

Blueland versus Orangeland: Exercise Mohawk, April 1964

Ken Reynolds

One of the stories in the June 1964 edition of *The Crow's-nest* dealt with a subject of interest to Canadian military planners then and now. Published under the dreary title "Joint Army-Navy Exercise Held," the story discussed Exercise Mohawk. It noted:

The object of the exercise was to transport by sea sufficient Army personnel and equipment to practise protection of military installations in certain Canadian areas. Other objects were to practise the Army force and ships in [the] problems of loading, unloading, approach and landing, to provide naval logistic support for land forces and to practise a company group in combating a small enemy operation.¹

This was the dull description of a very interesting joint exercise at a time of transformation in the Canadian military.

Rear-Admiral Jeffrey Brock, Flag Officer Atlantic Coast, Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), issued the instructions for Exercise Mohawk on 4 March 1964. The second in a series of joint exercises designed for navy and army forces to practise combined operations, the scenario called for the town of Shelburne, NS, to act as the main harbour on "Gull Island," part of the fictitious state Blueland. Gull Island was much desired by neighbouring Orangeland, which, it was feared, might try to take it, possibly through aggressive means. Blueland was to place an infantry company group on the island to protect its military installations and deter any Orangeland military assaults.

Orangeland was known to have a few modern aircraft and one submarine, which Blueland feared might be used to attack a Blueland naval force heading to Gull Island or to land a party of saboteurs. Blueland's own forces assigned to the mission included an infantry 'Iron Force,' a naval task group, and a possible aerial component. Blueland's Task Force 301 (under command of Rear-Admiral Brock) consisted of an amphibious force under the command of Commander A.H. Rankin (HMCS *Cape Scott*). The Atlantic Coast escort maintenance ship, *Cape Scott* was the headquarters ship for the mission and was accompa-



A Royal Navy A-class submarine.

nied by a support force consisting of five frigates – HMC Ships *Fort Erie*, *Outremont*, *Buckingham*, *New Waterford* and *Lanark* – under the command of Commander E. Petley-Jones (*Fort Erie*). The landing force was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel P.V.B. Grieve, Royal Canadian Dragoons, and included an Iron Force headquarters, an infantry company group from Gagetown and a logistics element from 3 Service Battalion.

Exercise Mohawk's objectives were clear: first, army personnel and equipment would be transported by sea to protect Gull Island (HMCS *Shelburne*) against expected Orangeland commando landings; second, the Iron Force was to practise unopposed landings and combating a small covert operation; and, third, naval units were to gain experience in the logistical support of land forces. All units in the exercise were to make use of the "Doc-



Sailors from HMCS *Cape Scott* and soldiers from the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps working on the vehicle ramp on Shelburne beach.

trine for Amphibious Operations” then in use by the US Army, Navy and Marine Corps.

Rear-Admiral Brock and Major-General Robert W. Moncel, General Officer Commanding the Canadian Army’s Eastern Command, announced Exercise Mohawk would be held 14-17 April. In addition to the military assets, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) had also promised to take part. RCMP personnel from “H” Division and the patrol boat *Adversus* would join in, mainly to help with local information gathering and coastal patrols.

Saint John, NB, was the staging port for the exercise, where the infantry company group and its vehicles were loaded on board the ships for the trip to Shelburne. The amphibious force commander’s operation order called for the loading of the army’s vehicles into *Cape Scott* and *Lanark* on April 11. The 42 officers and men comprising Iron Force’s headquarters were also to be loaded on board *Cape Scott* that day, followed by the main body of the infantry company group two days later. The company group would be loaded aboard the various ships participating in the exercise, with *Cape Scott* taking on an additional 40 officers and men. Three frigates were each to embark 37 officers and men. Overall, 193 officers and men were to be spread out amongst the ships.

As planned, the Iron Force headquarters staff and the army’s vehicles were embarked on *Cape Scott* on 11 April, the loading being quickly and easily accomplished. Six jeeps, four trailers and seven 3/4 ton trucks were loaded on the ship’s fore deck, another five jeeps and five trailers on its aft deck.

