



# SWO(N) Lifecycle: PA to RO

April 2021

Website: <https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Career-Management/Detailing/Officer/Pers-41-SWO/Detailers/SWO-N/>  
Facebook SWO(N) Mentorship Network: [www.facebook.com/groups/1890240891100295/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/1890240891100295/)  
Public SWO(N) Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/NukeSWO>

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## From Central

It is true that commanding a warship is the pinnacle tour in a Surface Warfare Officer's career. You get this feedback throughout your career as an aspiring CO and you see it in your FITREPs. Likewise, being a Reactor Officer is the pinnacle of a SWO(N)'s career after successfully commanding a US warship!

While we often make this point, we have not always had an in depth conversation about WHY. This SWO(N) Lifecycle issue is intended to enable a more substantive conversation about the RO tour and the path there within our community. We highlight some aspects in the career path from PA to RO, but we mostly focus on the Reactor Officer tour that is truly the pinnacle of a SWO(N)'s career. We've included several testimonials of RO-serving or RO-served officers. We want you to hear directly from these officers that have gone before us. Their testimonials highlight their unease at different points in their career about becoming an RO, how they moved past it, why they became an RO, some challenges they faced, and why the Reactor Officer tour is our pinnacle tour. A special thank you to the senior officers who shared their perspective as Reactor Officers and who are enabling us to have more informed conversations about our career path.

- |                             |                          |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| - RADM Marc Dalton          | - CAPT Paul Allgeier     |
| - CAPT Matthew Kawas        | - CAPT Michelle Nakamura |
| - CAPT Bo Johns             | - CAPT John Ryan         |
| - CAPT Mark Johnson, EDO(N) | - CAPT Steve Aldridge    |
| - CAPT Robert Francis       | - CAPT Michel Brandt     |

I truly admire the men and women maintaining, operating, and supervising the nuclear propulsion plants in our CVN fleet. The more time I spend interacting with our community in my new role, the more apparent it is that our young officers value mentorship, career flexibility, and information. Your community management team is dedicated to improving these areas. In that spirit, I ask that you spend some time with your junior officers and show them our Navy Personnel Command Website (linked above), the SWO(N) Mentorship Network on Facebook (linked above), your copy of the biennial SWO(N) Newsletter, and make sure they are on the SWO(N) Gram email distribution.

To be added to the SWO(N) Gram distribution, please email LCDR Cory Hardy,  
 We'll send it to both your personal and work email accounts, as desired.

We have hard copies of the SWO(N) Newsletter still available and will mail them out until our inventory is depleted. If you'd like a hardcopy or electronic copy, please email LCDR Hardy with your mailing address and/or email address (personal email address recommended due to file size restrictions).

Thank you for all that you do! We are honored to serve as your community management team!

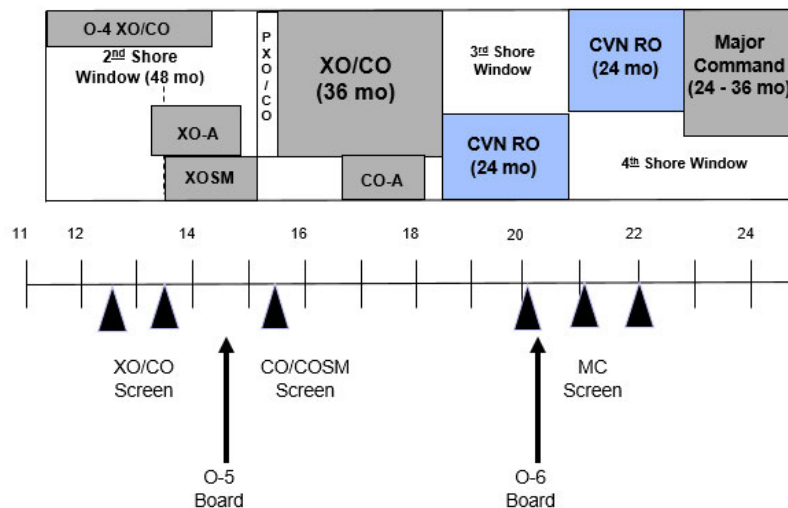
V/r, Craig

CDR Craig Trent  
 Surface Nuclear Officer Programs & Placement (PERS-424/41N)

## Career Path Focus

### SWO(N) Career Path – from PA to Reactor Officer

- Following PA, the traditional SWO(N) career path includes two shore duty assignments and XO/CO Fleet up prior to Reactor Officer. There are several variations to the career path shown below.
- All SWO(N)s must complete a nuclear shore tour prior to serving as a Reactor Officer. If not completed prior to PA, you should expect to be assigned to a nuclear shore duty during PD1, immediately following your PA tour.
- For officers that screen for Command Afloat on their 1st or 2nd Look, PD2 shore duty is an opportunity to enhance your career portfolio by seeking a broadening assignment, explained in detail below. PD2 tour lengths vary to ensure SWO(N)s complete Command Afloat prior to the in-zone Captain Promotion Board.



## PD1/PD2 Tours

Every detail has a common goal to prepare officers for milestone screening (CO Afloat, XO Afloat or XO – SM) and for future promotion boards. Competition for milestone screening is intense, and breakouts in both DH Afloat tours are key components of a strong record. Further, promotion to O5 depends highly on being screened for a milestone. One of our jobs as detailers is to translate board results into detailing policy to reduce risk to your record and ensure you are as competitive as possible for administrative milestone screening.

Slating in post DH shore tours depends on qualification status (EOOW, TAO, CMD Qual, JPME, Master's degree and others), FITREP breakouts (hard and soft breakout) FITREP trait average against RSCA, and block 40 recommendations. First, post Department Head detailing helps ensure officers are best positioned to compete for the next milestone screening and, subsequently, meet requirements for later milestones (Joint, DC, Waterfront and production tours).

While many SWOs are able to maintain two 24 month tours between DH tours and CDR CMD pipeline, your individual timing is more likely to be 3.5 years, and subsequently one or both PDH tours may be shorter than 24 months.

Officers who did not complete nuclear shore as a DIVO will complete nuclear shore post PA. Officers who have already completed nuclear shore will be detailed to a SWO community tour post PA. These SWO community tours are typically SWOS (SWSC), OPNAV N95 or N96, ATG, PERS 41, DESRON or PHIBRON staff jobs and others.

### **Post-PA Shore Duty Timeline**

Most SWO(N)s will complete their PA tour at about 12 YCS, shortly before their first look for CDR Command. Following the PA tour, officers screened for XO/CO Afloat will have approximately 3.5 years prior to starting the XO/CO pipeline. Those selected for XO Afloat or XO Special Mission may have a shorter period ashore in order to maximize their opportunity for O-5 promotion and CDR Command screening during their third look. Those who have already completed nuclear shore duty have the flexibility to go to a career broadening assignment directly following their PA assignment. Opportunities for follow-on shore assignments will be dependent upon career milestone screening, personal preferences and time remaining ashore.

### **Post-PA Nuclear Shore Duty**

The following nuclear shore duty billets are available following the PA tour:

NPTU MTS XO, Charleston (1-2)	NPC PERS-412N, Millington (1)
NPTU S8G XO, Ballston Spa (1)	NPC PERS-42D1, Millington (1)
NPEB LANT, Norfolk (2) and PAC, Pearl Harbor (2)	OPNAV N133C2, Washington DC (1)
N43 Type Desk CNAL, Norfolk (1) and CNAP, San Diego (1)	NR Technical Assist, Washington DC (1)
FRTA CNAL, Norfolk (1) and CNAP, San Diego (1)	NR Executive Asst / Speechwriter, Washington DC (1)
NPMITT XO LANT, Norfolk (1) and PAC, San Diego (1)	NNPTC Director of Officer Department (DOD), Charleston (1)

## **Post PA Conventional Shore**

Reconciliation is the monthly competitive process used to assign officers to post-DH billets. This process is slightly different from slating as the billet quantity greatly outstrips roller supply. This process prioritizes some billets for fill. All available billets are listed on the Downstream Fills List (DSF) which is the comprehensive list of billets matching roller PRDs. Not all billets listed on the DSF will be filled.

