not have done a few weeks ago. He gives the other dogs no attention. Good. We repeat this for all the dogs. The last dog lunges forward and bites Stone. Now he is even more worried about other dogs. When we do it again, he places me between the other dog and him.

As expected, the training finishes early and I arrive at home around lunch.

Because we did not go on Friday, we drive to the beach. It is still hot, although it is late in the afternoon. The waves are not big, but behave crazy. They coming from the front but

also from behind thanks. Very strange, but great fun. We stay far from other people on the beach, simply because there not ta lot of them around. For a few hours, we forget about corona.

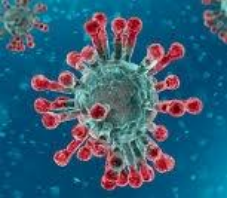




After a few hours, we return home for dinner and Seighin's game.

139

I did receive some e-mails from colleagues about the 139 comment – there was even one who dared to applaud for 138 =;-). 139 is the number of the promotion I entered the Military School. That number becomes and stays special. Do not Google it, because there is surprisingly not much information about it. A situation that needs to be changed. Your year was the most important one, and certainly, all the promotion that came after yours were not worth mentioning. The number of this edition would have been written as 139 + 139/139. You get the idea.



C+141: The Day Before

Preparation

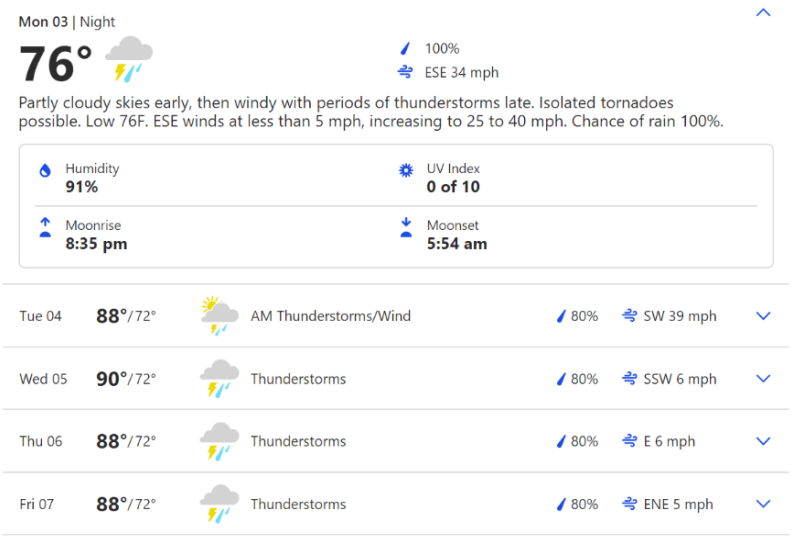
There is energy in the air. You can almost see it and you feel it for sure. The air is hot and humid. Something is going to happen.

Today a short branch meeting. With the branch head and our Norwegian second both on leave, our British colleague leads the meeting this week. He decides that we will all stay home tomorrow because Isaias will hit us tonight and tomorrow. "I do not need a 3 stars level approval for that." I like this style of command. You do not need a command decision for common sense. Is this personal or British officer's?

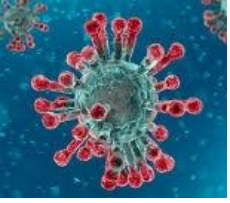
After speakers, I go over the possible workshops now. I have plenty of ideas on those but need to contact some people to find out if they are willing to lead them. Some of the proposed workshops need to be realigned with our intent. In the morning, I have a discussion with an American doctor about her virtual bingo session. I wanted to know how she did it to see if I could use her approach for networking. We end up brainstorming on how we can turn this into an interesting workshop. Late I have a meeting with a colleague on budgeting. How and how much do we pay speakers and workshop leaders? In the afternoon, another meeting on the revision of the online course. It seems I have many plates to hold up and turning.



In the evening, after dinner on the deck, I prepare the place the tropical storm. The table upside down, all the chairs folded and the BBQ secured on the rail. Will it be a hurricane or a storm? I check the forecast and they predict wind speeds up to 39 mph, or a bit less than 60 kmh. This must be a mistake. That is not even a heavy wind. Whatever, everything on the deck is safe.

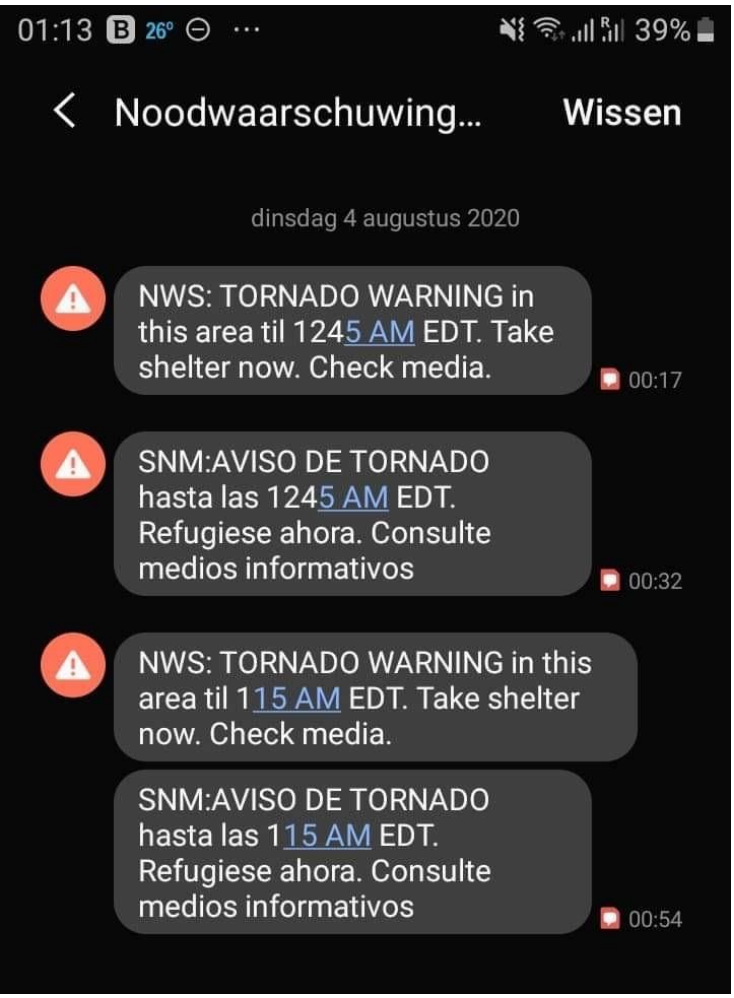


Monday, 03 August 2020



C+142: Storm Night

Tornado Warnings

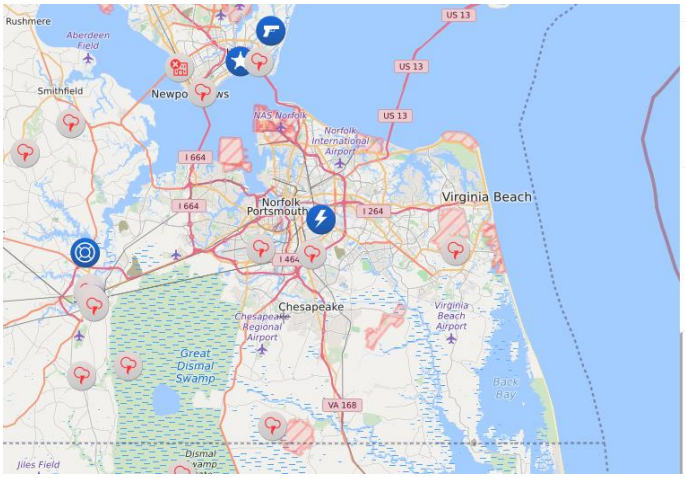


The day starts very early. A little short after midnight, we receive a general alert. A tornado warning by the National Weather Service (NWS). That means that all telephones make an alarming sound with a voice message and that you also receive a text message about the warning. I do not think there is an equivalent system in Belgium.

While a Tornado Watch means you must get ready because tornadoes are possible, a Tornado Warning means: take action! A tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. There is imminent danger to life and property. You have to move to an interior room on the lowest floor of a sturdy building. The tornado may be identified by a forecaster on radar or a trained spotter/law enforcement who is watching the storm.

Our local tornado authority, Ruie, advises to follow up on that alert. So, we move downstairs and prepare or shelter under the stairs. That means emptying the space and checking the lights. Food and water are plenty because of our hiking trips. We do not go into the shelter, because waiting with 5 people and a hairy dog in such a small room is an experience you only want to commit to when absolutely necessary. As it is calm outside, we decide to seek shelter as soon as we hear the wind picking up.

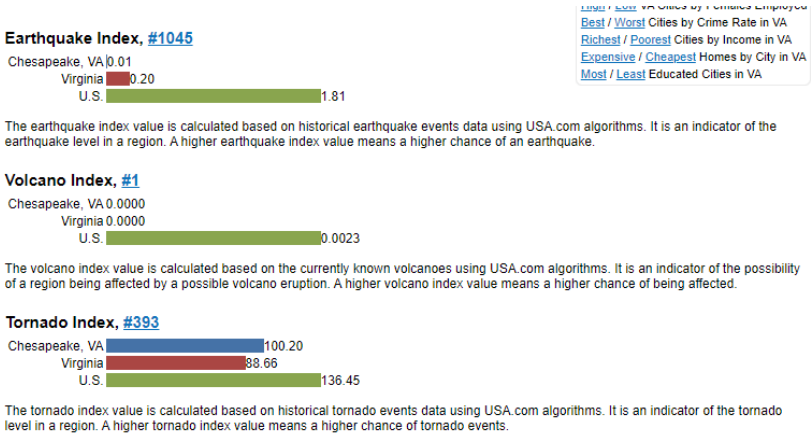
A second warning follows and extends the period of the first. We read that the tornado passes not far from where we are. As long as it does not touch the ground, there will be no severe damage. The only thing we can do is wait. At 0120 a.m. we decide it is safe to go back to bed.



Tuesday, 04 August 2020



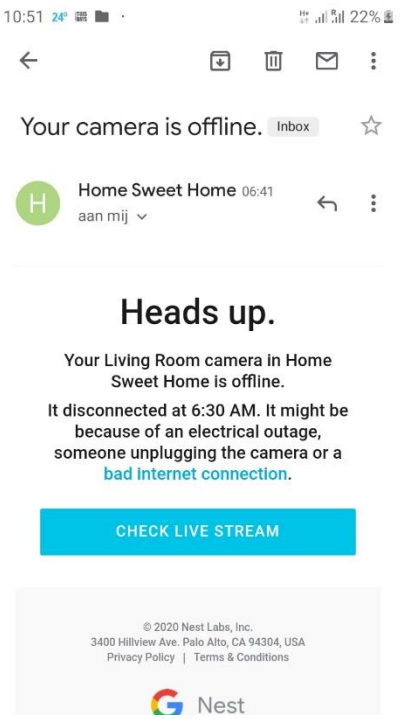
I did not know that thunderstorms have the potential to produce tornadoes. I thought the two weather phenomenon were separate things. It is also the first time I heard about their connection.



But the danger is not over. Around 0400 a.m. we received another alert. Again a tornado warning. We wake up the boys and get everybody downstairs in the living room. Loic lays down on the floor and tries to sleep. The rest is reading or just waiting. Stone, having no clue what is happening, likes the nightly activity. It is a long wait. Just before 0600 a.m., we all go back to bed. Will there be another warning?

Although this night's sleep was not great, I am awake before 0730 a.m. after the power is cut. No electricity. Let's hope that it will be only for a short period. I take Stone for a walk. The neighbors are standing on their porch watching the storm. There is much wind and some, rain, but nothing that I have not seen on the Belgian coast. There are more trees here and that may be an extra risk. I make sure that I watch the trees to make sure that we are not hit by a falling branch. With the debris on the street, it looks like there was some fighting last night. My first thought is to compare it with a battleground, but that would be an exaggeration. I have never seen so much debris in the streets after a storm. The walk goes uneventful.



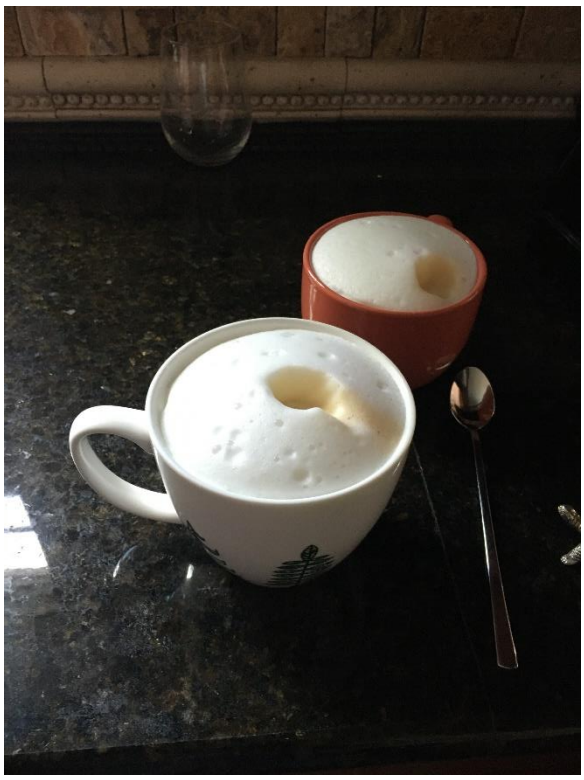


With no electricity, I send a message that I will not attend the branch meeting. I have no Wi-Fi but could call in. However, that would mean draining the battery of my iPhone with no possibility to charge it. Shortly thereafter, the meeting is cancelled because the power outage is widespread.

Most want to preserve as much energy as possible because we do not know how long it will last. I go back to back to bed to catch up on the sleep deficit.

Second time up for breakfast. I heat water on the gas fire. I was afraid that without electricity some safety would block the gas flow but that does not happen. I only have to ignite the gas with a match. When the water is near boiling, I pour it through the filter of the coffee maker. With the IKEA 1 USD tool that Calle uses when travelling, we foam the milk. A nice storm cappuccino. We mentally list up the things we need out of the fridge. When ready, we quickly open the door and take out all we need. The aim is to preserve the cool temperature in the fridge. The freezer we will not open unless necessary or when we think it is getting too hot and we must eat the content.





After breakfast, we walk over to the Pisonis on a beer delivery run. They had a strange night too and on top of that, a tree in their garden has fallen. The branch in another tree is broken and turned a widowmaker. The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration describes widowmakers as "broken off limbs that are hanging freely in the tree to be felled or in the trees close by." Coming from forestry, a widowmaker (or fool killer) is more generally used for a branch that kills by falling unexpectedly on people.

On the garage way of the Pisonis, we find a little bird fallen out of a nest. We see only one solution to safe it and that is putting it in a tree in a spot that it cannot fall out. We continue our second walk of the morning. People are starting to clean up and piling up the debris on the curbside hoping these will soon be picked up. We hear generators humming.



Some houses have back-up generators while others have potable ones standing near the garage. I guess these smaller ones are to provide electricity to some essential equipment like fridges and freezers.

Back in the house, I start warning people that I must postpone today's meetings to tomorrow. I need to conserve electricity in the batteries and the time to clean up the fallen branches in the garden. Around 1100 a.m. I drive to Panera Bread to pick up our weekly Baker's Dozen of bagels. I notice that the traffic lights are working. They must be fed by a separate power line. This makes sense as they are essential. Strange, the light board of the church is also working. Do we have again power, or is that message service from above also essential?

The whole Panera crew is sitting on the terrace. No electricity in the shopping mall and thus no ovens. Our order is ready because they baked these before the power outage.



After lunch, I start cleaning up. Calle has already started with picking up the smaller debris, I go for the bigger ones. It is hot and moist. When Calle, Loic and Ciaran leave for the last shopping trip together, I find a branch with a cicada on it. You do not see those animals very often, although you hear them 'singing' daily.

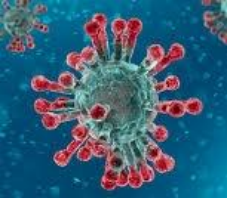
After cleaning up and weeding the garden a bit, I go play with Stone. It is a rough play, but I get better at it. When he wants to stop, I go on because I must be the one deciding when it is done. He reacts surprised, but that is good.

I take a shower – works also without electricity – and starts writing the two-pagers. Around 0400 p.m. things start peeping, meaning power is back. I catch up a bit of the work not done today. Tomorrow, although on leave, I will have to take care of the postponed meetings. After 0600 p.m., Seighin and I suddenly see that we are too late for soccer practice. We take off immediately. I do not want to hassle with keeping Stone out of the garage, so he may come with us. I will not drive back home and so we can go for a walk near the soccer field. The sky does not look like the one yesterday. There is no sign of the storm.



The three shoppers have a great time. Not so sure if my credit card has the same positive experience.





C+143: To Newark

Breakfast

Getting up for a walk in the morning warmth. A meeting with a company specialized in visual notetaking as breakfast. Interesting talk that takes longer than planned. After that, we take two cars to drive to the International House of Pancake (IHOP). A fancy name for a fast-food chain with a focus on the American versions of pancakes and waffles.



Ciaran wanted to have breakfast in that chain before flying back to Belgium. This is our last morning with the three kids together and the ideal moment to do it. There are not a lot of people in the restaurant that has a poster on it windows telling that to have patience because there is a limited crew. Limited still means around 10 persons. Loic and Ciaran are full of energy. We think it is their way to react to their return.

Loic has an interview at 1000 a.m. and leaves early with Seighin. We must wait to pay because yesterday's power cut off caused the electronic payment system to reboot frequently. When after almost half an hour they are not able to get it back online, they propose to do it manually. Unfortunately, the new American credit cards with chips do no longer have elevates card data on it. This means the card data cannot be copied with the old' ironing' system. Luckily, the Belgian chipped card does allow it. It has been a while since the last time we had to pay in that manner.



Although the original plan was for me to drive to work from the IHOP, because Loic had to return home earlier, I first drive back to drop off Calle and Ciaran. Then I head to the HQ to deliver a big suitcase and a computer screen that need to be shipped to Belgium. There I hear that there is a discussion in the Belgian HQ about my request to let Loic fly back from JFK. Normally, being a family member returning to Belgium, he should fly from Norfolk to Brussels. Such ticket costs easily 1500 USD. Because we want to keep it cheap for Ciaran and have the two brothers flying together, we booked a flight for them with Aer Lingus. Price per ticket: 750 USD. The discussion is about paying that ticket back. Even with the toll and cost for gas, it will still be much cheaper. I do not see the problem. Sometimes I have the impression that administration is all about rules and not about paying less. It will again be a paper fight.

