



Arctic Response Company Group

by John McLearn

This paper covers the creation, role and tasks of the Arctic Response Company Group (ARCG).

The Canadian government has been involved with the Arctic since the early 1900s; admittedly this interest has waxed and waned over the years. The increasing need for resources and global warming have renewed interest in the Arctic not only in Canada but throughout the world. The Canadian government has recognized these challenges in the creation of the Canada First Defence Strategy and the Canada's Northern Strategy. Both specified a Canadian military response in the Arctic.

The Canadian Army, then known as Land Force Command (LFC), was also looking for roles suitable for the Army Reserve for post-Afghanistan and into the future. In 2008, Lieutenant-General Peter Devlin, the Chief of Land Staff and later Commander of the Canadian Army, issued the Chief of Land Staff (CLS) Planning Directive "Tasks for Reserve Force Units" which explained the rationale and subsequent tasks for the Reserve Force, one of which was a role in the Arctic. A planning document called the Land Force Arctic Strategy was issued in October 2009. It was followed in February 2010 by the Master Implementation Plan for the ARCG based on returns and comments on the Land Force Arctic Strategy. The Master Implementation Directive (MID) for the ARCG was issued in March 2013; it was the result which formally tasked the Reserve Force with creation of the ARCG.

The following assumptions were made in these documents:

- a. a military threat is unlikely in the near to mid-term;
- b. deployments will be focussed on key terrain such as villages, communications, military facilities, and points of entry and exit to Canadian inland waters;
- c. the need to exercise a domestic response capability; and
- d. national defence will not be the lead agency except for defence and air search and rescue.

The regular Army has been employed in Arctic conditions since the 1950s. The regular Armed Forces during the heights of the Afghan War maintained a capability of moving people, vehicles and equipment to the Arctic. The Regular Force-designated Immediate Reaction Unit (IRU), usually based on an infantry battalion, would always be the first element deployed. The ARCG were to supplement or if necessary replace these organizations. The roles of the ARCG as assigned in the MID were:

- a. sovereignty patrols;
- b. humanitarian aid;

- c. support to ground search and rescue (GSAR);
- d. support to a major air disaster (MAJAID);
- e. support to other government departments (OGD); and
- f. other generic Canadian Army operations in the Arctic.

The intent of the Commander of the Canadian Army was to enhance Canadian northern sovereignty. In order to do this, each Land Force Area (LFA) was to maintain a trained and responsive ARCG. The ARCG were to be equipped and trained to operate in all Arctic conditions. ARCG training and exercising would be scheduled and prioritised as part of the Army's overall Managed Readiness Plan. It would be based on actual operational requirements. The ARCG was to be able to work effectively with other Canadian Armed Forces organizations such as an Immediate Response Unit or other government of Canada departments and agencies to meet Canadian government objectives. Once deployed to an area of operations, the organization would fall under the command of the Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC). All ARCG are to be at final operating capability by 31 March 2016.

This task created conditions throughout the Army Reserve for expertise in Arctic operations to be retained across the country. What was new in the defence policy was a task given to the Canadian Army Reserve to mount and maintain a company group to meet the government of Canada's requirements to further government goals in the Canadian Arctic whether for humanitarian or other purposes. This was implemented by all four Land Force Areas in 2009 with each area creating its own solution. This has been maintained even after the Land Force Areas were re-designated Divisions in 2013. Each Division was assigned to produce one Reserve ARCG. Each of the four Reserve Divisions designated a single brigade as the mounting organization for the ARGC:

- a. 1st Division, Kingston – Regular Force (manned by organizations from other divisions as tasked);
- b. 2nd Division, Quebec – 35 Canadian Brigade Group;
- c. 3rd Division, western provinces – 38 Canadian Brigade Group;
- d. 4th Division, Ontario – 31 Canadian Brigade Group; and
- e. 5th Division, Atlantic – 37 Canadian Brigade Group.

The first question most asked is what is a company and then what is a company group and how are the two terms different? A company is an organization of approximately 100 to 200 soldiers and made up of a small headquarters, two or more platoons and a small support element. All of these personnel belong to the company, within a unit such as an infantry battalion.

A company group consists of a company plus attachments from outside the company or even from outside the parent unit. Each company group is built for the task it is assigned, and the organization can vary greatly depending on the mission or task assigned. Personnel attached can include engineers, artillery forward observers, armoured reconnaissance, medical, intelligence, influence activity, or extra support soldiers from other Reserve units if the company group is going to be completing different tasks

than its parent unit so that they can support themselves for short periods. Such attachments can nearly double the size of the original organization. As an example, the company group for the mission to Ethiopia was 450 personnel strong. The ARCG is no different in respect to attachments necessary for the mission. Each division has taken a slightly different approach but the intent to create a mission-oriented organization remains the same.

In the Master Implementation Directive, the actual organization was to consist of a headquarters, three generic platoons and an administrative platoon. The headquarters would be around 15 to 20 soldiers. The platoons are based on an infantry model of 38 soldiers, in a platoon headquarters, three sections of ten soldiers each, and a weapons detachment of four soldiers. The administrative platoon has a small headquarters and support elements including supply, medical, maintenance, etc., and would be around thirty soldiers. The size on exercise can vary greatly due to the availability of reserve personnel. Total strength would be approximately 160 personnel.

The ARCG are exercised every year as part of the overall Canadian northern policy. These exercises include northern exercises as coordinated by Joint Task Force North, sovereignty patrols, participation in Operation NANOOK, and individual ARCG exercises such as Ex NORTHER SOJOURN in the 5th Canadian Division.

The ARCG is a capable and useful asset that can be used to enhance or reinforce other Canadian units for humanitarian, security and sovereignty missions. It also provides a centre of excellence for winter warfare techniques for other units within a division. It is good use of Canadian Army Reserve resources and capabilities.

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