



Get on the Boat, Get off the Boat

OE Watch Commentary: The *Aleksandr Otrkovskiy* is one of three Ropucha-class large landing ships built in Poland that are in service with the Northern Fleet. They can be loaded from fore and aft ramps and can carry 450 tons and up to 25 standard armored personnel carriers. The training reported on in the accompanying excerpted article apparently included the different types of vehicles that the 66th Naval Infantry Brigade would use, but it was not a full-up combat load since tanks and artillery were not involved. It takes a good deal of crew and driver skill and training to embark and disembark vehicles quickly and efficiently. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“In the course of the training, the BDK Aleksandr Otrakovskiy’s crew practiced ship maneuvering and ballasting elements while receiving and disembarking the seaborne assault force, while the driver-mechanics improved their skills in getting on the landing ship’s twin-deck and getting off onto the shore.”

Source: “Large Landing Ship Aleksandr Otrakovskiy Practices Amphibious Training Tasks,” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 2 March 2019. https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12219776@egNews

The exercise was held in the Pechenga bay on the Kola Peninsula shore near the Liinakhamari settlement. It involved 16 BTR-80 and BTR-82 AM armored personnel carriers, 12 all-wheel drive KamAZ and Ural military trucks, [tracked articulated chassis all-terrain] vehicles and engineering equipment belonging to the Northern Fleet naval infantry, as well as some 150 naval infantry.

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Amphibious training is one of the core elements of the naval infantrymen’s combat training that in full measure allows to practice teamwork and the tactics of amphibious landing on an open beach. Practicing loading military equipment aboard a landing ship from the shore is a basic element.

After rehearsing the tasks with the naval infantry, the large landing ship Aleksandr Otrakovskiy sailed to the Northern Fleet main base – Severomorsk.

Freedom of Navigation to be Tested in Arctic?

OE Watch Commentary: A French Navy supply vessel, the *FS Rhone*, sailed the Northern Sea Route from Norway to the Aleutian Islands last summer, using the Russian Northern Fleet and Pacific Fleet radio beacons to navigate the waters. The *FS Rhone* is not an ice-class vessel and Russian rescue services reportedly were on standby (see: *French Naval Vessel Sails Northern Sea Route*,” *OE Watch*, November 2018). Whatever coordination and permissions the French obtained before the voyage is not readily available, but was apparently minimal; however, as the accompanying excerpted article from *Interfax* reports, the Russian government would like to establish rules for using the Northern Sea Route by “foreign military ships.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“In case of emergency or complicated ice conditions, the captains must send a report to the nearest Russian port or military base.”

Source: “Foreign military ships to be compelled to notify Russia about plans to travel along Northern Sea Route,” *Interfax*, 6 March 2019. <https://www.interfax.com>

According to the newspaper Izvestia on 6 March, Russia has pledged to protect the Northern Sea Route, and the government has elaborated rules of its use by foreign military ships...The ships will also be compelled to prevent environmental pollution. In case of emergency or complicated ice conditions, the captains must send a report to the nearest Russian port or military base.

The newspaper noted that U.S. representatives had repeatedly called for making the Northern Sea Route a transport corridor open to all. The latest statement of the kind was made by U.S. Coast Guard Commander Adm. Paul Zukunft in 2018.

According to Izvestia, the United States is challenging the right of any littoral country, not just Russia, to establish the rules of navigation in the Arctic waters. They do not recognize the right of Canada to control Arctic routes either. The U.S.’ claims regarding the Northern Sea Route date back to the Cold War. In 1964, Washington and Moscow exchanged protests after U.S. ships tried to travel along the coast without authorization.