

Watching the good guys win

In this world of ours, there is an age-old fact of life— we have good guys and we have bad guys.

And sometimes it seems the bad guys have an unfair advantage, since they rarely operate within a set of rules— a fact that sometimes hampers the efforts of the good guys.

But last week, the good guys were gaining ground in Halton— big-time.

I was invited to accompany Halton Regional Police drug officers as they raided and confiscated marijuana 'grows' in the north Halton area. This time, the good guys had the major advantage. It's called a helicopter.

When I think of a gang of cops confiscating a bunch of marijuana plants, I idly recalled seeing TV or newspaper images of armfuls of tall green plants being loaded into a truck, to be taken away and burned.

It seems there's a lot more to an operation than a leisurely walk in the open countryside.

During last Thursday's raid, I was in contact with the guys in the helicopter by my cell phone, as they directed me to the area where their cohorts were waiting on the ground.

Once the plants were located from the air, the cops on the ground were given what appeared to be the tough job— getting to them.

And even tougher— yours truly keeping up.

After driving to the back of the 100-acre property as far as we could, we had another two-kilometre walk into the thick swamp, with the helicopter leading the way like a pied piper.

I was reminded of television images of troops in 1960s Vietnam, helicopter roaring above, as I sloughed along behind them. Me, a 48-year-old lugging a camera bag, struggling to keep pace behind a bunch of jogging 30-something (or younger) cops, in top physical shape.

Once they located the grove of plants in the wet, muggy swamp, I watched as the cops set about the tiring job of chopping hundreds of

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plants off at the base of their stalks, then dragging them back out to a waiting truck, where they were loaded and taken to be incinerated.

This wasn't anything like drug busts on TV.

In fact, it's damn hot, dirty work, and I could only watch in awe at the enthusiasm these officers demonstrated in doing their job.

Of course, they were equipped for the task, with waterproof boots and lots of stamina.

Unfortunately, I wasn't.

When I left home that morning, I didn't expect to be wading through a mosquito-infested swamp, my nearly new Rockports squishing through the mud (never to be new again).

But the raid was well worth it. The week's haul of marijuana plants confiscated in Halton was estimated around the \$1.5 million mark.

After witnessing the laborious trek through the swamp to locate it, not to mention the accompanying task of chopping it down and bringing it back out, I'm certain of one thing: It would never have been possible without that helicopter— not in a month of Sundays.

For those debating the merits of paying for a helicopter, as opposed to adding more cops to the force, additional cops wouldn't come close to finding that much pot in an entire summer.

Yup, I can honestly say, with last week's operation, one thing was abundantly apparent: The good guys are winning.

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