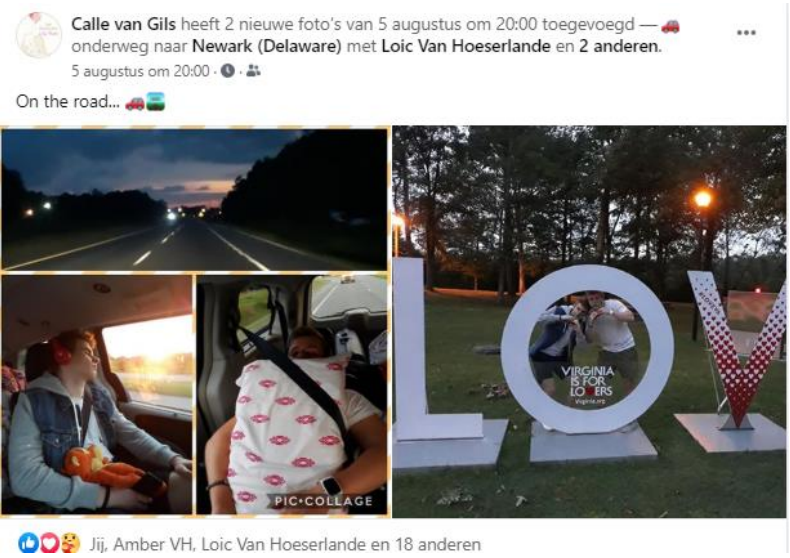


While the boys prepare their luggage and Calle irons their last pieces of clothing, I finish the meetings I have missed yesterday. We have self-made pizzas for early dinner. After cleaning up and doing the dishes, we load the car. A goodbye and some hugs, a last picture on the porch, and we are ready to leave for Newark.

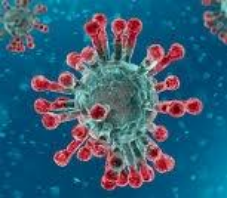
It is an easy drive, although it starts with a traffic jam at the toll plaza of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (CBBT). Suddenly, we drive again as more toll booths are being opened. A few kilometers further we see why there was a traffic jam. A truck is laying on its side blocking the other side. They must have stopped all traffic to evacuate the cars in the tail of the accident. Luckily, the truck is still on the bridge and did not fall off like the one a few years ago.







We have a quick stop at the Virginia Welcome center. Just before 1100 p.m., we arrive at Alex and Mark for the night. It is nice to see them back.



C+143: Loop to JFK

Homemade waffles

As a kind of payment for our stay in the house, Mark and Alex wanted to have Belgian waffles for breakfast. I never backed 'Brusselse' nor 'Luikse' waffles, but I have a recipe for homemade ones. That will do. Loic and Ciaran go to buy some of the ingredients and drop off the computer. Loic has taken that computer and screen from the university when he left because the lab was closed due to corona, and now he has to return it.

Once they are back, I start with baking while Calle prepares fruit salad. Looking at the time, it is more brunch, but that is fine because the only thing to do is driving to JFK and back to Newark. That is what I think, the rest of the family has other plans. They want to visit a TJ Max store for some shopping. Did they not shop enough a few days ago?





Loic can only say goodbye to Alex as Mark, being a social therapist, has plenty of work. Around noon, we leave for JFK, but first a stop for shopping. Loic and Ciaran are making

fun, while Calle is taking shopping seriously. It seems that they are hunting for smaller things like 'happy socks' and underwear. Although Calle and Loic go for some new luggage. We need some new ones, but this is unexpected. Calle buys a huge one – that promises for her next trip to Belgium – and Loic a smaller one. He transfers the content of one in his new suitcase. Next to the TJ Maxx, there is a sports shop selling out. I buy some long sleeve t-shirts that I will use for the K9 training when things are getting a bit colder.

Back on the road. Everything goes smoothly till the two boys, now the driving team, decide to go for some doughnuts in Dunkin' Donuts. They are pressing for the limit of being present at the airport. A few miles before the airport, we have to stop for a huge traffic jam. Luckily we arrive on time at the airport. They step out at the arrival side of the terminal. I take the wheel over and drive to the parking lot. There are more cars parked and inside the terminal, there are more people. The apocalyptic impression of a few months ago is gone. Except for the face masks, things seem more normal.



When I nearing the Aer Lingus desk, they are already checked in. Everything went well. No issues. Loic aims at a quick goodbye. His way to deal with the emotions of leaving for an uncertain period? Will we see each other around Christmas? In the summer?



After the security check, they disappear towards their gate. We head back to the parking for a drive to Newark. Traffic is dense but doable. Calle's mood is a bit grey, now that our two sons are away. We will miss them. They keep us up to date on the flight and all goes well.

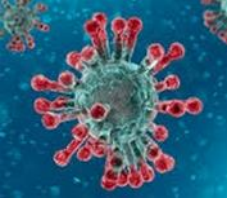

PIC•COLLAGE


I ♥ NY
OVER 38 DAZZLING WATERFALLS
200 MILES OF PRISTINE BEACHES
PLAN
YOUR NEXT VACATION IN

When we arrive in Newark, Alex has a glass of wine ready for us. They have ordered some Italian food. With good food and wine, we have some pleasant talks and a good evening.

Seighin sends a message that it is raining a lot in Chesapeake. He tells us that he cannot take Stone out unless they swim. The picture he sends shows that he is right. We have never seen that much flooding.





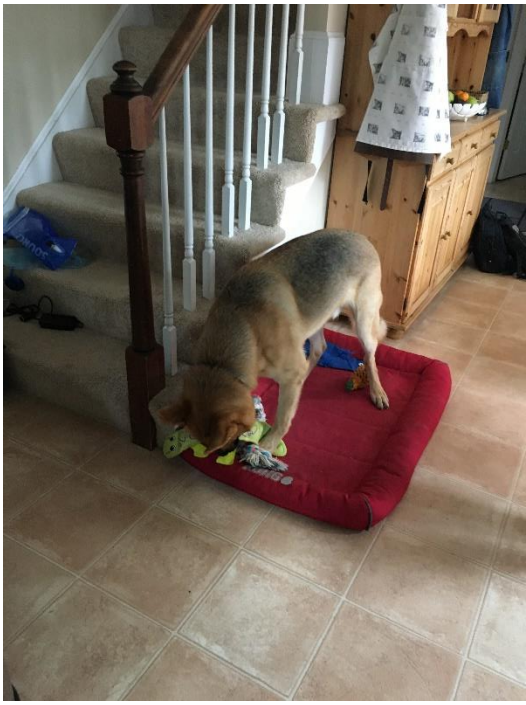
C+145: Drive Back

Belgian Crepes

Another night in their house, another payment. This time I make crepes for breakfast. The thin ones like we make them in Belgium. Not having a good, low pan, I struggle a bit with making them as I want them. The taste is fine, but I cannot get them thin enough.

After a nice breakfast and goodbyes, we leave for our five-hour drive to Chesapeake. The forecast mentions thunderstorms and I want to drive as much as possible before they hit us. No fun driving in bad weather.

Our route is a bit different because Calle selected one through the middle of the peninsula to evade driving along the coast. We have only one stop in Virginia Welcome Center and luckily only nice weather.



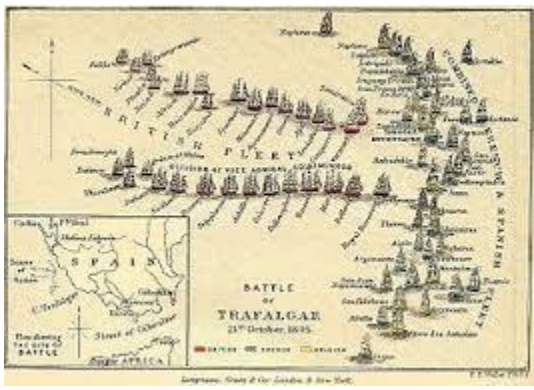
When we nearing home, we see the changes in the weather. It will not be long until it will be bad. Stone greets us. It is strange to be surprised every time I see him after a longer period. Every time he looks blonder than I remember him. Maybe the image of a German shepherd colors my memory? Stone seems happy with his new lizard out of firehose material. We bought the toy in the TJ Maxx in Newark. After 5 minutes, he bites off the first thing; a foot. Soon two other extensions will follow the same faith.

I quickly check my mailbox and see that NASA has decided to provide a speaker for the conference. That is good news but means we must adapt the program. Another idea that may change the program is what I call the 'Nelson tactic'. If we record all the briefings, we can make these available before, during, and after the conference. This means that we only need to program the events that are based on the interaction between speakers and the public. These are Q&A, panel discussion, and workshops. If we would do that, the sequential conference days would be very short. I am not sure if our audience is ready for that.

Friday, 07 August 2020



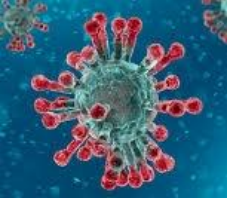




Why do I call it the 'Nelson tactic'? Well, I was wondering what a big change would grant us to talk about a new approach to virtual conferences. Yes, we could record the briefs, but we were still stuck with a series of scheduled events that attendees need to follow. What could be the bigger impact of the possibility to record? For some strange reason, I was thinking about Nelson's tactic to defeat the French at Trafalgar. Traditionally a sea battle would be fought with the two opposing fleets drawing themselves up to form two lines of battle. This tactic did not favor what was perceived to be the faster, more accurate gunnery of the Royal Navy and would often bring about indecisive results, usually with the enemy escaping. Nelson's idea was to quickly bring about a melee in which, due to superior gunnery, the British would have a distinct advantage. Nelson planned to divide his fleet into three sections. The largest part would engage closely with one section of the enemy's fleet crushing it with greater numbers. The other ships, sailing in two columns, would cut the enemy line and prevent them from coming to the aid of their comrades. The enemy fleet could then be destroyed piecemeal. In short, he would break the sequential line of the French. I do not want to create a melee, but I do think about ripping up the linear thought pattern.

We receive a picture of Loic and Ciaran waiting for the train in Zaventem. Their

flight went well. Their temperature was checked in the airport and now they go for a medical appointment for a COVID test to shorten their time in quarantine.

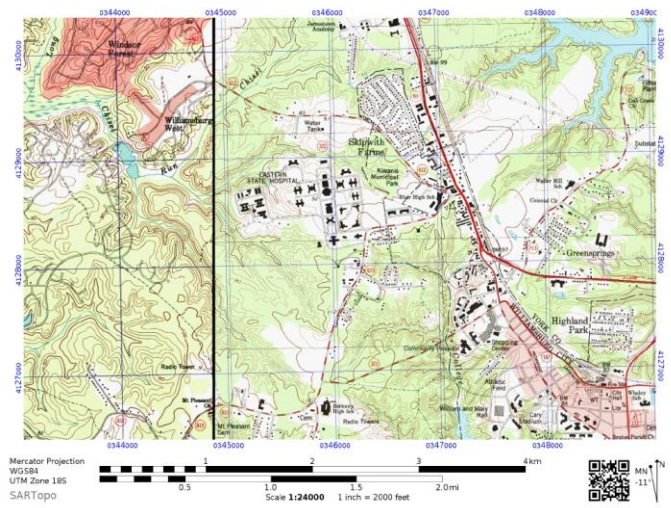


C+146: Land Navigation

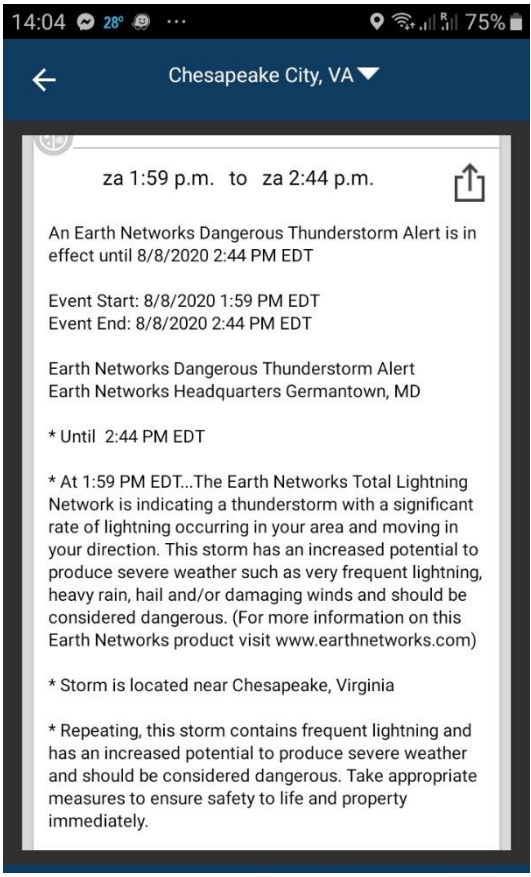
3 Months

Although it is weekend, my alarm wakes me up before 0600 a.m. My day starts with a walk in the dark of dawn. After that, I prepare my equipment. Stone knows something is going to happen and wants to come with me. Unfortunately for him, it is a K9 training without dogs. The handlers need to learn about land navigation. This means, navigation with compass and 60-year-old maps. Breakfast and coffee. The rest of the black liquid disappears in a thermos mug for the road. Everything in the car and on time on the road.

When I arrive a bit before 0800 a.m., there is nobody there. I check my map twice and conclude I am in the right place. Is the training cancelled because of a real search? I get the answering machine of the coordinator. I will wait 20 minutes before deciding to return home. A police officer stops and asks me what I am doing here. She confirms that there was a request for a K9 training today and tells me she will drive around to look for them. Maybe they are parked somewhere else?



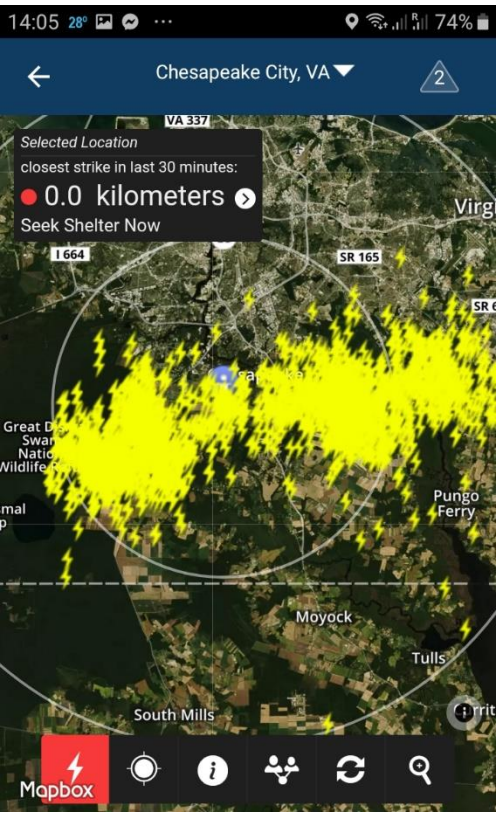
20 minutes later, the first of the team arrives. She had to drive back home and called the coordinator she would be late. The others are caught up in the tail of a heavy accident but are on their way. The training starts late.



First, we go over the basics: what is on a map? Finding the coordinates of a point? Direction and distance between points? Although it has been a long time since I did some land navigation, it comes back quickly. After studying the map, we have a walk in the field to exercise orientation, recognizing terrain features, estimating walked distances… An interesting training, certainly because the old map does not reflect reality.

Because of the heat and the small number of participants, the land navigation training is over around 0100 p.m. The other side of the road is one traffic jam after another, but my lane is fluid. I am back in time for lunch. Stone is happy to see me, dogs are very forgiving, but I am sure he will wonder when we are going to train. It seems I have brought bad weather with me.

Saturday, 08 August 2020



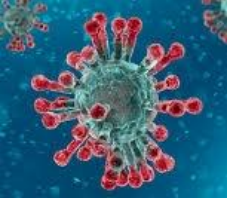
Grey clouds are pushing the sun away. We go walking with the three, oups, four of us before it starts raining. After that, I write a few two-pagers because I have a backlog of a few days. While doing that, the weather turns nasty with a nice light and sound show.

The two boys have already received the result of their COVID test. Both are negative. Not unexpected, but fine to hear it. A positive test would not only have impacted them but also us. No worries now.

Our grand-daughter turns 3 months today, and I have not seen her yet. Seeing her virtually growing up is not the same as in real life, but at least I can see her.







C+147: Sunny Sunday

BBQ

Today, I am awake late. Yesterday evening I felt like I needed some extra sleep and that was confirmed this morning. No harm done. It is Sunday. No grey area between work and home on such a day.

Calle and Seighin, for the second one that is no surprise, are also late up. We decide to go for brunch. After that, I begin writing on the two-pagers. I do not succeed in catching up. I will need to speed it up or dedicate a daily slot. Writing is followed by some administrative work.

The weather is a bit unstable: sunny, rain and sunny again. Calle goes on the deck to read a book in the sun.

With the tests being negative, Loic and Ciaran can leave their quarantine and visit their sister, her boyfriend and niece. Looking at the pictures, they had a great time seeing each other.

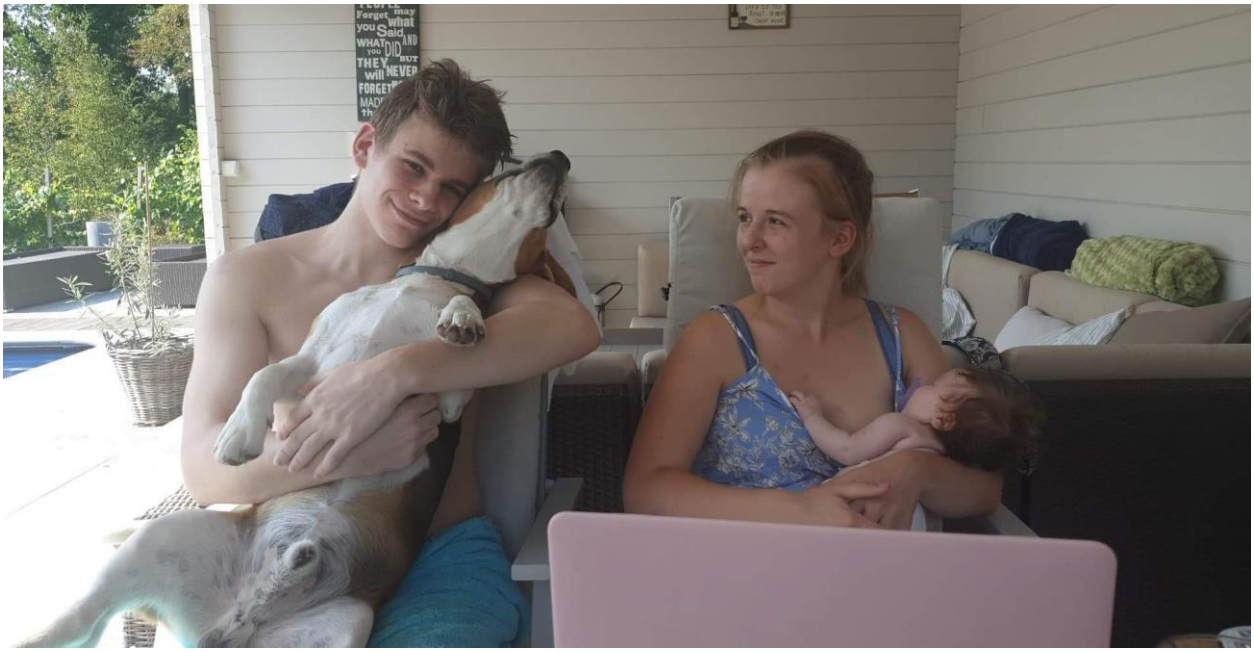




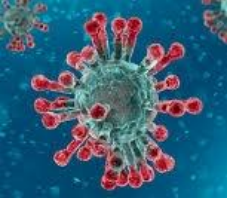
Sunday, 09 August 2020







It stays nice weather in the evening. Nice enough for a BBQ on the deck. I try salmon on a wooden plank and it tastes great!



