

NAS KEFLAVIK, ICELAND

The ASW Training Capital of the World

By
David Reade

Formed as a result of the earth's natural geothermal forces, Iceland is a volcanic island which rises out of the middle of the North Atlantic, a testament to the raw forces that bore it in all its splendor. Formed eons ago, Iceland continues to demonstrate geothermal activity consisting of steam vents, geysers, bubbling hot springs, mud bogs and active volcanoes. Amidst this hot volcanic activity, Iceland has the distinction of having several glaciers. In fact, 13% of the island is covered with glacial ice, with one glacier considered to be Europe's largest.

The residents are the descendants of Nordic settlers and Celtic slaves who arrived in Iceland about 1100 years ago. In the centuries that followed, Iceland found itself under the domination of Norway and, later, a state in the union of Denmark. Iceland received full independence in 1944 and, five years later, became one of 13 founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO).

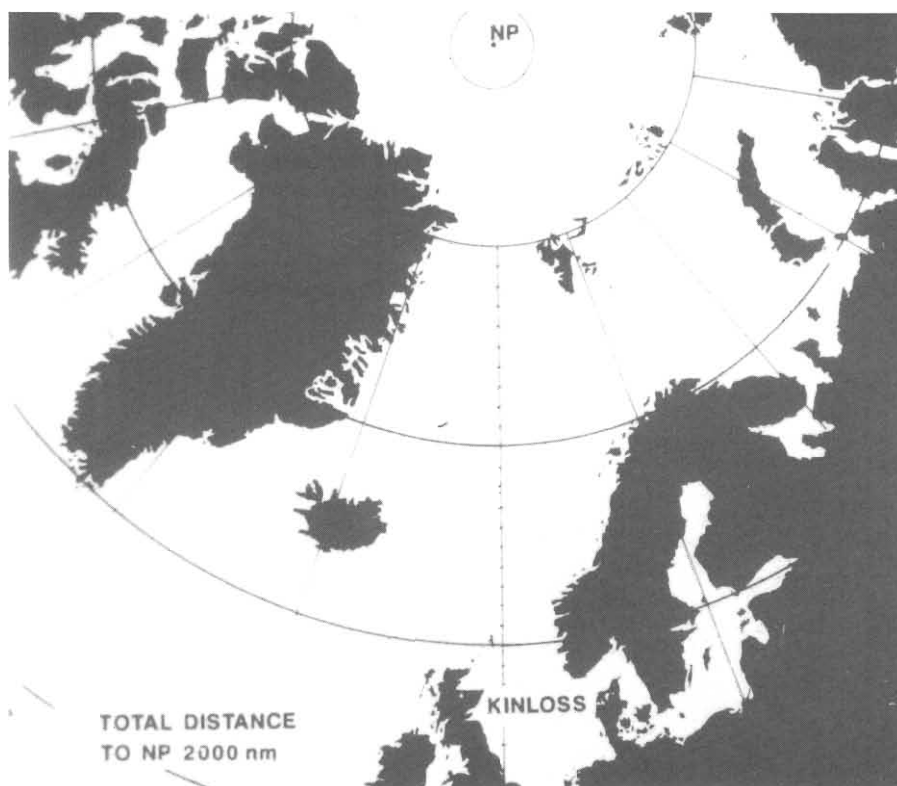
During World War 2, Iceland was the key to bridging the gap between North America and Europe. US forces built the airfield at Keflavik as a refuelling point for aircraft deliveries and cargo flights to the war in Europe. After the war, Keflavik continued to be used for support flights to the occupation forces in Europe. The US maintained and operated the airfield as the winds of the Cold War began to blow in from the east. The Icelandic government realized quickly the strategic potential of their island but, with a small population and no military force, the country had little prospect of defending itself. Thus, in 1951, Iceland signed a defence agreement with the United States, in accordance with the earlier NATO accords, which provided for an American-operated NATO airbase facility in exchange for defence of the nation. US forces represent Iceland militarily and formally assume the

responsibility for Iceland's defence on behalf of NATO.

