Royal Navy Looks to Canadian Coast Guard for Arctic Training and Expertise

The U.K. Royal Navy's HMS Lancaster recently returned from a deployment to the Arctic. *U.K. ROYAL NAVY*

The U.K. Royal Navy is learning the cold facts about operating in the Arctic from shipmates in the Canadian Coast Guard, who have a great deal of cold weather experience.

British sailors are training with Canadians to learn how to navigate through icy waters and how to break ice where necessary, while Canadian Coast Guard personnel will have operational training opportunities and gain experience with crewless technology with the Royal Navy, according to a press release from the Royal Navy.

An agreement to formalize the arrangement was signed between the two NATO nations at the Canadian Coast Guard's (CCG) headquarters in Ottawa by its commissioner, Mario Pelletier, and Second Sea Lord Vice Admiral Nick Hine on Oct. 8.

"I am delighted to sign this agreement that will see the Royal Navy and Canadian Coast Guard work even closer together in the Arctic, sharing and developing our ice experience, as we strive to become ever more interoperable and interchangeable," said Hine.

"The Canadian Coast Guard welcomes the opportunity to build on the existing close relationship between Canada and the United Kingdom. Through this memorandum of understanding, we will benefit from the Royal Navy's operational experience and expertise, and we look forward to sharing our skills and knowledge of the Arctic," said Pelletier.

The two services have worked together before. In 2020, several Royal Navy watchkeeping officers from HMS Protector, the UK's sole ice patrol ship, sailed with a CCG vessel to gain experience in ice operations.

"The sharing of the Canadian Coast Guard's wide experience and expertise will mean British sailors are better equipped when sailing to the frozen region," the Royal Navy statement said.

Canadian Coast Guard icebreaking vessels, from hovercraft to heavy and light icebreaking and long-endurance ships, keep Canadian ports open year-round, freeing ice-bound vessels, escorting ships through ice-covered waters and maintaining a constant presence the High North during the navigable season.

The Royal Navy has shown a renewed interest in the Arctic region in recent years because of its key strategic importance to the security of the U.K.

"Warships are a regular presence in the region, while Royal Marines train in Norway annually as the U.K.'s specialists in the cold weather warfare," said the Royal Navy statement. "HMS Lancaster recently returned from a on a 3,000-mile round-trip through the Norwegian Sea and into the Arctic Circle – the latest Royal Navy vessel to head to the High North over the past few years."