C+148: No Title

Just a workday at home

Sweating after the morning walk is probably the most exciting thing I can write today. Really nothing happened.

It starts with the normal morning routine. Walk with Stone and a lonely breakfast watching a part of a scientific series on 'Connections' on Netflix. Going through the e-mails and a short branch meeting. After that a short coffee with Calle on the deck and again to work. Preparing the organization for the conference and meeting with my colleagues on how we will proceed. They like my idea of Nelson's tactics. A lunch break and again working.

After my 'work hours', I go for a quick stop to the Aldi for today's dinner. Tomorrow, Calle will go playing tennis and do the weekly bulk buy in the Commissary, so no need to do it today. Back home, I go for a run in the heat. After weeks of inactivity, my pace is a bit low. The heat and the fact that my earplugs gave up did not help my pace either. The run is followed by an evening walk with Calle and Stone. It is a nice evening.

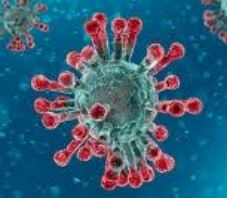


While we have dinner, Seighin is commenting a game. He is getting better at it. Maybe I need to record it and put it online?

I do not know who forwarded the YouTube link https://youtu.be/RpPya2ARgK4. The link leads to a trailer of a fictive movie on the Belgian virologist Van Ranst. It is a nice example of how Belgian use humor to make life bearable.



Monday, 10 August 2020



C+149: Apero at the Beach

Routine

It seems like the new corona normal is settling in. The days flow into each other without something noteworthy taking place. That last fact is from my point of view in front of a keyboard and screen a bad thing. Not that I do nothing or not have interesting times but repeating that I meet different potential speakers and workshop leaders must be a boring lecture. With the two boys back on the other side of the pond, there is less activity in the house, certainly with a teenager following a completely different daily schedule. Anyhow, even with Stone, there is not much deviation in the routine. Routine is a survival tool but is lousy for getting inspiration.

Let us start the day. Calle is up soon too. She will go to play tennis. Her first since long. She has fun getting back into that routine with a visit to the commissary as the topping. A curious fact, I that the spouses' tennis club – I almost wrote ladies' but as two men are playing too that would be a sexist mistake - is only SOPC club active because of the only activity in the open air. They are looking forward to attracting new members from the families arriving this summer.



While Calle is having fun on the tennis court, I work from home. Nothing different from the last week, although it seems that things are moving together in what could be a high moment at the end of this year. However, I want to practice caution to not to jinx the lucky wave I am surfing on. If this accumulation materializes, I will fall in an empty space once it passes but that is something to worry about later.

Calle passes by Panera Bread to pick up our weekly Baker's dozen of bagels. She was not in favor of keeping this routine, but we convinced her that bagels the day after are not that bad. You do not have to eat them all the same day.

After lunch, I continue working while Calle prepares a big salad to take with us to our Belgian friends Lieven and Caroline. They live at the seafront – you can walk from their living into the sea – and the plan is to have an aperitif at the beach and dinner at their home. Rain scuttles that plan. There was no rain in Chesapeake, but Virginia Beach was

hard hit just before we arrive. Unfortunately, there is a dune in the backyard, so we do not even have a view of the sea.

It is our first social evening since long and it feels fine. Anyhow, we are much later than planned back home. A walk with Stone and straight to bed. It will be a short night.

Some corona news



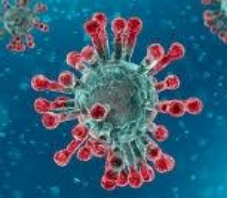
LOOK: Lashes - Massage & More
5 augustus om 14:33 ·

Shit Got Real !!! 😳.. If I can get it.. So do you ⚠️Sunday I went from just a little bit tired..(which working mom of 3 is not?) To more symptoms, fever, cough on Monday morning. We are both home isolated with the girls now..A lot of emotions are coming along with Covid. It's not something u wish for.. Anyone who knows me good knows I did everything I could to keep my family, friends, clients, co workers and myself safe during this whole CoronaTime.
We don't know where Covid hit us or my parents..and we will ever know..-My last few clients got a message from me when I knew I was positive and I am happy to say they tested negative for now. What a relieve! - So YES I am sure a mask and shield are usfull to wear and help to keep coronavirus infection rates from rising again! If u are sick.. get tested!
HOPE TO SEE EVERYONE BACK SOON. (GESLOTEN TOT 16/8) BE SAFE X

The CDC has dropped the requirement for 14 days of quarantine after returning to the United States from all travel abroad. Instead, the general requirement is now to keep a 6-foot distance and follow the usual safety guidelines.

Of course, that does not count for us, military. We still follow the old quarantine rule. A TDY will stay an exception until the end of 2020.

Something that I wanted to publish but forgot to do it. Corona is still a fact of life. Janice, a member of my family in Belgium, has corona and communicated this via Facebook. She did it in English. She did a good job of sketching her situation. "Shit Got Real!"



C+150: Good Morning Office

Verizon

I knew it. A short night. I am early awake for my weekly trip to the HQ. It is a strange feeling. I start considering a visit to the HQ as a waste of time. First the more than 60 minutes of commute. Not the most productive hour of the day. Although I listen to an audiobook, rather a summary of an audiobook, and do some thinking, it is still basically mindless sitting and trying to prevent getting involved in an accident. I do not even have to think about the route to follow, my WAZE tells me where to go with the voice of a boy band singer. The commute is a perfect razor to make the distinction between home and work. There is no fog of work. But that is not a good justification for the loss of 1/24th of a day. Additionally, I have the impression that my most creative thinking happens at home. I must admit, that since I work at home, I did not write a ThinkBox article. Maybe, I am less frustrated when working in the self-imposed confinement of home?

I arrive early at the HQ. The parking lot looks empty. I check the mail and work on the briefing for the next update on the conference to our branch head. The brief goes well. The drive is back. The Nelson tactic is well received and I think we will go that way. I still not grasp the full impact of the idea, but it is going in the right direction.

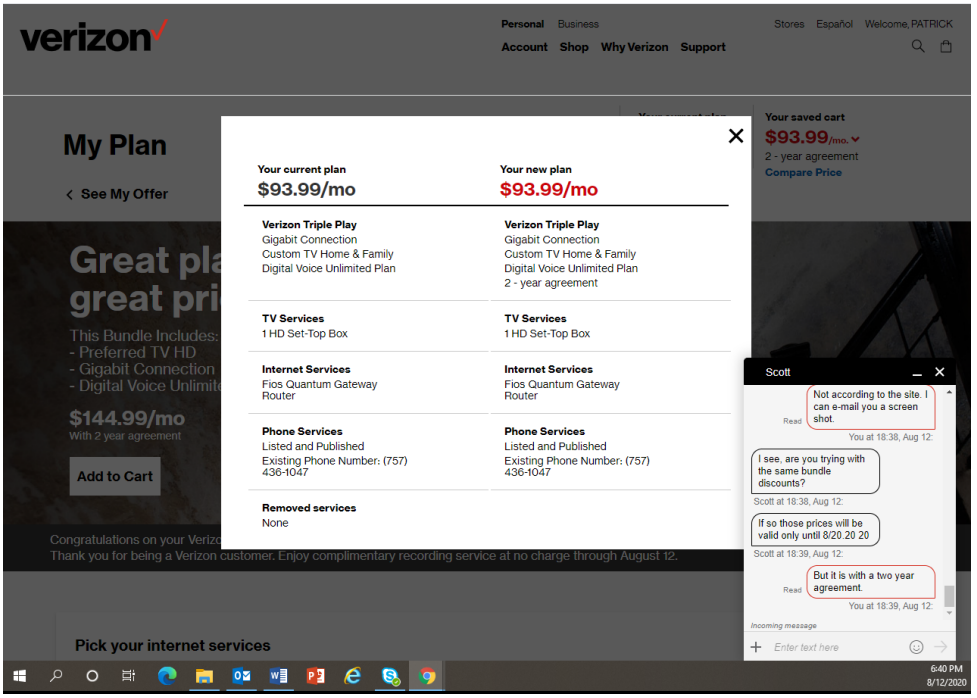
After giving and wrapping up the brief, I spend some time on planning the next course and revising the handbook. I also start the paperwork to get our money back for Loic's travel. I am always surprised by the number of documents you have to collect and fill out to make a 'profit' for an administration.

I am back home for lunch. This morning Seighin had his first job interview. He wants to work as a student and was looking to work as a barista in Starbucks. After sending his application, he did not receive any news. He is picky about where he wants to work: no fast food, no store… I propose him to have a look at Panera Bread. "But, I never say a high school student working there." Well, if you do not try, you do not know. He did and the same day they called him for an interview appointment. His first interview went very well. The second step is a chat with the café manager.

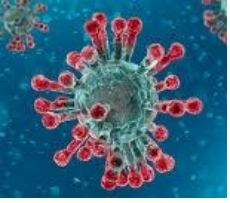
In the early evening, I surf to the site of Verizon, our internet and TV provider. Our current contract ends this month and we have to decide if we switch provider, a decision that frequently is the best and cheapest option, or stay with Verizon. In their letter, they propose a contract of 150 USD a month, about 55 USD more than what we pay now. Their website confirms this. I think that I can reduce the cost by getting rid of the landline. However, I do not find out how to do that. Convinced that it is an easy question, I go for the live chat. The AI – a lousy one – controlled Autobot quite quickly forwards me to a live agent. Scott makes me a price of 180 USD. Okay, that is without military discount and without tax. While he is looking things up – I think he is handling multiple clients – I continue to push buttons. Suddenly, the site proposes a contract of 93.99 USD. The same

as we have now. I mention that to Scott and he replies that that is not possible. He keeps repeating this line, even when I propose to send him a screenshot. He looks for a better deal.

I compare the old with the new contract and see no difference. Curious. If their site keeps offering me this deal, why would I not accept? I press 'print screen' and save the picture. I hit the checkout button expecting a crash or a reset of the costs. No, the same low price. I press 'print screen' and save the picture. "Engage!" And yeah, a confirmation mail for 93.99 USD per month is on its way. It is official. Curious about how they will react on that, but I think I have hauled in my catch.



May I call it a productive day?



C+151: A Bug's Life

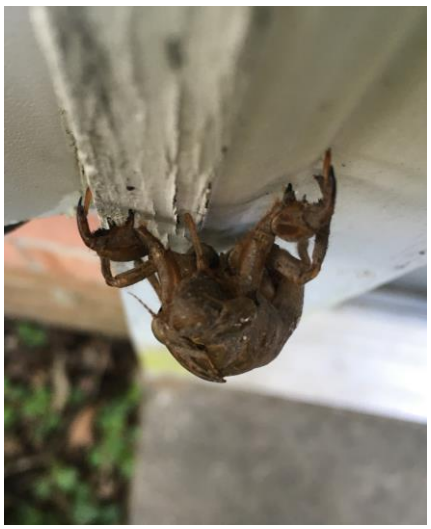
Second interview

Calle is again up early, but not before me. She heads of shortly after I am back from the morning walk with Stone. Tennis, although they forecast rain. But the value of a forecast is nothing if what you see outside your window does not confirm it. Accepting the risk that a window forecaster may be inferior to a model run by a supercomputer, she drives to Little Creek for smashing balls.

I fire up my computer and to my surprise, there are no new e-mails. Cannot be. Oh, I see. The network is down. I start a message traffic on WhatsApp. There will be no branch meeting because without network the few in the HQ are cut off from the rest of the world. The branch head will contact the persons he needs to talk to. I am one of them. There is a potential tasking out. False alarm, we have minimal interference with the new task.

My work is juggling with different tasks and document while jumping form one ad hoc meeting to another. I thought I would have a slow day with no meetings planned and a downed network. Well, this is clearly not the case.

After lunch, I drive Seighin to his second interview for a student job in Panera Bread. After 10 minutes he is back. I have barely finished my decaffeinated coffee. He is accepted. Good news for him. Congratulations. But not so good for me. No, I do not mind driving him to his job. There is again some administration to be done before he can start. As a dependent of a Belgian military, he is allowed to work in the USA, but I need to fill out the necessary paperwork. And administration is never as simple as you think at the start.

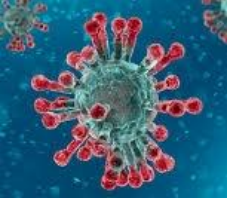




When Calle and I, and Stone for the matter, return form our evening walk, we discover a strange bug clamped to the outer frame of the garage door. We have no idea what it is. The internet does not provide an answer either.



In the evening, we go for dinner on the deck. When Seighin goes back into the house to play a game, I see a bug eating a grasshopper. When we shine some light on the meat-eating bug, we identify it as a cockroach. I did not know that they eat insects.



C+152: Meeting Morning

Skype for Business

Friday is a traditional meeting day. In NASA they reserve this day for external meetings meaning that all employees have to refrain from planning internal meetings and focus on external contacts. Normally, people plan the internal ones and leave the external one to chance. Anyhow, thanks to that rule I will have a meeting with the NASA speaker today, but first our daily branch virtual get-together.

The branch meeting does not provide much information. The usual 'nothing to report' most of the time, and of course the 'have a nice weekend', although we still have a day of work ahead of us.

The second it the NASA one. I open the meeting sooner just in case the other side is soon too so that we can start early. That is indeed the case, but his colleague has troubles getting in. He has an iMac and that may explain why he cannot get in. We start chatting about living in the USA and, when we assess that number three will not join us, tackle the conference. It is a very good meeting that goes very smooth. The other side is a deputy director in NASA I thought it would be a more formal talk. When I explain the Nelson tactics, he knows I am talking about Trafalgar and tells me they did a similar approach, although he confesses they copied from somebody else. I am a bit disappointed because that means it is not new. The good news is that he found it a very good approach and tells that the live part was very lively. Attendees were more involved and active because they had the time to have a good look at the videos. Skipping boring parts, replaying interesting parts. If NASA did it, why not we? I end up with an offer for two speeches for our conference for zero USD. Now I have to find a slot for brief number two.

The next meeting is about getting a virtual operations center. Although we will go virtual for the conference, we decided we need an in-person operations center. Without direct communication, it might be hard to act during a crisis and it will be of no use if the internet connections are broken, as we experience occasionally. We also need a simple studio with a green screen for our live activities or to stream an urgent message. We prefer to have such a center in our HQ as that would be good publicity, but our IT-department is not that forthcoming. We are looking for other options in case we get a 'no' from them. One option is to pay a defense contractor to provide that to us. The meeting is to discuss our requirements and see if they could deliver that service to us. It is not our preferred choice, but better explore all possibilities.

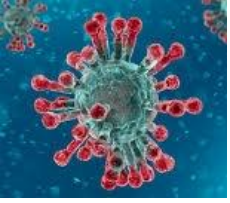
Next is a chat with the coordinators to get some US Navy reservists in support. They are very willing to send us some reservists to enhance our workforce. I stress that we are not only looking for people to do 'general' tasks but that it would be most beneficial f they could find some reservists with media experience. As these people have civilian day jobs, it

could be that some are working in media-related companies or have that as a hobby. Getting access to these skills would be very helpful.

The dive manager of the VA aquarium sends an e-mail telling that all volunteer diving operations are cancelled till Jan 21. Not the kind of news I was hoping for, but I understand their concern. However, that means no diving this year. That will be hard.

After lunch, I clean up my e-mail box, make some appointments for next week, work on the contractual documents for the game… and call it a day around 0400 p.m. It is time to start the weekend. It is going to be a busy weekend, but this evening we are going to continue our quest through Middle-earth.





C+153: Mother's Day

Expecting





You may be surprised by today's title. Am I wrong? Normally, in Belgium, Mother's Day ("Moederdag" or "Moederkesdag") is celebrated on the second Sunday of May, like most countries. According to the English version of Wikipedia, in the week before children make little presents at primary school, which they give to their mothers in the early morning of Mother's Day. Hey kids, please skip the next sentence because this is 'fake' information. Typically, the father will buy croissants and other sweet bread and pastries and bring these to the mother while she is still in bed – the beginning of a day of pampering for the mother.

There are also Belgian people celebrating Mother's Day on 15 August; these are mostly people around Antwerp, who consider that day (Assumption) the classical Mother's Day and the observance in May an invention for commercial reasons. It was originally established on that day as the result of a campaign by Frans Van Kuyck, a painter and Alderman from Antwerp. Calle being from the Antwerp province, we celebrate Mother's Day today.

For your information, the only other country where the celebrate mother today is Costa Rica.

15 August (Assumption of Mary)		Antwerp (Belgium) Costa Rica

Against the above-mentioned tradition, Seighin, although with a bit of my assistance, prepares breakfast for Calle. Not in bed, but on the deck as she likes sitting outside and enjoy the weather and the song of the cicadae.

Saturday, 15 August 2020

Talking about these insects. Do you remember the picture of the insect, it had six legs, that I published on Thursday? I asked if somebody know what bug it was. We had a hunch that it was a kind of cocoon or nymph, but we were not sure. I googled to find a site with the ability to search an insect based on a picture. Insectasylum.com seemed to be the best one and I posted my picture. Today, they, although I think it is some kind of artificial intelligence behind it, e-mailed me that it is a cicada nymph.