Shortfalls in the number of available rollers will drive a prioritization of the billets to be filled. Current SWO community health: short 400+ O4 and O5s. As you can imagine, the operational assignments are the highest priority fills. Detailer counsel will focus on career progression in these tours and prioritize the most important jobs for your career development and the highest operational need.

Reconciliation timeline will notionally start about 7 months prior to your PRD from the PA tour. Plan to complete the full 24 month PA tour. Notional timeline. (7 months prior to PRD)

- 1<sup>st</sup> week of month: DSF list posted, rollers notified
- 3<sup>rd</sup> week of month: Preferences due/Detailer counseling
- 4<sup>th</sup> week of month: Reconciliation held, assignments approved by PERS-41, rollers notified

## **Other Career Broadening Assignments**

There are several additional requirements on your path to Reactor Officer. In addition to stand-out performance in your at sea tours, the following requirements will need to be completed during your shore duty windows:

- Master's Degree (prior to Major Command)(In Residence for YG 15 and junior)
- Joint Professional Military Education Phase I (prior to assuming Command)
- Nuclear Shore
- \*SWO community tour (SWSC/SWOS, OPNAV N96/N95, DESRON/PHIBRON staff, PERS, ATG, etc)

\* Although, a SWO community tour is not a hard requirement to be a CO AFLOAT or Reactor Officer, it is required to maintain your SWO clock currency, if your post-PA nuke shore tour doesn't count towards your SWO clock. Additionally, SWO community tours broaden your experience, better prepare you to be a CO, and make you more competitive for CO AFLOAT during the board process.

To be competitive for Flag Officer, additional requirements include a joint tour and JPME Phase 2. OPNAV and Pentagon experience make you competitive for flag rank as well. Due to the nature of a SWO(N)'s career path, some of these requirements will need to be combined during tours. For example, you can serve on the Joint Staff to meet joint tour requirements, get valuable Pentagon experience, and potentially earn a proven subspecialty, such as Financial Management. Another example, is working for N96 or other OPNAV staff to get needed DC experience, OPNAV experience, and perform a valuable community lifting job.

# Sub-Specialty and Other Career Skills

## Building a sub-specialty

- Subspecialty codes (SUBSPECS) identify officers who have advanced education, functional training and/or significant experience in a particular area of expertise. Billets also can be coded for fill by officers with matching SUBSPECS. Therefore, SUBSPECS provide officers the opportunity to utilize the skills they have acquired through education and/or experience while also providing commands a path to identify officers with the desired skills.
- SUBSPECS 2000 and above are of value to the URL Community, particularly the following series:
  - 2000 National Security Studies
  - 3000 Resource Management and Analysis
  - 5000 Engineering
  - 6000 Operations
- The suffix of the SUBSPEC denotes the level of education and/or experience gained by the individual. Most common are:
  - S – one experience tour
  - R – multiple experience tours (proven experience subspecialty)
  - P – Master’s degree
  - Q – Master’s degree with experience (proven education subspecialty)
- High priority is placed on the following codes:
  - 3110 – Financial Management
  - 3210 – Operations Research Analysis
- 5203P and 5203Q SUBSPECS are awarded for nuclear milestones in accordance with BUPERSINST 1540.41E.
- The Naval Officer Manpower and Personnel Classifications (NOOCS Manual), Volume 1, Part B provides additional information on SUBSPECS and can be found on the MyNavyHR/NPC Website under the Reference Library.

# Master's Degree

## Earning or building on your master's degree

- If you have not completed your Master's Degree and/or JPME Phase I, PD1/PD2 shore tours offer an opportunity to satisfy these requirements. While your priority in PD1 is to make yourself as competitive as possible for milestone screening at the CDR Command Board, you have options for graduate education.
  - PD1:
    - Recommendation: Earn Master's Degree and/or JPME Phase I certification while also serving in a Nuclear Shore Job or heavy-lift SWO job.
    - Options:
      - Naval War College (NWC): NWC Fleet Seminar Program (FSP) holds courses at locations across the county. Graduates earn credit for JPME Phase I. Combined with the Graduate Degree Program (GDP), an officer can also earn a Master's Degree. See NWC website for location information.
      - Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Distance Learning (DL): Earn a Master's degree in Finance (EMBA), Engineering (EE, Mech Eng, Software, etc.) and science (Comp Sci, Acoustics, etc.). Engineering EE and Mech Eng programs offer credit for Nuclear Power School.
      - Low-Residency Graduate Education Program (LGEP): Affords opportunity to earn graduate degree Institutions in strategy, management, and international relations from numerous Civilian while on shore duty near fleet-concentration areas (e.g. Norfolk, Washington D.C., San Diego, Pacific Northwest, Monterey). Participants spend limited on campus while assigned to shore duty. LGEP satisfies in-residence graduate education requirement for YG15 and junior.
      - Civilian Institutions: Numerous Civilian Institutions (e.g. ODU, Duke University, Catholic University) offer Master's programs that give credit for Nuclear Power School.
  - PD2:
    - PD2 offers options to complete in-residence graduate education, especially if screened CDR Command while on PD1.
    - Politico-Military Masters (PMM) – One-year in-resident Master's Degree program from elite Civilian Institutions. Participants earn the Naval Strategy Subspecialty code (2300P). Information enclosed in annual NAVADMIN.
    - In-resident Naval War College (combined JPME Phase I / Master's Degree)
    - Combined Master's Degree/JPME Phase II at various War Colleges.
- If you have completed your Master's Degree, PD1/PD2 shore tours offer an opportunity to build on your Master's degree by serving in billets that utilize your education. Several of these billets will award additional subspecialty codes as discussed above.
  - If you are interested in serving in a billet to utilize your Master's Degree, contact your detailer to discuss your options.

- Officers in year group 2015 and junior are required to complete in-residence Master's degree program prior to assuming Major Command per NAVADMIN 263/18. While not required to be completed prior to serving as an RO, completing an in-residence graduate degree during the post-division officer, PD1 or PD2 shore tours will provide you the greatest career flexibility. There are several in-resident graduate education opportunities available including:
  - Post CVN Divo Tour:
    - Fleet Scholar Education Program
    - Low-residency Graduate Education Program (LGEP)
    - Graduate Education Voucher (GEV)
    - USNA Graduate Education and Teaching (GE+T)
    - Purdue Military Research Initiative (PMRI)
    - Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI)
    - Massachusetts Institute for Technology/Woods Hole (MIT-WHOI)
    - NROTC (potential to complete graduate education)
    - Navy Post Graduate School
  - Post PA tour (PD1/PD2):
    - Naval War College
    - USMC/Army/Air Force War College
    - Low-residency Graduate Education Program (LGEP)
    - Politico-Military Masters (PMM) - CIVINS

## Joint Tours

Joint tours are career broadening assignments that expose officers to other branches of the armed forces and are required to become a Joint Qualified Officer (JQO). The purpose of joint duty is to develop officers who have cross-service experience to ultimately serve as Flag Officers as required by the Goldwater-Nichols Act. To become a JQO, officers must complete Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) Phases I and II along with a qualifying joint tour of 24 months or greater in length.