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Fort Erie, Outremont, Buckingham and New Waterford arrived in Saint John on the 11th. *La Hullose* replaced *Lanark* at the last minute, and was ordered to join the other ships off Shelburne. Of greater concern than loading *Cape Scott*, a vessel that was well equipped for such a task, was the loading of vehicles on board a frigate. Secured alongside *Cape Scott*, the loading of *New Waterford* was much easier than expected. Three jeeps were embarked and the drivers got the vehicles into place in about an hour. The navy concluded that “While a frigate is not a very suitable vessel for the transport of vehicles,

in an emergency there is no doubt they can do the job.”²²

Iron Force arrived in Saint John on the 13th and was loaded within half an hour, with 20-25 troops on each frigate. Personnel on board *Cape Scott* later noted that there were no difficulties and that up to 50 soldiers could probably be lodged on a frigate for up to 10 days. Early that afternoon the support force sailed out of Saint John Harbour in order to sweep the approaches and then formed an anti-submarine screen around *Cape Scott* as she left the harbour entrance.

During the voyage to Shelburne the frigates conducted various drills for their army passengers, including a jackstay transfer and a live firing of Squid anti-submarine mortars. *Outremont*'s commanding officer wrote: “Fortunately the weather was calm for our guests and the epicurean highlight of the day for them was ‘Tot Time.’”²³

The amphibious force anchored off Shelburne around 0900 hours on April 14, and *La Hullose* arrived soon after. The base's report of proceedings noted that “Throughout the day, the presence of the Naval Force at anchor and the hustle and bustle of small craft associated with the landing force was reminiscent of World War II activity in Shelburne harbour.”²⁴ Some of that hustle and bustle came from preparations made for the landing of the soldiers

and vehicles. Commander Rankin dispatched a perimeter guard of soldiers to protect the landing beach, followed by another party tasked with preparing the site for the army's arrival through the erection of wheel ramps for disembarking vehicles onto the beach.

By 1210 hours the vehicles stored on *New Waterford* and the after deck of *Cape Scott* were sent towards shore on the scow, guided by the ocean tug *Riverton*. Unfortunately, the tug was unable to beach the scow and naval cutters and a landing craft, vehicle, personnel (LCVP) attempted, and finally succeeded, in beaching the scow. As a result of this experience, Rankin ordered the second load of vehicles to be landed by ramp, but at the government wharf instead of on the beach to keep the exercise moving. All of the vehicles were landed by 2200 hours.

Meanwhile, the amphibious force became the target of an attack by low-flying enemy aircraft, disrupting the landings and the gunfire support exercises the frigates were conducting. *New Waterford* reported that a Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) F-86 fighter jet made passes over the ships in the anchorage. *Cape Scott* later reported that although very little notice was given and the aircraft only flew over the group for about 10 minutes, the frigates got to practise their anti-aircraft tracking abilities.

The report from *Buckingham* was a little less optimistic, recording that the frigate practised using its close-range weapons in a futile exercise as none of the frigates or *Cape Scott* were capable of throwing up an effective air defence.

The Royal Canadian Dragoons called the arrival of its troops on the beach an assault landing. Parts of that regiment, plus members of the 1st Battalion, The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada, and other elements of 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade Group were also landed early on the morning of the 15th from *Cape Scott* and the frigates. By 0800 hours the amphibious force had assumed a defensive position around HMCS Shelburne.

Cape Scott later noted that ac-



Photo: Author

The ocean-going tug CNAV *Riverton* attempting to guide the scow loaded with army vehicles to the vehicle ramp on Shelburne beach.



Guiding an army jeep and trailer ashore from the scow.

tivity on shore on the 15th was minimal despite reports from the RCMP of sightings of unknown individuals in the area. *Shelburne* reported the Iron Force in position around the base's perimeter at first light that morning. Unfortunately, the weather rapidly worsened. The Report of Proceedings noted that "by nightfall a steady drizzle accompanied by intermittent fog made life uncomfortable for the Army troops bivouacked in the area. My ship's company were generally agreed that it was fortunate that implementation of complete integration of the Armed Forces of Canada was not yet upon us."⁵

Blueland army personnel, meanwhile, believed that an Orangeland raiding force had landed in the night of the 15/16th after a series of red flares were observed around midnight. Nonetheless, little indication of anything unusual could be found after sunrise on the 16th and *Shelburne* concluded the raiders had not been able to gain entry into the base.

