



## Exercise CUTLASS EXPRESS

by Chris Tiller

CUTLASS EXPRESS<sup>1</sup> was the fourth instance of an annual six day Naval Boarding Party (NBP) 'capacity building' exercise which took place from 27 January to 2 February 2015 in Djibouti, Tanzania and Mauritius. I and another member of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) were given the opportunity to deploy as instructors, mentors and assessors alongside the US Coast Guard (USCG) and US Navy (USN) for the Mauritius portion of the exercise. Participating in the training were NBP from Mauritius, the Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Comoros. A NBP onboard a warship is comprised of a team of individuals with specialized training to be able to deal with any problem that would arise during a boarding. Boarding operations can either be domestic or international in nature, and include but are not limited to the enforcement of fishery and drug legislation or operations that fall under the auspices of international law. NBP members attend courses and exercises to develop and maintain their skills to respond to a situation at short notice. Capacity building refers to developing and strengthening the skills, competencies and abilities of the people of partner nations through various organizational and leadership activities.

### Day 1

The day began at the Mauritius Coast Guard Training Establishment with a brief on the history and planning process prior to CUTLASS EXPRESS. We were introduced to the other instructors, and confirmed our role and responsibilities. We identified the two lead instructors and commenced assisting them with their impromptu training plan. The NBP were given a brief detailing the fundamentals of tactical movement room clearing and first aid. Teams were then split into two groups in order to walk through the lessons briefed. Throughout this training the team members were given feedback and assessed on their overall skill levels.



### Day 2

Alongside training commenced at the Port Louis dockyard. The boarding parties were again split into groups and conducted a training round-robin. The USCG provided training on detainee handling, the USN trained on basic tactical ship movement, and the RCN instructed on evidence gathering.

Petty Officer First Class Chris Tiller, Royal Canadian Navy, observes sailors of the Kenya Navy Special Boat Unit climbing aboard the United States Navy frigate *Simpson* during Exercise CUTLASS EXPRESS in Port Louis, Mauritius, on 29 January 2015.

Photo: Master Corporal Marc-André Gaudreault, Canadian Forces Combat Camera

### Day 3

The NBP embarked in rigid-hull inflatable boats (RIB) supplied by the Mauritius Coast Guard. and approached two vessels that were alongside in Port Louis. Once onboard, the parties were expected to clear the vessel and to take control of the vessel's bridge. In the afternoon, the NBP conducted the same style of training onboard the USS *Simpson*, a US frigate, which added the challenge of climbing the side of a significantly higher platform.

### Days 4 to 6

The second phase of the exercise involved teams executing boardings at sea. We had numerous assets including two boats from the Seychelles, four boats from the Mauritius Coast Guard and one US warship. Teams launched from shore and executed their respective missions utilizing lessons learned from the first three days of training. The mentors and assessors were spread out amongst the target vessels to monitor and assess the boardings. We took extensive notes and debriefed after each boarding.

### Afterwards

My overall opinion of this exercise is that it was a success. The various nations' NBP were extremely receptive to the training and eager to learn. The diverse backgrounds and expertise of the staff offered the teams multiple perspectives on how to do the business. Teams progressed each day of training, rarely making the same mistakes twice. Exercise CUTLASS EXPRESS is a great opportunity for nations to learn from each other and to build relations.

Personally I feel a great satisfaction of being a member of a small training team and providing instruction to various nations about boarding operations. It was an unforgettable experience. CUTLASS EXPRESS shows that employing highly qualified people in a specific field to train with others can make a global impact on behalf of Canada and the RCN as would deploying a major warship. I will most definitely be volunteering to deploy for next year's exercise and would be honored if I were chosen again.

Note: 1. It is a military convention to capitalize exercise names

<p>Chris Tiller is a naval member of the Canadian Armed Forces. He has extensive experience serving in ships as a member of naval boarding parties and is a naval boarding party instructor. This work is the sole opinion of the author and does not necessarily represent the views of the Canadian Armed Forces, the Canadian Department of National Defence or the Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia. The author may be contacted by email at: <a href="mailto:RUSINovaScotia@gmail.com">RUSINovaScotia@gmail.com</a>.</p>
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