



Rear-Admiral Nigel Greenwood RCN, MNI

Naval Column

Leader, mariner, manager, warrior

Designing a command development scheme to suit a 21st century Navy

Command at sea has been an abiding preoccupation of The Nautical Institute. Indeed, possession of a command qualification used to be the primary requirement of membership. Recent articles in *Seaways* have dealt with both the philosophies and practicalities of preparing young officers for the challenges of command. In this article, I would like to share the Royal Canadian Navy's experience and evolving approach to command development.

Starting point

Around eight years ago, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) was faced with the need to review its process for producing command-qualified officers. Over the previous decade, the assignment of coastal defence vessel operations to the Naval Reserves meant there were no minor commands for Regular Force officers. Thus the first (and often only) command was likely to be a frigate, at about 20 years of service. This was imagined to be a slim and distant prospect by many officers, with the result that voluntary candidacy for the RCN's Command Qualification process declined.

Up to that time, the RCN's Command Qualification scheme consisted of two parts. Part I was a battery of exams, covering navigation, seamanship and ceremonial, logistics, engineering and damage control and operations/weapons. All of this had to be fitted in by busy Lieutenants on a semi-annual cycle. Once they passed all Part I exams, the candidates had to win the personal recommendation of their Commanding Officer in order to appear before a 'command board' of serving frigate COs under the chairmanship of a Squadron Commander. If they passed this oral examination, candidates were then eligible to be appointed Executive Officers, in which position they would be further mentored toward selection for sea command of their own.

The command board itself (Command Part II) had evolved over the years to accommodate the use of bridge simulators. Practical questions could be assessed by direct observation of the candidate's skill in shiphandling and bridge leadership during difficult alongside manoeuvring

and complex Colregs situations, often involving operational imperatives. There was no place for well-explained intent with ship-models for illustrations any more; the candidates had to show they could do it in practice! Like the scheme discussed in the November 2012 *Seaways* article on the RN Command Certification process, this was seen as a very positive step. Even the unsuccessful candidates could admit that the pass criteria were objective rather than subjective.

The Part I process was less positive. The exams themselves were out of date and run by relatively junior officers who, albeit subject matter specialists, were often not command-qualified themselves. The rigid semi-annual cycle was often in conflict with major deployment timings. And the multiple-choice exam format encouraged officers to risk recurrent poorly-prepared attempts rather than invest in serious professional study. The result was a lot of wasted effort on the part of exam custodians, candidates and invigilators, as pass rates became abysmal (often near 25%).

Incentive for change

The incentive for change gained momentum in 2005-06, when the flotilla of 80-ton twin-screw wooden vessels used for basic seamanship and navigation training was replaced with eight new *Orca*-class patrol boats. These new vessels, 110 feet overall, displacing 200 tons, and having a top speed of 22 knots, featured accommodations for 20 crew/students and state of the art bridges with redundant ECDIS & ARPA consoles. This called for an interim qualification between a tender-charge ticket and a full command qualification.

The increased potential for damage due to increased momentum (200t x 22 kts versus 80t x 10 kts) was only one part of the RCN's risk assessment. It had also become apparent that the previous 15 years had seen a net decrease in the average young officer's quality of seamanship. Intensive navigational and seamanship training within the training squadron had given way to OJT Bridge Watch-keeping Certification in single ships. Recurrent operational deployments to the Adriatic and the Persian Gulf were long on sea-time while being short on multiple-ship interactions, coastal navigation or seamanship. In

addition, the pressure to advance junior officers and rebuild numbers after a badly-managed Force Reduction Programme in the mid-90s meant that there was little time for skills and experience consolidation at junior ranks. Tellingly and repeatedly, debriefs of failed command board candidates' performance revealed that the RCN's mid-grade officers did not know their seamanship.

Against this backdrop, and with increasing scrutiny being placed on command development as a result of failures in command across the Canadian Forces, it was high time for a revision of the Navy's Command Development process.

Balanced, unified development

The decision to reform the Part I process with online, on-demand exams started in 2007 as a joint project of the RCN's Atlantic and Pacific Fleet Commanders [I was at that time the more westerly of the two]. It has since evolved into a comprehensive and unified scheme of professional development for seaman-officers (in the RCN, this is known as the Maritime Surface/Subsurface (MARS) speciality.)

