



## Naming Ships

by Colin Darlington

Steel will be cut in the few months for the first of the Harry DeWolf-class Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPS). The official date of the cutting will be an opportunity for senior politicians, Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and industry to mark the occasion with media announcements, interviews and photo-ops. The real date of first cutting will probably be sometime earlier than the official date if for no other reason than the actual shipbuilding program schedule is driven by other than times convenient to various agendas. Before all this, though, there is one date under government control, that of the announcement of names of other ships of the class. Considering the national environment, that is likely to be soon.

Naming government ships, particularly warships, is a government prerogative, and that is the way it should be. Warships are a piece of Canada<sup>2</sup>, and with other department ships are signs of national presence and action. Past vessels of the RCN have been named according to various conventions including geographical features, first nations and animals. Of late, with the Halifax-class frigates and Victoria-class submarines (and, to be built, the Queenston-class replenishment oiler replacements), there has been an explicit effort through naming to connect with the Canadian public. Despite some misgivings that in cases this results in warships lacking antecedents (and therefore inheriting history and battle honours, elements important to esprit de corps in ships' companies), naming warships after cities and towns has worked. It remains to be seen whether naming the AOPS after people, whilst long a practice in other navies and other Canadian government departments, will work.

With the announcement of the name of the first AOPS to be *HMCS Harry DeWolf* (HAR<sup>3</sup>), the policy for naming the remaining ships was made public<sup>4</sup>: "Subsequent ships in the class will be named to honour other prominent Canadians who served with the highest distinction and conspicuous gallantry in the service of their country." Whilst the opportunity to name the AOPS after northern locations or animals has been passed over, the government decision has been made. Lately, Coast Guard vessels and Halifax ferries have been named after Canadians whom people take to be heroes, and there has been a certain resonance with the public in the names. As long as the warships names decided upon continue to receive general support, and not be divisive, especially for the companies onboard, because of disagreement over achievements, politics, etc., then naming warships after people will continue to serve good purpose.

One can play a game guessing at names of subsequent HAR-class class (AOPS is a shipbuilding program name), looking at lists of recipients of Victoria Cross and other high honours. More useful in the names announcement will be the indications of government thoughts and intentions. There may be those who would draw conclusions about class size from whether four or five names are announced. It may be

more useful to the government, therefore, to continue to highlight the shipbuilding program but also avoid untimely controversy by announcing only two or three names at this time. The remainder can be announced at a later, more convenient, time. As an aside, when considering the number of HAR ships to be built, there appears not to be much public discussion as to what the ships are to do, that is, their concept of employment. They are sizable and with or can be fitted with a variety of capabilities. How many are needed for Arctic operations, and how many are desired to be available for offshore operations elsewhere, balanced against shipbuilding funding, are interesting but generally unanswered questions.

In addition to names and numbers of ships, there are some other indications yet to come out in announcements. Canada is a signatory of a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) agreement which sets a standard for designating types of ships (e.g., the Kingston-class vessels are designated MM – mine warfare vessel, general). Alliances such as NATO can be useful for the development of common terminology for planners and operators for writing messages and plans, developing marine surveillance databases, and displaying ship locations in plots. By that NATO agreement, the HAR-class could be type designated as PSO (patrol ship, offshore) or PGB (patrol ship, icebreaker). With national focus on the Arctic, it is believed that PGB is the more likely designation to be selected, indicative of the primary intent in the use of the ships.

Finally, another indication is the “pendant number,” sometimes known in other navies and colloquially as the “hull number” because it is painted on a ship’s hull, for the HAR-class. In the RCN the number indicates the type of ship, e.g., 300-series numbers are assigned to frigates. The 400-series is the number block for patrol ships. It is understood that *HMCS Harry DeWolf* and her sisters will be assigned numbers starting with 430, emphasizing their patrol role.

The next months will be interesting, especially for the RCN as a time of needed revival after many years of a declining fleet, but also for Canada as a whole. The building and commissioning into service of the HAR-class will provide the country a significant capability to operate ships at a wide variety of defence, security, research, national development, humanitarian and other missions, up north and deployed overseas. One can be confident that Canadians can look forward to being proud of *HMCS Harry DeWolf* and her sisters, whatever their names and designations.

1. This paper is amended from when it was first published 1 March 2015 with information that subsequently became available.
2. Not quite legally; see RUSI(NS) paper “Warships: Sovereign Immunity versus Sovereign Territory” at <http://rusi.ca/security-affairs-committee>.
3. The RCN assigns two and three letter initialisms to ships (e.g., HAL for *HMCS Halifax*) to facilitate correspondence and plotting. The three letters are usually the first three letters of the ship’s name. The two letters are usually the first and last letters of the name. Though HAR for *HMCS Harry DeWolf* has not been announced, it is the likely initialism. Similarly, HF is likely.
4. <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2014/09/18/pm-announces-name-first-royal-canadian-navys-arcticoffshore-patrol-ships>, accessed 1 March 2015

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