Back on the water Commander Rankin received another report at about 2300 hours on the 15th that two vessels were making their way towards Shelburne Harbour. He believed the Orangeland submarine was trying to slip quietly into the harbour behind a fishing vessel in order to fire torpedoes at the anchored Blueland warships. *New Waterford* was immediately sent off to investigate. The frigate identified one of the vessels as the RCMP patrol boat *Adversus* on duty at the harbour entrance. Another vessel was leaving, but was identified as the enemy submarine *Alcide*. *New Waterford* was ordered to establish a patrol line off the harbour entrance.

HMS *Alcide*, a British submarine on loan to the RCN for training purposes, had spent the day before in Bedford Basin on final pre-exercise training. In addition to its

Royal Navy crew, 11 soldiers from The Black Watch were on board as a raiding party. *Alcide* left for Shelburne early on 15 April and, after arrival, used its periscope at depth to examine the shoreline. Although the weather made conditions difficult, the raiding party was at least able to view their objectives before the boat left for more open water.

Due to mechanical problems and the poor weather, *Alcide* made its approach towards shore that evening on the surface. Six foot swells on the water made the loading of the Zodiacs difficult and their outboard engines had difficulty starting. Nonetheless, both dinghies were off by 2250 and *Alcide* departed. Fifteen minutes later the British submarine sighted a series of red flares, and turned around. It soon spotted one of the Zodiacs, which had developed a serious leak, and the damaged dinghy and crew were recovered. The other dinghy continued on with its clandestine raiding operation.

Alcide had again turned to seaward by 0020 hours on the 16th but was closely followed by *New Waterford* and was caught at 0107 hours. The Royal Navy crew acknowledged the frigate's signal and asked it to go away, but *New Waterford* remained, insisting the submarine admit to being her "old friend *Thrifty Stress*,"⁶ *Alcide*'s call sign for the exercise.

On board the frigates sealed orders were opened, tasking them with setting up an anti-submarine patrol off the coast. All five frigates were on patrol by 0230 hours, and they conducted anti-submarine exercises with the assistance of naval and air force aircraft until the evening of the 16th. Meanwhile, *Alcide* dove to 100 feet at 0258 hours and (mostly) remained there until the end of the exercise at 2100 hours when she surfaced within sight of

the amphibious force, proudly noting she had remained undetected throughout the day.

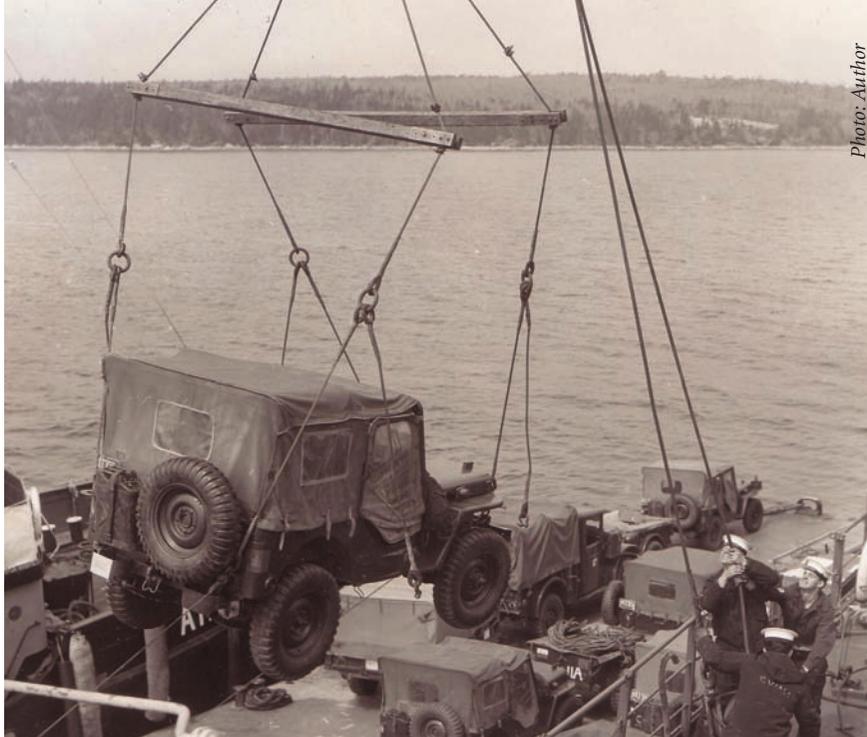
Cape Scott, *Fort Erie*, *La Hulloise* and *New Waterford* embarked their wet and tired troops from the beach in about 20 minutes. All of the army's vehicles were loaded on the scow and removed, stowed away on *Cape Scott* and *New Waterford* by the early hours of 17 April. The troops which had been landed from *Outremont* and *Buckingham* were embarked on board *Cape Scott* for the trip home, as those two frigates immediately returned to Halifax. Before leaving, the two warships retrieved the members of the Orangeland raiding party landed by *Alcide* on the 15th as the previous plan to have them retrieved by the submarine was cancelled.