The RCN believed that the command qualification process should be a more deliberate developmental process, rather than a self-motivated process of assimilation and emulation. Accordingly, in 2008, the year-long Operations Room Officer (ORO) course was reduced by 10 weeks. This time was devoted to the new Command Development Course (CDC), which would encompass classroom instruction and examination in the traditional topics of the Part I Exams. The course was significantly augmented by case studies, decision-making challenges, manoeuvring tutorials in the navigation simulator, and mock command boards. It was by no means a spoon-fed 'attendance-only' course, and candidates would have to put in significant extra-curricular effort if they were to be successful.

A further two-week module provided the opportunity for candidates to be exposed to the *Orca* patrol boat, and to obtain a command ticket for the vessel on passing a check-ride. This was crucial to providing an early opportunity for independent command, and would in turn feed

enthusiasm for the later hurdle of the command board and major ship command.

Expanding the concept

As the CDC developed, it evolved through the direction and energies of its two champions, retired RCN Captains Sandy Bellows and Kevin Greenwood, to become the keystone of a broader concept of professional development encompassing the whole scheme of MARS training.

The scheme was based around the realisation that the balanced, well-developed officer the RCN sought for command would have to be a master of four disciplines; a consummate leader, mariner, manager and warrior.

- **Leader** covers the Captain's necessary appreciation and exercise of responsibility and authority, the art and performance of leadership and, most importantly, the fundamental mission focus which informs all prudent risk-management.
- **Mariner** entails the skills of the seaman to the extent that the Commander must continually exemplify to his crew significant experience, technical skill, resourcefulness and perseverance.
- **Manager** is not just about bureaucratic efficiency, but use of resources in the best operational, logistic sense; it is about detailed planning and project supervision.
- **Warrior** is the particular expertise of the operational environment; in the navy this means the judicious threat or use of force. The counterpart in the merchant service would be a mastery of the principles of trade.

These four disciplines are now well established as the basic pillars of the RCN's Naval Officer's

Training Centre (NOTC) *Venture*. The curriculae for all three phases of training prior to ORO and CDC, totalling around 250 training days altogether, are oriented around these four principles. For younger officers, the criteria for Leader are tailored to the roles and tasks appropriate to their positions onboard.

Content and format

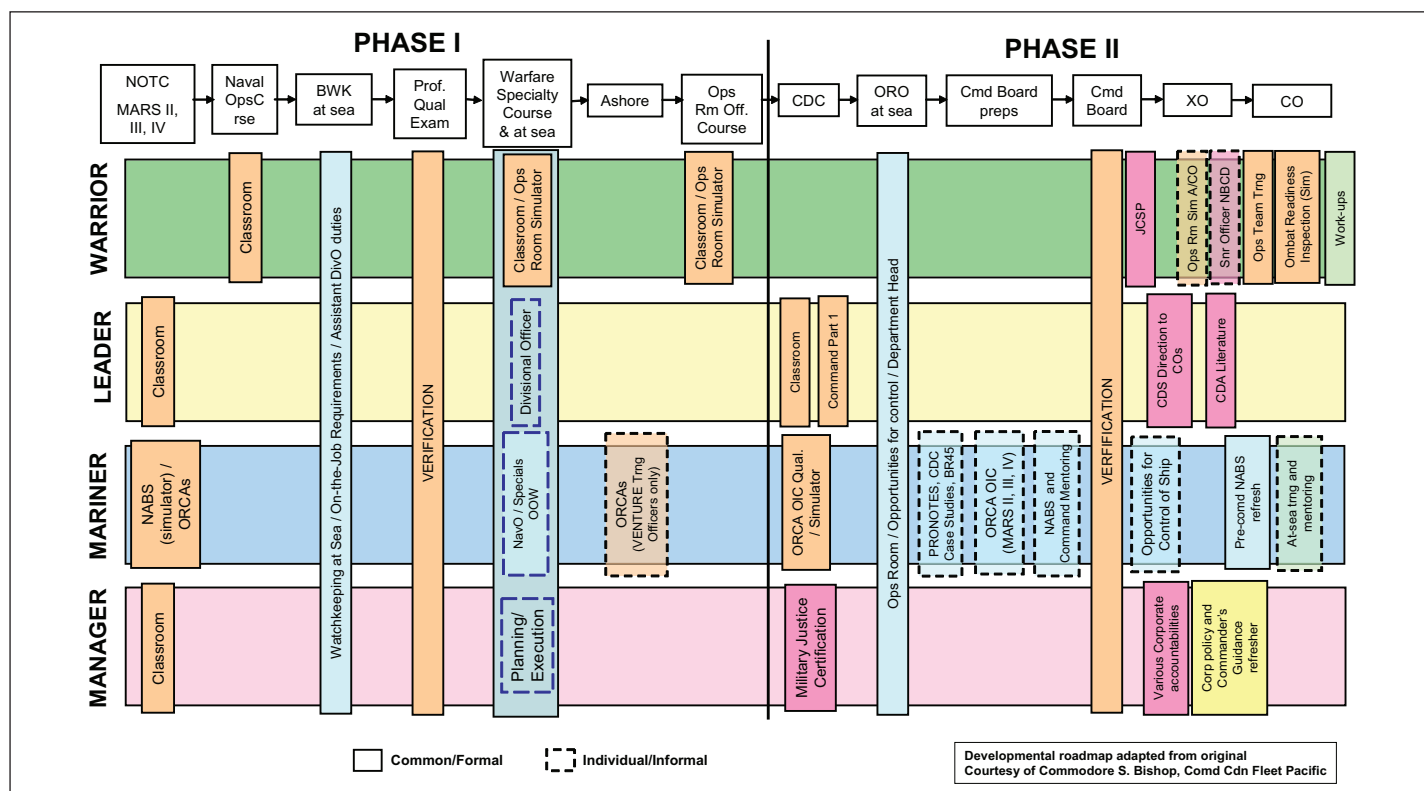
The ratio of classroom, simulator and live *Orca* training at sea during the CDC now stands at 40-30-30%. A very strong emphasis is placed on Colregs and seamanship, both of which feature Pass/Fail criteria in the final exam. Students are prepared for the exam through extensive lectures and case studies, and in the case of Colregs, daily quizzes. The seamanship plan includes seven worksheet exercises in which students are required to conduct a literature review ('pub crawl!') to find and apply knowledge to technical problems. A fail in either the Colregs or seamanship exams means that the CDC is registered as incomplete. The candidate must then study the material on their own and find time to return for a supplemental exam in the missing credit.

