

GREENLAND

Canada's Arctic Neighbour

Canada's northland shares a land border with Alaska, but the next closest neighbour is Greenland. *FrontLine's* Vancouver-based correspondent and video-journalist, **Jane Kokan**, spoke with **Rear-Admiral Henrik Kudsk** about Greenland Command.

A vast part of the world's largest island is almost completely buried beneath a cap of permanent ice and snow. The distance from Ellesmere Island (Canada) to Franklin Island (Greenland) across the Nares Strait, is a mere 25 kilometres. In contrast, the island is almost 1,500 km from Norway – its link with Europe is historic rather than geographical.

Rear-Admiral Henrik Kudsk assumed the post of Island Commander Greenland, in August 2007. He proudly claims a "special connection to Canada," saying it is more than just geography. "I took the Commanding Officers Qualifying Course for submarine commanding and I passed the course aboard the Canadian submarine, the *Okanagan*, so I hold a drivers license for your submarines," he chuckles. The course has been dubbed the "perisher" because of its high failure rate.

Today, RAdm Kudsk still proudly displays HMCS *Okanagan's* crest in his office at Greenland Command, in the port of Kangilnnguit, situated in southwestern Greenland. During the early Cold War years, the naval base at Kangilnnguit, was used to monitor Soviet submarines in the North Atlantic.

The Admiral's active and much decorated career includes command of four submarines in the Royal Danish Navy (1982 – 1986), command of Arctic/Offshore Patrol ships (1995-1996) and Branch Head, Special Operations, at Allied Joint Task Force Command in Lisbon, one of NATO's three operational commands (2004-2007).

Greenland has had home rule since 1979, meaning it has its own government but is still part of Denmark. (The Faroe Islands are also part of the Kingdom of Denmark.) Some political analysts predict that Greenland could gain full independence in the not too distant future. In that case, Ottawa would have to develop a new military and political relationship with its potentially new independent Arctic neighbour.

Kudsk quickly gets back to the challenges of his current job and the extensive area of responsibility. "My responsibility –

my search and rescue region – stretches from a latitude of Denmark proper and goes towards the North Pole; we are remote and have few friends to call."

Canada and Denmark share the challenges of a huge AOR, therefore, Kudsk suggests, "it is extremely important that we cooperate across borders and have a close knowledge of each other and also join forces for military exercises. It might not be [solely] for the purpose of doing military business, but really to get to know each other on a first name basis."

The Admiral confirms that "the state of Denmark is in charge of the military in Greenland, and in addition to our military tasks, we more or less hold the responsibilities that would otherwise be [assigned] to a Coastguard, as we do not have a Coastguard." Such duties are normally handled by the Navy and the Airforce.

RAdm Kudsk and Brigadier-General Guy Hamel, who commands Joint Task Force North, are joint commanders who are responsible for all capabilities, regardless of which service they originate from.

According to Kudsk, Greenland Command is responsible for: the military defence of Greenland; the surveillance and maintenance of territorial sovereignty; related maritime duties such as search and rescue, notices to mariners, fishery protection, anti-pollution and oil spill recovery in the open ocean; and support to local communities such as ice breaking and hydrographic surveying.

Reminiscing about his days as a submarine commander, Kudsk says he has particularly fond memories of his time and the camaraderie aboard the *Okanagan* (an



Rear-Admiral
Henrik Kudsk,
with P571 HDMS
Ejnar Mikkelsen
visible in
background.

Oberon-class submarine that served the Canadian Forces from 1968-1998).

Not long before she was decommissioned, the *Okanagan* had one final mission. She was tasked to search for Swissair Flight 111's flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder shortly after the aircraft crashed into the waters at the entrance of St. Margaret's Bay in Nova Scotia on 2 September 1998. There were no survivors.

Peering out at the frenzied snow blizzard outside his office, the Danish Admiral is humbled by his Arctic geography. "You have to respect what you are doing up here. It might be beautiful one moment, and a moment later, if you don't know what you are doing, it will try to kill you."

Submarines

Responding to a question about Denmark's present submarine capabilities and future plans, Kudsk replies: "We scrapped the submarines six years ago because, as a small nation, we had to focus on our armed forces." Yet he acknowledges their importance, admitting that "the most capable war fighting instrument in the Arctic will be a submarine."

