



JOINT TRAINING FOR FUTURE DEMANDS: THE NEED FOR ARMY-NAVY COOPERATION

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Service Paper

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JOINT TRAINING FOR FUTURE DEMANDS: THE NEED FOR ARMY-NAVY COOPERATION

AIM

1. This paper seeks to bring attention to the inability of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to conduct amphibious operations, despite a growing importance of this capability both domestically and internationally. Rather than speaking to physical platforms, it will argue the need for more joint training and a revitalised interoperability between Land and Maritime forces in the CAF, including some recommendations to regrow this lost capability before the next conflict forces Canada to employ it.

INTRODUCTION

2. Currently, China is the largest adversarial threat to the USA and its allies, including Canada. With China's sights set on Taiwan and the South China Sea, there are obvious comparisons to be drawn from the Pacific theatre of World War II, where a US-led, island-hopping campaign ultimately led to the defeat of the Empire of Japan. Since then, Canada's largest allies have worked to maintain strong links between their Land and Maritime domains – usually in the form of Marine Infantry. The CAF is far too small to support a full branch of Marines, such as the USA, or even a Brigade within the Navy, such as the Royal Marines (UK). Yet, for a nation with such vast amounts of coastline, and an increasingly heavy demand to be active in both the rapidly-warming Arctic and the Indo-Pacific region, it should be considered a massive oversight that the CAF does not prioritise interoperability between the Canadian Army (CA) and Royal Canadian Navy (RCN).

3. It would be easy to imagine a scenario similar to the recently-ended saga of Hand Island, a back-and-forth of arctic sovereignty claims, but with Canada opposed by a hostile China, rather than friendly Denmark. As polar ice continues to melt, the Army will increasingly need to deploy into the Arctic. At some point, they will need the Navy to get them there. If the CAF does not immediately institutionalise the practice of Tactics, Techniques, & Procedures (TTPs) for amphibious warfare, and enable more joint training experiences between CA and RCN units, it will be too late to learn our lessons when the call for action appears at an unexpected and inopportune moment. Using historical parallels, comparison with allies, and a contrast with what the CAF currently is doing, this paper will argue the need for the CAF to prepare its personnel to operate effectively, and with mass, in amphibious operations. The CAF must acknowledge the need to revitalise the amphibious warfare capabilities of its soldiers and sailors if it hopes to meaningfully support its own sovereignty and alliances in the future.

DISCUSSION

4. During June of 1942, the Empire of Japan invaded and occupied the islands of Kiska and Attu, part of the Aleutian Islands in Alaska.¹ To believe that a hostile China could not do

¹ “Aleutian Islands Campaign,” Wikipedia, last modified January 26, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleutian_Islands_campaign.

something similar is naïve at best. The amphibious operations launched to retake these islands each included tens of thousands of soldiers landing ashore in hostile, near-arctic conditions. This is to say nothing of the far more famous Operation HUSKY, Dieppe Raid, or D-Day landings. The demand for amphibious operations has diminished with time, but has never gone away completely. From the Falklands War and the invasion of Grenada, right up to the Al-Faw Peninsula during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, there remains a need for militaries to be prepared. Especially now, as the world shifts from unipolarity to multipolarity with the rise of China and India, the likelihood of major conflict and total war has risen, and with it so has the likelihood that more niche operations, such as amphibious operations, will be necessary to achieve victory.

5. Previous attendees of the Joint Command and Staff Programme (JCSP) have made compelling arguments for the need to equip the CAF with an amphibious assault platform. Nolan writes that "...the CAF cannot afford to continue operating without an amphibious platform...", and Natynczyk made it clear that amphibious assault ships were a necessity for the whole spectrum of operations.² They understood, and it is easy to agree, that procuring a suitable platform is of great importance, and would enable amphibious operations to again become part of the CAF's capabilities at home and abroad. What has been less explored in this area is the need to rebuild joint interoperability between the CA and RCN, the two branches of service in the CAF that retain a vast gulf between them due to lack of joint training and shared understanding. Teixeira-Correia, a Brazilian officer on exchange to JCSP, gave the greatest consideration to the hurdles of training, interoperability, and common understanding between Army and Navy that would need to be overcome if the CAF were to revitalise its ability to conduct amphibious operations.³ Even then, Correia's central argument was the need for the CAF to procure an amphibious assault ship, and he only offered a plan to revitalise training through the lens of that purchase. While a new platform designed for amphibious assault operations would provide an easy starting point to begin rebuilding Army-Navy interoperability, this paper assumes a much more realistic, and perhaps cynical, outlook.

