



Following the Voice: The Eyes of Vexillology

Alain Raullet

Abstract

After delivering my paper, “The Voice of Vexillology”, at the Yokohama congress, my radio broadcast vexillological chronicles continue, reaching number 204 in 5 seasons. In the past three years, I have been experimenting with new Initiatives (“I”s or “Eyes”) beyond the radio program, to make Vexillology better known.

The Eyes of Vexillology: A Flag Exhibition in Tregastel (in north Brittany), in October 2009, a display of some 50 large flags seen by 700 visitors over 9 days. A Flag Quiz of 10 enigmas inside the exhibition. A Flag Conference with an audience of 30 people audience discussing the radio flag chronicles. A Flag Contest in November 2009, suggested by the deputy mayor, to involve the city’s schoolchildren in designing a flag for the city—110 students participated, offering 61 designs, one which a jury selected, Flag Sponsorship, where I created a flag for a local Gaelic football club, and Flag Surprises—more to come.



The flag of the St-Brieuc Gaelic football team

Following the Voice: The Eyes of Vexillology

If you weren't in Yokohama two years ago, you missed my first time as a lecturer, presenting on my three years of broadcasting weekly 4-to-5-minute radio segments on vexillology, ten months a year.

Since then, I am pleased to report that the radio broadcasts have continued and I've completed seasons 4 & 5, totalling **204** different episodes so far.



For season 4 (Sept. 2009 to June 2010), I recorded some **40** episodes; they were broadcast on Mondays around 11:30 AM. For season 5 (Sept. 2010 to June 2011), there were **41** more broadcasts in the same slot on Monday, and then repeated on Thursdays around 18:35. Season 6 will start in September 2011, and after my return from the Washington congress, I am going to record 5 new chronicles, though I don't know yet the broadcasting day.

After my lecture at ICV 23 in Japan, I promised myself to give you further news about my Dream: I mean TV Vexillology. I got no answer from the people I have been contacting, not even a polite one; that's the French usual attitude, and I discovered later that mentioning RCF (French Catholic Radio) network, to which I have been offering my chronicles, is politically incorrect in France—especially when you are a Catholic, as I am ... Anyway that is another debate.

Meanwhile, as Philippe Rault sometimes says, teasing me, 'Take Kennedy's slogan "Don't let them kill you"', I've been experimenting with others ways to make Vexillology known to the world. Here, therefore, are the Eyes of Vexillology or the "I"s of Vexillology. "I" stands for Initiative.

EYE I—Flag Exhibition

It started as a joke in July 2008, when my friend Claude said to me: “Alain, so many times you talk to us about such or such a flag—why not put on a flag exhibition? In fact, why not do it right here in Tregastel?” (Tregastel is a beach resort town in the north of Brittany.)



TRÉGASTEL
en *DRAPEAUX*

Trégastel
TRÉGASTEL

du 25 octobre au 1^{er} novembre 2009

La **VEXILLOLOGIE** en *BRETAGNE*
CENTRE des *CONGRÈS*

10h à 12h30 / 14h30 à 19h

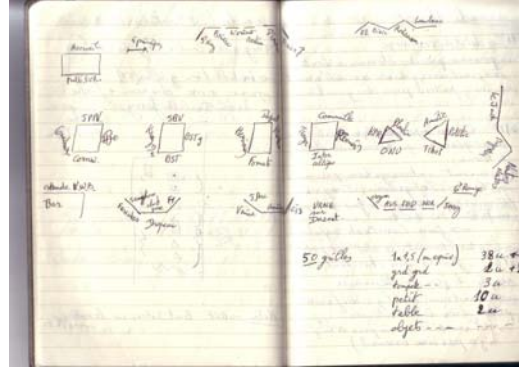
Although that sounded a little strange to me, in October he contacted Tregastel's deputy mayor, Mme Briand. Then in December 2008 we met and she showed great interest in the proposal. But I still had no idea where I was going. We first scheduled the exhibit for May 2009, but technical problems due to agenda schedule conflicts postponed the idea to the week of All Saint's Day 2009.

After the Yokohama congress, I met Mme Briand in early September to start preparations. The deal was very simple: I would bring and exhibit some 50 large flags, so that the public could discover Vexillology, and the city would be in charge of everything else, for example, advertising the date and location of the exhibition throughout the city.

The title of the event, held from 24 October to 1 November 2009 was "Discovery of Vexillology in Brittany through a Personal Collection". D-Day was set for 23 October 2009, when I arrived with large suitcases containing some 55 large flags, mainly from Brittany. I tried to bring different and uncommon flags, such as flags of cities and associations, maritime flags, as well as some foreign flags to lead people to discover Vexillology through the five principles of good flag design (thank you, Ted Kaye and NAVA). With the help of Isabelle Fossey, who was in charge of city communications, we displayed the flags on some 50 panels, and for each flag or panel I attached a description with information about the flag. (These descriptions were actually my preparation notes for recording the radio chronicles!)



