

CANTERBURY SAILS THROUGH SEA TRIALS

BY ENS MATTHEW MCQUAID RNZN

On January 22, the Nuship *Canterbury* sailed from the Tenix shipyard in Williamstown to conduct four days of contractor's sea trials. For many of the newer members of the ships' company, including myself, this was our first time at sea on our colossal new ship.

On sailing from Williamstown, Tenix and the Ministry of Defence team set out to test that the *Canterbury* could meet the requirements stated in the contract.

Canterbury's primary role will be to provide the New Zealand Defence Force with a tactical sealift capability so she can transfer personnel, equipment and stores into a theatre of operations and thence from the ship to shore.

She has many inbuilt systems and components to provide that ability, such as the vehicle deck, stern and side ramps, 60 tonne cranes, landing craft, a large hangar and flight deck with two "spots", and container-sized cargo hatches.

She can accommodate 363 personnel. There are 252 bunks set aside for embarked forces, leaving 111 bunks for

- 53 naval ship's company
- 7 ship's Army loading team
- 10 Royal New Zealand Air Force flight maintainers
- 36 trainees
- 1 flag officer or VIP, and
- 4 government agency officers

The embarked forces have their own galley, dining area and recreation spaces. There is also a hospital capable of taking five patients, including an operating theatre, pre and post-operative care and a sickbay.

The *Canterbury* has four options to facilitate the movement of embarked forces ashore:

- berthing at a wharf and unloading through the stern and/or side ramps
- helicopter transfer
- landing craft utilising the crane and stern door, or
- a (RHIB) sea boat

The preferred option is to berth at a wharf so that vehicles can drive on and off utilising the stern door and side vehicle ramps. This option will definitely provide for easy operation. However, in many situations a port may be unavailable or inappropriate for the mission.

Helicopter transfer of equipment and personnel is also a viable option. *Canterbury* has a storage hangar for up to four of the future NH90 helicopters, and a separate hangar for the SH-2G Super Seasprite. The flight deck can take up to a Chinook-size helicopter, providing inter-operability with the helicopters of the Australian Defence Force.

Canterbury is equipped with two Landing Craft Medium which are stored on 01 deck just forward of the flight deck. Each

LCM weighs 58 tonnes and carries up to 50 tonnes of stores or vehicles.

Transporting equipment ashore by LCM is very simple in principle. The crane lowers the LCM into the water, and the crew drive it around to the stern of the ship. The ship's stern door is then lowered and the LCM makes its approach with its bow ramp down. Once the LCM is in position on the stern door of *Canterbury*, two hydraulic rams guide the LCM into place. Vehicles and stores can then be driven on and off as required.

As with the other ships in the Protector fleet, the *Canterbury* has two new 7.3m self-righting Gemini rigid inflatable boats.

The RHIBS will be an effective way of transporting small numbers of personnel with equipment into areas where the LCMs or helicopters can't reach.

A key component of the ship's capability are the two 60 tonne self-tensioning cranes located just forward of the flight deck. These cranes can lift a light armoured vehicle through one of the two flush hatches located on the flight deck. The onboard cranes mean that the ship can berth at ports that don't have cranes on the wharf.


In addition to all the sealift ability, the *Canterbury* is very versatile in terms of military shipping. She has seven engineering mode configurations giving a top speed of 21 knots.

She is equipped with a 25mm Bushmaster cannon located on the fo'c'sle. This is a versatile weapon controlled and fired from the bridge. Firing up to 200 rounds per minute, this cannon provides a flexible weapon, especially when

patrolling the exclusive economic zone, a major operational requirement of all the Protector vessels. There are two operations planning rooms allowing for effective operational planning and coordination.

Canterbury's sea trials were a learning experience and enjoyed by all. In particular, the main capability, our ship to shore transfer system, or SSTS, was demonstrated. This included transferring a 20 tonne vehicle from the MRV to the LCM in conditions approaching sea state two.

This was an impressive evolution, given that it was undertaken in rougher conditions than was initially intended, and by a Tenix coxswain with less than two weeks experience operating our LCMs. This bodes well for the development of the full SSTS capability once the ship enters service.

Overall, they were four successful days at sea in *Canterbury*, indicating she is well on the way to being one of the most versatile and robust ships in the Royal New Zealand Navy. 



The port landing craft being launched



The Bushmaster cannon

Photos and article courtesy Navy Today.