

# The Canadian Navy in the War on Terrorism

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The departure of Her Majesty's Canadian Ship *Calgary* from the Arabian Sea on 1 November 2003, marked the end of Operation Apollo, Canada's military contribution to War on Terrorism, almost exactly two years after another frigate, HMCS *Halifax* joined the international coalition on 24 October 2001. Seventeen deployments and over 900,000 miles later it has been the fullest two years of Canadian naval activity since the end of the Second World War, and the lessons are legion.

Forward deployed in European waters with NATO's Standing Naval Force Atlantic, *Halifax* was ideally situated to be dispatched promptly to the Arabian Sea. She was the first Canadian Forces unit to engage in the War Against Terrorism after 11 September 2001. Elements of the other services eventually also were dispatched to the theatre (Airbus, Hercules and Aurora air detachments, and a battalion to Kandahar), but the Navy did the heavy lifting for the first two years of the war.

Between those initial and final frigate deployments, the Navy more typically maintained a complete task group in the southwest Asia region, on occasion with as many as six ships in-theatre. Sustainment of this effort has required the deployment of practically the entire major surface fleet: sixteen of seventeen destroyers and frigates, and both supply ships; and nearly every one of the 4200 sailors of all ranks and trades in sea-going billets. The Canadian Navy effectively has been operating at wartime mobilization for the last two years.

And during that time the Canadian Navy carried a disproportionate share of the Coalition maritime effort, boarding suspect vessels in search of escaping Al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorists, and escorting merchant shipping through the dangerous waters of the Strait of Hormuz. With a contribution typically constituting less than twenty percent of Coalition naval resources, Canadian sailors have accomplished some fifty percent of the measurable achievement: altogether they completed some 600 of the nearly 1300 Coalition boardings, an average of nearly two a day for the duration of the operation. *Calgary* alone conducted 92 transits of the Strait of Hormuz.

If our allies were impressed by the size and duration of our marathon effort they were even more impressed with our ability to lead the Coalition effort at sea. Our Navy was the first major fleet to arrive after the United States Navy (USN). Many of the sixty-nine other participating nations dispatched a frigate or supply ship to establish a presence, but most had little experience operating with the others. Our ships' unique communications "interoperability" with the USN, plus our command experience and multilateralism, made it natural for the USN to delegate command of this fleet to a Canadian commodore.

Coalition building is perhaps the most under-appreciated of the naval roles in the War Against Terrorism, and yet it is the most quintessentially Canadian. When a Canadian, Commodore Roger Girouard, took command of Task Force 151, which involved more than a dozen warships from many different nations including the United States, it became the only operational-level command exercised by a senior Canadian officer in an active theatre since the Second World War.

Although Operation Apollo has ended, the Navy's valued contribution to the War on Terrorism continues with the recent single-ship deployment of HMCS *Toronto* to the Persian Gulf integrated with the USS *George Washington* Carrier Strike Group. The challenge for the Navy now is to re-constitute itself while at the same time meet all of its domestic security obligations with diminishing budgetary resources.

Perhaps the most enduring lesson from this marathon is that the command of Coalition fleets has become a recurring Canadian responsibility. Canada's task groups performed it in the Persian Gulf War of 1991, off Haiti in the mid-1990s, in the Adriatic soon thereafter, and now recently in the Arabian Sea. The probability is that Canada will be called upon to perform this role in the future.

Source: [http://www.navy.gc.ca/cms/10/10-a\\_eng.asp?id=297](http://www.navy.gc.ca/cms/10/10-a_eng.asp?id=297)