Discussing potential conflicts in the Arctic, he explains that "we are not talking about militarizing the Arctic at all. We do not see a military threat in the Arctic. And even though, obviously, my first responsibility is formally the defence of Greenland, the other part of that military task is really sovereignty and surveillance."

HDMS Hvidbjørnen, a Thetis Class Arctic patrol frigate, is equipped with a LYNX helicopter.



PHOTO: GREENLAND COMMAND



PHOTO: GREENLAND COMMAND

A Knud Rasmussen Class patrolship, HDMS Ejnar Mikkelsen is specially designed for operations in the Arctic.

Icebreaker Assets

Kudsk, who has spent most of his life at sea, describes the Naval assets under his current purview. "For designated use in the Arctic we have a total of seven ships. We have four frigate-sized ships (three and a half thousand tonnes) – they operate helicopters and are ice capable. We normally keep one permanently stationed around Greenland and the other permanently stationed around the Faroe Islands. In addition to these four, we have two medium sized patrol ships (a little less than two thousand tonnes). And then we have one remaining small cutter, *Tulugaq* – which means *Raven* in the local Inuit language – with a 13-man crew, but still ice capable. In terms of our naval capacities, these ships are spread around. In the summer we deploy two of

them in a permanent station to the very far North – [this is] east of your Northwest Passage, east of Resolute Bay, but on our side. Up around the Thule area, we hold a ship permanently, whenever the ice permits. So as soon as the ice thaws, we have a ship up there. And we have the same on the northeast coast of Greenland, on the other side."

Thule Air Base, across from Ellesmere Island, is the Northernmost base. "We have been in the vicinity of your Alert Bay with ships because of the thaw in recent years."

Arctic Borders

The international boundary between Canada's Ellesmere Island and Greenland, lies roughly in the middle of tiny Hans Island – 1.3 square kilometres of uninhabited, barren rock.

The boundaries of the continental shelf between Ellesmere Island and Greenland were agreed upon in 1973. But the two nations couldn't agree on which country would control the real estate on Hans Island. A topographic map, endorsed by Ottawa, and originally used in 1967, placed Hans Island entirely in Canadian territory. Then in 2007, after viewing newer satellite imagery, Ottawa admitted that the island is not solely in Canadian territory.

Still, over the years, the "dispute" of competing boundary claims has reached almost comic proportions – complete with flag raising ceremonies and a "war of words" from both sides. Why the big interest in a chunk of frozen rock? Scien-

tists with the Geological Survey of Canada have sampled rocks from Ellesmere Island, Hans Island and Greenland to test for oil and gas potential in the region. Wood Mackenzie, an energy consultancy group, has pointed out that Greenland could have reserves of 20 billion barrels of oil, which could turn the semi-autonomous Danish island into one of the world's major new oil regions. So it is entirely possible that dormant oil and gas reserves lie somewhere between Hans Island and Ellesmere Island.

Responding to the Hans Island issue, the Admiral says: "For me that is a non issue, because it has existed since 1973 and there is no chance of it turning into a conflict. We agree to disagree, that's it. And then let's go cooperate on something else. From a political standpoint, we have decided not to make it an issue, and that we would stop doing flag raising ceremonies and provocations and stuff like that – and let the diplomats settle it sooner or later."

Both sides now inform each other of any "action" they take in regards to the island, and each are mapping the ocean floor for submissions to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. It is still unclear what the end result will be; one possibility could be shared jurisdiction. Another is to split the island, effectively giving Canada and Denmark a shared land border. An agreement is expected before Canada submits its Arctic seabed claim to the United Nations in 2013. Kudsk is a firm believer in a diplomatic solution to the Hans Island issue. He is more concerned with the "real battles" that lie ahead in the Arctic, such as dealing with the increase in Arctic traffic from cruise ship tourism and scientific and resource activity. "This is why we need a polar code," he states candidly.

The Polar Code and Arctic Tourism

Although complete data for Arctic cruises are hard to obtain, global tourism statistics clearly show the number of cruise ships visiting the Arctic is rising, especially in Nunavut and Greenland.

