

# West Coast Navy Moves the Yardstick on CF Transformation

Canada's Pacific Fleet, based in Esquimalt, British Columbia, has just completed (May 2005) *Exercise Trident Fury*, the most ambitious Canadian-led multinational naval-air exercise of its kind since the mid-1990s. This undertaking, occurring just in advance of *FrontLine's* publication deadline, provides an excellent opportunity to assess the state of Canada's Navy.

In an exclusive interview, Fleet Commander, Commodore Roger Girouard (inset), observed that the importance of the exercise was twofold. He previously commanded a coalition task force in the Arabian Sea as part of *Operation Enduring Freedom* (the post-9/11 war against terrorism; Canada's initial contribution was called *Operation Apollo*), and will be promoted to rear admiral this summer to become commander of all Maritime Forces Pacific



(MARPAAC). Girouard sees *Trident Fury* as the culmination of a year and a half period of rejuvenation of the fleet after the major effort of *Operation Apollo*, and he is entirely satisfied with the readiness of the Navy now to embark again on similar operations. At the same time, he also believes his forces "have moved the yardstick" on several key fronts in the pressing transformation of the Canadian Forces.

The scope of the exercise began modestly, as the regular at-sea assessment phase of the year-long Operations Room Officer Course, the next generation of naval warfighter commanders. But in an era of tight fuel budgets and restricted training resources, Girouard's staff saw an opportunity to achieve a number of concurrent training objectives, such as the mid-cycle workups of the replenishment vessel *Protecteur* and the return to operational status of the submarine *Victoria* after several months alongside pending the findings of the inquiry into the tragic October fire onboard her sister *Chicoutimi*.

This high level of activity attracted the attention of various Canadian, American and allied forces, and *Trident Fury* soon blossomed into a challenging scenario of coalition joint-coordinated maritime operations in a limited multi-threat environment, with both homeland security and expeditionary warfare dimensions.

May 2005 –  
Four American F-16s from Atlantic City Air Guard Station fly over HMCS Algonquin off the coast of British Columbia. The jets from the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, have travelled to Comox, B.C. to participate in Exercise TRIDENT FURY as an enemy force to the Canadian-led Naval task group.

PHOTO: MCPL ROBERT BOTTRILL, CF COMBAT CAMERA





*Dressed in battle gear, members of HMCS Protecteur navigate their ship through the waters of Port Alberni, BC, as they prepare for possible threats created by sea training staff.*

Participants comprised the usual units of the Pacific Fleet (the destroyer flagship *Algonquin* and frigates *Calgary* and *Vancouver*, with their embarked Sea King helicopters and associated Aurora maritime patrol aircraft from Comox Air Base), but this time augmented by Canadian Coast Guard vessels and CF-18 Hornet fighters from Cold Lake, Alberta.

Ships and aircraft of the United States Navy (USN) have regularly attended past MARPAC exercises, but this year's participants underscored the broad spectrum of renewed interest in the joint CAN/US responsibility for the defence of North America: the modern Aegis destroyer USS *Shoup* can hook directly into the NORAD aerospace defence network (like *Algonquin*), while the aging frigate *McClusky* has been brought back into service (manned by naval reservists) specifically for homeland defence purposes. That same imperative led to the novel participation of several US Air National Guard units (F-15 Eagle fighters from Oregon, F-16 Falcons from New Jersey, and KC-135 tankers from Washington State), as well as a pair of NATO E-3A Sentry AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System).

Just in the simple fact of such a scale of participation, the exercise was a great success in meeting the

objectives of the government's new *Defence Policy Statement* unveiled only in April. It set a high priority on coordinating joint and combined inter-agency security efforts. But *Trident Fury* measured progress beyond the mere optics of a paper order of battle. A real highlight was significant progress in sea-air combat interoperability.

In this respect, the integration of *Algonquin* and *Shoup* into the NORAD network was achieved to a higher degree and sustained for a longer duration than all previous efforts, proving beyond doubt the ability for warships to maintain a common operating picture linked to shore deci-

sion-makers through the 1st Canadian Air Division in Winnipeg, and the Canadian Air Defence Sector (CADS) in North Bay, to NORAD HQ in Cheyenne Mountain.