Per NAVADMIN 247/19, all URL officers must complete JPME Phase I prior to assuming Commander Command. JPME may be completed either in residence at the Naval War College (NWC) or Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), or via distance education. Many officers choose to complete JPME Phase I between their Division Officer and Department Head tours in conjunction with graduate education, however, there are opportunities post-Department Head/Principal Assistant. Officers are awarded the JS7 AQD once JPME Phase I is complete.

The next step towards becoming a JQO is completing a 24 month standard joint duty assignment (SJDA) in a qualifying billet. Joint tours may be shortened to 22 months in exceptional circumstances, however, officers can expect to serve approximately 24 months in these billets. Qualifying billets can be identified by the JD1 AQD associated with the billet on the downstream fills list (also color coded purple). For example:

1910	64656	00510	1110	JIOWC WASH DC	IO PLANNER	WASHDC	JD1
1911	49324	01210	1050	STRATCM J3/J5/J6	GOC INTEGRATION OFFICER 0000	OFFUTT	JD1

Once complete, credit for a Full Joint Tour is credited via the JS2 AQD. When combined with JPME Phase I, an officer is then designated a JQO Level II officer and the JS4 is awarded. In short, JPME Phase I (JS7) + SJDA (JS2) = JQO Level II (JS4).

The last step towards full joint qualification—and eligibility for Flag Officer—is completion of JPME Phase II. JPME Phase II may be completed before serving, while serving in their joint tour, or afterwards. Phase II quotas are limited and the law restricts the number of these quotas that **MUST** be joint outplacement fills (50% +1). Ideally this is accomplished en route to or TDY from your joint tour. If you are serving in a joint tour at one of the CCMDs, we encourage you to engage your J6 or J7 on the option to compete for one of the limited Navy (4 x total Navy) quotas for the Satellite JCWS Phase II courses that are taught across the CCMDs each quarter. Officers may complete JPME Phase II either in residence or via distance learning and completion is annotated by the JS8 AQD. Once all requirements for JQO Level III are met, an officer is designated fully joint qualified and the JS5 AQD is awarded.

In summary:

JPME Phase I (JS7): required before assuming Commander Command

SJDA (JS2): 24 months in a JD1 coded joint billet

JQO Level II (JS4) = JPME Phase I + SJDA

JQO Level III (fully joint qualified; JS5) = JPME Phase I + JPME Phase II (JS8) + SJDA

Please reach out to your detailer to determine when your timing best supports assignment to a joint tour. If you have already completed some joint requirements, check your record for accuracy to ensure the appropriate AQDs are listed.

\*\*\* Check the 2019-2020 Edition of the Surface Nuclear Officer Newsletter for more details \*\*\*



## Strategies for Working With Your Detailer

There is NEVER A BAD TIME to contact your detailer. We are happy to help, and if there is a better time to work on specific detailing conversations we will gladly take a minute to help you understand the timeline.

Detailing is a balance between your personal preference, your individual career needs, and the manpower needs of the Navy. As you progress through your career and promote to O4 and beyond, career needs (milestone screening, promotion selection) become more important to the detailing picture. The desire to screen for the next milestone and continue to promote also likely becomes a greater share of what shapes your personal preferences. It is the role of the detailing team (along with placement officers) to fill the most crucial roles (needs of the Navy) and to keep officers on track for milestone screening and promotion (career needs). Personal preference is a significant consideration in these decisions, but is also the toughest for a detailing team to accurately piece together. The more you share, and the earlier that information is conveyed, the better the picture your detailer will have when working to complete a slate.

Helping clarify your personal preferences can't be done well in a single conversation in most cases. For example, an officer could have a single interaction with the detailer once slate preferences are solicited. The detailer sends out slate info and asks for preferences, the officer sends back the required input, a slate is approved and orders are cut. That interaction is very transactional, much like a clerk at the store. The outcome may meet your desires, but is far more likely to miss important details on what you value and help you meet your personal goals.

Conversely, when you communicate what is important to you and to your family we are better able to work to align your assignment to a job which also meets your personal needs and the timing of jobs available. Don't let the detailing interactions become a one-time transaction.

We recommend you send a note to the detailer about one month into your new assignment. This will provide an update to your contact info and open the conversation to "What's next"? You should be thinking about your next tour, and probably the next one after that. There is little substitute for early planning and clear communications with your detailer.

# Managing Your Role

The following is some guidance you can use to manage your career:

1. Learn and understand your community values. These are updated annually and approved by SECNAV. Your detailer uses these values to determine your next tour and they are also what the selection boards are briefed on when the promotion board convenes. You should already know what to expect when you call your detailer.

Community Values:

Navigate there by going to the mynavyhr home page ([www.mynavyhr.navy.mil](http://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil)) -> Career Management -> Boards -> Active Duty Officer -> SECNAV Approved Community Briefs -> Line

[https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Portals/55/Boards/Active%20Duty%20Officer/documents/FY-22\\_Act\\_Community\\_Briefs-Line.pdf?ver=otmOiyKxSNoxReuSbCokPA%3d%3d](https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Portals/55/Boards/Active%20Duty%20Officer/documents/FY-22_Act_Community_Briefs-Line.pdf?ver=otmOiyKxSNoxReuSbCokPA%3d%3d)

2. Keep your record updated. Use the time that you're in your orders negotiation window to send any AQD updates to your detailer. Request that your detailer give you a rundown on what your record needs based on the last promotion board trends.

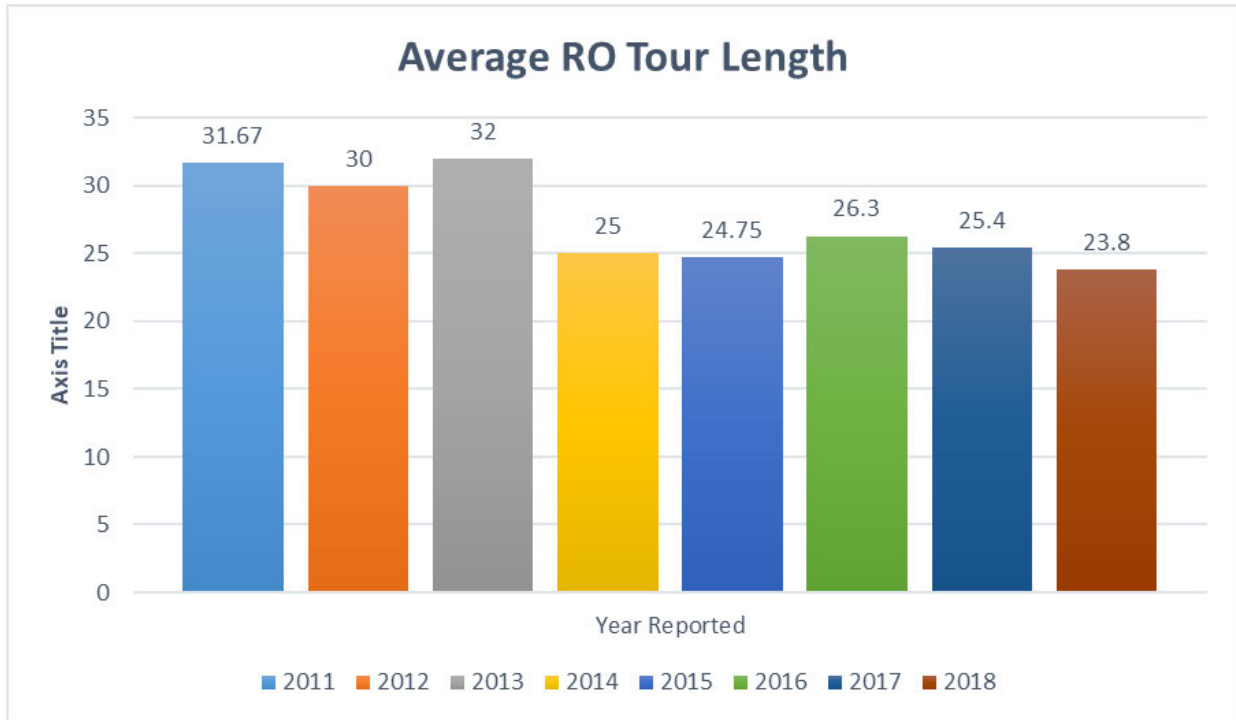
3. FOCUS ON THE MISSION! If you are performing well in every assignment, it's all documented, and you are completing the required milestone tours, then you have done what the community has asked of you. You will be aligned for the best opportunity for promotion!