Van: **Bug ID at INSECTASYLUM** <bugs@insectasylum.net>
Date: za 15 aug. 2020 om 12:20
Subject: Insect ID: cicada nymph

It's always a good idea to get a second opinion. We do not offer medical, veterinary or pest control advice.
Best wishes!



Soon, we will find an empty shell and the cicada will be gone. Hopefully, that transformation will be finished before they start cleaning the house.

Our breakfast includes fresh orange juice, a salad of seven fruits, cappuccino, turkey bacon and eggs, toast, yoghurt… a very big choice. It is a nice meal and with our kids in Belgium joining us via Messenger, it is a family activity. It is Amber's first Mother's Day and that is something special.

Later Calle Skypes with her mother while I enjoy the warmth of the sun hidden behind a light grey curtain of clouds. After that, we relax on the deck until it is too hot to be enjoyable.



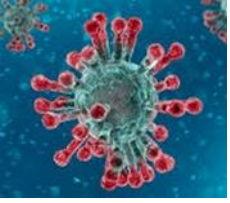
Her third virtual meeting is with her sister. Lore, the niece, is halfway her pregnancy. Yes, I write many things in this two-pager, but some news I have to withhold on request. This was such a request, but now the news is out.

The rest of the day is a quiet and relaxing one. We skip lunch after our big breakfast. I prepare dinner. I try out a new recipe for a cold summer pasta salad.

Between 0230 and 0300 p.m., I prepare and load the things I need for the K9 night training. Stone feels that something is going on and takes post in the strategic place before the garage door. We will leave Calle alone this evening, but she will get some kind of compensation tomorrow. On the way to Sandy Point National Forest, a two-hour drive, the weather is bad. Lots of rain. But the biggest problem is the driving style of the other people on the road and the use of four flashers even when speeding or changing direction.

When I arrive, I am not the last one being late. Luckily, it is no training in the training area, although we get some rain later. This evening we are working on increasing Stone's enthusiasm for the 'hunt'. Again, when there is an issue with the dog, it is mostly the handler to blame. In this case, I am the one tempering his spirit unintentionally. After getting instructed on how to act, it goes much better. There is still some work to do, but I know how to do that. Something to write down in my K9 training journal.

The drive back is not that bad. Fewer cars and the rainfall is not as bad. After unloading, a walk with Stone, and a shower, it is after midnight when I hit the sack.



C+154: Mother's Day Two

Fancy

As Seighin had a game yesterday and I was on a K9 night training, we felt some obligation to make things even. I had made a reservation in 'Le Yaca' in Virginia Beach. This is one of the better restaurant, French for that matter, and during lunch the price is acceptable. Calle likes eating there and they recently reopened under COVID19 conditions.

A small breakfast to start the day after the daily walk with Stone. A bit of writing. I still have a backlog in the two-pagers and some articles I need to revise. Somehow I am not able to catch up on that and I do not even talk about new articles. Is the grey zone eating up time for personal projects?

Picking the right clothes and getting dressed up. We still have the habit to dress smart when going to a real restaurant. Seighin is up late and is barely on time. Luckily, I have taken enough spare time when setting the time to leave. Calle does not know where to we are heading, but the options are not that plentiful.



In the restaurant, we notice that the great majority of the customers are dressed for the occasion too. Nice. I see only one person in shorts and t-shirt, and they are sitting near the bar. The waiters are wearing masks, the tables far apart and only half of them are available for customers. We are getting a nice place.

Sunday, 16 August 2020

After a run through the menu, we opt for the brunch of 4 plates. The meal is nice and Seighin seems to enjoy it too. There is no rush. Just the way we like it.



After two hours, we are out again and drive home. The rest of the Sunday is easygoing like a weekend day should be.

I take a bit of time to write a review.

"The brunch menu was great and at the right price. Enough choice to everybody's taste and all dishes were served at perfection. This is a culinary experience you may not miss." Not soon after it, I receive a reply from the restaurant owner.

Le Yaca - Virginia Beach sent you a private response

Thank you very much for sharing your experience and visiting us during this difficult time, we are glad to know that your Brunch was great and you had a good time! We will make sure to let our team know about it, thank you, we hope to see you again! Cecile

Reply

Please don't reply directly to this email, as it won't get delivered to our inbox—use the button above.

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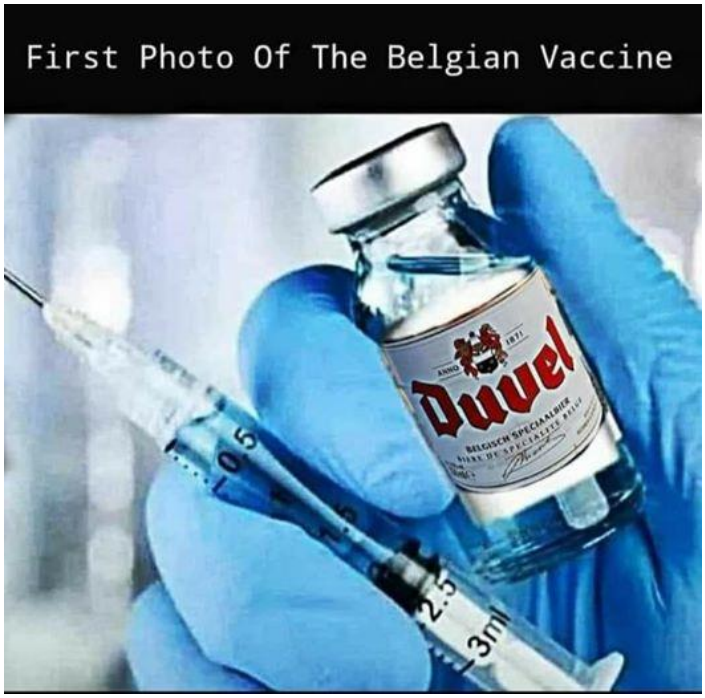
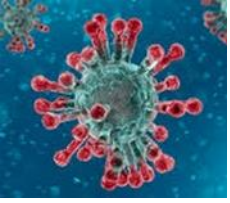
To report this response, forward to reviews@opentable.com.
OpenTable processes messages sent through it in accordance with its privacy policy.

In the Facebook group of the Belgians in the USA, there is a joke about the Belgian vaccine. I kind of like it.





C+155: A Foggy Start

Not as planned

No damp on the windows. When it is hot, there is condensation water on the interior side of the windows because of the temperature difference between the outside and the air-conditioned inside. What is making my sight from the bathroom foggy? Oh, fog? Long time no see. Luckily, I do not have to commute to the HQ. Driving is strange on normal days, risky under rainy conditions, and dangerous in fog. Road safety is one advantage of working at home.

What promised to be a calm day at work/home, turns into a series of meetings. At first glance, it is strange that working at home needs that many meetings. But as get up and walk to your colleague is transferred in a virtual meeting, it is no wonder that there is a multiplication of meetings when you are involved in a project demanding coordination. Still, virtual do still not match in-person meetings. Something is missing, an interpersonal dimension that cannot, yet, be transmitted over the net. Anyhow, this is not a calm day and the work I have planned flushes down the drain.



Stone goes outside during a Skype session with Ciaran about his first exam old style. Ciaran is positive about the outcome. Let us hope he repeats his flawless parkour of June. While we chat over Skype, Stone thinks he deserves a nice place to rest and claim the deck sofa. Am I not allowed to lay in this?

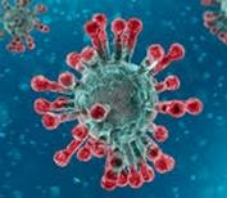
After Ciaran, it is the turn of Amber, Sander, and of course Lily-Rose to Skype with us. Do not get me wrong. Virtual meetings and other online possibilities are great tools. It would be harder without these modern possibilities. But watching videos of your granddaughter growing up is only a surrogate for the real stuff.

The rest of the day is a non-event. I start missing the running, but for some odd reason, I do not get to it. Feeling too tired, some neck and back pain from working on the computer, and it is still too hot outside to enjoy a light trot.

In the Facebook group of Belgians in the USA, somebody posted an old picture of the Atomium under construction. It is the first time I see such a picture and it is a strange sight. Somehow it does me think on some old, apocalyptic sci-fi movie. But that may be my imagination going wild.

Monday, 17 August 2020





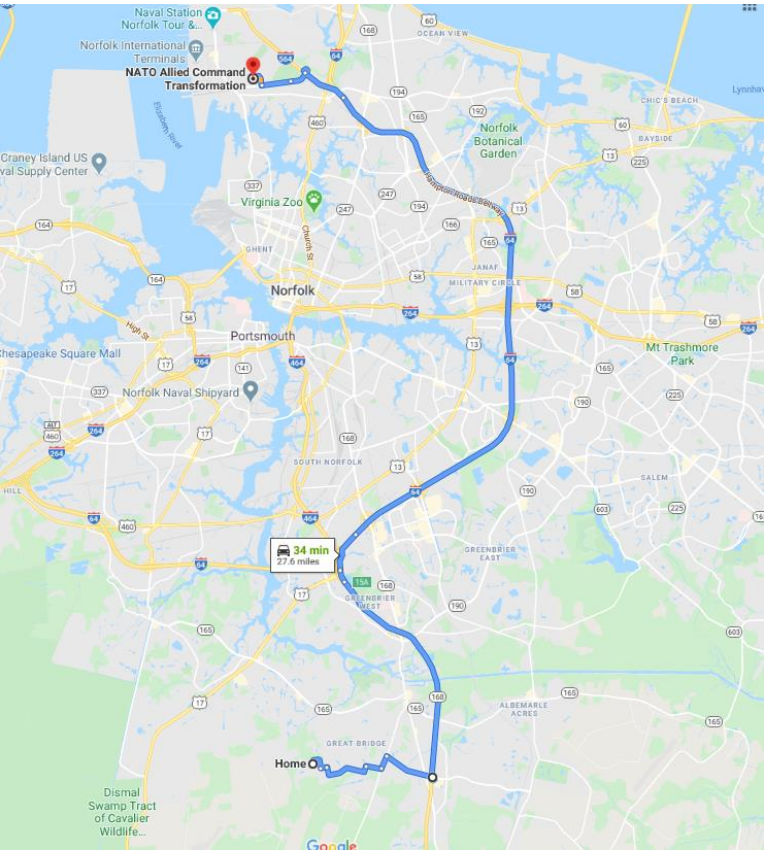
C+156: Walk in the HQ

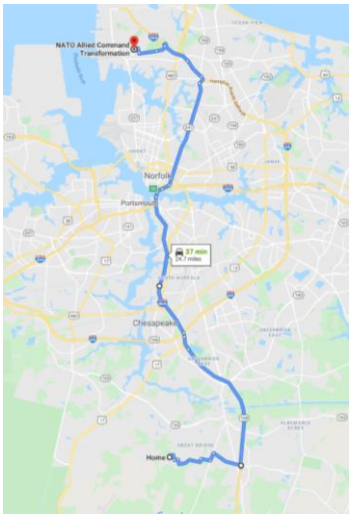
Walking

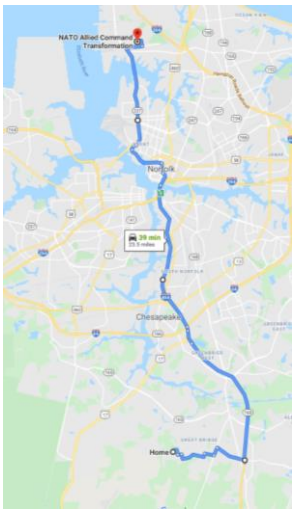
It is not my weekly HQ visit day, but I have to work in the HQ. I have several in-person meetings, the virtual fatigue is slowly kicking in, and we need to bring our Norwegian colleague up to speed after his three weeks of leave. So, up early and enjoying a solo breakfast.

After that, a walk with Stone in uniform in the neighborhood. After his daily combing routine, he walks up the stairs into the house. He does not insist on coming with me, although he must see that I am in uniform. Is he getting used that when I go working, he may not come with me? Even when he insists. Is he that smart to have picked that up in such a short time? We will see it tomorrow.

The traffic on the I-64 is dense. Maybe a good time to sketch my commute routes to the HQ? When all goes well, most of the time, it is a 28 miles drive and takes about 35 min. Pain points are the switch from the VA168 Expressway to the I-64 Highway, and the I-64 to Terminal Boulevard ate the end. If things go bad, I have two option: continue on the VA168 towards the I-464 to Norfolk, a few minutes more but with more lane changes, and through Norfolk, also a bit longer but through a city.







I put my laptop in its cradle and start up the two systems. Prepare my coffee for the day and start working. That is going to be difficult because I forgot my glasses at home. No detail work today. Luckily, it is a morning full of meetings and I go home for lunch.

Tuesday, 18 August 2020

The branch meeting via Skype does not go well. Most of us are kicked out of the system and having a hard time to connect. The IT-system will not sabotage my next meetings. My colleagues and I walk downstairs for face-to-face meetings.

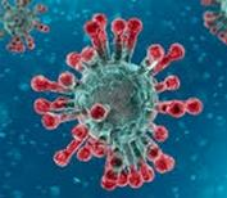
Our first visit is to the HQ's green room. I thought we had a studio and a green room, but they are the same thing. One mystery solved. We talk about what is possible and how long things take to make. The sky is the limit, but do we need to reach for the highest level?

Next is a chat about lessons identified. Our counterpart organized one of the first virtual conferences in the HQ. However, it was a simple version. Nevertheless, he has some valuable lessons to share. Ideas we can implement.

After those two meetings, our task is to bring our Norwegian colleague, who is the conference lead, up to speed. The approach has changed during his three weeks of leave. We sometimes must explain to him that what was decided earlier does not count anymore. He is quickly back on track.

Back home after lunch, I work on the briefings for the coming days. We have to brief our admiral to get an official go.

Although there is a K9 training today, we do not attend. I feel too tired and tomorrow it will be an early day. I need to go to the HQ again. Thursday too. That will make three days in a row. That is something that did not happen since long. After Seighin's soccer training, we enjoy dinner. Getting to bed early.



C+157: Frustration

Do we ever learn?

Day two in the HQ. The main reason, besides it is my weekly 'be present in your cubicle' day, is the preparation of tomorrow's briefing of our admiral to get his 'go' for our plan for the conference.

But first, no branch meeting for me, I have to attend a meeting about the innovation initiative of the HQ. Innovation is the current buzz word and the vacuum for people doing things. Do not ask me what things, because I do not have a good view of that. Not that surprising because I do not follow-up the work of all in this HQ. However, the innovation initiative has attracted a German one-star general as the champion. His team is already working on it for a few months, thus, as naïve as I am, I expect to see a sound plan to make it all happen.

That was not the case. It is a frustrating meeting for me and with more than 30 people attending, most of them online, I assessed it is not the place to make a statement. The approach follows the standard unimaginative plan when somebody is tasked to start a new way of working with an underlining culture change and assessed very interesting by the high brass. I have seen this implemented 5 or 6 times and failed as much. What are the big steps?

Step one: make an inventory of all the current projects you can put the label 'Innovative' on (in this case, but you can do this for any initiative). Make sure you are broad enough with your criteria or better do not have criteria. Be as inclusive as possible. Once staff people sense that you need to have that new label attached to your project to be visible, they will happily present their project in such a way that it will become part of the inventory. Of course, once you have a bunch of projects than somebody will suggest to streamline them, get rid of duplication whatever that might be, make a master plan to match the priorities… Tasks enough to keep you and a whole team busy for months. Tasks that are hard to be against because they all make sense.

Unfortunately, by collecting current projects you start diluting the new approach. If most projects are 'innovative', what is the new thing then? Why do we need to change? If their project is 'innovative', why is mine not? Also, innovation is much more than a collection of innovative projects. As far as I know, an inventory has never produced an output, so all that work is just overhead.

Step two: write a communication plan. You have to tell how good you are to the rest of the world. Your new approach will change the world and everybody needs to know it. Your huge inventory of new approach projects is the perfect proof of that. Shine up the armor. This is a success and everybody has to spread the good news.

Wednesday, 19 August 2020

Step three: send out the troops. Make some people specialist, apostles that must preach the new religion. Do not bother about telling what the principles are, they will learn it by studying the projects. There may be no doubt as to the effectiveness of the approach.

So, innovation in this HQ starts with all the signs of every previously failed approach. The staff will keep on doing their daily work, keeping up the appearance till the high brass are gone and the new group comes with another approach.

Every cloud has a silver lining. This frustrating experience too. I have observed a decrease in my creativity during the last months. No new articles, no new stories, no ThinkBoxes… surely signs of fewer creativity impulses in my brain. That might be the unconscious reason why I jumped at the challenge of the virtual conference. Anyhow, now I have inspiration for at least two ThinkBox articles. Could my creativity find its origin in frustration at work, in the gap between what I expect and what I observe?

The pre-brief meeting with the branch head ends up in a bit of frustration. This time the frustration is positive, that is with meaning. We had prepared a briefing that I am giving like we always do following the presentation rules. One slide per idea with a few words. We hide the slides with extra Info in case there is a question that needs further details to explain. Of course, that results in higher slide numbers. Too many according to the branch head. I have never briefed the admiral, so I have no idea what he wants. The brief is for him and we have to adapt. If he wants less, we will do it, but why was that not told before?

Together with my German colleague, we reduce the number of slides and delete the slide number so the hidden slides are not adding up. Compressing more would mean deleting important information. In the afternoon, our Norwegian colleague writes to us that he has reduced the number even more. When I look at the result, I see that he has cramped all the information on a limited number of slides. It reminds me of a story many years ago when a colonel, the boss of the Air Force audit team, told his auditors that the audit report of a unit was too thick. He did that while smacking the thick book on his desk. Did somebody had a suggestion on how to reduce the number of pages? Silence. After a few minutes, an NCO raises his hand. "Yes?" "If we print recto-verso, the audit report will be half the current size."

I do not make sense to me, but if the admiral wants it that way, he will get it.

After that meeting, we have an interesting talk about directing a virtual conference. My contact in our Strategic Communication department wants to help us by directing the live part of the conference. A helping hand we do not refuse, because that is one area where we have no experience.

Before I head back home for lunch, I work on the travel order for Loic. It is the first time that I must fill out a travel order for a civilian who is not part of Defense. A strange

thing to do, but if that is what it takes to get my money back. Ronny from our Belgian office passes by and takes the document to send it to Belgium.

Back home, I send a quick mail to the Military Assistant of the 'Innovation' general telling him about my frustrating meeting. In a virtual chat, he tries to convince me that that is the way forward, but I do not even listen. I know they are trying to do good, but they lack the experience to know that it is not the right way.

