

Canada: Major Military Exercise involving US, Canadian, British and Danish Warships

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Naval manoeuvres end today in Halifax

\$2 million cost of Canadian-led program called 'one of the best bargains in the business'

By EVA HOARE Staff Reporter

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It cost \$2 million, involved international warships, fighter jets, submarines and naval officers, and covered an area eight times the size of Nova Scotia.

And it ends today in Halifax Harbour.

A giant military exercise dubbed Halcyon RV (Rendezvous), led by Canada, was designed to train military members to work together so when real war, humanitarian crises and counter-terrorism operations happen, there will be a seamless transition into action, said Commodore Mark Norman, who led Halcyon's maritime component.

"This is all about readiness," said Norman. "That's what this exercise was all about."

The 10-day operation covered 400,000 square kilometres stretching from Virginia to the Maritimes, and included live bombing by British Harrier jets flying off HMS Ark Royal on range fields at CFB Gagetown in N.B.

Jets of all stripes also roared up the Bay of Fundy, sailors boarded vessels "of interest" and defended against warships and submarines disguised as the enemy.

The exercise, to help a fictitious nation called Coral embroiled in political upheaval that dwindled into a humanitarian crisis, hasn't happened on this scale for about 12 years, said Norman, who held a news conference Thursday with commodores of three other allied navies aboard the Danish navy's HDMS Absalon.

The Canadian commodore also gave kudos to the Absalon, one of the newer warships in the world, saying in some respects it fits the bill for this country's warship requirements.

“We’re looking quite seriously at a number of different ships,” Norman said. “It’s certainly attractive for a future capability perspective,” he said, noting the Absalon’s flexibility and its lower crew requirements.

The Absalon’s crew numbers 100, but that figure may be bumped up to 120, a Danish naval spokesman said.

Danish Commodore Christian Rune, also at the news conference, said “any potential customers would be very welcome” at his country’s shipyards.

One of two ships of its kind plying the ocean for Denmark, the Absalon will be joined by three similar Danish vessels in the future, the spokesman said, noting it’s capable of carrying tanks, being used for medical purposes and also has a helicopter deck. The roughly \$750-million ship also features containerized weapons systems.

Norman said fully integrating fighting capability with allies such as the Americans is something that could be on the horizon.

At this point, Canadian warships cannot “plug in” to American weapons systems, but there is a possibility modifications could be made to do that, he said.

U.S. Commodore Aaron Jacobs said Canadians’ training is fully integrated with that of the Americans before heading out to sea.

“It’s the same thing as having a U.S. ship along,” Jacobs said.

British Lt.-Cmdr. Simon Chapman, representing HMS Ark Royal, said it was challenging for his crews to conduct exercises in this arena, but appreciated the ability to drop heavy weapons on Gagetown.

Norman said some of the costs of the exercise were assumed by all the countries involved, adding the \$2 million price tag was “one of the best bargains in the business.”

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