The CDC also contains a number of other modules of necessary command knowledge. These include: law of warfare/law of the sea; command accountability; command and control; engineering; damage control; stability; financial oversight and material control; military justice; administration and logistics; and force protection. Operations, tactics and weapons are covered extensively on the ORO course during the nine months preceding the CDC.

A critical element in command board failures has long been poor performance in handling

the ship, and more so since simulators began to show the awful truth of what candidates would actually do with their ships. Thus manoeuvring tutorials play a significant part in the CDC. NOTC *Venture* is privileged to have a navigation and bridge simulator consisting of six visual bridge modules. These can be operated separately, or they can be linked together so that each ship can see the others and respond appropriately (eg for formation manoeuvres). The CDC starts from basic shiphandling principles in the classroom, then leads each student to execute basic and more evolved manoeuvres in the simulator. This includes increasingly challenging berthing and departure scenarios in extreme conditions of adverse wind and tide. In this, the CDC staff are augmented and assisted by the simulator operator and a team of over 20 senior mentors, all retired senior officers of the RCN with live command experience.

Along with designing and delivering the CDC, Captains Greenwood and Bellows have built an impressive intranet website of references to support the CDC. This includes all the formal references from the curriculum, along with all the briefs and lectures that make up the course. They have also amassed an extraordinary electronic library of cases studies, collisions and grounding reports, Boards of Inquiries and other resources. Their intent has been to learn as much from studying failure as from teaching examples of success. They have become the RCN's custodians of 'pronotes', the traditional manner in which commanding officers detail for the edification of their mates where it all went wrong, rather than 'I did this particularly brilliant manoeuvre yesterday'...



Decision-making under pressure

It has long been appreciated that decision-making is the main business of command. For many command board candidates in the past, however, it was not obvious how this happened. Reaching a decision was like a magic epiphany informed by complete knowledge, an almost impossibly tall order. The CDC staff, therefore, set out to demystify this by providing some frameworks for arriving at a decision. It is no longer a matter of 'How would you do this?' but 'Would you do this?' and 'How would you mitigate the risk?' and 'When do you have enough information to make a decision?'

The decision-making aspects of the CDC lead the candidate through basic risk-management philosophy, to modes of decision-making (analytic vs. intuitive, and urgent vs. deliberate), and to the varied modes of failure. They are also led through the various kinds of ethical dilemmas, so that they can recognise the occasional need for a decision that will please no-one but is nonetheless the correct thing to do.