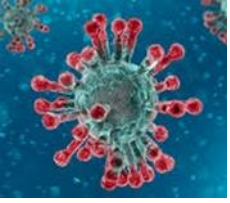
News



No news on corona, but two articles that I want to share. The first is light news posted on Facebook about two dogs from a Belgian breeder that have taken an oath to become police dogs. Can you guess what these animals have to swear on?



The virtual journal 'Defense One' published an interesting opinion article under the title "Six Scenarios for Military Intervention After January 20 - We have to be able to talk about the military's political influence" (https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/08/six-scenarios-military-intervention-after-january-20/167777/). It is a strange article in a chain of discussions about the possible aftermaths of presidential elections. It follows a war game line of thought, but that is not the most interesting part of the article. I find the arguments of the military being apolitical much more thought-provoking.



C+158: Go

The briefing

Day number three in the HQ. A new record since the beginning of this two-pager series. Not sure if that is something to be proud of. But here I am after an early morning routine and a temperature check – always a bit scary-, back in my cubicle. Still no important emails in my classified inbox.

After the branch meeting, I have a meeting with the Naval Mine Warfare Center of Excellence in Oostende, Belgium. We agreed on an update meeting to be held yesterday, but I had to push it today because Wednesday was just too busy. The update turns into a full comment session on the concept. I let them ventilate their concerns acknowledging these without reacting. I want to read what they have before I say something. Last time, there was much wind but the sea stayed calm. I have the impression that it is again something of the same. In that case, it is wise to read their comments first and react later. Anyhow, we are again on track.

Next it the briefing on the proposal for the conference to our admiral. He is in a decision mode and asks me what and how I want it. Well, that is an easy question. He approves our proposal and gives us his 'go'. He says that he enjoyed the lunch with the speakers in Madrid and asks if we can organize something similar. A challenge, but with UberEATS and similar services, we should be able to organize that. He volunteers to record an opening speech on the importance of concept development and experimentation. I see an opportunity and ask him to make that recording early as we could use that as the first video that we will put online and as an incentive to attend the conference. Now we need to make it happen.

After making sure we have all understood the same message and agreeing on the next steps, we close the internal meeting after the briefing. Back to Chesapeake.

Late afternoon, Seighin and I drive to the hairdresser for a haircut. My first since months. I would use the trimmer, but Ciaran has taken it with him to Belgium. I propose the lady that Seighin comes after me. Because we are family, there is no need to disinfect the entire booth. She refuses telling me they have to disinfect the booth anyhow, even between family members. Okay, no discussion.

A quick stop at the Neighborhood Walmart for a pizza for Seighin. He will need dinner while we are away hiking. There is now a freezer section with organic pizzas. That is new. We discover something else too: breakfast and dessert pizzas. How crazy can it be? I think that could start a protest movement in Italy.

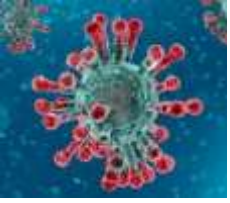




We pick up a DVD from the Red Box next to the store. This evening is a film night. We pick the title 'Stuber'. A movie about a police officer using an Uber to solve a crime. Not intellectually challenging, just simple entertainment.



I check the weather forecast for Shenandoah. It is a little bit better, but still not that good. If it stays that way, it will be a difficult call. Before powering down my computer, I discover that the two-pager I want to send out today is not ready. That is a surprise because the next two are written. My mistake. It is too late to write the missing one. Sorry, my readers will have no mail to read tomorrow morning.



C+159: Shenandoah, or Not?

The decision



One of the first things I check this morning is the weather forecast for Shenandoah. It is looking good, well better than yesterday. Of course, the Shenandoah National Park is a ridge of about 100 miles long and the nearest weather station is 30 miles away. This makes it hard to find the right weather forecast. It is more reading a collection of different bulletins trying to figure out what it will be. Continuously raining during the day is a no-go as being wet is not a hiker's dream scenario. Rain at night or local, short showers are no issue.

I have a day of leave and take it calmly. We have breakfast on the deck after the morning walk. It is already hot even without the sun. The first task of the day is to write the missing two-pager and send it. Back on track. While it is traversing the ocean, I drive to Lowe's for some small things I need for repairs. I do not find a thing I need. Strange.

Around noon it is decision time. We have a small conference call with the four, Lieven and Carolyn, the couple that would join us, and we. The weather does not look good and there is no fun in driving 4 hours to the Shenandoah for rain. It could be fine, but the long drive makes it a potentially big effort for nothing. I decide to call it off. A pity, because we were looking forward to it. Now, we have time to do other things. We invite the other couple for dinner this evening.



In the hours freed because we do not have to drive, we clean the house an extra time and install the closet we have recuperated from Loic's dorm. Calle collection of Starbucks mugs of American states we have visited has now a place on its own. When we have finished, our guests arrive.

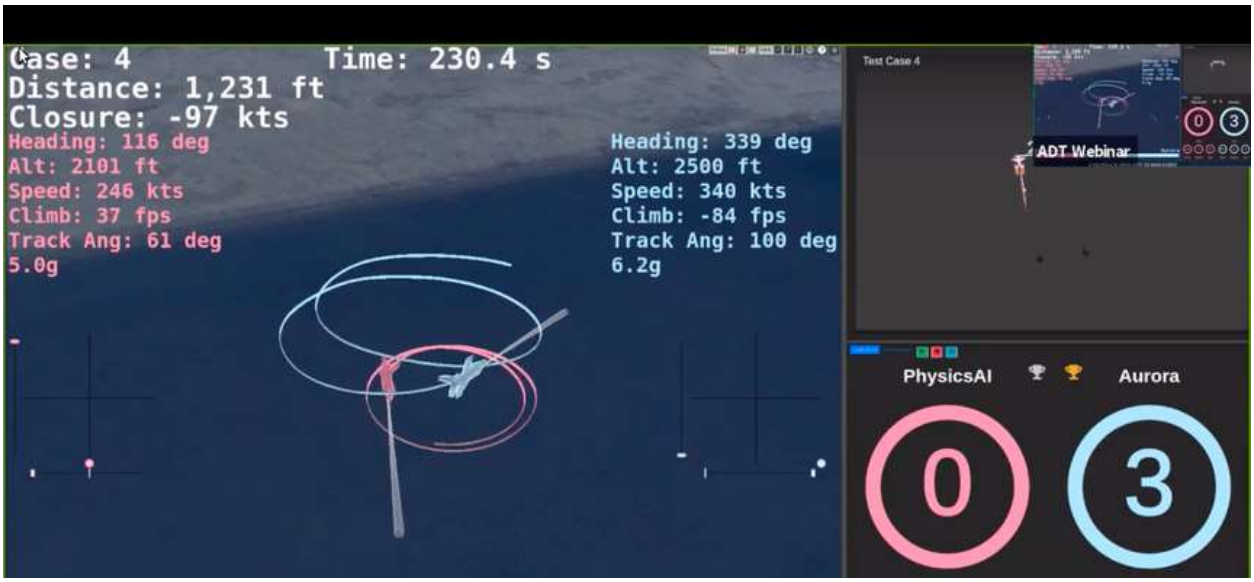


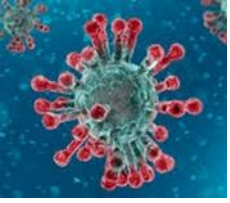
Stone still demonstrates a mixed behavior towards visitors, but having few people coming into our house, you can hardly blame him. He does not know if he has to bark, or just be friendly. They brought the food with them that we were supposed to eat in the park. Hamburger on the BBQ. A simple menu and a great idea

that we did not consider. You can cook a burger on an open fire. It is a great evening outside, and it turns late.

Human against machine

In the afternoon, I found an interesting article on the use of artificial intelligence (AI). An AI Just Beat a Human F-16 Pilot In a Dogfight — Again (https://www.defenseone.com/technology/2020/08/ai-just-beat-human-f-16-pilot-dogfight-again/167872/). In five rounds, an artificially-intelligent agent showed that it could outshoot other AI's, and a human. This is not surprising. It was a thing waiting to happen, especially in a simulated environment. Simulators are good basic training aid but there are different than in real life. Also, a computer can take an aircraft to its structural limits with more g-forces which might exceed those of a human body. The pilot of our branch remarked: "Curious to hear the fighter jock chime in with his true feelings as his career starts to stare at the light at the end of the tunnel."





C+160: Relax and Work

Busted

Normally, this two=pager would have been filled with our adventure in the Shenandoah National Park, but the weather has altered our plans. We stay in Chesapeake, but I would have preferred writing about our long hikes in the forest. I refuse to check the current weather over there. No need for confirmation or being faced with the reality of the wrong decision. There is no lesson learned into that.

We were late in bed last night, so no need to get up early. Even Stone does not mind a lazy morning. On our walk, we discover that there I a community garage/yard sale going on. We must have missed that announcement. Considering the low turn up, we are not the only ones who have not read it, or are people afraid to organize a yard sale? I must admit that the number of yard sales is much lower compared to pre-COVID, so people must be indeed reluctant to try to sell their stuff.

To our surprise, Seighin is up much earlier than normal. We can have a family breakfast, although it is rather brunch time. But before we can enjoy our first meal of the day, Ciaran calls to debrief us on his oral exam. It was not very successful, but he may still pass. Let us hope that this series will be as successful as the former one. At last, breakfast with three and the whole crew of the spaceship Voyager. It has been a long time since our last visit in space.

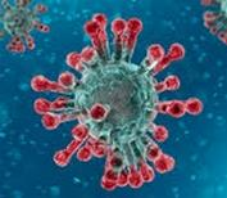


The first part of the afternoon, I use to do some small repairs. Things I have put aside for later and that 'later' is now. I also prepare everything for the K9 training for tomorrow. Having nothing planned for Sunday, we can go train. After that, I attack the garden first by mowing the grass, a sweaty thing to do, followed by weeding the front yard, an even sweatier task. Around 0500 p.m., completely soaked, I call it a day. Time for an aperitif and enjoy the evening.



Calle and I watch a movie together while Seighin is participating in an online game. After we go to bed, Calle returns to the kitchen to check on something and finds Stone lying on the sofa. Busted! He lays

on the rag treated with a product that should repulse dogs. Well, it clearly does not do its job. We must find another solution to keep him out of the bench.



C+161: Cancelled

Brains

An early day. Not a Sunday worthy hour at which my alarm kicks into action. 0600 a.m.! Not to marvel on a sunrise in the mountains, but to drive to a state park for a K9 training session. Normally, I would not have gone, but because we stayed home, Stone and I can attend this session.

A quick rush through the kitchen to prepare breakfast and lunch while Stone lays motionless on his cushion. Only when I open the garage door, he decides it may be interesting to get up and walk to the garage into the car. I load the Chrysler and leave the garage at the planned time. After more than 1 hour driving, I find myself in the York River State Park. 10 minutes early and nobody there. Good.

I look around and evaluate that I must be in the wrong place. This area can become crowded and that is no good for training SAR dogs. I check my e-mail and see that there is another landing in this park. I put the new destination in Waze and of we go.

When Waze tells me that I have reached my destination, we are 5 minutes late, but still nobody here. That is strange. I send a text to the organizer and take Stone for a quick morning walk. The reply tells me that the training was cancelled. Why did I not know about this? I have to figure that one out to prevent showing up at cancelled activities.



There is nothing else to do then a 180 turn and driving back, but first, I take Stone for a longer walk into the woods. I want to see how he reacts when I deviate from the path. I never did that and this is a good moment like any other to test it. The test is successful, although he tends to choose a path when possible. That is no issue.

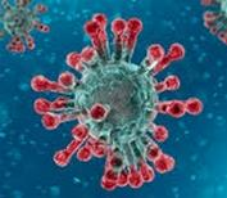
On my drive back, my biological computer is mulling over the virtual conference. Ideas are popping up in my head and I cannot write these down. I hope I will remember the best ones, once I am at home.

Around 1000 a.m., I drive the car back in the garage. Ready for a relaxing day with Calle and the possibility to bridge the missing days of the two-pager. I also improve an article written by a student of our Military School and a book about Skubba & Fred. Even after the cancellation of the training, it turns out to be a productive day.

Sunday, 23 August 2020

In the late afternoon, I drive Seighin to his friend Orlando who has just returned from a stay with his father in Texas, for a sleepover. For us another movie night together. I pick the strange epic science fiction film "Cloud Atlas". The film has multiple plots occurring during six different eras in time and is a challenge to follow. Great acting, but it is certainly not a no-brainer.





C+162: Informal Confirmations

Sad dog

The start of another work week under the pandemic. The week plan is in my head, but I know that the real thing will differ greatly from that plan. No use in writing it down. I want to go for our morning walk while water turns into coffee, but Stone has decided it is too early to stretch his four legs. Begging does not help. Hey, who is the dog here? I have to drag him out, literally. Once he is out of the garage door he walks normally. There is nothing wrong with him except that he is no morning dog.

After breakfast, I leave the breakfast table for my one-minute commute to work. The computer is already warmed up and the second screen lit up. I log in. While the Windows wheels turn, I take a sip of my cappuccino. The self-imposed main task of today is sending out personalized informal confirmation e-mails to the speakers and the workshop leaders. I do not want to wait till we can do this formally, because we risk losing some if we wait too long. Also, I do not want the non-selected speakers hanging in the air too long, but need to make sure we have enough speakers before I cut them loose. Also, I want to provide all speakers with the same Info as our approach has changed the last weeks.

Of course, some react with or without additional questions. Luckily, I have a good follow-up system.

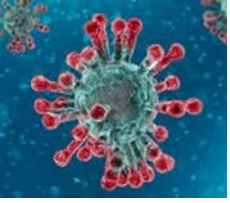
I want to add our Italian colleague to our team. He is the fourth person in our cubicle and the only one not involved in the conference now. I also like working with him. Reasons enough to involve him in the project soon before we do not have time to brief him. I contact him to see if he is interested and he confirms it. The branch head agrees after my plea.



Next to some smaller stuff, I finish my article on our new approach and publish it on our intranet under the title "Virtuality: the Final Frontier?" Will somebody react?

In the afternoon, Seighin calls to ask if he may stay another night with his friend. Why not? 20 minutes later, I send him a text that Stone is missing him. He replies that I am making this up. Well, what do you think?

Monday, 24 August 2020



C+163: Vaccine

Behind the keyboard

More and more people are picking up their travel plans, while the lack of a road trip and a real holiday is taken its toll. People ask us what to see on their trips, and although we like giving that kind of advice, reading our own travel stories make the yearning bigger. 'Wanderlust' may be a great thing, but in times like these, you are much better of being a homebody. Even my intention to go for a 4-day week will not lessen that unease feeling. For sure, being stuck above water does not help either. I know that if I would be in Belgium my number of dives would have increased rapidly, but here even that is not possible.



There is one family member that does not seem to care. He likes it that we are almost 24/7 with him, but that may in the long run not be such a good thing. He may learn the wrong things.

When we walk with Stone, many by-passers tell us that it is a nice dog. At first, we thought that it was such a variation of being polite to strangers, but now we are convinced that people really find him a good-looking dog. Luckily, he does not understand our language otherwise it could go to his head. This evening a girl, twelve, rides by on her bike. When she sees Stone, she yells "Cool dog!" That is a new one.

Hong Kong reports its first confirmed reinfection

Today, interesting Corona news. A 33-year-old man was infected a second time more than four months after he initially contracted the coronavirus. After getting sick in Hong Kong in March, the man tested positive on August 15th after a trip to Spain via Britain, picking up a strain that was circulating in Europe in July and August.

Doctors have reported several cases of presumed reinfection in the United States and elsewhere, but none of those cases was confirmed with rigorous testing. The Hong Kong researchers sequenced the virus from both infections.

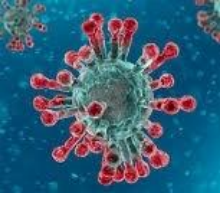
The bad: reinfection is possible, although one case like this out of tens of millions "should not cause undue alarm as of yet". The good: the patient did have an immune response but did not show symptoms the second time. His immune response prevented the disease from getting worse.

While there is the commotion about the Russian vaccine, the first volunteer was inoculated with a "made in Italy" vaccine on Monday at the Spallanzani hospital in Rome, which specializes in infectious diseases. Here in the USA, there is a campaign on Facebook to recruit volunteers for the vaccine effort.





In Leipzig, Germany, volunteers who had been tested for the virus beforehand were gathered in an arena with distanced seating. These people volunteered for a concert that was also a scientific experiment to help create safety measures for live events around the world. Outfitted with tracking devices, masks and fluorescent disinfectant, they were then asked to do things like visit concession stands and restrooms with varying degrees of social distancing in an effort to determine which scenarios pose the greatest risk for transmission.



C+164: Running

Change of plan

Okay. If the real coronavirus should disappear as often as its 'picture' that I place in the left upper corner of these two-pagers, we would never have talked about a second wave and maybe not even a first one. It would have been a bump in the road like strange flu. However, what is on paper is not always a reflection of real life. A pity.

I am still struggling with getting the two-pagers out of the door on time. Publishing the stories, however short, the same day becomes more and more a burden. I intend to close the time gap but leave a one-day delay in the future. This means that within a few days, you should get the two-pager of two days before. No longer the one of yesterday. I hope that this delay does not mess up your daily lecture.

My eyes open before 0600 a.m. for a Wednesday at the HQ. It is already warm to walk in uniform. I still do not understand, although I have an opinion on the real reason why it was decided, why we have to wear our woodland camouflage. Yes, the fabric is lighter, but the dark colors are working as a red flag on a bull. It attracts heat. And black boots are not sun and heat friendly either. Maybe the idea is that we need to stay in the airconditioned building of the HQ?

I spend the morning with meetings concerning the conference. It is strange to discover that although we use all kinds of communication, there is sometimes confusion about what is really decided. Decisions we all agreed on, are suddenly interpreted in a completely different way. I think that is because interpersonal communication is less effective in a virtual environment. Talking eye-to-eye give the extra dimension of full-body language in a blink of an eye. A small above the waist video does not come close to that.

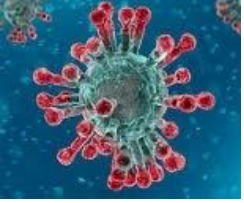
Another thing that certainly helps, is the fact that I, when briefing, have the habit to explain a decision as I understood it. If there was another interpretation, that is the moment is surfaces.

As we dive deeper into the platform, we also discover new things and things is does not. The whole exercise is one of discovery. There is always a way around it, but time is not on our side.

I received two replies from speakers who have an issue with prerecording. One has never done that and does not know how to do it. Another one is afraid that a prerecorded video will need to be scrutinized by their communication department and that could take weeks. Strange, but understandable. I would not be surprised that we would have to do that too if we were speakers. We will need to find a shortcut for that.

