

The Making of a Warrant Officer

Warrant officers hopefuls get head start at Pre-WOCS

By Staff Sgt. Terra C. Gatti, Virginia Guard Public Affairs



Virginia Guard Soldiers hoping to become warrant officers attend Virginia's Pre-Warrant Officer Candidate School Feb. 23 at the 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute at Fort Pickett. The weekend-long course enables prospective warrant officers to gain an understanding of what they can expect when they attend WOCS, either at Fort Pickett or Fort Rucker, Ala. The course is a requirement for all Virginia Guard Soldiers wishing to become warrant officers and includes an Army Physical Fitness Test, familiarization and training on the standard operating procedures candidates can expect to find in WOCS, and a land navigation course. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Terra C. Gatti, Virginia Guard Public Affairs)

FORT PICKETT, Va. — At the Fort Pickett-based 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute, Soldiers hoping to one day become warrant officers gathered Feb. 22-24 for Pre-Warrant Officer Candidate School. The course allows Soldiers with an interest in joining the warrant officer corps a chance to experience the challenges they're likely to find should they go on to WOCS.

“The Pre-WOCS program is designed to give [reserve component] Soldiers who might have aspirations of becoming a warrant an opportunity to see what it’s like and it gives them a snapshot of what it’s like to be a candidate at either Fort Rucker or at the reserve component WOCS program here in Virginia,” explained Chief Warrant Officer 3 Brian Temple, course manager for WOCS and Pre-WOCS.

“It’s pretty intense,” said Sgt. Kathleen Hopkins, from the 266th Military Police Company, who was undeterred by the rigors of the course and who came at the suggestion of her company commander. “You kind of expect what’s coming, but it’s all a surprise at the same time.”

The course acts as a condensed version of WOCS and began on Friday, Feb. 22, with an Army Physical Fitness Test that all students are required to pass in order to successfully complete Pre-WOCS. In the following two days, academics focused on standardization and attention to detail, as well as the procedures found in the most important chapter of the WOCS Standard Operating Procedure, chapter three.

The course also included a land navigation course, the assignment of additional duties, just like the candidates would have in WOCS, as well as time for the Training, Advising and Counseling , or TAC, Officers to counsel the students and for the students to give feedback to the TAC officers on their experience at Pre-WOCS.

“This is the biggest class we’ve ever had and we’re almost at maximum capacity,” said Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Lyles, the state command chief, of the course that had a starting roster of 21 candidates. This course was also the first Pre-WOCS taught in the newly-opened buildings at the RTI.

Just two other states have a Pre-WOCS program; Pennsylvania, which the Virginia program is built upon, and Louisiana, who adopted Virginia’s Pre-WOCS program after a site visit.

“In my opinion we have an extremely stellar program. A lot of people get a lot of benefits out of it,” said Temple.

In the Virginia Guard, attending Pre-WOCS is a requirement for all Soldiers interesting in submitting a packet to become warrant officers and Temple said he notices a difference during WOCS between candidates who have taken Pre-WOCS and those who have not, and has received the same report from many new warrant officers as well. During a recent conversation with a newly-pinned warrant officer, Temple said, “He told me that he could tell the people who were prepared and that he was one of them. He was very thankful that Virginia has this course and that he got to attend it.”

Several of the instructors at Pre-WOCS are former graduates of the program themselves. They returned to teach in order to give back to a program that helped them succeed as they began the path toward becoming members of the warrant officer corps. Chief Warrant Officer 2 Robert Thompson completed both Pre-WOCS and WOCS at Virginia’s RTI and said, “Staying involved in the course was something I wanted to do, to come back and help other potential warrant officers and help guide them through the process.”

Thompson said the program is a great chance for Soldiers to figure out how serious they are about attending WOCS and can help weed out those Soldiers who aren’t up for challenge. “It’s not going to hurt our feelings if you come through Pre-WOCS and decide not to go. We want you to be 100 percent sure that this is the career path you want to take before you go to WOCS,” he said.

Weeding out unprepared students at Pre-WOCS before sending them on to WOCS, whether at Fort Pickett or Fort Rucker, also allows the state to save money by ensuring that candidates who do attend WOCS are as ready as possible for the challenges of the course, according to Lyles.