Students are presented with a number of problems, and must lead their colleagues through detailed and difficult decision-making scenarios representative of what they may encounter, both in real life and at the command board. Most of these problems are culled from the collective memory of the CDC staff and mentors. They are sometimes, perversely, both improbable and true! Over several iterations of the CDC, the staff have increased the formality of these presentations so as to pre-condition the candidates to the stage fright they may encounter at the command board. In the end, however, it is not about teaching to the board, but rather getting the candidate to 'own' the problem.

Selection for Command

As I have said earlier, a pass at the CDC (Command Part I) is only a step toward gaining further experience and maturity, so as to be suited for a recommendation to the Command Board (Part II). Success in this would then lead to an appointment as an executive officer. It is during this stage that most significant one-on-one mentoring should happen.

After the first few serials of the CDC, however, it was determined that the qualification as officer in charge (OIC) of one of the *Orca* vessels should be a more definitive element of the process. After all, if an officer cannot qualify to drive a 200-ton vessel, why would we persist in preparing them for a 5,000-ton first command?

Accordingly, the *Orca* OIC is now a pass/fail criteria of the Command Part I. The course scheduling has been appropriately adjusted to ensure candidates can gain platform familiarity with this unique vessel. This should be less of a concern as succeeding generations develop their familiarity with *Orca* ships in earlier phases of training. The requirement to obtain the *Orca* qualification before proceeding further has the added benefit of increasing the number of qualified individuals ready to command those



Command of an *Orca*-class vessel is a key step in training for high-level command

vessels in training roles. The *Orcas* are operated on a rotating-command basis as the platforms for both junior officer training and other assignments.

Notwithstanding the lengthy and detailed effort required to get command-qualified, not every officer crossing that bridge actually gets to command an HMC Ship. Professional advancement remains fiercely competitive, with several opportunities for both formal and informal development between the ranks of Lieutenant and Commander (see developmental roadmap on previous page). Not shown in the diagram but also very relevant is the year-long Junior Command and Staff Programme (JCSP), usually undertaken before the executive office tour at sea. In the Canadian Forces this is a critical course for developing joint warfare and staff duties skills, and is thus done in concert with Canadian Army and Royal Canadian Air Force officers, as well as foreign colleagues.

The final hurdle to command is selection. In the RCN, this is conducted by a Board of Commodores, chaired by the Deputy Commander of the RCN. Each officer's qualifications, performance and suitability, and potential are assessed in a five-year succession plan for Commanders and above. All command-qualified lieutenant commanders are considered as the input-rank to this matrix, leading to the deliberate selection for the JCSP, appointment as executive officer, and subsequent (competitive) selection for Sea Command.

Conclusion

After three years of conducting the CDC, it may be too early to declare that this is a revolutionary success in command development. The recent command boards are still largely made up of pre-CDC candidates, even as the proportion of CDC and *Orca*-experienced candidates is increasing. There is occasionally some anxiety that the success rate on the Command Board is not

substantially increasing. It remains on average about 25%, while the number of candidates (approximately 30 across the navy, twice a year) is variously made up of first and repeated attempts.

However, the number of candidates attempting the Board is increasing slightly, which suggests that the RCN has once again made command both achievable and desirable. If this is so, and this renewed enthusiasm is being carried by those who have mastered decision-making under pressure, and see themselves clearly as Leaders, Mariners, Managers and Warriors (ie Captains!), then this is certainly a step in the right direction.

The process itself is under continuous review. The Commander of the RCN's Pacific Fleet, Commodore Scott Bishop, has been charged by the Commander of the RCN to review the whole MARS Development scheme to make sure that it is both meeting current demands and anticipating the challenges of command in the future. While he is at this moment satisfied with the process, he did relate one concern or area of particular focus: the degree to which truly dedicated, personal mentorship by serving Commanding Officers is the key factor determining the success of their subordinates. This has been a frequent preoccupation of *Seaways* contributors over the years, common to both naval and merchant mariners, and it brings the whole subject neatly full-circle:

Captain, what are you doing to train your relief?

Rear-Admiral Nigel Greenwood RCN MNI retired from service in June 2012, having finished 37 years in the RCN as Commander Maritime Forces Pacific. He can be reached at nsg@greenwoodmaritime.com