

• BERSERK IN THE ARCTIC

• Coast Guard Eurocopter Crew Helps Mounties Get Their Men

• STORY & PHOTOGRAPHS

BY ERIC W. MANCHESTER



TOP: Sgt. Louis Jenvenne, RCMP detachment commander, Cambridge Bay, Victoria Island, Nunavut. "Laurier's helicopter and pilot were major components of our mission."

ABOVE: Capt. Mark Taylor, commanding officer, CCGS Sir Wilfrid Laurier is a veteran Arctic mariner. Seen here at chart table on Laurier's bridge. "It's interesting how our small piece dovetailed into the bigger plan."

“A helicopter! My kingdom for a helicopter!” Royal Canadian Mounted Police sergeant Louis Jenvenne didn’t really utter that slightly skewed dialogue from Shakespeare’s play *Richard The Third*, but quickly finding such a machine for his difficult Arctic mission held very regal value.

We of the southern latitudes take for granted the ubiquitous presence of rotary-wing aircraft, but their thwack-thwack-thwack is a real attention-getter over the Land of the Midnight Sun. There, helicopters on ships are rarer still, but it was just such an uncommon seagoing bird that came to Sgt. Jenvenne’s aid, and as it turned out, to his quarry’s rescue also.

That Mountie’s mission in August 2007 was to bag a pair of aliens – the illegal kind – who tried hiding in Canada’s western Arctic in hopes of evading notice. “This was not a normal incident for us. We mostly handle municipal policing,” said Sgt. Jenvenne, commander of the Cambridge Bay (Nunavut) RCMP detachment on Victoria Island.

Sgt. Jenvenne’s unusual mission began weeks before in Halifax, Nova Scotia. There, the Norwegian-flagged sailboat *Berserk II* was turned away from Canada when two of its crewmembers were deported. Undeterred, the boat and crew regrouped in Greenland and headed for the Canadian Arctic, fully intending to dodge authorities. According to their skipper there was no need to register with anybody because they were headed for the Pacific Ocean, not

visiting Canada. While it’s not mandatory for small vessels to register when transiting our Arctic waters, coming ashore requires foreigners to report in – which the five-person Norse-American crew chose to ignore.

Once *Berserk II* – sporting painted shark’s teeth and real caribou antlers – was among Canada’s Arctic islands, the behavior of its crew soon reviled locals and caught RCMP attention. Canada Border Services Agency took the lead in pursuing *Berserk II*, but it fell to local RCMP to locate and apprehend that 48’ boat. Part of the task became easier when the pretend-Vikings sailed into Cambridge Bay where they were arrested – but not before two crewmembers were dropped off on a forlorn coast to conceal their illegal presence in Canada.

The remaining hazardous job was to find and capture the two fugitives hiding somewhere in hundreds of square miles of remote shoreline. Fortunately the Canadian Coast Guard Ship, *Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, was in the neighbourhood with its helicopter, and went out of its way to assist. “It was a big deal for us to be able to call upon Coast Guard

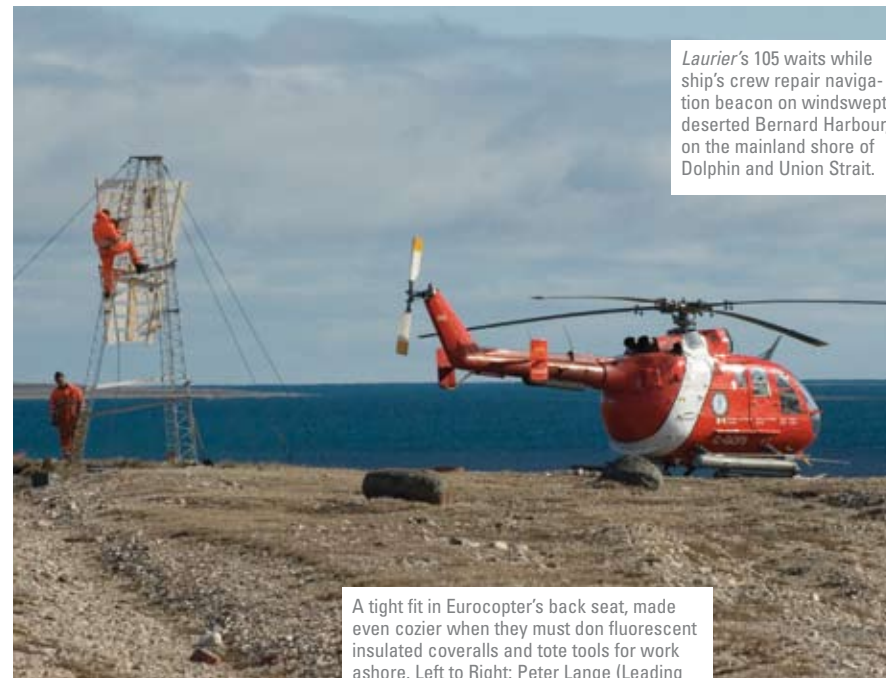




LEFT: Over barren landscape along Coronation Gulf, pilot Glenn Diachuk demonstrates Eurocopter's sports car nimbleness, while *Laurier's* medical officer, Jackie Callen, holds tight in the left seat.



