

Nowhere to hide

by BRIAN LOCKHART

Several years ago, I took advantage of Ancestry.com's two-week free period where you could peruse their records and see if you like the site.

It was a fascinating experience.

I was able to trace the paternal side of my family all the way back to the late 1600s, with some help from information posted on there by distant cousins.

I knew some family history dating back about 150 years, but beyond that, much of it had been lost.

I knew my great-grandfather had arrived on Canadian shores with his family around 1870, and settled a farm in Saskatchewan. They had arrived from Russia, although they were actually German, which never made sense to me.

Turns out they were indeed German and about 100 years earlier, they had fled Germany due to religious persecution, and had lived in a religious colony established on a Russian peninsula before someone decided it was time to move to North America.

I then moved on to the maternal side of my family. I was able to find records of my grandparents arriving in Halifax by ship in the mid 1920s. From those records, I found my grandfather's home address listed where he had lived with his parents in Belfast, as well as the photo of the ship he had crossed the Atlantic as a passenger.

I then went on to Google Earth Street View, and typed in the address of his boyhood home. It came up almost immediately.

It was a working-class townhouse on a street in Belfast and it is still occupied.

I found Google Earth to be a fascinating resource. I toured the streets of cities and towns across North and South America and Europe.

I was able to virtually drive down through neighbourhoods in towns that I will never be able to actually visit.

This is fascinating technology that must have taken an unbelievable amount of work.

The Google Earth version has mapped out the entire planet from above ? and that includes Moscow, and every city and town in Russia.

The war in Ukraine is not turning out the way the Russians thought it would, and a lot of it must have to do with this modern technology of being able to spy on your neighbour with a drone or, in the bigger sense, a satellite orbiting 100 miles overhead.

I've already seen several videos of on-going battles that were posted by amateurs flying amateur drones over the action near their home.

At several hundred feet, you won't even hear a tiny drone, and if you did notice it, there would be little you could do about it. It would be a speck in the sky and almost impossible to knock out of the air with ground fire because they are so small.

There is no doubt that concealing a vehicle, a tank, or troop movements is a lot more difficult than it used to be.

In the past, it required a risky reconnaissance mission to scout out enemy locations and there was good chance the aircraft would be blown out of the sky as soon as they spotted you.

There is one Ukrainian drone video showing several Russian artillery pieces that had been destroyed by return fire that hit the mark. That is some very good and accurate shooting.

It wasn't that long ago that artillery required spotters to head out to the field and report where shells were hitting and calling in corrections. Now, the eye in the sky can tell you exactly where to aim your guns.

I have no doubt that American or NATO military intelligence is watching all these troop movements from some eye in the sky and forwarding the information to the defenders. This can come down to an exact position of a tank or vehicle.

It's hard to hide a column of several hundred troops when someone is having bird's eye view of what's going on and can zoom in so close they can see that the troops are again being served borscht for lunch.

Warfare has changed a lot in just that last few years. Knowing exactly where your enemy is, troop strength, and which weapons they are bringing to the fight means you can prepare a better defence.

It seems consumer level drones can be used for a lot more than just videotaping real estate listings from the air.

The world is a much smaller place thanks to useful tools like Google Earth and I'm sure the military versions are even better.

It also means there are few places to hide.