Seighin is still looking for a fitness space nearby. At this moment only active military may work out in a military fitness room and we think that is going to stay a long time this way. There is a fitness club nearby. One we will soon try out with a free pass. We, because he tried unsuccessfully to motivate some friends to join him. As he needs transportation, I am his plan B.

I planned to go running this evening after the walk with Stone. The optimal window for running is rather small. Not too early in the evening because of the heat and not too late because of dinner. Well, I missed today's window. Tomorrow?



C+165: Pizzameeting

Bike

After the 'getting-up-in-the-morning- routine, I have the daily branch meeting. We have skipped the use of Skype for Business as the software has become erratically trustworthy and is no longer. We have switched back to Go-To-Meeting. Is seems like our IT-experts in NCIA are picking the wrong software to support our work.

After that, I want to connect with the Italian Modelling and Simulation Center of Excellence, but their virtual meeting software decides to execute an update the moment they start the meeting. Back to the old telephone call to have at least some kind of long-distance meeting. The colonel has some interesting proposals. I hope he delivers what he tells me he will.

This morning, they, well one Latino-looking man, Mexican, who speaks English with Spanish enhancements, will do the high-pressure cleaning of the house. While the exterior work is going on, Stone barks from time to time, but it is acceptable. Although they have planned two days for the whole house, he does the job in one. Tomorrow will start the repair and paintwork.



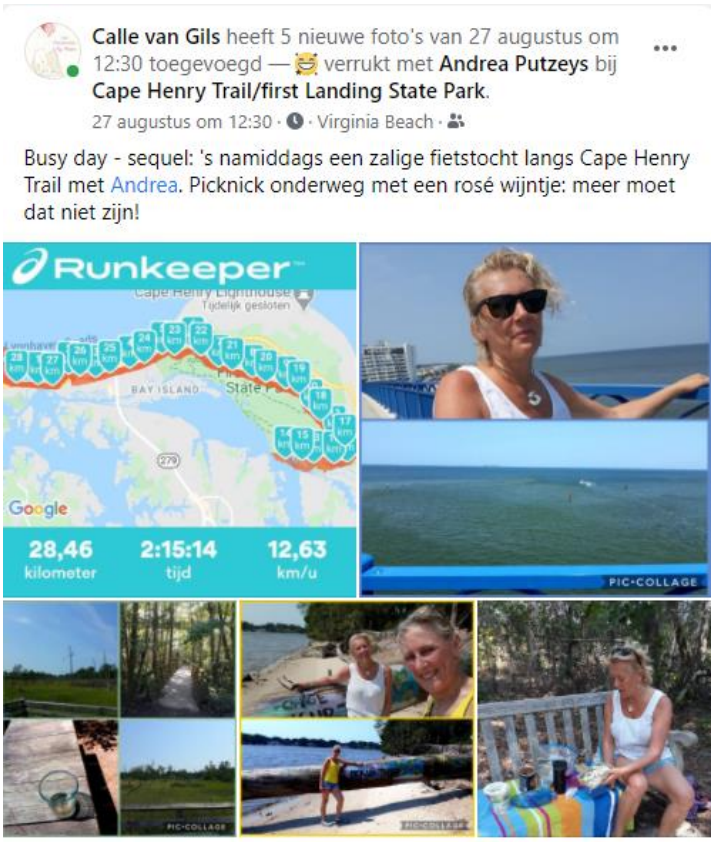


After the Italian meeting, I drive to HQ where I arrive on time to attend a small ceremony. Our US Navy administrative aid receive a service award before she leaves the HQ. It is not because we are living under COVID rules, that we should not be present at such an occasion. I have received most of my medals in a brown envelope and that is not how I like others to receive theirs. Being present is the least I can do.

Finally, the statement of work for turning the board game into a virtual one is out. I think I had more than 30 e-mails from our contracting branch before it was OK. Now, we have to wait for offers.

C+162: Pizzameeting

Around noon, we have an outside lunch meeting with the Belgian officers. After exchanging information, mostly about the COVID regulations and the introduction of the new Belgian officer in the HQ, we have pizza. During my first tour in the HQ, I was for a certain period the only air force officer in this group, now it seems as the light blue have taken over.



After lunch, I drive back home to continue working. Calle is not home yet. After her tennis morning, she is biking through Virginia Beach with Andrea. I think it is the first time in years she has done that.

Good news. Seighin can follow the AP Computer Science via Virginia Virtual. AP, or Advanced Placements, is the level in high school that prepares students for university. The Computer Science class is not taught at Grassfield HS. The only option was to go via Virtual Virginia, a statewide high school that only teaches online courses, but there was a waiting list. The course starts next Wednesday, earlier than the rest. Yesterday, Calle told that this is the longest possible Summer holiday because of Labor Day falls on the latest possible first Monday in September. Well, Seighin's longest holiday period is suddenly shortened by a week.

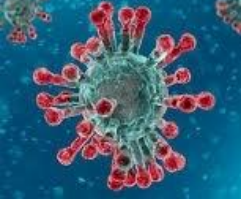


To make up yesterday's missed running, I decide to go today. I intend to make it a calm and short run, but end up with a not so calm and longer one. It went fine and I decided on the spot to make it longer than planned.

Today, a law regarding leave for Belgian officers was officially published. They reduced our current 60 days of leave to only 40. Under the 60 days rules, we had to include weekend and holidays. Because that is not necessary anymore. We only need to take leave on workdays and that means that the reduced number does not necessarily mean less leave (we rarely use our quota anyhow). However, the symbolic value is that we as officers are no longer available 24/7. One of the values of the officers' corps is to be always ready. With the new law that is no longer expected. I find this an extra sign of the decline of our moral code in favor of administrative 'simplification' or bureaucracy. While

people find it difficult to hold others to a moral code, they replace these by simple administrative rules and do away the necessity for moral courage. What will be next?

With this kind of weather, grass everywhere is growing fast. The soccer field was mowed last weekend, but the grass is already too tall! The coach cancels the training and invited the whole team for a pool session. With the predicted storm and rain this evening late, the grass if our garden will get an extra stimulation to grow. A task for this weekend.



C+166: Wesleyan

Recce

Second Friday on leave. I continue with my plan to have an informal 80% workweek. I need to gain back some time to do things because work in creeping into the grey zone between work and home. Although, I have to visit the Wesleyan University in Virginia Beach to have a look at what they propose as room for our operation center.

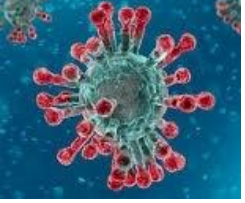
I take it easy in the morning. The painter is on time to start his work: repainting the wooden structure that needs no repairs. I drop Seighin at his appointment and drive to the Home Depot. I need some small stuff for repairs and last time I did not find the right items at Lowe's. I think I might find these in the other do-it-yourself store. After 30 minutes, I am right, but I would not call it a success as I find only 2 of the 4 things I need. But 2 is still better than 1.

Back home, I switch to military uniform and get in the car again for a drive to the university. We will meet with the president, the neighbor of our branch head, to have a look at their proposal for rooms to set up our operation center during the conference. They have three proposals, but the first one, a big room next to their sports space, it directly the best option. There is lots of light, a small room for a studio, good internet connection and enough outlets. The other two options are not bad, but the first is the one we go for.

While we discuss the options, I ask the president if he thinks there would be students with media experience interested in working with us. We lack that kind of experience and I think it would be a good opportunity for the student to use their skills. He replies enthusiastically that he can think of some. That would also be a win-win situation.

I am late back home. The visit took longer than anticipated, which is a good thing. After lunch, Calle and I go for a bit of shopping. Firsts stop is the Yankee Candle store in the Greenbrier Mall. Calle likes candles and waits until there is some special sale to buy the big ones. Luckily, these high-quality candles are cheaper in the USA than in Europe. Next stop is the NEx to have a look at the clearance, followed by a visit to the Commissary for groceries.

It is late when we arrive back home. We can start enjoying the evening.



C+167: Crash

Where are they?

Although a Saturday, my alarm is set for an early rise. We have a K9 training today. It is less than 30 minutes to the Northwest River State Park, but we have to be there at 0800. Because I have prepared as much as possible yesterday evening and everything goes smooth, we arrive 10 minutes early. The first. I take the opportunity to walk with Stone instead of just waiting in the car. The terrain looks better than the first time when it was more a swamp or shallow lake than a camping meadow.

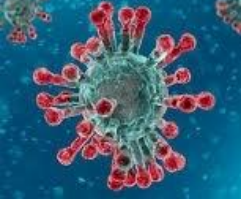
We still concentrate on motivational runaways for Stone to sharpen his hunt drive. He is doing better with every training session. Strangely, he does not bark as he does while at home. Cheese and worst are fine but does not drive him that well. I am still looking for that one thing that excites him extremely.

It is a good training session. Not only for Stone but also for me. Soon I will get involved in real searches. At the beginning without Stone. That is for much later when we are a certified team. Dogs do not care, because for them there is no difference between real and training searches. It is all a game.

Back before lunch, as planned. My plan for the afternoon was to work in the garden, but an active rain zone spoils that plan. Garden work is scratched. The new plan is to go through my mail and write two-pagers.

But I do not find the two-pagers. Yes, the directory is still there, but I cannot open it. The rest of the drive works well, just not that one directory. I have a copy of the published two-pagers, but not of the other ones. I refuse to rewrite all those. Q diagnostic check reveals no issues. What is going on?

Normally, we would have guests this evening. The new Belgian colonel and his wife, but they called it off. No guests does not mean no BBQ. The rain could have been a spoiler, but it stops in time for an aperitif and a nice meal on the deck. As always, with the dusk come the no-sees and the mosquitos. Dessert is something to enjoy in the house.



C+168: Lazy Sunday

There are back!

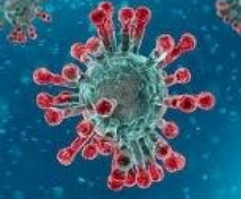
Today a 'normal' weekend day. A lazy Sunday. Surprisingly, I am up late. It seems I needed to catch up some sleep. The temperature on the late morning walk is 28°C and since long it feels like it. The air is dry and there is a little breeze. It feels good. Back inside, we have brunch.

The first task of the day is to restore the 'Corona files' directory and to regain access to the two-pagers. With every day that these are inaccessible, the gap increases. My plan to reduce the gap had no chance to survive reality. After a few hours of letting all kind of Apps loose on the troubled directory, I have them back. Although, I make an extra back-up that will hardly solve the issue with recent files. Anyhow, I can start writing two-pagers and reduce the backlog.

In the afternoon, I spend some time on small repairs. One of those is the repair of the wooden chairs on the deck. It took a while before I found a wooden stick with the right diameter to replace the rotten connection rods, but I did. Replacing then is a bit harder than foreseen, but I am successful. All chairs are functional and safe to use again. Our table and chairs are complete.

We have a long chat with Loic on all sorts of things. He is preparing to leave for Paris and then Torino. Another adventure.

With such nice weather, we have dinner outside again. To prevent being chased away by bugs, we light some candles with citronella. One at floor level, a second on the table. It works!



C+169: AAM

DMV

Another nice day. I enjoy the walk with Stone without sweaty ending. Unfortunately, this kind of weather is rare in the hot and damp summer in Virginia.

Our security camera shows that our news set-up to keep Stone out of the sofa after the failed scent method, is not working either. We need a fresh idea.



My workday starts with a virtual meeting with people from NATO's Science & Technology Organization. They want to participate in our conference. A bit strange they pop up on the radar only now, but it is not too late yet. They want to deliver a high-level speaker from NATO HQ. Although I cannot refuse their offer, I do not accept it immediately. I have to make sure that I can fit the speaker in a good slot and I do not want to give the impression that I desperate, which I am not. Not for that level of speakers, that is.

Directly after the meeting, I leave with Seighin for a long time ago planned visit to the DMV. You need to require an administrative appointment between 2 and 3 months ahead. This one is for me. I lost the number of times that I have visited the DMV to get my driver's license extended. It was their mistake to only give a validity period of one year and now I must spend hours to get it right. Last time, that is two months ago, they told me that everything was OK, so it should be a short visit. As Seighin's learner's permit is the same issue and also ready, confirmed by a mail from the DMV HQ in Richmond, I told him to come along. The chances are slim, but you never know that they are willing to print it out.

Monday, 31 August 2020

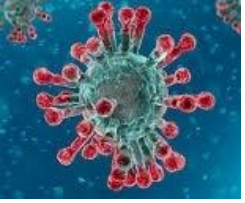
We leave on time, but after a few miles, I discover that I have left my face mask and wallet in the other car. A 180 turn and back to the Cherry Forest Court. Seighin calls Calle to take the items out the car and give it to us. Another 180 and again on route to the DMV. As I was afraid, the draw bridge opens before us. Waiting. Luckily, only two boats. We arrive 10 minutes late, but it is strangely no problem. We may enter. There is some confusion about why we have an appointment. No, we do not need to take a driving test. We are just here to get the paperwork.

In the beginning, everything goes well. The lady on the other side of the counter is w=very helpful. Yes, I can process your son's paperwork too. One hour, a few scans of the same documents, and a telephone contact with Richmond later, we walk out of the building with no license, nor permit. Richmond has to check our paperwork, again. They promised us that they would call us if Richmond confirms that everything is OK. It was approved. What is the issue? I do not need a Virginia driver's license. Why the fuss?

I explain to Seighin that the DMV is a school example of a bureaucratic administration. You are obliged to work with it. They have a monopoly. They think they deliver quality by just following the rules, no matter if the 'customer' gets what he needs. Rules are the quality. AAM: Absolute Administrative Monopoly

A bit frustrated, I pick up the work to finish a few tasks before lunch. Working is a bit hard today because Stone reacting crazy on the strange people, the painters, walking around the house and doing their job.

After I decide the workday is over, I get out to mow the grass. It is growing like it is fed with steroids. Luckily, we have a pretty, sturdy mower.



C+170: Messed Up

Go to virtual?

What started as a 'normal' workday at the HQ with the routine of getting up early, breakfast and a walk with Stone, followed by a not-so-busy commute to Norfolk, turns out into a bit of a mess. Today, I am driving to the HQ for some meetings that are better done in person. Virtual meetings are not optimal when you need lots of interactions and questions. I prefer to bring a few people up to speed on the changes in the approach to our virtual conference while looking at their body language. Also, we must discuss turning the concept development and experimentation course into a virtual setting without too much work.

There are some rumors about a possible infection in our branch, but nothing confirmed. After the branch meeting, my colleague from the experimentation branch asks me if we can virtually meet on the course. This happens almost at the same time that another person asks if we can do the same for the other meeting.

When I see the video feed from the Skype meeting on the course, I see my colleague sitting in her cubicle. I ask why we meet virtually when she is in the HQ? I came on purpose to Norfolk to discuss in-person. She is afraid to get infected based on the rumors.

Well, if she is, others will be also. No use in holding on organizing in-person meetings today. Although I do not like it, I transform the coming meetings into virtual settings and decide to drive back home. No need to stay here with those rumors preventing interpersonal contact, even at a distance.

But before I leave, I answer 30 questions on asked by companies reacting to the published Statement of Work for the game. It is clear that the companies have not played the game. Some think that they have to gamify the course while that is not the task. The whole procedure is not as easy as they have told me.

I update the branch head on some changes to the conference. He informs me that the generals have discussed the conference and that consequently the Chief of Staff wants a point paper explaining our approach. By this evening. It is good that we have the attention from higher up, but why do we have to deliver a paper that quick? There is no emergency.



When I arrive home, the paint is cleaning up. The exterior paint job is finished. The house looks nice and protected. When I walk around the house to check the repair and paint job, it strikes me that the wood

under the door is not painted. Is there a reason for that? Or can I paint it with the leftovers? Something I need to check with the company.





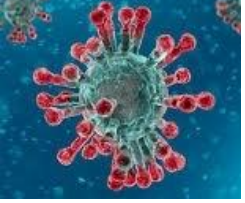
After the meeting and sending the point paper to the branch head, I prepare the car for the bi-weekly K9 training. As Stone is improving, I want to keep the momentum going and take the opportunity for an extra training session. I expect that he will be more active because it is evening and less warm.

He performs better as expected. The lead trainer concludes that he is focused but does not as excited as other dogs. He does whine a bit but does not bark when holding back. However, he is focused on the search, even when they set it up to force him to follow his nose. Maybe it is his character to not show much excitement?

I learn how to set sources out for cadaver dogs. I can confirm the stories that the scent of a cadaver stays for a long time. It sticks in your nose!

It is almost midnight when we arrive home. Time for dinner!

I wonder about the first school day in Belgium. How was it?



C+171: COVID Alert

COVID 19 Index case

Although it is Wednesday, I have decided not to ride to the HQ because of the issues I had yesterday and there are no in-person meetings planned. No need to waste time commuting. I planned to stay in bed till 0800, but I am awake around 0640. 20 minutes later, I have enough of lying awake and get up. The sight out of the window tells me that is again hot. The nice, cool weather is over. Back to Virginian Summer days.

Most of my work still goes to the organization of the conference. Contact with speakers, workshop leaders, and others who support us eats up most of my time. Soon I will have to implement other ideas and concentrate on the rest of the conference. Luckily, with summer leave over I can hand over the 'routine' tasks. Before I will do that, I double-check the current situation. I want to make sure that the situation is correct when the task is taken over.

And I need the freed-up time because some of my other tasks are neglected. There is a visible lack in articles, and I do not find the time to write. Not even for my articles. Or these two-pagers. Maybe I have to consider stopping writing these. There is not much daily news anyhow. Also, my creativity level goes down when I have to concentrate on routine.

My Inbox pings. An incoming message. Strange title. Not a bearer of good news.

From: SACT CAPDEV CAP MED
Sent: Wednesday, September 2, 2020 12:12 PM
Subject: COVID 19 Index case

Classification: NATO UNCLASSIFIED

All,

ACT MED was just informed, that you had contact to a person confirmed positive by a PCR test.

The risk of transmission is considered very low, however, if you develop or have symptoms typical for COVID 19 (see below)

a. Get a test
b. Stay at home until your test result is negative or you are cleared by your caregiver to return to work
c. Inform ACT track and trace of your status and test results asap and provide information on all close contacts (<2m, >10min) you had in the HQ beginning 48hrs before onset of symptoms.

If you have persons with an elevated or high risk to develop complications in case of a COVID 19 infection living in your household, please contact ACT track and trace for further advice, if you should get a test even if you are not having any symptoms.

There is no need at this point to quarantine or getting a test, if you don't have any symptoms typical for COVID 19 (see below).

