

# Return of the Seal Slayers

by Paul Watson

The barbarians were at the gate. They were drunk and they were angry, a mob of misguided illiterates hell bent on one thing—to kick my ass, or worse.

I could hear them surging through the second floor hallway of my hotel, viciously kicking and pounding at the doors, terrorizing guests and screaming that they would kill me.

In my room, I was not feeling very secure. Marc Gaede, our photographer, was with me, along with two plain-clothed officers from the Quebec Police Force.

"What do you intend to do when this mob breaks down that door?" I asked.

"We can do nothing," one said, as he shrugged his shoulders. "We cannot defend you."

A vicious kick to the door and a roar from the halls indicated they had located my room. I was in Room 201. Next door in Room 205 was Martin Sheen, who had joined us for this campaign. In Room 207, Lisa Distefano was with Chuck Swift. Media people from Europe and North America were in other rooms, all of them held prisoner to this terror.

We had not expected this attack. We had arrived in these islands in the middle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, not to protest sealing,

but to offer an alternative. I had discovered that the short, hollow hair follicles of the baby harp seal had excellent insulating qualities, ideal for making bed comforters and sleeping bags. In only a few days, Mr.

Tobias Kirchhoff of Kirchhoff Bedding Fabrics of Germany would be arriving to offer jobs to sealers. He would pay \$3000dn per kilo for the hairs. We would be bringing jobs to an economically depressed region of Canada.

These would be jobs created without having to kill a single seal. The moulting hair fibres could be quickly and easily removed from the seals. Each pup yielded an average of sixty grams, gathered in less than forty seconds. The most attractive feature of the idea for me, however, was that the harvesting of the hair did not kill, hurt or even stress the animals. In fact, what we were proposing was a cruelty-free, non-lethal method of sealing.

The traditional sealers would have no part of a "sissy" plan for non-lethal sealing.

"Seals are meant to be clubbed, not coddled," said one representative of the Sealing Association. "Who does Watson think he is? We are men, sealing men. We are not women."

The door cracked, the door frame collapsed and the mob burst into the room. I jumped into the bedroom and barricaded myself with the bed against the door. A roar filled the next room as the sealers surged into the area where Marc and the two police officers were waiting. Both officers were shoved against the wall. Marc was thrown to the ground and pinned.

I braced myself, shoulders against the bed, my feet firmly against the wall. It was like attempting to hold back a human avalanche. The force on the door was so powerful that my feet were driven into the wall. The door splintered and gave way, as a debris flow of arrogant ignorance surged through the doorway and poured into my room, stinking like a burst cesspool after a booze party. They were screaming with rage, their faces contorted with hatred.

I turned to face them and it was the most terrifying sight of my life. At least thirty of them had entered my room, with another thirty in the room behind them, and two hundred more filling the hallways and lobby of the hotel. The vile madness in their eyes will never be forgotten. I knew with absolute certainty that I was a dead man. There was no escape. My back was against the wall.

In my hand I clutched my only means of defense, a stun gun, taken from our ice equipment. Designed to discourage a rare attack by a male hood seal, the device could knock down a single man without a problem. Three hundred of them was out of the question, of course, but I'd be damned if I would die without a struggle.

One of the ringleaders leaped forward and punched me on the side of the head. I dropped him with the stun gun and stuck another coming from my right. This confused the others momentarily. Another invader pulled my hair, and his punches and kicks connected painfully.

I zapped a third sealer as two others spit in my face. I was going down.

The only thing that saved me was one large sealer with the sense to know they were going too far. He put his back to me to block the others and this stopped them long enough for two uniformed police officers to make their way over, screaming for me to leave the island. I said that I would not.

One of the cops screamed at me, "You will leave or you will be a dead man in one minute."

"I will not submit to this mob—I will not go in to that mob—no way."

The cops grabbed me and pulled me from the room through a gauntlet of punching, kicking and spitting sealers. I felt my legs kicked away beneath me, I fell, stumbled, and then was pulled to a waiting car and thrown into the back seat. The rear right window shattered against my face. The cop behind the wheel jumped from the car to apprehend the man who smashed the window, and a sealer jumped into the driver's seat beside the officer in front and the car took off, leaving another sealer in the back who repeatedly punched me in the side. Fortunately, the driver was the same sealer who had attempted to protect me in the room a few minutes before.

As the car left the parking lot, I saw the mob turn on Steven Douglass, a photographer from the London *Daily Mirror*. His cameras were smashed and they punched him in the face.

At the airport, I was taken behind the security partition as the crowd surged into the small building. There were only three officers with me and three hundred screaming people hammering on the glass partition.

The mob demanded that I wipe the blood from my face and pose for a photographer to prove that I was not injured. I refused. The police told me that if I did not cooperate they could do nothing to guarantee my safety. I refused. I could not believe that the cops were taking orders from the mob.

A plane had been ordered from the mainland. I waited before the enraged, screaming mob for an hour and a half until the plane landed and I was escorted out on to the runway and sent against my will to Monoton, New Brunswick, where I was taken to the hospital by the Monoton police and then released the next morning.

This was not my first experience with mob violence in the Magdalen Islands. In 1979, my crew and I barely escaped with our lives after disrupting sealing activities. We had been prepared then...after all, we were in the middle of the seal wars which ended in 1983 with a victory for us when the European Parliament banned seal pelts. These guys were obviously bitter losers who had

little use for our attempts at reconstruction. What we had taken away we were willing to replace with a more positive industry—an approach that promoted life instead of death.

The sealers were not interested in jobs or a better life. They simply wanted revenge. In the meantime, the terror had not stopped on the islands. The mob returned to the hotel to intimidate the rest of my crew and to demand film and videos from the media. A German television crew was told by the police that their safety could not be guaranteed unless the videos were turned over to the sealers. The film crew handed over five cassettes to appease them. Their story had been successfully hidden in a snow bank.

Bob Hunter, of City TV in Toronto, was also threatened, but he also was able to trick them into believing he had nothing left.

Satisfied that there was no documentation, the Quebec police told the outside world that nothing had happened. They claimed, "There was a peaceful demonstration, but no violence, and Paul Watson voluntarily left the Magdalens when politely requested to do so by the sealers."

All of us who were involved were astounded when much of the Canadian media echoed the lies and refused to run comments by journalists who had witnessed the incident.

The next day, when I called to request that charges be laid, the Quebec police spokesperson told me, "You were lucky to get off the island alive, so don't push it."

I was forced to lay a complaint with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), but was told by writer Farley Mowat who had contacted the Canadian Solicitor General's office that Canada would be most reluctant to interfere with an issue involving Quebec sovereignty.

Meanwhile, an idea that could provide many jobs for unemployed islanders was violently rejected by sealers whose only market for seals remains selling the amputated penises to the Taiwanese voodoo medicine trade, to be dried, powdered and

mixed with tiger bone as a means of curing impotence.

All around the islands, we saw numerous bodies of seals left on the ice with only the penis removed. Given an opportunity to embrace life, the sealers of the Magdalen Islands decided to embrace death instead.

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