# RO Tour Length

BLUF: SWO(N) community goal is maintaining 24-month Reactor Officer tours. Meeting this goal requires all due course SWO(N)'s to serve a nuclear PCC tour (i.e. RO, MTT OIC, PERS-424, CO Ballston Spa).

Here is a look at how we've done over the past 10 years of managing RO tour length:

- Data represents all current active duty officers that reported to an RO billet in CY 2011-2018 and completed the tour
- Data does not include officers that did not complete the RO tour for performance or medical issues



As you can see, RO tour lengths have been reduced from 30+ months to ~24 months.

The challenges to maintain consistent RO tour lengths include inventory (retirements, performance, medical) and fluctuations in officer career timing. Larger year groups enable flexibility in timing and opportunities for some officers to take breaks before or after RO tours. There are limited opportunities for breaks; however, the more officers available for RO tours increase the opportunity for breaks across the board. Before taking a break, it's important to understand how that could impact your Major Command slate/assignment and follow-on competitive looks for flag officer.

In summary, our priority is to keep RO tours at 24 months. Beyond meeting that goal, there may be some limited opportunities for a break before or after RO. It's important to understand the impact it has on your follow-on opportunities so that you can make an informed decision.

## RO Screening and Slating

Early in your command tour, expect to be contacted by your nuclear detailer about PCC preferences. We certainly recognize few want to discuss “after command” when less than halfway through the tour, let-alone only a couple months into it. Slating ROs is a dynamic and evolving process that starts with your preferences. The email from your detailer will provide the billets up for slating, including the location and the incumbent's PRD. Inventory, timing, and performance are all factors in your PCC assignment.

The slating process also involves consultation with each officer’s ISIC regarding command performance, RO potential, Major Command potential, and FITREP intentions. Our best COs go on to be ROs, which equates to a very high selection rate for Major Command.

The pipeline is ~4.5 months and includes a 30-day ship ride followed by the 13-week P-CO course at NR, which begins at the beginning of each quarter. A 5-day TYCOM INDOC is also a part of your pipeline but can be completed either before or after your P-CO course.

# RO Pay and Benefits

## O6 Spot Promotion

- The Reactor Officer billet was approved as a Spot Promote Billet to the grade of Captain in May of 2019. SWO(N) and EDO(N) officers are eligible for Spot Promotion. Eligibility criteria includes:
  - Minimum of two years as a CDR when the Spot Promote Board convenes
  - Serving in, or ordered to a Reactor Officer Billet
  - At least one year remaining in the Reactor Officer Billet
  - Recommended for Spot Promotion by your Commanding Officer/ISIC
- The delta in base pay between a Commander and Captain is **\$16,819** annually based on 20 years of service.
- SECNAVINST 1421.3M, Temporary Spot Promotion of Officers, provides program requirements. Captain Spot Promotion Boards are conducted semi-annually, typically in the 1st and 3rd Fiscal Year Quarter Boards.

## 3 more years of >\$200K/yr job security

In 2021, O6 pay in Norfolk with 20 years of service with 10 years of sea duty and \$45K COPAY is:

Base Pay:	\$134,611
BAS:	\$3,194
BAH:	\$30,456
Sea Pay:	\$6,072
<u>COPAY:</u>	<u>\$45,000</u>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$219,333</b>

## Increased Retirement Benefit (difference in retiring as O6 with three more years vs O5)

Using the MyNavyFinancial App to calculate the following retirement benefits with the following assumptions:

- High-3 retirement benefit, life expectancy 85, doesn't include TSP
- We get the following results:
  - Retire in 2021 with 20 years as O5 at age 42: \$55K/yr, Net Present Value (NPV) - \$1.68M
  - Retire in 2024 with 23 years as O6 at age 45: \$76K/yr, NPV - \$2.22M

You'll earn an additional \$21K every year for the rest of your life if you serve 3 more years and retire as an O6. The NPV value of that delta is \$540,000 and if you divide that over three years you get **\$180K** towards your retirement benefit/year. Stack that incredible retirement benefit on top of the annual salary \$219K for a **total compensation package of \$400,000/yr** which doesn't include the continued tax benefit for those three years and other intangibles of retiring as a CAPT.

Serving in the military has a huge advantage. When you look at your pay, add into the equation the "invisible" tax advantages sheltering BAH, BAS, and Social Security (FICA) not applied to special pay, and depending on legally declared residency, an absence of state income tax. Add this aspect when you consider your total annual compensation package for continued naval service.

For your information, the app is user friendly (although when entering data, you need to enter the year first, then the month) and is linked to [militarypay.defense.gov](http://militarypay.defense.gov). We encourage you to download the app or use the calculators at the above web address to explore the assumptions and different factors that apply to your personal situation.

# RO Testimonials

## \*\*\* Prospective Reactor Officer Course \*\*\*

When I took over as LINCOLN's RO in the Arabian Sea during month seven of what would soon be an unplanned 10-month deployment, the RO course made me fully prepared to balance the technical demands of maintenance, repairs, drills, and operational commitments on day one. Bottom line, there is no other training curriculum in the Navy that makes you better prepared for your next assignment.

With that being said, I do want to shed some light on a portion of your career that does not get very much attention. The RO course is actually four months long, one month of shipride on an operational carrier and then 13 weeks at Naval Reactors in Washington DC. Depending on the schedule of the carrier, you could spend the entire month underway which may make this course feel like a four month deployment for you and your family.

The RO course is not a walk in the park - so be prepared to work. Full disclosure, I was in the building working or studying everyday (Saturday and Sunday included) for the first five weeks in order to meet the demand of the curriculum. After week five, the hours become a lot more reasonable and the social events for the course attendees increased substantially.

With my family in San Diego, I did not have the time to fly home and back during a weekend, but my family did come for a week and we had plenty of time to enjoy DC. For people with family in Norfolk, travel home on the weekends after week five is a reasonable expectation.

I think my biggest surprise of the course was how helpful and accommodating I found the entire headquarters staff. They are 100% focused on getting you everything you need to be successful. You make strong relationships with the engineers and Line Locker staff which will aid you during the inevitable technical challenge sometime during your tour. Additionally, you really walk away from the course understanding why we do business the way we do in nuclear power.

Again, the course will absolutely prepare you to be a successful Reactor Officer, but you and your family need to be prepared for the time commitment it will entail.