A unique feature of Iceland is its strategic location, providing ready access to submarine transit routes into the Atlantic, and serving as a starting point for ASW missions into Scandinavian waters. During the Cold War, Naval Air Station Keflavik became the front line for ASW operations in the Atlantic. The engines of P-3 Orions could be heard around the clock, droning into the endless dark of winter and perpetual light of summer to hunt Soviet submarines on their way south to the open ocean. It has been said that Iceland was one of the keys which brought about the demise of the former Soviet Union's expansionism.

Today, Iceland maintains its strategic location for ASW operations. The ex-Soviet Navy continues to produce and launch submarines with advanced technology. Keflavik-based P-3s still make regular contact with both surface and sub-surface combatants. Although the tempo of the Cold War ASW operations has decreased, the potential threat of the combatants has not. P-3 operations from Keflavik are just as vital today for real-world experience that figures prominently in P-3 ASW readiness. This experience is critical to keeping the ASW skills of P-3 crews at peak efficiency. Iceland's location is the ideal place for the US Navy to conduct these operations.

Keflavik operations also include opportunities for shallow-water, anti-submarine warfare. Another unique feature of Iceland is its proximity to the shallow coastal waters of Norway. Shallow water, or littoral, ASW has become a major interest of the US Navy in recent years, because of the potential threat posed by the sale of advanced diesel submarines to unfriendly Third World powers. This threat has prompted the Navy to initiate the ASW Training Improvement Program (AWTIP), to address acoustic and non-acoustic methods of detecting new generation, advanced diesel and nuclear powered submarines in the shallow water



environment.

The AWTIP highlights characteristics and operating parameters of these sub-surface vessels in order to differentiate between them and the enormous amount of ambient surface clutter, and bottom-scatter noise distortion common in shallow water. It has been suggested that the AWTIP is as intensive as the ASW training conducted during the Cold War against earlier-generation nuclear submarines. The AWTIP is enhanced through ASW operations from Keflavik in a shallow-water environment.

Keflavik is also a unique environment for other aspects of P-3 Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) operations. Iceland is open to other NATO member nations who wish to conduct MPA operations from its shores. Often, these operations are developed into multi-national, interoperability training exercises in support of the primary NATO mission of maintaining a presence in the Atlantic region. One of these exercises, called Keflavik Tactical Exchange (KEFTACEX), is conducted with MP aircraft from Canada, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, Norway, Spain and the Netherlands. "Hostile" submarines are often provided by the Netherlands, Germany and Norway. These advanced diesel submarines are similar to those being purchased by third world countries and, as such, they offer a great training opportunity for MPA crews.

KEFTACEX provides insight into the difficult problem of shallow-water ASW against diesel submarines. KEFTACEX 94-3 included three

German Type 205 and 206 diesel submarines and MP aircraft from Canada, France, United Kingdom, Italy, United States and the Netherlands. One of the German boats was modified to allow MPAs to exercise torpedo attacks. The German support ship FGS Meersburg and a tug were used for torpedo recovery.

KEFTACEX starts with a one-day tactics symposium for MPA crews, followed by a week of flying during which each crew participates in three missions of increasing difficulty. Finally, the submarine crews and aviators meet to evaluate mission effectiveness in a doctrine-review session.

One lesson learned in KEFTACEX is that, upon detection, the MPA must be ready to convert immediately into an attack. The open ocean doctrine of detect, localize and track is not applicable in the shallow water environment.

Other exercises take advantage of the different branches of service under the sub-unified command of the Iceland Defence Force. An example of a joint operation exchange is a mine warfare exercise (MINEX), where P-3 Orions on a mining mission are protected by Keflavik-based US Air Force F-15 fighters. This type of joint mission can be enhanced by Norwegian F-16s acting as "hostile" strike aircraft. The same situation applies to anti-surface warfare (ASUW) exercises, where the Keflavik F-15s provide the P-3s with protection during Harpoon missile-strikes on hostile surface forces.