And accidents do happen. In 1984, the *MS Explorer* became the first polar cruise ship to transit the Northwest Passage. In November 2007, the veteran ice-strengthened ship, considered fully equipped for polar travel, sank in the Antarctic after hitting a submerged object. Kudsk cites this incident in many of his SAR presentations

because he believes it's only a matter of time before it happens again – and "we have to be prepared," he asserts.

Cruises through the Northwest passage increased by 70% between 2006 and 2009. It comes as no surprise that residents of Arctic communities worry about the risks that come with these "floating cities." Concerns include: disturbance of wildlife, accumulating air and water pollution, the possibilities of major fuel spills, groundings, outbreaks of disease and acts of terrorism.

Kudsk is a relentless advocate of the implementation of a mandatory Arctic Code on the conduct and equipment of ships. "Right now there is no Polar Code, and this is serious," he declares, noting that a Danish cruise ship was grounded in the Canadian Arctic in 2010. "Hopefully that mandatory code will be issued in 2013 at the latest. And this is heavily supported by the [other] Arctic nations."

Kudsk believes an Arctic Code should be issued by the IMO (International Maritime Organization) to clarify some basic safety issues. For instance, he says operators should not be allowed to have open lifeboats in the Arctic – "they should be closed lifeboats. Also, you should have ice [beam light] projectors in the ships." Low lying black iceberg ice can only be seen by beam light projectors, he says, not by radar. "Sailing in the Arctic without that kind of equipment is equivalent to driving your car at night without headlights." Kudsk is very concerned that such equipment is not a legal requirement.

Denmark is definitely taking a lead when it comes to implementing a Polar

Code as quickly as possible. A document titled *Kingdom of Denmark's Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020 (Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands)* lays out the following goals: "The Polar Code will supplement the international maritime safety and environmental conventions which already apply in the Arctic with additional rules on rescue equipment, fire fighting, ice navigation and navigation in uninhabited areas to allow for Arctic conditions. The Polar Code must also allow for changing requirements imposed by geography and seasons. The work is taking place at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the rules are expected to come into force in 2013-2014."

The Admiral recalls a pivotal year. "I would like to say that the key year was 2008." That summer, part of the multi-year ice cover of pack ice "certainly disappeared in Greenland," he says. "We detected four cruise ships in that area the first day. So you can see that commercial activities are immediate. I have seen an increase in commercial activities coming from the outside of Greenland. This traffic has increased by 70% over three years."

Getting more specific, Kudsk recounts the 2011 September 11th anniversary. He says he will never forget the view from his office. "I [counted] a total of 59 or 60 ships coming from the outside. We would normally have 12-16 cruise ships around on a September day. But the thrust towards the Arctic is growing right now at an exponential rate. I have seen it in the past 15 years. I sailed as a commander here on one of our Arctic patrol frigates in the mid 1990s and, in those days, we had 3 to 5 to 6 ships in



the high season. Then in 2008, we had around 34. Then in 2011, we had around 60." He describes the growth rate in the Arctic as "exponential" right now.

In the winter, large cruise ships that have finished their summer cruises return from Europe and elsewhere, passing the southern coast of Greenland. "There we [see] the very large 3,000 passenger ships."

This begs the question, what if disaster strikes a 3,000-4,000 passenger cruise ship off the coast of Greenland? Who can forget the recent images of the stricken Italian cruise ship, *Costa Concordia*, which capsized off the coast of Italy with some 4,200 people on board? The latest report indicates 32 people are dead or missing. Had that accident occurred in Arctic waters, would there have been any survivors? That's hard to answer. In fact, does any one nation have enough search and rescue capability to deal with a marine disaster of that size?

Prevention is the best policy. In Greenland waters, cruise operators are warned of the risks against operating alone and are advised to operate in "pairs" when navi-

gating remote areas. Kudsk affirms there are "poorly surveyed waters in remote areas of Greenland."

The Arctic Council

it's own right, which naturally holds great interest both for Canada and for my nation and the other Arctic states."

An international exercise took place in Whitehorse a few months ago. "It was fruitful," says Kudsk of the October 2011 meeting on Arctic search and rescue co-operation. The table top exercise concentrated on air and marine incidents that could potentially occur in the Arctic and that would require international cooperation and sharing of resources.