As the amphibious force prepared to return to Saint John early on the morning of 17 April, the three frigates positioned themselves to protect *Cape Scott* as per pre-exercise instructions. Around 0900 hours the frigates began conducting an anti-submarine search of the area, exchanging that role for an anti-submarine screen around *Cape Scott* at 1300 hours when she left the harbour.

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HMS *Alcide*, in the meantime, had dived at 0433 hours in order to make preparations to launch an attack against *Cape Scott*. At 1315 hours she carried out an attack on *Cape Scott* firing from a distant range of 4,300 yards, but reporting a good firing line. The frigates continued their anti-submarine searches, but were never able to make contact. About an hour after the end of the exercise *Alcide* rose to periscope depth and saw the amphibious force sailing away to Saint John. The submarine headed for Halifax.

The ships arrived off the harbour at Saint John on the morning of the 18th. Because of the prevailing tide conditions, the warships were unable to berth for several hours. Forty-six soldiers from *Fort Erie* and *La Hulloise* were transferred to *New Waterford* and the other two



Sailors from HMCS *Cape Scott* and soldiers from the 1st Battalion, *The Black Watch* (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada loading a jeep by crane onto the scow.

Photo: Author

frigates went on their way. By mid-afternoon *Cape Scott* had been docked and *New Waterford* was close behind. All of the army personnel and vehicles were landed.

Exercise Mohawk was certainly not the first, nor the largest amphibious exercise carried out by the peacetime Canadian military, nor was practice of using RCN vessels to transport the army revolutionary. Although not common, navy vessels had done this before – HMCS *Magnificent* in 1956 and HMCS *Bonaventure* in 1964 to transfer army vehicles and equipment for peacekeeping missions – and there had been study into the possible use of a *Cape*-class ship to sail up the Congo River in 1960. But Exercise Mohawk, as a small-scale landing exercise, was far more typical. It would seem, then as now, that naval transport of army assets is a relevant issue. As a result, the experience of Exercise Mohawk is still of interest to the Canadian Forces. 🍷

Notes

1. "Joint Army-Navy Exercise Held," *The Crow's Nest*, Vol. 16, No. 6 (June 1964), p. 3.
2. Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH) 81/520/1650, Box 80, File 5, Operations and Plans – General – Ship's file from HMCS *La Hulloise*, report, HMCS *Cape Scott*, "Exercise – "Mohawk," 4 May 1964, Annex A, "Vehicle Loading – Frigates – *Cape Scott*."
3. DHH 81/520/8000, Box 77, File 5, HMCS *Outremont* 8000, Reports of Proceedings (1955-1964), HMCS *Outremont*, "Report of Proceedings for April 1964," 3 May 1964.
4. DHH 81/520/8000, Box 156, File 7, HMCS *Shelburne* I (Base), Reports of Proceedings (1961-1964), HMCS *Shelburne*, "Report of Proceedings for April 1964," 7 May 1964.
5. *Ibid.*
6. HMCS *Cape Scott*, "Exercise – "Mohawk," 4 May 1964, Annex D, "Exercise Mohawk – HMS *Alcide*," 4 May 1964.

Dr. Ken Reynolds is the Assistant Canadian Forces Heritage Officer at the Directorate of History and Heritage. He also keeps his feet wet by writing about naval logistics for the naval official history team.