

# Naval Warfare Officer's course tests knowledge and practical skills

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Being on the bridge of a warship as a [Naval Warfare Officer](#) (NWO) can, at times, be the most stressful job in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN).

Situations an NWO could find themselves in range from emergency actions for a person overboard, to receiving a helicopter resupply, to piloting a ship through narrow waters around dangerous hazards.

“My memorable moment [in training] was conducting pilotage through Sansum Narrows (between Vancouver Island and Salt Spring Island) in a snowstorm and having to stop the ship because a pod of transient orcas was approaching us from the other direction,” said Sub-Lieutenant (SLt) Bryan Cole, a member of the Ettrick NWO IV course that graduated on April 8, 2021.

The NWO IV course takes roughly 96 training days to complete, and when combined with the other phases, amounts to 219 days to become an NWO.

All NWO courses are named after a ship from naval history; the Ettrick course was named after a British convoy frigate from the Second World War.

Training is run by Naval Fleet School (Pacific) and each course is overseen by a Course Training Officer. Students cover foundational aspects of the RCN, giving them the tools to lead and work in ships.

The NWO course is one of the toughest courses an officer can take, and the COVID-19 pandemic introduced additional challenges for students and staff this time around.

“Despite a very compressed schedule in the second half of the course that saw Ettrick do 10 straight weeks of simulator training, isolation periods and sea phases with essentially no rest days, all students pushed through and exceeded the NWO IV standard,” said Lieutenant (Navy) Alexandru Madularu, Course Training Officer.

“Bravo Zulu to the students; that flexibility and drive to see something through to the end will serve them well in a trade and Navy that demand both.”

The course includes four written exams: collision regulations, which are rules of the road for the sea; navigation relating to planning and execution of passage through waterways; warfare and the actions to be taken in times of conflict; and the routine operations of an NWO.

All of these tests prepare the students for their two phases at sea, which test their practical skills. Pilotage involves planned navigation through areas close to navigation hazards and narrow waterways. The last sea phase brings together all the training NWOs receive up to that point in their careers. Students manage and perform multiple exercises and watches, such as tow approaches and responding to emergencies.

Finally, students must challenge an oral board in front of their superiors, where they are tested on their knowledge related to the trade and the Canadian Armed Forces, and then are ready to enter the fleet as an NWO.

“NWO training goes from zero to 100 really quickly depending on what phase you are doing, and while some phases are just fun and interesting, truthfully, some are extremely demanding and stressful,” says course graduate SLt Lucas Oesterreich.

“But that rollercoaster is a fun one to ride, and regardless, you feel like you’ve done something you can be proud of when you finish.”

SLt Hank Kieser said the best piece of advice he could give new NWOs revolves around teamwork. “Be a team player first and foremost; a supported and supportive team will pay dividends.” Graduates now look forward to what comes next in their careers. The majority are posted to the East Coast, while a few will remain west, and some reservists plan to return to their civilian life before returning to the coast in the future.