



**FORWARD OPERATING LOCATION NANISIVIK
HALIFAX'S GATEWAY TO CANADA'S ARCTIC**

By Colonel Sylvain Lescoutre (retired)

In an effort to strengthen territorial claims in the Arctic, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced on 10 August 2007 that Canada would build a deep-sea military port in Nanisivik, Nunavut. The port will enable the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) to extend its operational range in the Arctic by enabling re-supply, refuel, and transfer of goods and personnel inside the eastern entrance of the Northwest Passage. Two years later, the federal government released "Canada's Northern Strategy", and Canada's First Defence Strategy committed to procure Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPS) for the RCN to operate in northern waters.

The establishment of military sites in the Arctic is not new;

- Canadian Forces Station Alert, located on the northern tip of Ellesmere Island, has been collecting signal intelligence since the late 1950s;
- In 1970, Canada established a permanent military command in Yellowknife, which continues to operate as the Joint Task Force North Headquarters;
- The Distant Early Warning - (DEW) Line was an integrated chain of radar and communication centres from western Alaska across the Canadian Arctic to Greenland, that Canada operated in cooperation with the United States under the NORAD Agreement from the mid 1950s to the mid 1990s; it has since been upgraded to the North Warning System.

However, the designated deep-sea port in Nanisivik will be the RCN's first permanent, albeit seasonal, Arctic naval facility. Its selection is noteworthy for Halifax as a potential future mounting base to Canada's Arctic.

Nanisivik is located on the banks of the Strathcona Sound in Baffin Island, in the territory of Nunavut. The closest inhabited settlement, Arctic Bay, with a population of slightly over 800, is located 20 km west of Nanisivik. The Town of Nanisivik came to the forefront of the news when, in June 1974, the Department of

Indian Affairs and Northern Development signed an agreement with private industry to develop a lead-zinc mine. It was a pilot project to test the feasibility of conducting year-round mining in the Arctic and it initially anticipated a twelve-year production.

The mine began production in October 1976, and continued successfully for 26 years until 2002 when low zinc prices made the mine no longer profitable. The project employed, on average, 200 people and in addition to the construction of a deep-sea port, a town was purpose-built to support the operation of the mine. Since the mine closed, most of the facilities have been demolished and Nanisivik population was reduced to zero.

Because the deep-sea port currently forms part of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans inventory, offers a comparatively sheltered waterfront and good navigational passage in from Lancaster Sound, Nanisivik became the choice location to support naval operations in the Arctic as called for by Canada's Northern Strategy. Following the initial announcement, detailed planning for the project took place in Ottawa, and consultations were initiated with local stakeholders.

Initially pegged at \$100 million, it was anticipated that construction would commence in the summer 2010, with the port to begin operation in 2015. However, the project has suffered several delays due to reduced funding and challenges encountered during the environmental review.

Last year, during a visit to Arctic Bay, the project manager of the Nanisivik Naval Facility (NNF) announced that the construction of the new facilities would be delayed to 2013 to become fully operational by 2016.

Furthermore, to expedite the construction of the NNF, Ottawa decided to reduce the scope of the project by reducing the amount of naval fuel stored on site to only one season worth of operation, using the existing

wharf facilities, and deleting the two-storey site fabricated shore support building among other things.

This substantially reduces the scope of the project, but the NNF will still meet its essential mission to re-fuel the Arctic vessels on an as-required basis. With the expected delivery of the first AOPS in 2015, the Naval Facility in Nanisivik will be ready to receive the first vessel on arctic patrol operation. It is anticipated that the majority of the vessels will be based in Halifax. The

functional direction and management of the NNF will be exercised by the RCN's Maritime Forces Atlantic Command (MARLANT), also in Halifax.

With Halifax being the principal shore base for the Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker operations and CFB Halifax's Canadian Forces Maritime Warfare Centre hosting the establishment of an AOPS Centre of Excellence, Halifax is poised to become the future mounting base and gateway to Canada's Arctic.

Colonel Sylvain Lescoutre recently retired from the Royal Canadian Air Force after 37 years of service. His final assignment was as Defence Attaché at the Canadian Embassy in Ankara, Turkey. He is a member of the Royal United Services Institute (NS) Security Affairs Committee. He can be contacted by email at:

slescoutre@gmail.com