CAPT John W. Ryan

# RO Testimonials

## \*\*\* Prospective Reactor Officer Course \*\*\*

The prospective Commanding Officer course at Naval Reactors is certainly a challenge, but manageable by post-Command SWOs. The course starts at a fast pace the first several weeks, focused on rebuilding Engineer level of knowledge of fluid and electrical systems and plant operations. I served as a PA on a Type 2 I&C A4W carrier, so was familiar with the material, but that was still from 9 years prior. There are quizzes/exams handed out each Friday at first, so depending on when you're ready to take the exam, plan to study and take the closed book exam over the weekend. I did not make it back to Norfolk to see the family for the first 6 weeks or so. The fluids portion requires self-study, the electrical material is structured in delivery.

The first significant hurdle is the technical oral board which covers fluids, electrical, operations, and theory. One P-RO and three board members. The Fleet LTs at headquarters do a tremendous job providing run time and preparation for the technical oral boards. Written exams and assignments continue after the technical oral board, but are not as focused on memorizing material. The last hurdle is the final oral board with the Deputy Director. In my case, we had two P-ROs and a prospective prototype CO at the board with four board members. The course ensures you are prepared for this board.

There were only two Reactor Officers in my class (both Type 2 A4W), we studied together throughout the course. Other classes include P-XOs and A1B Reactor Officers.

The 13 weeks at headquarters includes all the technical rigor you would expect, but also provides significant insights into how the program approaches problems, the role of public affairs, and provides a valuable network to support you once in the seat as Reactor Officer.

CAPT Steve Aldridge

# RO Testimonials

## \*\*\* FDNF CVN RO Perspective \*\*\*

Even though my second RO inspired me during my PA tour on *Lincoln*, it was my peer Paul Allgeier who got me to see the bigger picture. It was during a discussion about our careers and long-term goals when I mentioned that I had no real desire to be an RO after my command afloat tour. Paul was shocked! He then reminded me that there were only a handful of officers who were even capable of doing the job, and out of duty to the SWO(N) community, I should seriously reconsider my future. That brief conversation got me thinking. The Navy had invested heavily in me as a leader. I had toiled long and hard in both conventional and nuclear billets, and through these variety of experiences, I was well-equipped for any possible leadership challenge. More importantly, there were almost 400 sailors who needed my leadership and experience. As a SWO(N), I had the benefit of experiencing career diversity on my sea and shore tours. This perspective as a leader would be very different from someone who worked as a nuke every day. The career enlisted nuclear-trained operators got no such variety.

I had a successful command tour on board the USS *Lassen* (DDG-82), and I used my experience as a nuclear-trained operator to excel in that tour. However, at that point in my career, I knew I COULD NOT leave the Navy until I had successfully served as an RO. In fact, I always told my wife Rena that I would not be able to look at myself in the mirror if I left the Navy without being an RO. It was the one job in the Navy that I felt I was trained to do from the day I was commissioned as an ensign, and I was determined to see it through. Besides, post-command I could either go to an RO tour and lead fleet sailors, or go to the Pentagon and push a desk. To me, there's no comparison to leading sailors. We only get limited opportunities at leading the best and brightest our nation has to offer and I was intent on taking it.

After serving as the reactor officer in the forward deployed aircraft carrier, I look back with fondness at the challenges faced and overcame, my successes and failures. As the RO, I was the senior department head and senior SWO on board the carrier. As such, I had a lot of say in the day-to-day as well as long-term planning we conducted as a ship. Even though every one of my peers was capable in his or her job, they often used me as a sounding board for their plans, especially since I had unfettered access to the captain each day. Because a number of my department head peers had little shipboard experience, I had a hand in every aspect of ship operations, from navigation and seamanship to combat systems. Even so, we were incredibly tight and I enjoyed my time as RO.

I also appreciated the relationships I developed with my two commanding officers (COs). I was fortunate to have two COs who allowed me to do the job as RO, even under the most stressful conditions. No one else on board the carrier besides the CO and the RO feels the immense pressure to maintain the highest standards of the naval nuclear power program while getting the ship to sea on time. It's the type of challenge that would drive an ordinary man or woman crazy, but to the experienced and highly trained officers who make it to the RO tour, it's another day at work.

As a junior officer, I often thought of better ways to do things in the nuclear community, but I could never overcome the Navy bureaucracy or the old-fashioned thinking of some leaders to implement and learn from these new ideas. However, as the RO, I not only had direct access to the people who could implement these ideas across the fleet, but I could immediately implement the idea in the *Reagan* and be the pilot ship for the community. After all, my goal was to make the community better as the RO. We implemented for the first time a circadian-rhythm watch rotation, something that one of my sharp principal assistants came up with. It was something the SWO(N) community had never implemented, but I was determined to give it a try. It was a risky proposition, but to me it was well worth it. My 450-person department benefited from well-rested and alert watch standers. Not all of my ideas were successful, but the lessons learned from all of these initiatives were shared widely with the rest of the Fleet, all in an effort to be an instrument for change.

While I started out like most junior officers who had no desire to be an RO, I now can't imagine completing my Navy career without this incredible opportunity. I loved every minute of my time mentoring and helping my officers and sailors. My advice to the current and future ROs is to groom your officers for the CO as well as the RO job.

CAPT Robert Francis



## RO Testimonials

### \*\*\* EDO(N) Perspective [CVN CHENG & RO served] \*\*\*

For me, the most exciting thing about serving as an EDO(N) Reactor Officer was the opportunity to put the 120 months of Naval Nuclear Power experience I had coming into the job to good use. Like many other EDO(N)s prior to RO I had served the nuclear Navy in many different capacities; as a member of ship's company, at nuclear shipyards, and in the CVN new construction program office. All of these experiences shaped the RO I would become. I looked forward to being able to pay the Navy back for all the great experiences I enjoyed over the first 20 yrs of my career and to place my own personal stamp on the history of the Nuclear Navy by helping develop the next generation of enlisted and officer leadership.

Prior to becoming an RO, I served under or with five different ROs during my various shipboard tours. Each RO had a different way of tackling an extremely challenging job. Serving as RO gave me the opportunity to take the best qualities I had observed from each of these officers and apply them in my own particular way to develop my own style of leadership.

If I had to only give one piece of advice for incoming ROs, EDO or SWO, it would be this; you can't micromanage 500+ Sailors, so don't even try! Hopefully at this stage of your career your leadership toolkit has developed enough that you are comfortable delegating authority and responsibility down to the appropriate level. If not, then you need to make it that way or you are headed for a stressed out and unsuccessful tour. Appropriate delegation is the key not only to your own quality of life, which believe it or not can be pretty good, but to having sailors that are invested and involved in helping the department succeed.

It is a hard tour. Safely refueling two nuclear reactors and rebuilding a propulsion plant from the ground up is a demanding task that requires precision and discipline to an overall goal. That being said what I will remember most from the tour are not the technical challenges we overcame, but the Sailors I was given the opportunity to serve with and lead. Watching them achieve that next qualification or career milestone will be the highlight of your tour, the sense of pride you will feel when one of your Division Officers passes PNEO, when one of your First Class Petty Officers make Chief, or simply when one of your long struggling sailors finally qualifies Senior in Rate and smiles from ear to ear are the memories you will take with you long after your tour is complete. I envy the opportunity that lays before you and wish you the best of luck.

CAPT Mark Johnson

# RO Testimonials

## \*\*\* A1B RO & P-RO Course Perspective \*\*\*

Reactor Officer on GERALD R FORD was the most technically demanding job of my career. Early in the P-RO course, I realized the incredible trust the Navy was placing in me to safeguard the people and uphold the standards that allow nuclear power to remain a critical enabler of our Navy's strategy. It is crucial to apply technical rigor and long-range vision to guide the department's preparations for the complex availabilities and at-sea periods, and to consistently look for ways to improve performance. The command perspective I needed to be a successful ship's Captain proved just as vital leading 250+ highly talented operators and technicians. As the senior SWO and one of the senior HODs, I was a frequent source of counsel and involved in command qualifications, processes, and successes.