OK. The rumors were right. It is confirmed. And I am involved. The 'If you have persons with an elevated or high risk to develop complications in case of a COVID 19 infection living in your household' triggers me to call our medical branch. 'Old age' for one thing has put me in a higher risk category of developing complication in case of infection. It seems that they already tried to reach me via the work phone. Good follow-up! Their advice is to get tested, but no need for going into isolation.

I call the US Navy COVID hotline. After a short wait time and answering some questions, the lady on the other side books me a test slot for tomorrow. The service is very professional. No fuss, good information and handling of the request. Her advice is, not unexpectedly, to stay in quarantine till the test result is known. This is, of course, the standard reply, but having no symptoms, I will just be very careful.

When the daily update on the COVID situation lands in my e-mail box, I look at the Info from another perspective. Are the numbers right? I am one of those 'All personnel …'

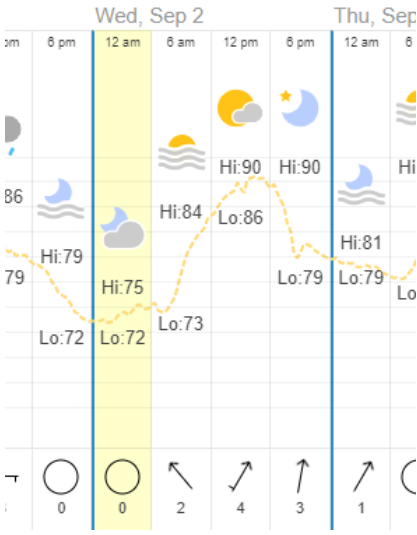
Incidents tracked by the CT (from 1 Aug). Test results were negative for two staff members identified last week as having close contact with a positive case outside the HQ. The CTF is tracking one new staff member who tested positive and is self-isolating at home. All personnel that had close contact with the individual in the HQ have been notified.

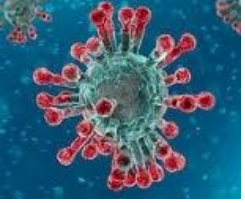
	Staff (including NLRs)	Dependents
Tested	6	2
Awaiting Results	0	0
Negative	5	2
Positive	1	0

The next question that comes to mind is: Who was it? It is not important now, but a curious mind cannot put that question aside. Does the mail from the medical branch give something away? Who is on it, and who not? Why? I try to figure it out and come up with a name. Tomorrow, we will know.



Although it is too hot to go running, it feels like I have to. Just to escape and let some energy out. Calle is not happy with my plan, although I promise to keep it calm and short. The calm translates in a pace of 5 min 36 sec per kilometer and short means 5 K.





C+172: COVID Test

Portsmouth

As expected, the morning branch meeting does shed a light on the source of the infection. Strangely, people do not directly talk about it. Like there is some kind of shame connected to be the source. Only when you do not pay attention, you should feel guilty. Otherwise, the only things you can do is reducing the infection risk. Risk is never zero. So even when you do the maximum short of total isolation, you can get infected. It was something waiting to happen.

Anyhow, after retirement, I should not think about becoming a detective. I was wrong in my deduction. It was somebody else. That is in itself good news because of the probability of being infected in even lower. Today's test will confirm that.

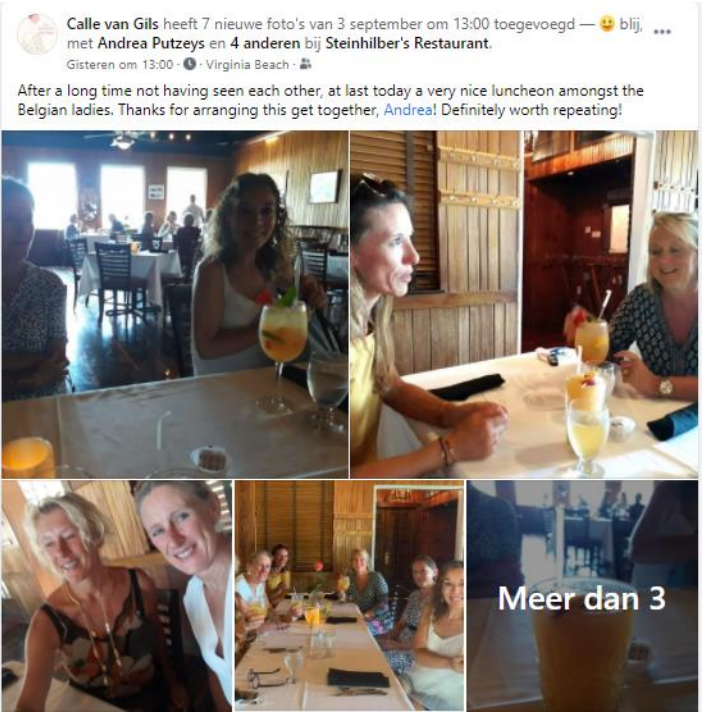
There is a short notice meeting to coordinate the conference because we have cancelled these. It seems we are still on track and did not forget things we know about. The one we are not aware of are still out there.

While working, it is hard not to pay attention to possible symptoms. Not that I have any, but it is a bit like having to itch when somebody talks about fleas. Although you know you have none, there is an urge to scratch anyhow. This is something comparable. It reminds me of one similar incident. After a deep dive during my 2star instructor evaluation week, I felt a pain in the elbow. Considering the dive profile, it could be a bend. The first treatment was breathing pure oxygen and, when this or other symptoms would be confirmed, I had to go to a hyperbaric chamber. Knowing the symptoms, I started to feel them all. If you have nothing else to do, you start imagining things.

Around 1230 p.m., I head to the Naval Clinic in Portsmouth for the test. The lady on the phone clearly told me to go right, but I went left. Still mixing up those two directions. As a result, I have to drive around the clinic and through the parking garage. The big white tents show me where I have to be. The whole set-up is well-organized by experienced people. In less than 5 minutes, I am ready for the swab test. The nurse sticks a cotton ball stick deep into my nose. "It will feel a bit uncomfortable" is her fair warning. The result will be known by Thursday. They will call me if it is positive. If negative, I can check it on the secure medical mail. That is it.

After my test visit, I send e-mails to the speakers that are not selected. Although there are still some uncertainties on the speaker slots, I do not want to let the non-selected one hanging out there. It is not an easy thing to do, but I must. Luckily, their reaction is constructive.

One of the NATO civilians make her task complicated and want us to agree with her approach. We have no idea why she does it that way and tell her that she may do what she



wants as it is her job. I think she is not used to working in uncertain circumstances with daily varying parameters. Maybe we, military, are used to that kind of situations?

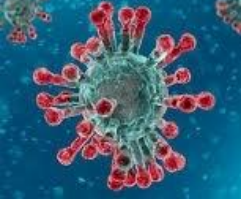
Calle is on a lunch with the Belgian ladies. The purpose was to welcome the new Belgian lady, but she cancelled her participation because of COVID. The ladies decided to keep lunch on their agenda.

With the two cars outside, it is the right opportunity to clean the garage. It was necessary. Unbelievable how many things I keep there and that I can throw away now.

After the soccer training, Seighin and I stop at Domino's for a pizza. Some have nice lunches while others must be satisfied with fast food =;-)

Five Military Sites Chosen for Phase III Trial of COVID Vaccine Candidate

I have read that Russia and China use their military as guinea pigs. Surprisingly, the USA does that too. The Defense Department has selected five sites across several states to stage a Phase III clinical trial for one of the leading COVID-19 vaccine contenders. I hope that the soldiers are not obliged to participate.



C+173: 4 Out of 5

Leave



As planned, I have this Friday off again. I push forward with my 80% workweek and I did not even touch my 2019 leave yet. Of course, in the ramp-up to the conference, I will not be able to take a day off every week, but that is something for later. Leave without plans, but that does not mean that Calle does not have ideas on how to fill the day.

It is a later walk. I think I have hit the rush out hour. During our morning walk of about 1 mile, I have to say hey or wave at least 20 times. Not bad for a leave day.

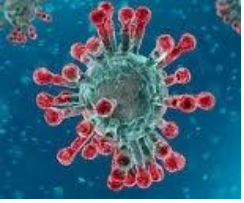
After breakfast, Calle and I watch a YouTube video on the Advance Placement courses followed by an online explanation of the two AP courses Seighin will follow this semester. Some teachers have made a good effort in adapting to online teaching. I hope it is as good as they promise, but their efforts are already appreciated.

A bit writing on the two-pagers. Almost caught up. Some small work in gluing some things that were broken for a long time. Ready for lunch.

After lunch, it is shopping time with Calle. We visit a few shops and end up buying things for Seighin. At least, the majority of the things we bought are for him. The rest of the day is eventless.

In the evening, I find a mail from the DMV HQ telling me that our papers are OK. Again. Luckily, I already have requested another appointment without waiting for the e-mail. Or will the local DMV office call us as they have promised? A bit too naïve?

Friday, 04 September 2020



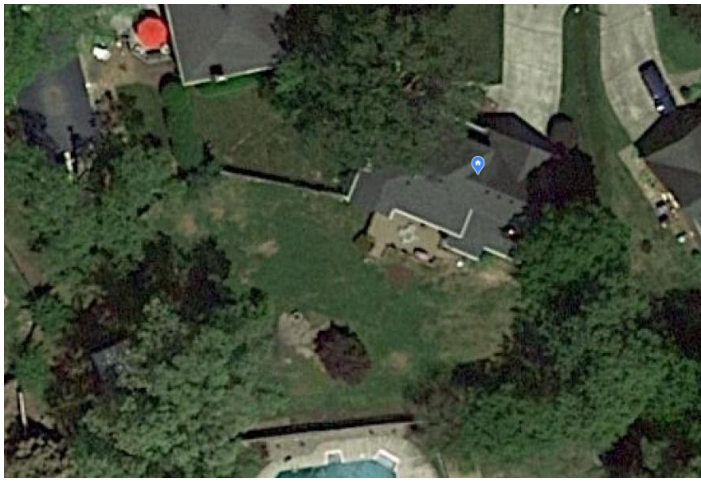
C+174: Mower

Stone against machine

No sleep this weekend. Today, I have to get early out of bed because Sieghin will volunteer in getting the soccer fields ready for the coming season. He has to be there at 0800 a.m. I decide to have breakfast after I have returned from dropping him off at the soccer complex. But first a walk around the neighborhood.

A long breakfast followed by another drive to the soccer complex. There were many volunteers and thus the work is finished much earlier than anticipated.

The early pick-up makes it possible for me to mow the grass. It is not that long yet, but when I do it now, it will go faster and without interruptions. After I have done the front yard, I let Stone out to let him get used to being around the mower. As expected, he reacts wildly and runs around while barking at the machine. After a period of chasing, he tries to attack from behind with puppy bites. However, I am the one behind the mower and that means I am in the danger zone. Not completely unexpected, he nips in my short and tears it. A pity.



20 minutes later, he seems to give up and calms down. I can even play with him like with a normal dog. A short time after that, he is too tired to react or run. From now on, I can mow without interruption.



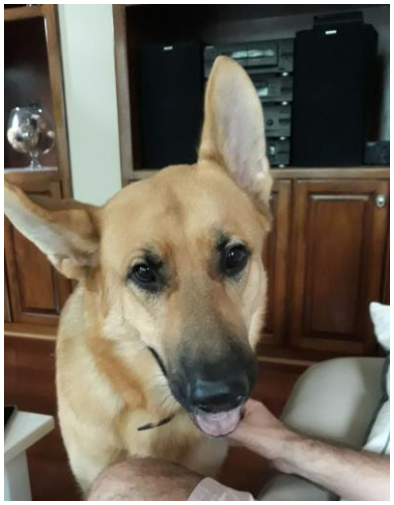
When finished, I search for an App that makes a car cam out of my iPhone. After some reaching and reading comments, I pick one and test it when I drive Seighin to a friend.

After our lunch, Calle and I enjoy the sun on the deck. A lazy afternoon.

After dinner, we are watching TV while Seighin is gaming at a competitive level. When Calle wants to take a selfie to send to her best friend, Stone wants it too. Jealous?

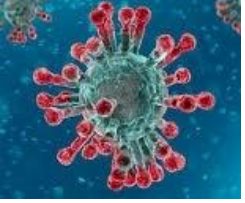


Saturday, 05 September 2020









C+175: Training in Nice Weather

Combination

Saturday early, but not that early, I am awake preparing everything for the next K9 training. From now on, the sessions start again at 0900 a.m. That means not an early start, but also that it will be half the afternoon when I get back. Too late for lunch. When everything is loaded in the car, a bit time to enjoy breakfast before we have to leave for the more than 1-hour drive.

They forecast nice weather, not too hot. The dogs will be more active and training more fun. Today two new candidates. One is coming over from California and was in a K9 search team there. It will be interesting to learn how they do it on the other side.

Stone does it well. We start with some runaways. He does not directly react on the first attempt because he did not see who was taking the cheese. I need to remember that he needs to see that the 'runner' has the cheese with him/her. After that, the rest goes very good. A bit later, we try the shuttle whereby he has to indicate to me before he gets rewarded. He does this better and better. This exercise is repeated a few times while extending the distance, and he does it better and better. In the end, we combine the shuttle with a small runaway. This is a good day for him.



I have the impression that he is more and more motivated to go to training. He is looking forward to it and on the day itself, he is getting more excited.

It is not only Stone that needs training, but I also need some. Today, I have a dry run of the land navigation test. Based on step counting and compass direction, I must find a certain terrain feature. I found it. The basic military training is coming back, however, I did never use step counting. The confidence is there. Ready for the real stuff.

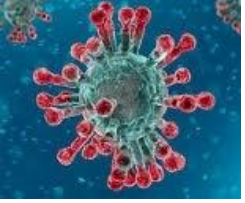


Sunday, 06 September 2020



In the meantime, Loic has arrived in Paris to start his MBA studies and Calle is enjoying the sun.

As expected, I am late back home, however, I did not take lunch with me, so I have to eat first. After unloading and cleaning the car, it is time to enjoy the weather. Reading a book and dozing off. With still some energy left, I go running to take advantage of the moderate temperature.



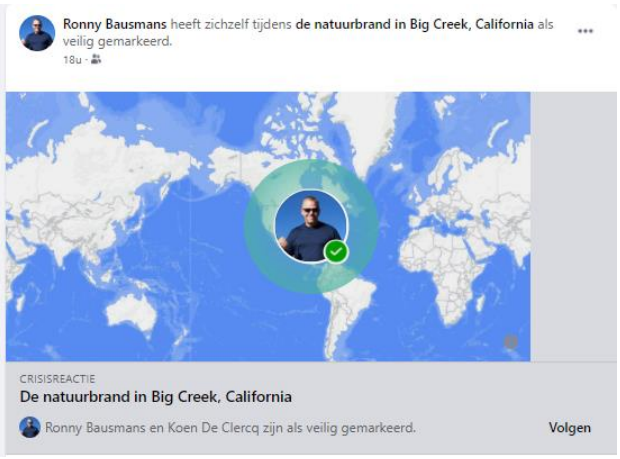
C+176: Labor Day

Late morning

Labor Day means, sarcastically, no-work day. While Europe is active, we can enjoy an extra day off. Calle and I are awake late. It is warm outside, but doable. Is that an indication that better weather is coming? Fall and spring are the best seasons here. You can enjoy being outside in a t-shirt and shorts.

After the walk, we enjoy a simple breakfast on the deck. There is a complete change in plans today. No fitness with Seighin in the morning. The shopping is pushed to after lunch. Suddenly, I have the whole morning free. Well, there is enough to do.

It may be premature, but I send an e-mail to the other K9 volunteers if they know a good place for Stone to stay when we will go to Belgium for the Christmas holidays. It is not sure yet. Our travel plan will be subject to the corona measures and the decision on our fourth year here. Anyhow, I better start looking around.



Our Belgian colleague Ronny had to leave Yosemite National Park because of a threatening wildfire. The California wildfires are ignited for the second time in the U.S. since 2017, by a gender-reveal party at which an unborn baby's sex is exuberantly revealed. I have no clue how such a party can start a fire. Are there fireworks or bonfire involved? Anyhow, our colleague is safe.

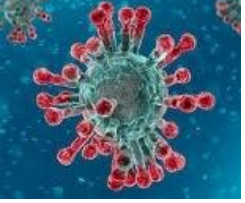
After lunch, we leave with three for an afternoon shopping in the Norfolk Premium Outlets. It is strange to see people walking with masks and waiting in line to enter shops. Some shops have huge lines in front of their doors. Not sure if that is popularity or a small shop. Maybe it is a publicity trick? The second line is inside the store to check out. Why do they not organize it so to minimize the interior line? Every customer waiting to pay is one who cannot enter the store.



Back home, Calle takes a picture of the hunt. Not sure who the prey was.

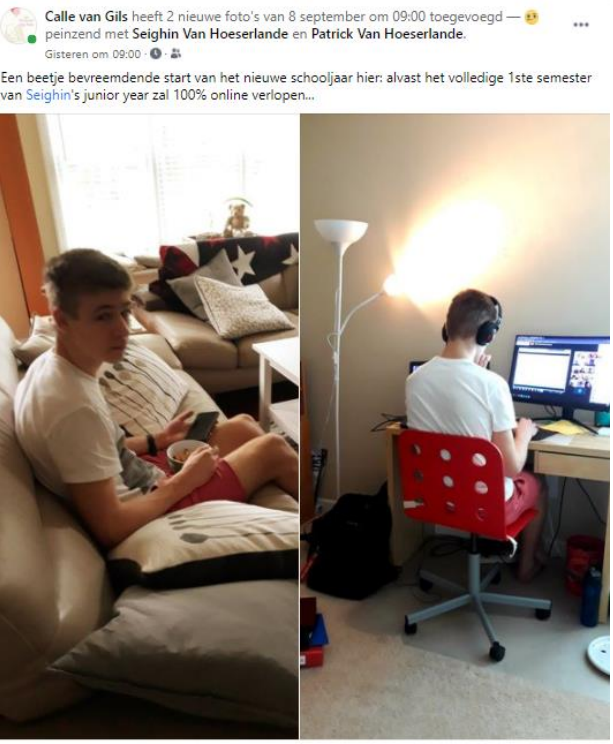
At the close of the evening, I get back in the house via the garage. I trip and hit the stairs with my big toe. My toenail is ripped out. A painful and bloody experience. No running and slow walks the coming days.

Monday, 07 September 2020



C+177: First School Day

No yellow school bus



A strange first school day. No kids waiting and no yellow school bus driving around to pick them up. Streets empty, except with people driving off to work. The kids here stay home for the first four or nine weeks of online learning, depending on the grade they are in.