The goal of this gathering was to build on the agreement signed in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland. On 12 May 2011, representatives from Canada, Denmark, the United States, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland, signed a circumpolar Search and Rescue Treaty, which commits each country to co-operate in cases of Arctic disasters, making it the first binding pact agreed to by all eight parties. The agreement also divided the Arctic into

specific search and rescue areas, assigning responsibility to each Arctic country for a specific area.

Kudsk, who was present at the Nuuk Arctic Council meetings, affirms: "Really, the Arctic Council was advisory in the past. I believe that the decision around Arctic search and rescue was transformed as was expressed by the Foreign Minister of Denmark at that meeting. It transformed the organization towards a more decision making organization, representing the Arctic nations."

So, are members of the Arctic Council embracing the new age of Arctic co-operation? RAdm Kudsk certainly is. He is busy organizing a search and rescue exercise, *SAREX Greenland Sea 2012*, on his home turf in the fall. "All eight members of the Arctic Council are invited to this event," says Kudsk, enthusiastically reading out the invitation that is being sent.

"I the Commander of Greenland, also the Maritime Rescue Command Centre, are responsible for the operation of the maritime rescue command centre, Greenland, have scheduled a search and rescue exercise stressing a cruise ship in distress in a remote area of the Arctic. The exercise will be conducted over a period of four days from September 10-14th, 2012 in the Greenland Sea on the North Eastern Coast of Greenland. The search and rescue exercise will be the first [such] exercise involving both ships and aircraft under the auspices of the Arctic Council search and agreement signed in May 2011. The exercise will include both an open sea search operation and an inshore rescue and evacuation operation. The 'cruise ship' in the inshore rescue and evacuation operation will be performed by a Danish navy ship with role players."

Ilulissat Harbour, Greenland



Aurora Borealis over Nuuk, Greenland's capital.



gating remote areas. Kudsk affirms there are "poorly surveyed waters in remote areas of Greenland."

Responding to a question about ship traffic in the years to come, Kudsk replies: "During the past three years, the economic growth and the activities related to the Arctic have been increasing exponentially. And that is simply because the Arctic is opening up [and gaining] importance. Certainly, the Arctic is getting a value in

Melting Polar Ice Caps

From both land and sea, Rear-Admiral Kudsk sees distinct environmental changes in the Arctic. “Although being a ‘per definition’ conservative naval officer, I do see climate change. I see the very real effects of the melting of the polar icecap. The melting of the ice and the incoming commercial interest in the Arctic has meant that my effective maritime area of responsibility has doubled over the past few years. Where people sail now used to be covered by multiyear ice,” he says.

The long polar nights of winter with few hours of sun means it will be freezing cold, but this is a perfect time to watch the Northern Lights – a big attraction at that time of year. However, there is much more ship activity during the summer when frozen areas are thawing out. “You see the big difference in the summer.”

Collaborative Relationship

In recent years, the Danish and Canadian militaries have conducted joint military exercises between Greenland and Nunavut. Kudsk has participated in annual Canadian Forces Arctic exercises, including Operation *Nunalivut* and Operation *Nanook*.

Kudsk explains, “During *Nunalivut 2010*, we integrated with the Canadian Forces by sending one of our dog sled teams that was included in your exercise. That had a very good effect, it might even have had a profound political touch, by focusing on cooperation rather than conflict.”

The Danes are reciprocating with an exercise along the east coast of Greenland in March of this year. They are keen to show the Canadian Forces how they integrate the serious business of dog sled patrols. “We are hoping to, at best practice, to merge and see how things can be done differently – in order for us to learn from your Canadian Ranger knowledge, and vice versa,” says Kudsk.

The two countries can learn from many common challenges, Kudsk notes. “We are trying to learn how to use skidoos. They obviously don’t have the long range of the dog sled teams, but let’s say there is an accident up there – you can parachute a team in and then control the situation, or perhaps establish a temporary landing zone for rescue. We are looking into a search and rescue related scenario like that, using your experience.”