6. The procurement of the new Joint Support Ship (JSS) is currently in its Implementation Phase, with the first of two JSS set to be delivered in 2025, the second in 2027, and the program to have reached Full Operational Capability (FOC) by 2028.⁴ The extent of the JSS amphibious landing capability will be in the form of barges, or 'sea-to-shore connectors', which will provide excellent ability for the JSS to put ashore troops, vehicles, equipment, and supplies in a location where no dock or pier exists.⁵ These barges are also very explicitly designed for non-combat operations.⁶ The Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPS) that are currently in/entering service

² K.R. Nolan and Canadian Forces College, *Justifying the need for an Amphibious Capability in the Canadian Armed Forces* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 2016), 9;

<https://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/259/290/318/192/nolan.pdf> J. Natynczyk, *Let's Make a Real Contribution* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 2023). <https://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/259/290/49/192/Natynczyk.pdf>

³ C.H.T. Teixeira-Correia, *Amphibious Capability for the Canadian Armed Forces* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 2016). <https://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/259/290/318/192/correia.pdf>

⁴ "Joint support ship (JSS)," Government of Canada, last modified December 3, 2018,

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/procurement/joint-support-ship.html>.

⁵ "New barges bring exciting capability to the RCN," Government of Canada, last modified November 1, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/maple-leaf/rcn/2022/11/new-barges-bring-exciting-capability-to-the-rcn.html>.

⁶ Canada, "New barges."

will each have a single landing craft capable of moving only 4 tonnes of personnel and equipment at a time.⁷ Meanwhile, US wargames have spent many years focused on a war with China in 2030, and Chinese President Xi Jinping has claimed that China's military will be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027.⁸ With no other major procurement initiatives on the horizon, and budget constraints hitting every government department in 2024, the realist must accept that the AOPS landing craft and the JSS barges are the tools with which the CAF will go to war, and in fine CAF tradition they will 'make it work'. Therefore, while the need to revitalise Army-Navy cooperation in the form of amphibious operations has not at all diminished, one must diverge from those earlier authors that have centred their arguments around the need for a new platform. The CAF already has the platform that they are going to fight with, like it or not.

7. The United States Marine Corps (USMC), designed specifically to fight amphibious operations as part of the US Navy (USN), is trained and equipped accordingly. Even then, with all of that experience and focus, the USMC still regularly suffers training casualties as it carries out these operations in a completely unopposed manner.⁹ Amphibious operations remain some of the most dangerous and rehearsal-intensive operations that any Land Component may be called upon to undertake, and the CA is currently woefully under-prepared. CA doctrine states that "[a]mphibious operations require joint planning and execution."¹⁰ History has proven that joint training is critical for success in amphibious operations. Yet, the CA has done nothing to develop the training, institutional knowledge, or relationships that would enable this complex, joint planning. Currently, the Artillery school in Gagetown offers only an introductory lecture about Naval Gunfire during its Forward Observation Officer (FOO) training. Similarly, the Infantry School discusses amphibious operations in lecture format, but never trains in the planning or execution of them. Naval personnel are never integrated into the Fire Support Coordination Cell (FSCC) of a Battle Group or Brigade conducting Ex UNIFIED RESOLVE, or any other Computer-assisted Exercise (CAX), something that would enable even rudimentary relationship-building between CA and RCN.

8. On the part of the RCN, there is currently no joint planning or training of any kind happening between Maritime Command Atlantic (MARLANT) and the CA. Maritime Command Pacific (MARPAF), which participates in the multinational 'Rim of the Pacific' (RIMPAC) exercise in Hawaii every other year, invites Land domain elements to participate (specifically, one or two Infantry companies). That said, this Land Component winds up working almost exclusively with the USMC while there, and trains strictly with use of their landing craft to get on and off beaches and landing sites. These soldiers fly in to, and out of, the exercise, remain stationed on land throughout the duration of the exercise, and interact very little with their RCN

⁷ "Canadian Navy AOPS landing craft complete trials," *NavalToday*, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.navaltoday.com/2019/10/24/canadian-navy-aops-landing-craft-complete-trials/>.

⁸ Valerie Insinna, "A US Air Force war game shows what the service needs to hold off – or win against – China in 2030," *Defense News*, April 12, 2021, <https://www.defensenews.com/training-sim/2021/04/12/a-us-air-force-war-game-shows-what-the-service-needs-to-hold-off-or-win-against-china-in-2030/>; Michael Martina and David Brunnstrom, "CIA chief warns against underestimating Xi's ambition toward Taiwan," *Reuters*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/cia-chief-says-chinas-xi-little-sobered-by-ukraine-war-2023-02-02/>.

⁹ Philip Athey, "New investigation reveals more details on fatal Marine AAV accident," *Marine Corps Times*, October 6, 2021, <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2021/10/06/new-investigation-reveals-more-details-on-fatal-marine-aav-accident/>.

¹⁰ National Defence, *B-GL-300-001/FP-001 Land Operations* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2008), 8-11.

counterparts the whole time. Other CAF elements cannot be relied upon to fill the amphibious skill gap. The Naval Tactical Operations Group (NTOG) only does ship-to-ship boardings, not landings. CANSOFCOM's amphibious capability through JTF 2 is designed to be small and covert, and would likely be a low priority SOF task were open conflict to break out.