As I finished my ENTERPRISE RMA tour, I was convinced that I did not want to be an RO, even though small year group numbers made it a certainty. The many personnel and material challenges my fellow PAs and I fought through every day, compounded by a long SRA, did not make the PA job enjoyable and I was certain the RO job was worse. In my XO tour, my perspective shifted and my job satisfaction derived from watching (and in some cases guiding) my subordinates' success. From the E5 who became a top-notch work center supervisor to a junior officer transforming into a watchteam leader, those successes kept me motivated. Ultimately, it changed my opinion about the RO tour and I grew to welcome the challenge. The tour is tough. Not every day will be the best of your career, but you will have many instances where your team excels. The talent of all Reactor Department Sailors is second to none and with the proper motivation, they can continually achieve greatness.

The P-RO course is the capstone of a huge training investment, and was one of the best courses in my 25+yr career. I strongly recommend all P-RO's take full advantage of their time assigned to the CVN prior to the course to master the basics. The course tests you to a PNEO level and beyond. If you have most of the knowledge before you get there, you can ask the experts the background questions you've never been able to ask – they know the answers or will find them. I felt technically ready to be the RO after that course and prepared to conduct qualification boards from the day I checked onboard.

RO of a first-in-class PCU was an extraordinary experience. I arrived in time to watch initial criticality and much of the testing program. It was intellectually satisfying to watch the validation of principles we'd studied in Power school. Taking a ship to sea, either for the first time, or after a long availability, is challenging and your experience as a CO will come into play. Equipment repair and testing is important, but training your crew, not just in casualty control, but in aircraft carrier operations is just as vital. 70% of my department had never been to sea when we first left Newport News and headed down Thimble Shoals Channel. As with my experience as CO of FORT WORTH (LCS3), on FORD, with only half the people of a NIM class Reactor Department, we could not afford to "throw people at a problem." We had to break down traditional barriers and create truly hybrid teams. A single job might require mechanics from RM division, electricians from RE division and technicians from Reactor Networks to plan and work efficiently together. When that happened, it was magical.

I started my XO pipeline training in August of 2010 with my XO nuclear refresher training and am 2 months into my 5<sup>th</sup> straight sea tour as a Commodore. The pace is often like running a 10K and definitely places demands on the family. Still, the work/life balance can be met if you focus on attending the important family events rather than measuring your balance in time spent at home. I managed to take 2 days off to move my daughter into college in the middle of my RO tour. It can be done – you just have to make it a priority and train those who will carry the torch while you're gone.

RO really is the pinnacle of our nuclear careers and a remarkably important tour. It brings together everything we've learned from Power School through our PA tours. Although it is not the same as command, you have many of the same responsibilities and may have more people than in your O5 command. The CO of the CVN is counting on you to be the expert, effectively lead your department, and also provide the necessary leadership in the ship, just like on your other tours. I was lucky to have two Captains who let me run the plant – they challenged me but always supported me and my department and developed me as a leader. I am a better Navy leader for having served as an RO.

CAPT Matthew Kawas

## RO Testimonials

### \*\*\* Mil to Mil Perspective \*\*\*

As a Junior Officer, I did not intend to continue through RO (or equivalent). The hours looked very long and the job looked hard! As it turns out, that was all true but I don't regret any moment of the experience and wish I could've served longer. I originally requested orders as the CNAL MTT OIC while my husband (Justin Hodges) was completing his DDG XO/CO fleet-up tour so that we could have a parent "at home" for our teen daughter. Towards the end of my MTT tour, there was an unplanned RO loss in CVN 69, so I filled that gap for about five months as the ship completed an extended availability. The hours were *\*very\** long preparing the ship for end of the production phase and to begin the test program. However, I was incredibly proud and impressed by the efforts of so many Sailors and drastic improvements they made in material condition during my short tenure. Regardless of length, it was one of the most rewarding things I've done in my 23+ year career. My husband is now RO in CVN 69 and working shorter and more consistent hours than I did based on Reactor Department's continued improvement to more of a "steady strain" culture.

In our experience, our SWO(N) detailers have been very conscientious about keeping us co-located and maintaining geographic stability for our family. Following XO/CO fleet-up and my MTT/RO tours, I've gotten about two years of "down time" to complete my joint tour. Justin's timing afforded him a lengthy period post-XO/CO fleet-up to decompress prior to his RO tour.

CAPT Michelle Nakamura

## RO Testimonials

From the time you complete your accessions interview to become a SWO(N), you're told RO is the pinnacle of your nuclear career. For me, it didn't really set in until my first week as RO on THEODORE ROOSEVELT. The first time when the RDO (or EOOW) calls you to make that initial casualty report, it becomes quite clear that you're the one who has been entrusted with the direction and safe operation of two waterborne reactors. And I was ready – even though I didn't have all the answers immediately, I knew exactly how to guide my department. So why had I been so apprehensive about being an RO? Really, it boiled down to two things: technical expertise and back-to-back “arduous” sea tours.

After having been the Forward Station Officer on ENTERPRISE (a billet unique to “BIG E” at the time, Station Officers were essentially a “mini-RO” for the two plants in either the forward or aft groups, coordinating all operations and maintenance), I was pretty sure I didn't want to be a Reactor Officer. I just wanted a break from sea duty and time to decompress. Being a PA is hard, no one will ever argue that it isn't. But after a while and some time working in the staff world on shore duty, I started to think again about life onboard the CVN. As with anything, it had its ups and downs, but it was also so very rewarding to have it in the rearview. I thought I had already made up my mind and didn't think about it again until the SWO(N) detailer started reaching out to me to talk about my options for RO. I started to feel like RO was something I could do, but I still had my doubts about accepting the job – after all, I still had to get through the rest of my CO tour.

While I was successful in my nuke tours – maintenance planning, program admin and assessment, and effective watchstanding – I felt like I wasn't necessarily *THE* expert on the plant (well, *maybe* I did right after my PNEO exam). Our tours are short in comparison to the enlisted Sailors or even the LDOs, and by the time you get comfortable, it's time to transfer.

When I found out pretty much my only option (because I requested to be collocated with my husband) was going to THEODORE ROOSEVELT (A4W with Type 2 I&C), my first reaction was, “Not another plant!” I had served on numerous different types of propulsion plants – in fact, I never served on *exactly* the same platform in my career. They range from S8G at prototype, to A4W (Type 1) for my 2<sup>nd</sup> DIVO tour, to being a Shift Engineer at the MARF prototype, to ENTERPRISE (A2W) for my PA tour – and not to mention the different plants on my conventional tours (CG, FFG, and LCS). Won't they expect me to be the expert as the RO?

Add to that mix – the RO tour is right after your command tour. Thinking about going to be a Head of Department (HOD) on a CVN right after being the CO of a ship and after 3 years of sea duty wasn't appealing. By committing to be an RO, I was committing to 2 more years of phone calls in the middle of the night, periodic inspections, personnel issues, etc. But I was also signing up for 2 more years of all the things I love the most about being a senior officer in the Navy – meeting people from all different backgrounds, mentoring SWOs, fostering comradery within the lifelines of the ship, and rewarding the hard work of others.

It wasn't until I was in the seat as RO that I figured out that I had made the right choice. The Naval Reactors pipeline prepares you to be the expert on your plant and just leaving CDR Command keeps you thinking like a CO, making you a better asset to the command (and really to support the CVN CO). You are the senior SWO in ship's company, often the most senior HOD, and the only HOD that has commanded a warship. Very quickly I was a part of the CO's inner circle, providing counsel and advice in all things nuclear – and sometimes acted as a sounding board for things not in the nuclear swimlane.

