Life slowly returns to normal for couple injured in Dutch fire

By GEORGE EVASHUK Herald staff writer

... A Georgetown couple who survived an ordeal by fire during their dream trip.vacation count themselves lucky to be alive and will finally sleep in their own bed this

Harry and Laura Hoyle left their Georgetown home April 22 on a long planned for tour of the European capitals.

On the morning of May 9, they were in their room at the Hotel Polem in Amsterdam, spending their last few hours there before checking out to travel to Belguim and Britain. They had selected the hotel without reserva-

From his hospital bed in Peel Memorial Hospital Thursday, Mr. Hoyle described the ordeal which put him and his wife in Dutch hospitals for eight weeks, injured many others and left 38 persons dead.

"I heard a Godawful roar in the hall, like an express train," he said. It was about 7 a.m. and they were all packed and ready to go "Smoke began curling in under the door of the hotel. We knew it was on fire."

Getting off the bed, they heard a commotion in the hallway. There was screaming and someone was pounding at their door, he said. He opened the door to let in five elderly people who were trapped in the hallway. "Intense smoke" also entered the room, he said, while the group was led to a window to escape.

Flames were streaming out of the next window, "tike a blast furnace" Mr. Hoyle said. "The heat was so great, so intense, there is no way to explain it.

He saw his wife and the elderly people get to the ground but before he could jump, he was overcome with smoke and fell back into the room. "I knew I'd have to get up or be done."

Mr. Hoyle said he got up and managed to fall through the window 40 feet to the ground, where he broke his leg. People in the streets were in panic, he said, but he noticed that Laura had landed in a sitting position on the cobblestones.

"I grabbed a guy and he moved her away." he said. "A second fella got me, grabbed my arm and pul-

led." Secunds later, "the whole side of the hotel came down."

The heat was so intense, he said, that he asked to be pulled back further because his feet were burning hot.

"I remember saying. 'Baby, we're alive, we're going to live. We're going to make it," Mr. Hoyle said.

Mrs. Hoyle had burns to 50 per cent of her body; Mr. Hoyle had burns on 20 per cent of his body, besides a multiple facture on his leg, a hairline crack on an ankle and a hairline crack on his

Europe's best burn hospital is in Beverwijk, about 25 miles from Amsterdam, and Mrs. Hoyle was sent there immediately. Mr. Hoyle joined her after to days in the intensive care unit at Wilhelmina Hospital in Amsterdam and they shared a room. When they returned they were determined to share a room in Peel Memorial and did, setting a precedent for the hospital and as far as they know, for Canada as

"The head nurse was

shocked," Mr. Hoyle said. The Dutch people "were very generous hearted," Mrs. Hoyle told the Herald. "They were very eager to

streets, he said.

ope, he sald.

Mr. Hoyle a Peel regional

police detective, said the

International Police Associa-

tion, "took over and did

everything" for them after

the fire. The association, a

fraternity of police men and

women in Europe and more

popular there than in North

America, met their children

at the airport and got them to

see their parents and sent

"thousands" of letters and

posteards from all over Eur-

Many ordinary Dutch

people sent best wishes to the

Hoyles while they were in

hospital there, At Peel Mem-

orial there have been plenty

of visitors, Mr. Hoyle said,

They appeared in good

spirits, and Mr. Hoyle fondly

teased his wife with keeping

them in the hospital a week

longer because of skin grafts.

Being together in the hospital

room as they have been since

the ordeal has speeded their

recovery, they believe, but

they're eager to be home.

"almost a few too many."

help and assist us." "It's an odd feeling to be in a country and not even own a toothbrush," she said. "We had nothing. Everything went up in flames."

Although the catastrophe occurred over two months ago, its impact is still being felt by the Hoyles. "New that it's an ocean

away," Mrs. Hoyle said, "it doesn't seem quite as awful. But over there, more people were asking and talking about it. It was more upsetting." Mr. Hoyle said it is only

since returning to Canada that he has been able to talk about the fire. "I wasn't able to talk about it in Holland." He said he relives the Incident in his mind and that lately it has been awakening him at night.

But to say that they were glad to be back was an "understatement" they both chorused. "There's nothing like this part of the country," Mrs. Hoyle said, adding that they gained two weeks improvement of health just by being back."

Mr. Hoyle an accomplished photographer, regretted the loss of two Nikon F cameras, a movie camera and an assortment of lenses as a result of the fire, but hoped that some of his pictures of Europe up to May 9 can be saved.

In the dash to the window, "Laura saved the tote bag with our passports, I threw my camera bag out," he said. When he landed on the ground, despite burns to his back and arm and the fractures, he reached for the camera bag to get a picture of the hotel in flames from an angle few people ever get to see but discovered that in the drop from the hotel window

all the lens were smashed, "It was only a matter of minutes before the whole hotel was in flames," he said The first fire truck on the scene was consumed by the flames. Another fire truck that arrived dropped the hose on his leg and he got hit by blasts of cold water in the struggle to douse the flames and get the injured off the





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Harry Hoyle, pictured here in a bed at Peel Memorial Hospital, is looking forward to returning to Georgetown this week.

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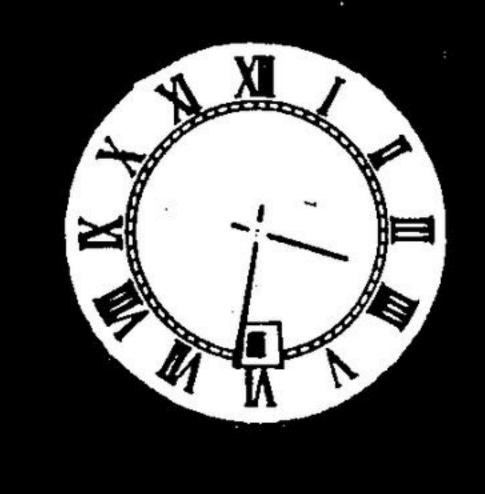
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