Organizationally, the US Navy rear admiral who is assigned as Commander Iceland Defence Force holds three other

operational positions. As Commander of Iceland Defence Force, he heads a command composed of all four branches of US armed services committed to the defence of Iceland.

In his second role, as Commander Iceland Sector Anti-Submarine Warfare Group, he exercises operational control over all USN and NATO MPA forces at Keflavik. This includes the deployed USN patrol squadron, called PATRON Keflavik, and the Royal Netherlands Navy permanently-detached P-3 Orion.

A third role is as Island Commander Iceland, a NATO command under the Commander in Chief Eastern Atlantic (CINCEASTLANT). This position commands the Keflavik forces which transfer to NATO command in the event of a serious crisis.

Additionally, the rear admiral is also Commander Fleet Air Keflavik, the senior USN commander in Iceland. Responsibilities include providing for the operational readiness of naval units on the island, and exercising administrative authority over NAS Keflavik which, in turn, is responsible for all airfield operations and support to other facilities at the station.

As part of the recent drawdowns, NAS Keflavik has assumed responsibility for all MPA forces operating from Lajes, in the Azores, and area support to carrier battle-groups during their transit to the Mediterranean.

A common sight on the PATRON Keflavik flight line is the distinctively-painted P-3 Orion of the Royal Netherlands Navy. The single aircraft detachment is the result of a 1985 military agreement between the Netherlands,

Seen on the flight line at NAS Keflavik during a recent Keftacex are MP aircraft from Great Britain, Canada, USA, Netherlands, Germany and France. (USN)





Netherlands and USN P3s are seen in formation over the coast of Iceland.

(Reade)

Iceland and the United States, at the request of the Icelandic government, to have a Dutch P-3 deployed permanently at Keflavik. Formally under the command of NATO, the aircraft operates as part of the Iceland Sector ASW Group, therefore tactical control is under the direction of the US Navy. The Dutch P-3 performs KEF OPS alongside the American Orions, and participates in NATO interoperability exercises. This type of training is immensely beneficial, and figures prominently in the Dutch training regimen.

The Keflavik-based Dutch P-3 also provides vital support to its own forces. One particular tasking includes assuming the search and rescue (SAR) guard for Royal Netherlands Air Force F-16s transiting across the North Atlantic to North America. Similar to the Canadian Aurora's "Duck Butt" missions, the Dutch "Goose Bay Ferry"

flights position a P-3 in an orbit over the southern tip of Greenland. The P-3's crew performs communication relays, and maintains a SAR-ready status in case the transiting aircraft develop problems.

In the past year, great emphasis has been placed on enhancing the ASUW capability of the P-3 Orion. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, and the perceived diminishing submarine threat, a real concern exists that there is a lower priority on maintaining ASW capabilities. However, as long as there are submarines in the world, there will be a need for ASW. Iceland continues to be the strategic location for the US Navy to conduct ASW operations and training. Iceland also provides a real-world environment to hone shallow-water ASW skills against advanced technology submarines. Iceland is truly the "ASW Training Capital of the World."

About the Author

David Reade (P-3 Publications) is a free-lance journalist and consultant. He has written countless informative articles on the P-3 Orion, its systems, missions and capabilities in many of the leading MPA community publications. Mr Reade is considered by most to be the leading authority on the P-3, and regularly consults with the U.S. Navy, contractors and industry on the aircraft. He has also authored an authoritative P-3 Bureau Number (BuNo) List that is recognized as "An Outstanding P-3 Reference Guide."

A regular contributor to Lockheed's Airborne Log and to Maritime Patrol Aviation, Mr Reade can usually be found wherever there are P-3 aircraft, from Iceland to Puerto Rico and Panama to Canada.



Rethinking Low Intensity Conflict

We should never build weapons systems with a low-intensity conflict in mind. When you are a participant, there is no such thing as a "low-intensity" conflict!

Source: GSCM (SW) R. Caceres, USN - USNI Proceedings May 1994