

Robert Wells

From: GRANT.MACDONALD2@forces.gc.ca
Sent: Tuesday, October 13, 2009 5:59 PM
To: Robert Wells
Subject: Canadian Forces SAR Roles and Responsibilities

Sir,

Supplementary to my forwarding of the Canada Command Search and Rescue Concept of Operations and our telephone conversations of last week, this is to hopefully clarify the nexus of roles between the Canadian Forces and the contracted Cougar response helicopter at St. John's.

Referring back to information contained within the aforementioned Canada Command document, the RCAF was initially assigned the responsibility to provide and coordinate response to aeronautical SAR incidents throughout Canada (and its internationally agreed area of SAR responsibility under ICAO--the Chicago Convention of 1944), by Cabinet Directive in 1947. Subsequently, in 1951, the Cabinet added to the RCAF's role, the coordination of response to maritime SAR incidents, (and the provision of aeronautical support to marine incidents), using any and all available Government vessels (there was no Canadian Coast Guard at the time). Essentially, these mandates continue today, with the Coast Guard coordinating response to maritime incidents (through Canadian Forces Joint Rescue Coordination Centres) and providing on-water response, and the Canadian Forces providing aeronautical capabilities in response to aeronautical and maritime incidents.

The Royal Commission on the Ocean Ranger recommendation that a helicopter equipped for SAR, (provided by government or industry), be based at the closest facility (St. John's) to the oil platforms, did not change the CF/CCG mandates with respect to providing maritime SAR coordination and response. Both the CF and CCG remain the responsible agencies for maritime SAR response to incidents of all causes; the industry-contracted helicopter at St. John's is in addition to the government-provided response, with priority to respond to oil-industry related maritime SAR incidents, presumably owing to the high risk of the oil-industry activities. Indeed, this is exactly what occurred with respect to the Cougar helicopter crash; the industry-provided, prioritized response helicopter, located as it was at the facility closest to the oil platforms, responded and was the first helicopter on scene, picking up the sole survivor, following the arrival overhead of the Provincial Airways fisheries patrol aircraft. The primary Canadian Forces SAR helicopter from Gander (which was involved in a SAR training exercise in Sydney, NS at the time) and the Hercules from Greenwood, NS, arrived subsequently.

It is important to note that CF air SAR resources are provided and located to deal with both aeronautical and maritime SAR response, and are not focused or dedicated to any single activity or domain (air/marine). Although it's apparently not within the terms of reference of your inquiry, it should be noted that recurrent CF studies have consistently confirmed the Gander basing of our CH-149 Cormorant helicopters as best meeting the service needs for SAR incidents, both maritime and aeronautical, in that portion of the Halifax Search and Rescue Region.

If I may be of any further assistance, please feel free to e-mail or call.

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