Candidates who attend the course do so in a normal drill status and attend the course in lieu of attending their scheduled weekend drills with their units. Soldiers who take the course who aren’t ready to go to WOCS or who must leave the course for any reason generally have the option to return and try again when they are more prepared.

[Click to view more photos from Pre-WOCS.](#)

WOCS begin Phase II at Virginia's RTI

By Staff Sgt. Terra C. Gatti, Virginia Guard Public Affairs



Nine warrant officer candidates conduct practical writing exercises during the first drill weekend of Phase II of the Warrant Officer Candidate School April 21, 2013, held at the Fort Pickett-based 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Terra C. Gatti, Virginia Guard Public Affairs)

FORT PICKETT, Va. – The warrant officer candidates enrolled in Class 13-001 of the 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute's Warrant Officer Candidate School, started Phase II of the program April 19, 2013, at Fort Pickett. The nine candidates remaining by the end of the weekend, down from 10 at the start, came primarily from the Virginia Army National Guard, with one candidate, from the U.S. Army Reserve, traveling from North Carolina to attend the course.

This first weekend of Phase II is the first of five drill weekends that make up the second phase of WOCS, all of which will take place at the RTI. The requirements for the second phase of WOCS are outlined by the U.S. Army's Warrant Officer Candidate School at Fort Rucker, Ala.

"It's an orientation to an extent," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Brian Temple, WOCS commander. "But it's also a highly stressed, action-packed weekend. Their training days are full and it's a very stressful initial weekend for them."

Before arriving at Fort Pickett for Phase II, all Virginia candidates previously completed Pre-WOCS, a Virginia Guard prerequisite for any Soldier hoping to attend WOCS that gives candidates a weekend-long glimpse into what they can expect from WOCS, and a chance for them to determine if they're up for the challenge.

All candidates also completed WOCS Phase I, the distance learning portion of the course, prior to starting Phase II at the RTI.

The weekend began Friday night with an orientation on Phase II, outlining for the candidates what they can expect over the next five months. As the drill progressed, leadership assignments followed, as did additional duties and counseling sessions designed to ensure all candidates are aware of and understand the course expectations. An Army physical fitness test was also administered early Saturday morning and the candidates spent time in the classroom learning effective writing techniques and military history.



Chief Warrant Officer 3 Brian Temple works with warrant officer candidates during the first drill weekend of Phase II of the Warrant Officer Candidate School April 21, 2013, held at the Fort Pickett-based 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Terra C. Gatti, Virginia Guard Public Affairs)

“We’re just getting into our leadership positions, trying to figure out how things work, what we need to do, and trying to come together as a class as best as we can,” said Warrant Officer Candidate James Crooks, from Company B, 429th Brigade Support Battalion, 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

Phase II of WOCS is more than just the time spent at drill. The candidates have additional requirements they must complete throughout the month, forcing them to work together to accomplish tasks while they’re away from the schoolhouse.

“Drills are usually just the executions of the different events,” Temple said. “All the planning and all the things that make events successful all happens in between the drills.”

Candidates primarily communicate through email during the weeks in between drill weekends to plan such things as their class community project and their sign and song presentation. Email traffic between candidates is monitored by either Temple, or the senior training, advising and counseling officer, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Wayne Sexton, to ensure collective participation among the WOCs.

“We’ve got our eye on them at all times,” said Temple. “They’re busy at work, and we get that, but they’re also committed to this program. They signed up for it, so they have to participate.”

Beyond the various requirements of WOCS, there is also a significant focus on both time management and attention to detail.

“This is a time management course,” Sexton stressed to the candidates after they acted prematurely on their carefully-calibrated schedule.

Temple explained that even though the “things we pay attention to might seem ridiculous at first,” the detail-orientated course pushes the candidates to understand the bigger picture, to maintain the standard and to prioritize their most important tasks. “As it progresses, and they start fully understanding what is required of them, they start doing more outside of the box thinking and trying to figure out how to troubleshoot.”

Once the candidates successfully complete Phase II of WOCS, they will go on to Phase III, consisting of a two-week annual training period at Camp Atterbury, Ind.