[As a side note, the Navy really does pick some of the BEST leaders to be CO's of CVNs – I've learned so much working directly for (now) RDML Sardiello and CAPT Crozier.]

So, what's the "so what"? As I look back at all my nuclear tours, what I remembered most was the people. We get to work with some of the most talented Officers and Sailors in our Navy. The opportunity to get back to sea to teach, lead, and learn from the best and the brightest is really what tipped the scales for me in my decision to stay for an RO tour. Because just like in all of your previous tours, the truth is you can't do it all by yourself and you don't have to do it all alone. As the RO, you get to have a team of 6 great PAs and 20+ DIVOs, an RDMC with a talented CPO Mess, and the ARO to make all the magic happen. I also had the mentorship from the N9, my former ROs, and the rest of the RO network. [And for those of you who aren't yet convinced, don't forget the added benefit of spot promotion to O6 and the increased nuke bonus.]

Just as the CO is the pinnacle tour for a SWO, earning the title of "Reactor Officer" is the culmination of all your hard work and years of experience. It truly is an amazing tour. An added benefit, I know that the experience has better prepared me for Major Command.

CAPT Michel Brandt

## RO Testimonials

It is no secret that being a Reactor Officer on a CVN is a challenging tour that demands more time, energy, and emotional stress than most other tours in the Navy. Yet with that enormous effort comes significant, long-lasting reward and satisfaction which other tours lack. In hindsight I have grown to appreciate my RO tour, yet I had significant doubts about ever wanting the job and feeling prepared to do it well. Here are my thoughts on being an RO over the course of my career:

As a Divo: "RO? No way - there is not enough money in the world to want to be an RO."

During PA tour: "RO looks really impossible. Who would want that job?"

Post-PA: "The RO job would be incredibly challenging. I hope I don't have to do it."

During command: "Uh-oh. I might have to be an RO. Not sure I am ready for it."

Pre-RO (after the NR RO preparation course): "I am ready to be an RO. I think."

During RO: "This job is hard. Like, really hard. Thank goodness for my teammates."

Post RO: "The RO tour was incredibly rewarding, and I am grateful for the experience."

What is so great about it? Simple - the people. Most of the essential components of the Navy's nuclear power program – the equipment, the procedures, and the maintenance organization – are inherently and understandably static because of the effort NR puts into them before they reach the fleet. That leaves the one variable – the people – under your control as the leader of reactor department. What a challenge...and what an opportunity! You are granted the authority to lead them however you want, and in turn, you learn as much about your leadership ability as any other experience in the Navy, all while working to achieve something incomparable: the safe operation of our greatest capital ships for indefinite periods of time in support of our national objectives. The pressure to achieve that colossal goal is enormous, which is why the RO tour can be so grueling, and likewise so rewarding.

Many prospective ROs comment that RO must stink compared to command. Sure – find any job as unique as commanding a warship. A more apt comparison is a career path alternative to RO, like a staff assignment. When the comparison is between leading Sailors or building a power point, the scales always tilt to the Sailors.

As far as being ready for the job, you have nothing to worry about; the Navy always prepares you for your next tour, whether you realize it or not. Your various tours, the technical experience you gained in your CVN tours, and the pre-RO course combine to set you up for success as RO. Additionally, you will be surrounded by an incredible team who wants you to succeed; humbly ask for their help and thank them for their effort, and you will do fine. And just as other tours prepare you for RO, RO prepares you for Major Command; your ability to analyze risk effectively (which is what command is really about) increases ten-fold with your daily decision-making as RO.

While extrinsic factors like promotion, pay, and recognition matter at some level to each of us, they are not what drove us into this career. We became SWO(N)s to be in the game and not sit on the bench of life. *We want to be challenged!* Few jobs in the Navy offer the same constant, 24/7/365 playing time of Reactor Officer. Whether slogging through an SRA end game, pre-underway startup trials and tribulations, intense drill sets, or the ultimate test - providing power for combat operations - you will be constantly challenged as a Reactor Officer. You will experience incredible lows when you make bad decisions and remarkable highs when your teams perform admirably in the face of adversity. You will walk away from the tour physically and emotionally exhausted, having put every ounce of yourself into the job. But you will also feel a lasting reward that you will cherish for years, having made an important contribution to our nation while leading a team of amazing people.

CAPT Bo Johns

## RO Testimonials

Being an Officer in the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program is tough. I left my RO tour on deployment and exhausted. Every day, regardless of what was occurring, I tried to walk the passageways with a smile on my face knowing that I could quickly change an attitude for the good or bad. Some days though, I had to shut the door and really work up to it. However, and much to my, and my wife's, surprise, I truly enjoyed the tour and even had a lot of fun.

The process to becoming an RO. You get an email from the detailer about 2 weeks after you take command asking for your preferences! I don't think I answered the first one, I was so upset that the detailer even sent it. Eventually, I just said Norfolk. My wife is a practicing attorney, licensed in VA and DC. I timed my contract to complete before my command tour and my command tour was set to end right at 20 YCS, and I did not intend to be an RO outside of Norfolk. I would not have accepted orders elsewhere. My Commodore must have said decent things near the end of my tour, so Randy (Head Nuke Detailer) eventually offered me ABRAHAM LINCOLN. The ship would be in Norfolk, do a deployment and I'd end up in sunny San Diego for up to 6 months. After talking to my bride, we agreed, and I signed back up.

While baby SWOS in Newport will always be my favorite school (it was GLORIOUS!), Naval Reactors in DC prior to RO is the best class I have ever taken. I served on BIG 'E' as a PA, so I had not been on an A4W in a long time and knew nothing about TYPE II stuff. Like a good Nuke, I studied the books – this was PNEO plus plus. It came back eventually, and there was plenty of help. I mean that too, the standard is rightfully extremely high, but it seemed that all of NR would have dropped what they were doing to assist me in preparing for the next two years. At the end of NR, I felt technically competent. I left command with an earned comfort in my ability to lead. These two experiences made me confident going into RO – it shocks me to write that because I never really envisioned myself in the job, but it was true.

I enjoyed being an RO, the reasons: the people, the trust, the challenges, and the decisions. As a whole, the PAs solved problems, the Junior Officers made them (I'm kidding you all), the LDOs were amazing, and the Chief's Mess was professional, experts in their trade, and took care of their Sailors. We approached everything as a team and took every opportunity to have fun with our Reactor Department team – from JO's hosting a poker night for the Sailors in the Wardroom to the near weekly ice cream socials led by the RX Dept CPOs for our team. The program standards are high and required consistent energy to maintain. Don't fight the standard, embrace it and move on to real challenges and opportunities!

I treated my JOs like I treated my Sailors as a new DIVO twenty plus years prior – they were mine to mold and influence and I wanted to be someone they would respect and be proud of. Maybe I could be as good as Mike Davis, my RO when I was a Nuke JO on GW! I most enjoyed discussing leadership topics and debating SWO and SWO(N) community issues. I enjoyed the elevated discussion of tactical operations. It was important not to let the job become focused on the constant inspections and NRRO comments – that would have been terrible. I really enjoyed watching them grow over the two years. I was most proud when they took up the mantle of leadership throughout the command – by proving why additional female officer berthings should be available on the third deck, developing a circadian schedule that was supported shipwide, participating in and winning shipwide PT tournaments, and by properly calling out violations of the Mess in RHYME, if not so much in tune and harmony, during a dining out.