9. With all of this considered, it is easy to imagine a near-future scenario where the USA, already at war with China in the Pacific, calls upon Canada to conduct amphibious operations closer to home. A Chinese radar station and listening post, supported by a permanent complement of commandos, has perhaps set itself up in the contested arctic.¹¹ Soldiers that have never sailed a day in their life stand aboard an AOPS, their fitness and morale suffering as a result of being in such a cramped and unfamiliar environment. They are en route to the island of Axel-Heiberg, where they will undertake the dangerous task of loading up on a landing craft with all of the ammunition, crew-served weapons, personal protective equipment, water, rations, boots, gloves, parkas, etc. that they'll need to survive what they believe will be an opposed landing, as well as surviving the operational pause that will follow as they move additional supplies and equipment into the beachhead. Frostbite, broken limbs, seasickness, and drowning are omnipresent threats as they do their best to transition from sea to shore. The AOPS itself will be the landing force's only fire support for the first few hours, and the FOO that will accompany the first wave has never called for naval gunfire before. The duty watch officer of the AOPS hands the FOO an aide-memoire, NATO standard, which they hope will give the FOO the tools they need in a pinch, but they still haven't had a chance to make sure their radios will even talk to each other, let alone whether the soldiers and sailors will speak any kind of common language on the radio. The time for rehearsals is limited only to a few days aboard the ship as it sails to its destination. They all wonder if that will be enough.

CONCLUSION

10. The CAF will never have the capacity to stand up a force with a primary role of amphibious operations, and it will be required to fight the next war with the equipment that is currently being delivered, rather than anything new and specialised towards amphibious assaults. Success in this area will require interoperability between the CA and RCN, which can only be achieved through joint training and a shared understanding that comes from shared experiences. Yet, there are currently next to no efforts made by either the CA or RCN to integrate their personnel via joint efforts, especially when compared to each branch's own separate efforts to integrate themselves with the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) within their own 'stovepipes'. By contrast, our allies maintain their skills in amphibious operations because, as this paper has argued, the need for this skill set remains evident, and will only increase with time as the threat of Chinese aggression in the Pacific grows. Without a reinvigoration of CA/RCN interoperability through joint training and exchanges, the CAF will face a Dieppe-sized disaster when it is next called to action in the space where the Maritime and Land domains connect.

¹¹ Bryan J.R. Millard and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Trojan Dragons? Normalizing China's Presence in the Arctic* (Calgary: Canadian Global Affairs Institute, 2021), https://www.cgai.ca/trojan_dragons_normalizing_chinas_presence_in_the_arctic.

RECOMMENDATION

11. At every level, both the CA and RCN must work towards integrating each other into existing training. In the near future, the CA will see most of its Collective Training (CT) shift from Canada to Latvia. Therefore, any CA units not deployed or in work-up training should have the capacity to integrate Section, Platoon, and Company leaders, as well as soldiers, into ongoing RCN training for the new JSS barges.¹² This will breed familiarity with equipment, and an ability to slowly rediscover the difficulties and tactics of opposed landings. Eventually, this should develop into full rehearsals during annual Op NANOOK activities, where JSS barges and/or AOPS landing craft, crewed by the RCN and occupied by CA passengers, could jointly practise amphibious troop landings.

12. RIMPAC deployment should always include CA elements, and these soldiers must be allowed to sail aboard the attending RCN vessels as much as reasonably possible. Allowing Land forces to experience the trials of the Maritime domain will create shared understanding, and develop institutional relationships that can be leveraged to create future Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) for amphibious operations in the CA. Even outside of RIMPAC, more opportunities for soldiers to spend multiple days sailing aboard RCN vessels (without interfering with regular RCN training and operations) would expose the CA's tactical leaders to the difficulties inherent not just in amphibious operations themselves, but in all of the work up to them.

13. Currently, the Artillery School is able to send upwards of one person annually to the Naval Gunfire Liaison Officer course in San Diego, California, which teaches "...naval gunfire planning for a landing force in an amphibious operation..."¹³ This number should be increased, and these personnel must be properly leveraged upon their return to Canada to develop and deliver both classroom and practical training for other CAF members. Additionally, the CAF should explore opportunities to load its personnel on the courses for International Senior Officer Amphibious Planning and International Coalition Amphibious Staff Planning, with a view to creating and maintaining our own cadre of CAF SMEs at the operational level.¹⁴ This capability could then be exploited by integrating RCN elements into future CAXs, where a single Naval Officer could play the role of an entire RCN ship that enables staffs to simulate planning some amphibious operations and fire support activities without overstressing limited RCN resources.

¹² Canada, "New Barges."

¹³ Expeditionary Warfare Training Group Pacific, "2022 Course Catalog," November, 2022, <https://www.ewtgpac.navy.mil/Portals/9/2022%20Catalog.pdf?ver=eHKOPozvQyHCO8tN-RE5Hg%3D%3D>, 44.

¹⁴ Expeditionary Warfare Training, "2022," 38-41.

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