[Click to view photos from the start of Phase II.](#)

WOCs present song & sign, become the Purple



Warrant Officer Candidates of Class 13-001 march with their newly-uncased colors June 22, 2013, at the Fort Pickett-based 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute just before presenting their class song. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Terra C. Gatti, Virginia Guard Public Affairs)

FORT PICKETT, Va. — For the warrant officer candidates enrolled in Class 13-001 at the Fort Pickett-based 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute’s Warrant Officer Candidate School, June was a big month. The candidates moved from the beginning phase of WOCS, into the intermediate phase, earning themselves a handful of privileges in the process and embracing their newly-bestowed class color and mascot to become the purple knights.

The weekend of June 21-23 was the third of five drill weekends that will make up Phase II of WOCS for the candidates, and, as usual, the weekend was packed with new challenges and experiences for the nine candidates enrolled in the course. Eight of the candidates are from the Virginia National Guard and one is from the U.S. Army Reserve.

On Saturday, the candidates took the first of two exams they will encounter during their training at the RTI, then spent time in the classroom learning the lessons that will make them effective and proficient warrant officers upon graduation. After their morning classes wrapped up, the candidates hurried outside to don their purple hats and t-shirts, emblazoned with their class motto. The t-shirts and hats were new for the candidates. Whereas the students had previously been the gray class, the color assigned to all warrant officer candidates in the beginning phases of WOCS, now they were becoming the purple class and rising to the intermediate phase of WOCS, something their new clothing items symbolized.

“From this day forward you will carry these colors with pride,” said Temple, as he uncased the colors. “You will represent the warrant officer corps for the Virginia National Guard with pride and honor.” According to Temple, the class color and mascot is something the candidates will carry with them throughout their careers as warrant officers.

“It’s an identity for them. As they’re talking to other warrants who have gone through either this course or through Fort Rucker, they can proudly say, ‘I was a purple knight,’” said Temple, who himself was a purple piranha when he went through Fort Rucker’s WOCS in 2004. “It’s part of the tradition at Fort Rucker, that every class is called something, and we continue that on here.”

Once the candidates officially became the purple knights, they presented their class song, to the tune of Queen’s “We Will Rock You,” for the purpose of hanging their class hat. Chief Warrant Officer 5 Phyllis J. Wilson, command chief warrant officer for the U.S. Army Reserve, presided over the ceremony.

“Sir, we are the knights, we’re prepared to fight, with honor and integrity to lead the way, by giving our best, passing all tests, putting any doubts and rumors to rest,” the candidates sang in front of a crowd that included Wilson, Temple, Chief Warrant Officer 5 William D. Lyles, Virginia National Guard command chief warrant officer, as well as senior leaders from the RTI. “We will, we will WOC you! We will, we will WOC you!”

Warrant Officer Candidate Shawn Crookshanks wrote the class song, and said, “I think the presentation went very well and we as a class came together on the song and sounded great.” For Crookshanks, the song writing was far easier than the actual presentation of the song. “It’s harder than you might think to stomp, clap and sing all at the same time. Things were rough in the beginning, but after a lot of practice we got it down.”

The candidates presented Wilson with one of their class hats, which she quickly donned. “Job well done. Excellent song,” she said, before bestowing on the candidates the privilege to talk during their next three meals, as well as dessert-eating rights.

Later, back in the classroom, Wilson took time to shake the hands of all the candidates. “The RTI program is not an easy way out, as you all can attest,” she said. “Do well and make us proud. You’re the next crop of warrant officers and I’m excited to see you all in just a couple of months sporting that little bar down the middle.”

Having Wilson visit the Virginia RTI’s WOCS program is an important step toward getting U.S. Army Reserve students into the courses taught in Virginia, according to Temple. “I have been fighting the Reserve component puzzle for five years now, trying to crack that nut to get the senior leadership of the Reserve to get comfortable sending their people here,” Temple explained. “It was extremely important to get Ms. Wilson here, but to have her involved in the ceremony and see the pride that we have in what we do, it fuels her fire to try to get her folks down here.”

On Sunday, the candidates rose early to conduct a four mile road march before heading back to the classroom for more academics. Once afternoon hit, the candidates prepared for another ceremony, their sign presentation, presided over by Lyles.

“The song and sign ceremonies are some of the oldest Fort Rucker traditions,” said Temple. “They’re extremely beneficial tools for organization, team building, esprit de corps and all the things that the Army values encompass, and we bring it all here to the schoolhouse. It’s not only a prideful thing for them, because they do such a great job on their signs, but it’s an extremely important piece of training that we do here.”