Pushing to a yet higher level of operations, the exercise scenario required 1 Cdn Air Div to respond to a simulated air attack against the task group by despatching a flight of eight CF-18 fighters from Cold Lake (in reality, an Air Weapons Controller Course with a requirement to conduct a long range engagement mission). The Hornets proceeded in formation to the vicinity of Comox, where they conducted an air-to-air refuelling with



*Canadian sailors coordinate events from the operations room onboard HMCS Algonquin.* >>

the Air National Guard KC-135s before continuing seaward to fly Combat Air Patrols over the task group. In real life, the Hornets would have been in an ideal position to engage the “attacking” F-16s, but in the interests of exercise safety separation requirements these continued with their sea level high speed attacks, which the defending ships’ crews found far more challenging than the standard drone missile profiles.

In a separate scenario, the Air National Guard F-16s also assisted in the development of a new tactical procedure to defend surface warships against small boat swarm attack, by dropping precision laser-guided munitions on the remote command of computer datalink signals from the ships. One Air National Guard pilot remarked to local Comox media, “We never get this quality of exercise activity in our own country!”

Other significant transformation objectives were met in the field of “network enabled operations.” This evolving concept envisions the use of advanced information technology to assist the command and control of military operations. In one *Trident Fury* example, the NORAD connection was enhanced by the integration of Link-16 with an experimental Canadian Automated Data Systems

Integrator (ADSI) system. In another example, the normal volume of message traffic was reduced significantly by the posting of routine warfare instructions to a highly classified secure internet channel known as “C@S2” (Collaboration at Sea, Version 2). Operators also used it to establish “chat rooms” in which they exchanged tactical messages in a fashion less cumbersome and less susceptible to enemy jamming than the normal radio voice nets.

Against these many successes, a few cautionary observations stand out. At a basic level, the continued fragility of the Canadian fleet was evident from the fact that the frigate *Vancouver* was severely limited by a large number of equipment defects that the Navy’s Fleet Maintenance Facility does not have the capacity to fix (the FMFs were drastically reduced in the budget cuts of the mid-1990s) and cannot afford to contract out.

All ships continue to suffer from personnel shortages, especially in critical high-tech trades. More generally, challenging exercises such as this must be held more than once a year in order to maintain the operator skills required in a complex operating environment.

Finally, the exercise demonstrated the under-utilized potential for better

coordination with the other services to harmonize exercise requirements for the most efficient use of scarce and costly resources.

To this end, building upon this year’s success with the Air Force, the Navy hopes to engage our Army for future exercises. Discussions already are underway with the Commander of the US Navy’s Third Fleet in San Diego for the “loan” of an amphibious vessel: with so many US Marines occupied ashore in Iraq, the USN is interested in concurrent training opportunities if we can provide the “boots on the ground” to put in them.

In the final analysis, it is easy to share Commodore Girouard’s optimism. On the evidence of *Exercise Trident Fury*, Canada’s Navy is true to its motto: “Ready, Aye, Ready.” ■



*Dr Richard Gimblett, CD is FrontLine’s Naval Editor and a Research Fellow with Dalhousie University’s Centre for Foreign Policy Studies.*

*His most recently published book is called Operation Apollo: The Golden Age of the Canadian Navy in the War Against Terror (Magic Light, 2004).*

*An American Sea Hawk helicopter flies over the formation of Canadian and American Ships on exercise off the west coast of Vancouver Island. The USS McClusky sails in the foreground, the USS Shoup (right), HMCS Protecteur (center) and the Tanu of the Canadian Coast Guard.*

*Led by Canadian Fleet Commander, Commodore Roger Girouard, Exercise Trident Fury is a multinational exercise aimed at advancing Canada’s ability to respond to offshore threats and unlawful acts from within a coalition environment. Participants include members of the Canadian Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard; the American Navy and Air National Guard; and an Airborne Warning and Control systems (AWACs) aircraft. With over 2,000 participants, this task group is the largest exercise to take place off of Canada’s west coast.*