24 October was the official opening of the exhibition, with local press attending. However, what I remember the most are the comments and how so many people were astonished by seeing large flags up close and being surprised that Breton flags are not just black and white. If only for that reason, sharing and presenting flags should be compulsory for every vexillologist, at least once in his or her life.



All during the week-long exhibition, I discovered and noted many errors, to be improved later for the next exhibition. Anyway, the week fulfilled my dream of sharing my knowledge with people of all ages, questioning me about such or such flag. When you try, you'll see what I mean. Let us not be afraid to share our Vexillology.



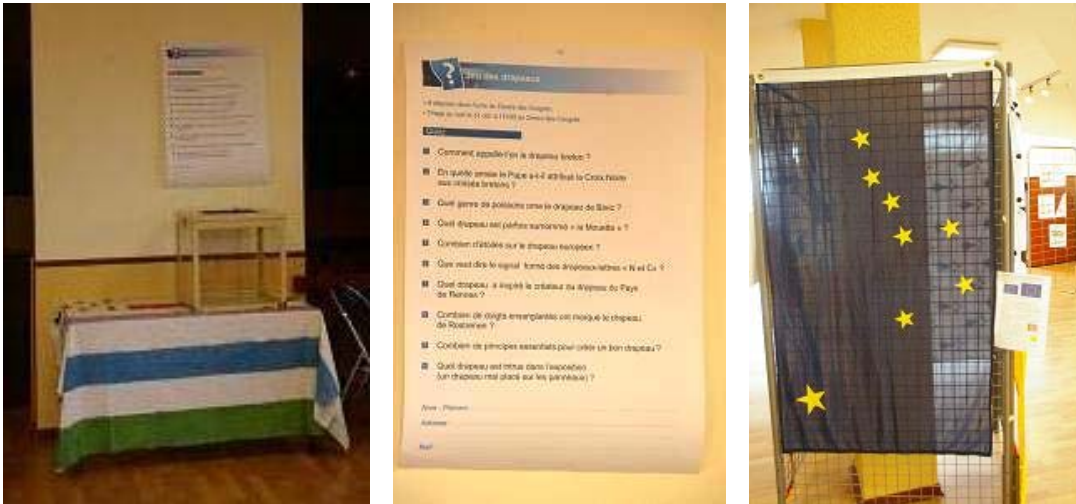
The exhibition received 700 visitors over 9 days, which is one new visitor every 6 minutes; think about that!



EYE 2—Flag Quiz

During the exhibition, in order to interest visitors, Mme Briand suggested I prepare a quiz, a kind of treasure hunt among all the information presented. I prepared a list of 10 questions whose answers could be found in the information posted next to the flags. Local shopkeepers helped invite people to come to the exhibition, and those who answered the quiz correctly got a chance to win one of three gifts offered by the shopkeepers.

The quiz had two purposes: First, to bring people to the exhibition. Second, to have them search through the flag notes for information and learn more about the flags.



The 10th question was a bit tricky: I presented the flag of Alaska, with the notes about the flag of Europe; that question was of course meant to narrow down the number of winners. And it did!



We got some 38 participants, with 9 winners; after drawing, 3 of them received their prizes on the last day of the exhibition.

EYE 3—Flag Conference

During the exhibition, building on the idea of the city’s communications officer, I held an evening conference to gather people and talk about and exchange flags.



To start the meeting, I offered the 30 people attending the French version of my Yokohama paper (that’s the one some of you missed, remember?). We all exchanged ideas about French and Breton flags. One of my fears was that among the attendees there would be a know-it-all full of himself, thinking he knew everything and/or criticizing everything. Fortunately, nothing like happened; we all spent a very nice evening, including several people who came and asked interesting questions about flags.

EYE 4—Flag Contest

When I had met with Mme Briand in early September to prepare everything, she wanted to attract schoolchildren to the exhibition. My instant reply was, “Let’s have a flag contest, such as ‘Draw the flag you imagine for the city’” “OH, VERY GOOD”, she replied.

During the exhibition, I prepared the contest rules and specifications. We reserved a special day after the exhibition (6 November 2009) for the schoolchildren of this small town; on that special day, all five grammar-school classes visited.

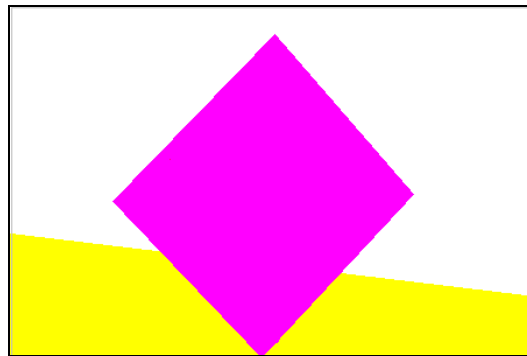


Each class had one hour to go through the exhibition, copy of flag of their choice, and at the end of the hour I offered them some explanations and showed them good designs in order to prepare them for the contest.

110 students came that day, and three months later, on 30 January, they presented some 61 designs, all of them incredibly original ideas for the town flag. After helping the 5-person jury to grade the drawings, Mme Briand and I announced the names of five winners, one for each class, with the grand prize winner getting a score of 83 out of 100.



