

# The Northern Mariner / Le marin du nord

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## From the editor

In August 2021, the United States Coast Guard medium icebreaker *Healy* will journey through the Northwest Passage – its first transit of the route since 2003. The Coast Guard’s objectives for the mission are simple: “support research that advances fundamental understanding of the Arctic region and continue to work with our allies and partners on the mutual goal of ensuring a safe, secure, and cooperative Arctic.” This messaging matches with the Coast Guard’s *Arctic Strategic Outlook*, which calls for cooperation and coordination with various Canadian agencies “vital to the safety and security of the Arctic.” It also reflects the long history of cooperation and partnership that has characterized the relationship between Canada and the US in the Arctic. Even though the two countries agree to disagree about the legal status of the Northwest Passage (the US viewing it as an international strait and Canada arguing it is internal waters), they still work closely together in the region – an arrangement enshrined in the 1988 Arctic Cooperation Agreement, which requires Canadian consent for US icebreaker transits. Icebreaker operations have long been the bedrock of Canadian-American cooperation in the Arctic, although historians have paid little attention to these historic bilateral activities (or to the service of both Coast Guards in the polar region, for that matter).

Canada-US cooperation and icebreakers are at the core of this special issue focused on the North American Arctic. In their article on the 1957 Bellot Strait expedition, Adam Lajeunesse and P. Whitney Lackenbauer explain how Canadian and American vessels together charted a usable Northwest Passage for deep-draft ships that could be used as an escape route out of the Arctic. The second half of the 1950s saw a dramatic increase in the number of US Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS) vessels operating in the North American Arctic as they worked to establish military installations and chart northern waters. As the authors point out, however, the MSTS “inherited one persistent worry from past Arctic enterprises, extending as far back as the whaling fleets and Victorian explorers of the nineteenth century: the prospect of being trapped by the ice as the region froze back up in the fall.” The search for a reliable escape route was a dangerous mission, but together Canadian and American vessels worked through unpredictable ice conditions, weather, extreme isolation, and uncharted hazards to accomplish their objectives.

The second article, which I authored, is the first part of a larger study exploring how stakeholders have built their cases for US Coast Guard polar icebreaker acquisition over the last 65 years. Successive generations of American practitioners and policymakers have had to justify why the state requires an icebreaking capability – often to decision-makers with little to no knowledge of icebreakers. This study assesses why these efforts so often ended in failure or partial success and explains why the US icebreaking fleet currently consists of one, frequently broken down, 45-year-old heavy icebreaker and one ageing medium icebreaker (although new Polar Security Cutters are on the way). This article explores the push by members of Congress between 1957 and 1961 to gain authorization for the US Coast Guard to construct a nuclear-powered icebreaker – an American response to the Soviet construction of the world’s first nuclear icebreaker, *Lenin*. Although the drive for a nuclear icebreaker enjoyed popular bi-partisan and bi-cameral support in Congress, it failed to convince a budget-conscious Eisenhower administration.

Canadian-American relations are also the focus of Preston Jones’ article, which argues that reliable shipping served as the cornerstone for cooperation in the Arctic and near-Arctic during the Klondike and Nome gold rushes. Jones explains that the culture of cooperation described in numerous gold rush memoirs was built atop “an infrastructure of certainty and stability.” While effective Canadian law enforcement was a key pillar of stability in the region, Jones argues that shipping provided the basic needs – food, supplies, mail, security, and transportation – required to foster this culture of cooperation.

With both countries set to revitalize their icebreaker fleets, the US and Canada have the opportunity to continue and expand upon this long tradition of cooperation. As they intensify their construction programs, both countries should continue to share best practices and lessons learned to ensure the best vessels are launched. With more vessels, the Canadian and US Coast Guards will be able to increase their collaboration on scientific research, emergency preparedness, search and rescue, mass rescue operations, oil spill response, and other disaster management activities on an annual basis. Increased national icebreaking capacity and expanded bi-national cooperation will support a safer and more secure Arctic – and, as this issue of *TNM* highlights, there is plenty of history upon which to build.

This is my first issue as editor, and it would not have come together without the assistance of many helping hands. I would like to thank my predecessor, Bill Glover, for his willingness to share advice and editing tips – he has left big shoes to fill. Editorial board members Roger Sarty and Richard Gimblett, book review editor, Faye Kert, and CNRS president, Michael Moir, also generously shared their wisdom and support. Without the patience and guidance of production editor, Walter Lewis, I would have been adrift. Finally, I thank the authors for making the process enjoyable and the peer reviewers for their diligent and vital work. I hope you enjoy the issue.

All the best,  
Peter Kikkert  
Editor, *The Northern Mariner*