Thule, on the northwest coast of Greenland, has the northernmost deep water port in the world. Evacuation exercises are performed, using the port facility around the Thule airbase. However, there is only a short window in the summer when the sea ice melts enough to dispatch ships to that base. The Thule Air Base, established after the second World War, is the northernmost U.S. Air Force base, and today is used by both the American and Danish militaries.

The Pride of Greenland: The Sirius Sledge Patrol

RAdm Kudsk boasts that his furry, four legged “soldiers” play an integral part in supporting Danish sovereignty. Denmark’s Navy dogsled teams, known as the *Sirius Sledge Patrol*, patrol Greenland’s northeast Coast. This unique canine unit is the world’s only military dog sled patrol. The detachment was activated in the summer of 1941 to prevent German landings along the northeast coast of Greenland during the second World War. Today, patrolling is usually done in pairs, sometimes for months, and often without human contact. The unit selectively breeds dogs for hardiness and stamina. Each dog works for five years. By retirement age, a Sirius Patrol dog will have pulled sledges for more than 20,000 km.

“We use dogsled teams because of [Greenland’s] topography. The dogs cover vast distances, they don’t need gas, and are always happy to work,” adds Kudsk. Not

to mention the fact that the elite canines don’t have to spend any time in the repair shop, as is the case with snowmobiles. Also, the dogs don’t expel fumes into the fragile Arctic environment.

Future Relations?

Canada and Denmark have “extremely good relations,” points out the Admiral. Both are members of NATO and the Arctic Council. And there is more work to be done. “We can learn from your Rangers and you can learn from our dogsled teams,” he adds enthusiastically. Both countries have resources to offer each other to tackle the challenges in a fast changing Arctic.

Similar challenges include: ensuring the safety of maritime transport in Arctic waters; balancing resource development with environmental protection; addressing the impact of climate change due to the melting of the polar ice caps; and ensuring that Northern communities participate in the sustainable economic development of the region.

Both countries are sparsely populated and remote. Canada’s North is home to little more than 100,000 (mostly Inuit) people. Greenland’s 57,000+ inhabitants are scattered over a vast terrain, and the majority are also Inuit.

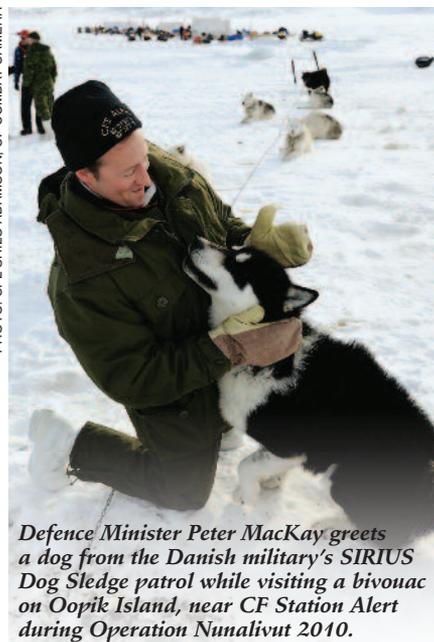
Hopefully, by 2013, or sooner, politicians and military brass from Ottawa and Copenhagen will be shaking hands and celebrating the future of Hans Island – and who knows, perhaps Canada will acquire a new land border with its Arctic neighbour.

In any event, it will be easier to travel to both countries. In the summer of 2012, *Air Greenland* will offer direct flights from Greenland’s capital, Nuuk to Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut. The carrier seized an opportunity with regards to increasing oil exploration and mining activity in the region, a boom in Arctic tourism and expanding cultural and political links between the Inuit of both nations. The statistics show that the skies and waters of the Arctic are becoming busier each day.

Rear Admiral Henrik Kudsk is committed to cooperating with Canada and the other Arctic states in keeping those waters and skies safe in light of the many complex challenges ahead. And he is absolutely right when he says it’s high time for a Polar Code to be established and made obligatory. **FL**

Jane Kokean is a *FrontLine* correspondent from Vancouver.

PHOTO: CFL SHILO ADAMSON, CF COMBAT CAMERA



Defence Minister Peter MacKay greets a dog from the Danish military’s SIRIUS Dog Sledge patrol while visiting a bivouac on Oopik Island, near CF Station Alert during Operation *Nunalivut 2010*.