Admire the result: The winning designers were two girls, Lou-Ina Barbosa and Marie Hugon, only six years old! Their design is simple, easy to draw, and very symbolic for the place, which is famous for its red granite rocks facing the sea, one of them nicknamed ‘the Die’. (*Nota Bene*: it is not a mistake that in the design the Die is pink coloured, as in French red granite is ‘Granite rose’!)



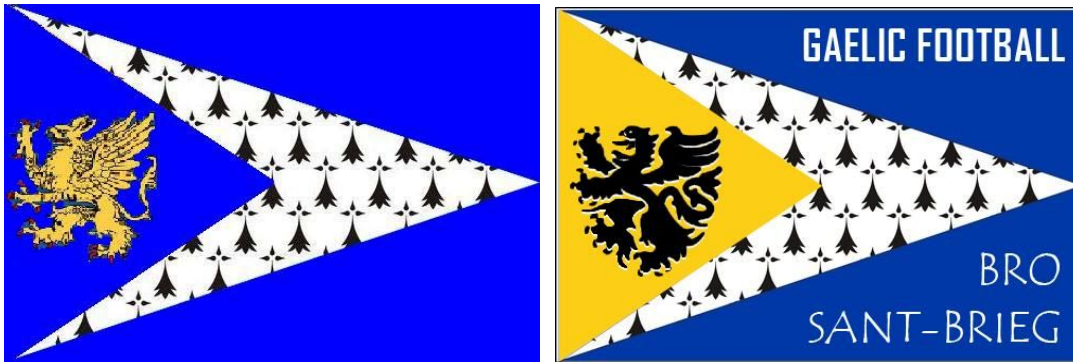
61 designs—could any expensive communications agency compete with those 110 schoolchildren? Moreover, children are the future of mankind and the bearer of its symbols, aren't they?



EYE 5—Flag Sponsoring

On the Internet one sees so many things, some bad, some good. One day in early 2010, I discovered two interesting subjects on the same page.

1. There was a new team created in my city of St-Brieuc, playing *Caid* (Gaelic football).
2. They had already chosen a flag of their own: they had based it on a paper version of a flag that our Breton flag society, SBV, had designed in 1996 as the St-Brieuc provincial flag. That was a nice surprise, with a slight change of colours but, unfortunately, words on it...



Getting in touch with the team's president, I offered to volunteer for the team, especially helping with a tournament in February 2010. Soon after that I decided, without telling anybody, to make a couple of examples of their not-yet-existing flag and offer them before the new tournament to be held in April at Brest. (Of course, I left off the words.)



When I came at the end of a training session one Monday evening in March to offer the flags, you should have seen the eyes of the guys. Now those two flags are everywhere at the various tournaments they compete in. They are so proud of their new flags that one disappeared during summer and reappeared at a new tournament ... surely one player had it hanging it in his room during that absence.



With a little money you can give a paper flag a real life; moreover, sponsoring a flag is one of the best opportunities to design an effective flag!



EYE 6—Flag Surprises

As you can imagine, since as you know I am different, I have others ideas in mind. Once they have been introduced, I'll let you know whether they succeeded or not.

Among some current ideas, cousins of my friend Claude are interested in setting up a flag exhibit in another local town, actually not far from Tregastel. Nothing has happened yet. I am also writing some articles about city coats-of-arms in a weekly local newspaper.

In the city where I am a civil servant, the people in charge of the local library asked me in late March for a U.S. flag to decorate their 'Week of American Books' event.



Finally, in the experiences I have just recounted, I didn't quite succeed with certain efforts. The best (or should I say my worst) example is to have missed sponsoring the design that won that wonderful school flag contest in Tregastel and so give life to a new flag. Next time, I promise, I won't miss it! I have been beaten on one field, but the war is not lost. As I told some of you at Yokohama: "GANBATTE", meaning "go ahead and imitate me"! Now, here in Alexandria—in this building resembling a lighthouse which today is the centre of the world of Vexillology—may I say to you: Make Vexillology better known through Broadcasting, Exhibitions, Quizzes, Conferences, Contests, and Sponsorships...everything is possible. And while you're at it, why not try the impossible, too!?

About the Author

Alain Raullet, born on Halloween's eve in 1953, in central Brittany is:

- Single and living in Saint-Brieuc, north Brittany.
- Working since 2001 as team manager of 50 technical civil servants in Loudeac, a city of 10,000 in central Brittany.
- Before, worked as civil engineer in Iran, and later oil services engineer in England, Guatemala, and Brazil (1978 to 1983).
- Back to Brittany, team manager of road building company (1988 to 1996).
- And a civil servant from 1998....
- Interested with flags since childhood (when started reading dictionaries at first page).
- Reader of *Flag Bulletin* since 1980.
- Attendee of every ICV since Melbourne in 1989.
- Founded SBV, Breton vexillological society, in 1996 with Philippe Rault.
- In charge of Breton society, Breton Flag Bulletin (*Ar Banniel*).
- And since 7 September 2006 the world's only radio broadcaster on Vexillology...