I think I earned the trust of the COs, XO's, fellow HODs, and TYCOM N9s (our second boss – who leads directly to NR). We were transparent in what support we needed and we would assist others where we had time. My goal was to have a great department and be good supporting the ship. Not everything has to get done, and certainly not NOW. The RO gets to prioritize, which means some things are less important or not important at all. We operate in a space where there is no adding without subtracting. The RO gets to say 'no' and 'not now.' It's actually a pretty nice feeling.

The technical problems we faced were unbelievable. Also unbelievable was our department's ability to fix our own problems. ***The things our Sailors can do when we let them is amazing!*** Never thought I would actually see the peening of a valve but we did it (got it on the third and last attempt!), and many more repairs that I'll never forget. That culture was a mindset that I was fortunate to inherit from CAPT Scott Tasin, MMCM Brian Taylor and the crew, but we rode it and it was impressive. At the end, a few relatively junior folks got NCMs to thank them, and they earned it.

Lastly, the decisions. There are time sensitive decisions that have to be made and the book does not have every answer. I kept my bosses informed either before or after and explained my rationale. The CO trusted me on every account and the TYCOM did the same. Somewhat to my surprise, the off-ship institution accepted the RO's on-scene judgment without significant debate – but I also did not cross clear lines as learned and discussed at NR. It's my belief that the perspective and experience of command made this a much easier task. While I'm glad these decisions were not daily or weekly, I'm proud of making them and proud of how the department responded when I did.

A true benefit of my RO experience – I'll be a better CO the second time around. I learned a lot from the COs and XOs on ABE. They were each very different and that was wonderful. While we SWO(N)s do not get the amount of topside experience as our SWO sister and brothers, we get plenty of and more time leading Sailors at sea. We have to be mindful to continue our tactical education to keep up with the changes and be confident in our shiphandling. But our nuclear experience, approach to good self-assessment, and tendency to get into the details and learn, put us in pretty good standing!

Exhaustion is real near the end of the CO and RO tours. I think I would have had the opportunity to take a break between the successive sea tours, had I asked for it after my RO tour. Several of my peers found a job to recover and unwind. Many of them took the same path I have. For me however, it goes back to that give and take with my family – now was the right time for my wife to take off two years from her career and take our 3 school age sons on an adventure to Japan, it was her idea. A CG in Seventh Fleet was my dream job! After which, I'll go where my family wants.

I continue to serve for many reasons, I genuinely like what I do and found I really enjoy teaching. I am much nearer the end than the beginning. In the end, professionally, I hope I've made some of my predecessors proud and given our Junior Officers some good memories, experiences, and leadership. Personally, I look forward to spending much more time with my family having successfully blown through the crucible that is our career path.

CAPT Paul Allgeier



## RO Testimonials

As XO of USS ANTIETAM or CO of USS BOONE, if someone offered me a “Get Out of RO Free” card, I’d have been happy to take it. After tours on the 30+ year old ships USS LONG BEACH and USS ENTERPRISE, I looked at my potential upcoming RO tour as a possibly overwhelming challenge.

My first SWO(N) tour on LONG BEACH was my first afloat tour (the OLD career path), so I was learning about ships, being a SWO and being a nuke. My first division was M1 Division (think #1 MMR), with no Chief and my LPO got taken to mast by the CHENG for being UA a few months in. So, I learned a few things the hard way. LONG BEACH was a tough plant to operate and maintain. An A1/3 to AIII bell felt like a casualty. We replaced a primary relief during POM – after letting first period go on leave. During this tour I got engaged and married and going home to have dinner with my fiancé/wife on non-duty days was pretty high on my priority list, but not as high on my boss’s. All-in-all a tough tour, with some great shipmates.

My second SWO(N) tour on ENTERPRISE was not a lot different. As #1 Station Officer (an ENTERPRISE thing), I worked for both the RO and the CHENG, integrating ops and maintenance in the forward 2 plants/4 reactors. (Needless to say, the other PAs normally felt like they didn’t need the Station Officers’ help...) ENTERPRISE had just come out of the refueling overhaul and we made up for all that yard time by rarely being inport. Except when we replaced a primary relief...with ship’s force.

Both those tours challenged me. I learned a ton, but after each I felt like I and the departments could have done better. That sense weighed on me when I thought about going to the RO job. From command of my own deployed warship to being a department head, it seemed an especially difficult shift.

Fortunately, no one offered me that “Get Out of RO Free” card and I decided that I was not ready to end my Navy journey (more on that later). I also realized that I wanted to test myself. I felt like I had grown as a leader and a Naval Officer, and I looked forward to another swing at making a nuclear department excellent. When I took those orders as RO of REAGAN, I was not 100% confident that I had made the right choice. *I realize now, however, that NOT going to RO would have been a HUGE mistake. Why? Because RO remains one of my most rewarding tours in the Navy - even as a Flag Officer.*

What didn’t I know before I went to RO that changed my perspective after I arrived? First, my experience with RO was that it was very much like command afloat, perhaps minus the bridge wing chair. The responsibility and authority I had to run Reactor Department were more similar to command than anything I have done other than command. In addition, I had more talent than in CDR command, with experienced senior enlisted, LDOs, and 2nd tour DOs and DHs. To be sure, RO is challenging - but it is rewarding in more than equal measure. The example that comes to mind is an explosive celebration when we got our ORSE grade - a scene that I’ll never forget - as the results of long term continuous efforts that we already had tremendous pride in were confirmed.

As a result of all that, I treasure the relationships from my RO tour. Big challenges mixed with the talent and resources to face them confidently is a powerful team building combination. Those relationships include not just the Reactor Department, but the other Department Heads, XOs and COs. The trust and teamwork with them were a vital part of my experience as RO. Those relationships endure, as I am still in touch with many of my shipmates from REAGAN to this day.

My viewpoint ahead of RO was not unique. Then and after RO, I have often had SWO(N) DIVOs and PAs express concern for taking on the daunting job they see the RO doing. Why is that? RO can seem overwhelming when you look from the DIVO or PA position. As I wrote above, it certainly was for me, after tours on LONG BEACH and ENTERPRISE - both very challenging plants to operate and maintain even when they were new. But what you don't realize is that you are not going from PA to RO the next tour. What happens between PA and RO is that you get years more experience, so when you do get to RO you have a whole lot more tools in your toolkit. You've learned more about leadership, team building, and problem solving. You have probably already worked out your preferred solution to many of the challenges you are likely to face. As a DIVO you are still filling out your starter size toolbox. By the time you finish command and head to RO, your toolkit will fill up the Craftsman 20-drawer Pro model. What probably would have (or did) overwhelm me as a PA was a fairly straightforward problem to solve by the time I was an RO. And as I worked through each issue and challenge with my team, our combined confidence grew together and became a self-reinforcing source of improvement.

I have made many deliberate decisions to continue the adventure in the Navy, including my initial obligation, after my DH tours and after CO -- mostly because I wanted to spend more time with my family. Because I always knew time at home was limited, my top priority when I am home is my family, and that has worked for me, but being away is still hard. Fortunately, the more senior I got, the more control I had over my time when not underway. Lots more responsibility, but no duty and more time being the boss (and getting to decide to be home for dinner).

What has kept me in the Navy through each of those decisions? First, the Navy invests in its own. The training and education I received in the Navy, from leadership training to The Harvard Kennedy School, have made me not just a better officer, but provided me invaluable insights into myself. Second and more importantly, what I enjoy most about the Navy is being part of high performing teams with a clear sense of mission, facing common challenges, getting the mission done well and - especially - the sense of camaraderie that goes with it. RO provided that as much as any job in the Navy. I am thankful for the opportunity and experience.

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