Seighin, however, is certain that he will not go to the high school building before the end of January as he has chosen for the virtual option. Although the approach does not exploit the full potential of online learning like the virtual high school Virtual Virginia, it is not as bad as expected. He has to be present during the first three blocks because his fourth block is his virtual AP Computer Science at Virtual Virginia. For every block, he needs to attend the 45 minutes video stream by the teacher followed by another 45 minutes. During these last minutes, the teacher is available for questions, but they may spend their time how they want. Of course, they have exercises and preparations for the course but may do these later. A bit of flexibility, certainly with his AP course.

The morning walk is nice, although walking is less pleasant because of the torn out toenail. It is a bit bloody but less painful than expected.

From 0830 on, my morning is one flow of virtual meetings till 1330. It starts with the branch meeting followed by a meeting with the specialist from our strategic communication branch. We want to know all that there is to know about videos and live streaming for the conference. A few weeks ago, they were very cautious about helping us, but now they seem to be eager to support us. I think they understand what we try to do and want to be involved to learn as much as possible. That is good for us, and them.

The last meeting is the hand-over/take-over as contact with the speakers and workshop leaders. It was fun to start it and find speakers proving that it can be done, but that it is keeping contact and making sure that they deliver, I find it less interesting. By handing it over as planned, I will have time to focus on other ideas I want to bring to the conference. Maybe even some time to write articles and do some work for my doctorate?

While I am hooked up in meetings, Calle is playing tennis. Because the tennis club is the only active SOPC club at this moment, their club has grown. There are many players now.

Tuesday, 08 September 2020

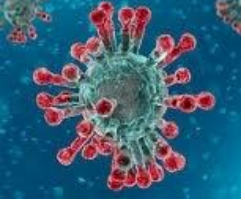
After lunch, my work continues, but now no more meetings but writing reports and answering and sending e-mails. Although my colleagues have the speakers now, I am still involved with the ones that did not confirm officially their participation. One day is still critical and thus I need to keep some options open.



Loic sends us a picture from the group of students at the foot of the Eiffel tour. He stays for his first weeks in Paris and the French are showing their capital. It looks like he has fun. I thought that most student would be older, but that seems not to be the case.

A mail from the Flemish K9 team asking how things are going. Nice that they follow it up.

After the soccer training, the parents have a meeting about soccer and COVID. Players and supporters have to wear masks when they walk. Masks are not obligatory when sitting if you respect the 6 feet. If one player has symptoms, the whole team must go in quarantine for 2 weeks. Of course, the players run the risk on the field because they have no mask on. We have to sign a form that we agree with these rules and the corresponding risks. Understandable.



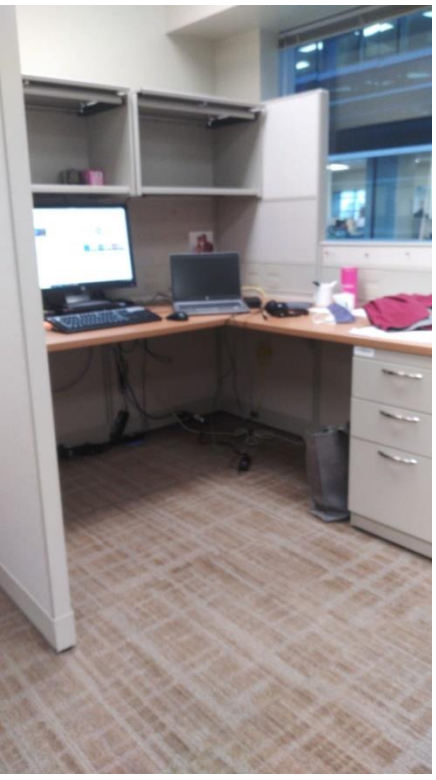
C+178: Sunshine After Rain

And the results are

Today, we have unstable weather. A constant flux of periods of sun and rain. By some luck, we can keep it dry during our morning walk.

I eardrop in on the chat between Mamie and Calle. It seems that the delay in the two-pagers results in some confusion about the weather. Now, the weather is not fine, it was fine a few days ago. Not anymore. If you read a two-pager, you can check the date below, in the footer of the page. I plan to fix that delay but is seems that days fly faster than I find time to write about them.

My workday at home is still filled with meetings related to the conference, be less involved in the speakers part of it. I now have time to manage other things. One of these things is to make sure that people confirm their participation. With two more confirmations, the agenda is almost completely confirmed. As long as that is not, I have to keep some reserve speakers in my pocket.



During one of those meetings, a colleague shows us our modified 'corona proof' cubicles. This means that they have added extra walls and that our workspace is more limited. We are getting enclosed. The open space created by putting 4 cubicles back to back is gone. A pity. Does that mean that we are going to the pre-COVID routine?



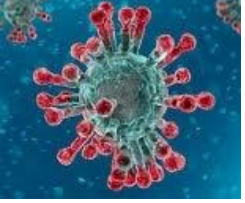
The reactions on my question about boarding experience for Stone are a bit surprising. Two have offered to take care of him during the holidays. That would be great as he could continue his training that way. Of course, we have to arrange the financial side of it, but it is comforting that people are willing to take care of him.

In the afternoon Ciaran calls to give us the results of his second exam period. The result is not as good as the first period, but not bad either. He could finish his bachelor the coming year.

Loic is further exploring the French capital and saying hello to Mona Lisa.

C+178: Sunshine After Rain





C+179: Video Recordings

First aid

Again, a humid day. Not something to look forward too. Lucky me that it is a workday at home. It starts with an early virtual meeting and then flows into one after the other. At 1030 a.m. I can finally finish my breakfast I started just before 0800.

Breakfast done, I can work on e-mails. After that a fast visit to Aldi for some 'urgent' groceries and a late lunch. The whole daily routine is shifted to the right.

To prevent Stone from licking his small wound open, again and again, I put a bandage around his front leg. When finished, he acts like he is wounded but surprisingly he leaves it on. He does not try to remove it and limits himself to playing the poor dog.



Loic sends us a copy of an article published in the Virginia Pilot on August 27th 2013 wherein he is mentioned. We certainly have seen it, but it is nice to read it again on the internet. The web never forgets.

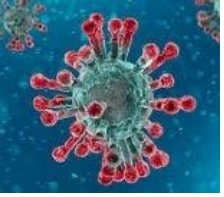
[…]

Thursday, 10 September 2020

Elsewhere in Chesapeake
Grassfield All-American setter Curtis Stallings left for Long Beach State, and Belgium transfer Loic Van Hoeserlande will step in. The junior still is working on his English so the language barrier is something to keep an eye – or ear – on. One of the youngest teams in the area, the Grizzlies will look to sophomores Garrett Stallings, Curtis' younger brother, and Austin Obenour for leadership. Both will be top offensive options.
[...]

In the spirit to do things before you ask somebody else to do it, I set everything up to record my teasers. It is hard to find a good and quiet spot to do this. I have to build an improvised studio. Very quickly, I realize that my prepared text is too long. I have to cut it in three. After 20 attempts, I have 25 seconds of acceptable video. Not fully happy with it, but it has to do. Recording yourself is much harder than expected and now I understand why people are reluctant to do this. I hope it is easier to record a brief.

We have a relaxing evening because soccer practise is cancelled. The fields are flooded.



C+180: 911

Not again

Having back-ups did not protect me from another crash. This time I cannot restore my hard disk and have to save the back-up files from one disk to another. Unfortunately, the most recent files are gone and those files are the basis for writing these two-pagers. Before the end of the day, I write a few topics of that day in a word file and add pictures if there are any as hooks for when I produce the two-pager of that day. Without these, I have to write from memory. The coming days, that will be the case.



911 has a double meaning in the USA. It is the American notation of the date September 9th 2001. The ripples of that terrorist attack are still left all over the world and will do so for a long time. I expected that this event would be more newsworthy but it was not. Maybe because this is an election year?

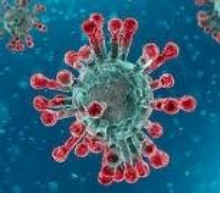
911 is, of course, the general emergency number too (comparable to the 112 number in Europe). It is a coincidence that I started my online course first aid and CPR today. I must say that the course is very well done. It is a nice example of how such courses can be delivered online and almost be as valuable as an in-person course.

After lunch, we go shopping. Are we heading towards turning my weekly off day into a shopping day? At Macy's, we return Seighin's short that was too small, at the hobby store Michael's we buy a magnetic sheet to turn two Belgian stickers into magnetic ones for the car and some Halloween gadgets that are on sale, a quick visit to Marshalls for pumpkin spice coffee and some underwear, and finish in Harris Teeter for groceries.



The evening is normal again: dinner and watching a movie.

Friday, 11 September 2020



C+181: 28



Wedding anniversary

Today 28 years ago, also a Saturday, we said yes to each other. It feels like that was yesterday, but the pictures and our current appearance tell us something else. Anyhow, this is a day to celebrate and that is our plan too. But first, the daily routine to start the day.

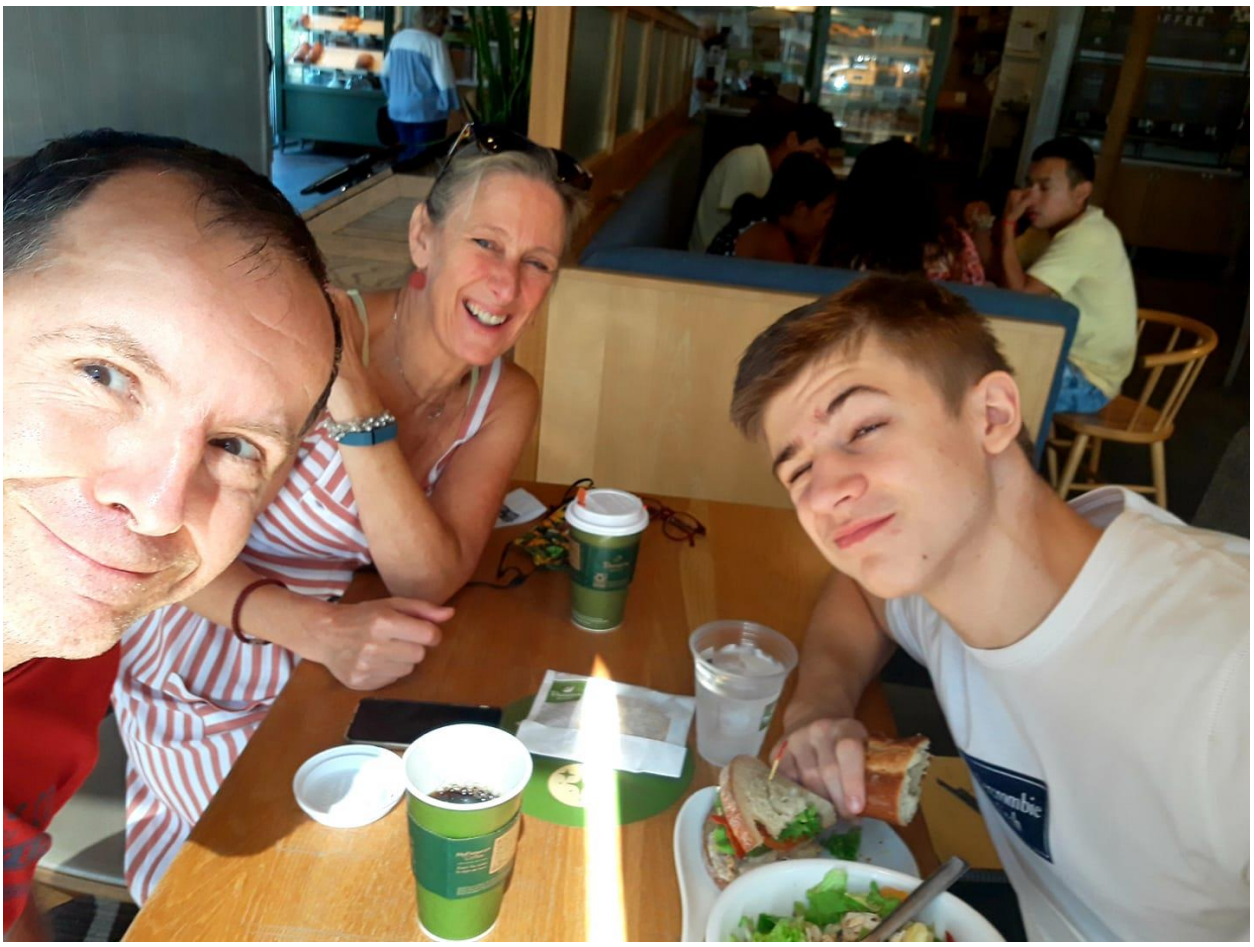
At 1100 a.m., we have an appointment with Seighin's piano teacher. With his future piano teacher to be correct. She wanted to meet us and hand him a piano book. What was planned to be a short meet and greet turns into a long chat. Seighin and she seems to get along. That is great.

At the parking lot, I discover a car with the right text written for this day and this strange period.



Saturday, 12 September 2020

We walk from the music store to the Panera Bread to enjoy a morning coffee while the youngest is hungry again.



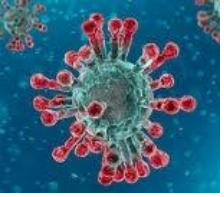
Back home, I write a two-pager and mow the grass while it is not too long. A walk with Stone and I can start preparing for a nice dinner with Calle. She has picked the Glass Light Restaurant in the center of Norfolk. It is French cuisine in a nice hotel. The music is just a bit off and the interior is nice but misses a touch of coziness. However, the food is delicious and served as a painting. I had planned to tell the waitresses that we, as Europeans, do not mind waiting a bit between the different dishes, but I forget to do it. After a bit of waiting for our oysters we ordered as an appetizer, she comes offering these on the house because we had to wait so long. A bit confusion on our part: waiting too long? That was just about right, but the offer is appreciated.

It is late when we are back in Chesapeake and Stone tells me that he still wants his evening walk.

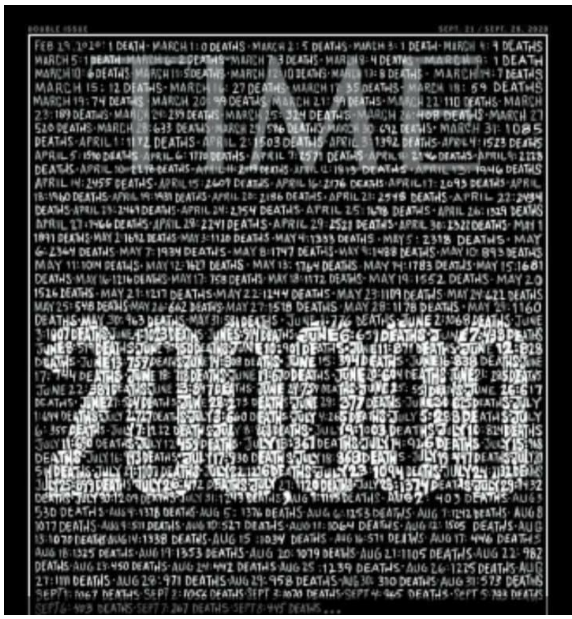



Happy
Anniversary!





C+182: The Final Edition

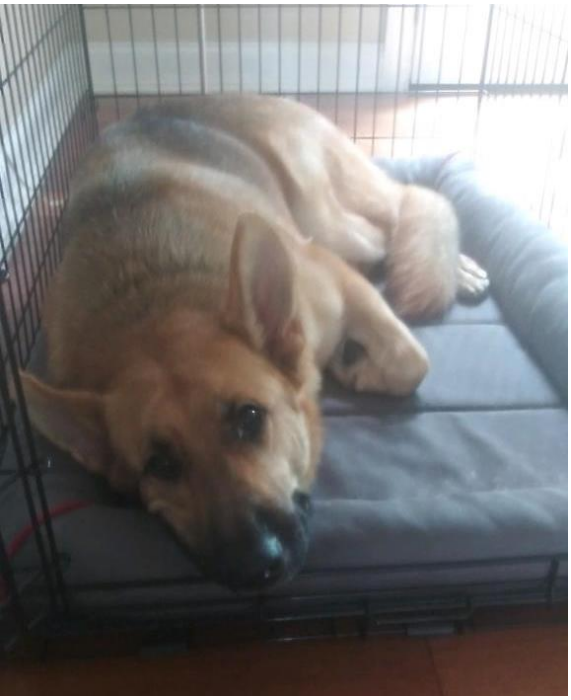


The new normal

6 months ago, I wrote that the situation had changed a bit. Our world had become smaller under the threat of the coronavirus. To keep more people informed, and not only our Flemish-speaking readers of our 'Across the Pond' editions, I decided to start a daily report on our situation in the USA during the COVID crisis. I aimed to publish an English two-pager every day. I had initially a 90-days effort in the back of my mind.

We are now twice that period. The two-pager has become a daily burden, although I like writing, and looking at the number of people reading it, I have the impression that you, the readers, are losing interest. The fast-changing corona-world has levelled off. Although the virus still makes the news from time to time, it is not daily anymore and barely something completely new. The national fluctuations in the number of infected people are no longer attention-grabbing. The question if we are on the first or second, or even the third wave does not get a good answer. The chase for a vaccine even played in the political arena, deserve hardly our attention. We will all know if and when a working cure is available. Hopefully, it will be tested with normal scrutiny. Even the 1,000,000th death in the world or the 200,000th in the USA went by unnoticed.

The size of my two-pagers slowly decreased to one page and I have sometimes a hard time to fill that one. Some days, pictures offered me an easy solution to reach the 2 pages. The things I could elaborate on did hardly have to do something with corona. I had to drop the second title that was normally focused on that piece of DNA in the world's focus. After months, it evolved into an ordinary diary, instead of a reflection on the 'quarantine', the social isolation. I had a hard time to keep up with the days and my weekends went up in catching up the delay. When the number of people opening the two-pager dropped below 40%, it was time to call it a day. The question left open was "When?"



The second crash of my hard disk provided the answer. With my written memory gone and wasting time to get it back, the gap widened by the day. 911 and our wedding anniversary made a nice closure. Edition 182, six months after the start, is the last one.

Sunday, 13 September 2020

Yes, the coronavirus is and will be with us for a very long time, but life goes on. I need to escape to the other side of the pond to hold our grand-daughter after the many first moths I have missed. We must find a kind of new normal. There will be bumps on the road, but even when we do things wrong, we will last and be challenged by other dangers.

Yes, I will miss writing and sending the two-pagers out, but I will find time for other things. I hope that within a few months, I will not feel the urge to start the two-pager again because that would mean we have returned to limited social life. Maybe there will be a flash edition with some corona related newsworthy sending electrons worldwide, but please no restart of the series because we must go into quarantine again.

Keep safe!