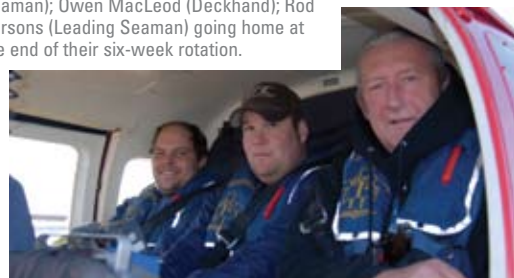
Approaching *Laurier's* tiny, moving flight deck in Coronation Gulf. Behind the retractable hangar, airflow sucks the machine down toward the deck.



Laurier's 105 waits while ship's crew repair navigation beacon on windswept, deserted Bernard Harbour, on the mainland shore of Dolphin and Union Strait.



This shot of Polar bears is of a mother and her two cubs, which we encountered on the ice pack south of Banks Island in the Beaufort Sea. Summer 2007 saw the least amount of sea ice on record - ever, so our sightings of Polar bears were few and far between during that patrol.



A tight fit in Eurocopter's back seat, made even cozier when they must don fluorescent insulated coveralls and tote tools for work ashore. Left to Right: Peter Lange (Leading Seaman); Owen MacLeod (Deckhand); Rod Parsons (Leading Seaman) going home at the end of their six-week rotation.

resources," said Sgt. Jenvenne, "Otherwise we'd have a long wait for aircraft from Yellowknife or Resolute, or we'd have to conduct the search by small boat."

From its base in Victoria, B.C., *Laurier* patrols the western Arctic from July through October every year. The ship's complement of up to 50 officers, crew and scientists includes just one pilot and one helicopter engineer. Besides being a sovereignty presence and hosting international scientists, the 272' *Laurier* services hundreds of navigation aids and breaks ice for tugs re-supplying remote hamlets. "We try to reach out to police and other agencies whenever we can," said *Laurier's* commanding officer Capt. Mark Taylor,

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Transport Canada pilot Glenn Diachuk: 2007 was his fourth Arctic patrol. "The helicopter is a valuable extension of the ship."

"Search and rescue is more common for us than apprehending criminals. But, when RCMP told me about *Berserk II*, I offered our helicopter in support and reduced our speed to stay nearby longer in case they needed us."

When called, *Laurier's* Eurocopter carried two armed and armored Mounties (while the helicopter was neither) across open water to search a desolate shore. "We had perfect weather, and the short distance meant that fuel wasn't a concern," said pilot Glenn Diachuk, "Their red inflatable dinghy was obvious, but it took some searching to find their camp."

After nearly one week waiting by their tent for shipmates who weren't returning, the duo had only some soup and bread left, and with wolves nearby they seemed relieved to be found, even if arrested. "They had big smiles," recalled Diachuk, "They were just thinking about calling Coast Guard for help when we suddenly appeared." After the rescued campers were reunited with their jailed mates in Cambridge Bay, the whole lot was deported and had to hire

sailors to retrieve their boat.

Helicopter CG362 operated off *Laurier's* hindquarters during its 2007 Arctic patrol. The 1985-vintage Eurocopter BO105, powered by twin 840hp Allison engines, can lift nearly a ton. It cruises at 120 knots, carrying four passengers plus pilot.

The machine has skid-mounted inflatable flotation for emergency water landings. It can operate from *Laurier's* flight deck in three-metre seas and 40-knot winds. Tough landing gear and a roomy cargo compartment make this helicopter well-suited for its ship-borne role. When approaching the tiny flight deck that's steaming away at 14 knots the machine's agility is valued, especially since aft of the retractable hangar the airflow sucks the machine down to the deck.

The 105 is integral to *Laurier* completing its Arctic work. There are no ship-sized docks, and small-boat beach landings are often impractical.

The machine hauls crews and materials, reconnoitres ice-infested waters and conducts SAR and medevac missions. In Canada, Coast Guard helicopters are a collaboration of federal government agencies. The machines are owned by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Pilots and engineers are provided by Transport Canada.

Lack of weather information, landmarks and service facilities in the Arctic are challenges facing *Laurier's* aviators, who mostly operate under Visual Flight Rules. The weather can quickly turn ugly. Icing at the front of the engine and on the rotors is common, and the rotors lack de-icing capability. Once airborne, pilots are mostly on their own except for an Automatic Direction Finder, Distance Measuring Equipment and two GPS units.

The Eurocopter needs two hours of maintenance for every one hour of flying. Saltwater corrosion is present, even in the Arctic's desert climate. Intakes and rotors get damaged by sand and gravel, and the cold Arctic temperatures affect the transmission more than the engines.

Fortunately for the lone engineer caring for CG362 in 2007, the patrol was mostly problem-free; however, flight ops were regularly suffocated by fog, and the wind continuously blew at more than 20 knots. The summer weather included see-your-breath temperatures, fast-moving squalls and snow.

Flying the 105 over the vast vacant Arctic, off what seems an even smaller flight deck, is to experience the sheer joy of soaring empty skies, balanced by the demanding certainty that you really are all alone. While the Arctic is vulnerable to abuse, its splendor can be deadly. There are few jobs offering more freedom and responsibility than those of the lone pilot and solo engineer of *Laurier's* far-north air service.