The candidates worked together to create both the class song and the sign, communicating through email and meeting up when they could to put the sign together as a class.

“The sign looks great. You all did a great job on it,” Temple told the candidates. “You should be proud. It’s probably one of the better signs we have. Be proud of it. You all are the purple knights now, so carry that heritage with you.”

By the end of the weekend, the candidates were more than halfway through Phase II of WOCS. They had presented their class song and sign and had earned a new identity as the purple knights. In the coming months, the candidates will take their second Phase II exam, complete their 10 kilometer road march and then head off to Phase III, in September at Camp Atterbury, Ind., where, if they successfully complete Phase III, they will graduate WOCS and become the Army's newest warrant officers.

[Click to view photos from song and sign presentations.](#)

The Final Phase

By Staff Sgt. Terra C. Gatti, Virginia Guard Public Affairs



SANDSTON, Va. – For the two-week, third and final phase of Warrant Officer Candidate School, nine Soldiers enrolled in the Fort Pickett-based 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute's WOCS program headed to Camp Atterbury, Ind. Phase III included more than 150 warrant officer candidates from the National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve from states across the country and kicked off Sept. 7 before culminating in a graduation ceremony on Sept. 21, where the candidates pinned the rank of warrant officer 1.

"Phase III is more hands-on," explained Chief Warrant Officer 3 Wayne Sexton, training, advising and counseling officer for the Virginia Guard's WOCS program. "Phase III is designed to build confidence and it strengthens your integrity, commitment, loyalty and self-discipline."

Phase III acted as the implementation phase for the many lessons the candidates learned over the previous phases and included significant training events including a land navigation course, a field leadership exercise, combatives, the leader reaction course and close quarter combat training.

“In Phase III, you implement all your warrior task and battle drill studies and are evaluated on your ability to lead a team or squad through a squad tactical exercise,” Sexton said.

The Virginia candidates were part of the largest-ever regional class and all successfully passed the required test to phase up to senior status in Indiana, which earned them additional privileges and titles. One Virginia candidate, Warrant Officer 1 Adam Hicks, earned recognition by graduating in the top 10 percent of the class, and Warrant Officer 1 James Crooks was recognized for a perfect score on the Army Physical Fitness Test.

Warrant Officer 1 Shawn Crookshanks, recent WOCS graduate, said Phase III helped to alter his way of thinking.

“A focus of Phase III was on changing our thought process from that of an NCO to one of an officer and the key attributes necessary for maintaining your credibility as an officer,” Crookshanks said.

For Virginia’s newest warrant officers, the process of shedding their noncommissioned officer stripes and pinning on the rank of warrant officer first began with a two and a half day Pre-WOCS course, taught at the Virginia Guard’s RTI, that aims to introduce potential warrant officer candidates to the rigors of WOCS and to ensure they are mentally and physically prepared for the challenge. Pre-WOCS is essentially a condensed version of WOCS and is a requirement for all aspiring Virginia Guard warrant officers. During the weekend, warrant officer hopefuls take an Army Physical Fitness Test, gain an introduction to the WOCS Standard Operation Procedure and take on the assignment of additional duties.

Following Pre-WOCS, the candidates enrolled online in Phase I of the program, the distance-learning portion of WOCS, before beginning Phase II at Fort Pickett. Phase II included five drill weekends comprised of classroom training time focused on topics such as warrant officer history and critical thinking skills, as well as road marches, a student-planned and executed community project and physical fitness training, as well as ceremonial events, such as the sign presentation and the song presentation.

The students worked together outside of their scheduled drill weekends on a variety of planned tasks, including planning for and building the class sign, as well as planning the class community project. Candidates were expected to communicate regularly with one another during the time between drill weekends and had to earn various privileges along the way, like having coffee in the classroom or dessert after meals.

Warrant Officer 1 Jody Wilson said his favorite part of WOCS was, “The overall camaraderie and teamwork from fellow candidates,” as well as the challenge of the final road march.

On the final day of Phase III, Sept. 21, warrant officer candidates from across the country gathered for a graduation ceremony that concluded with their ascension to the rank of warrant officer 1.

“The ceremony was a day of smiles and joy for all that candidates,” Sexton said. “It was the day that signified mission accomplishment of becoming a [warrant officer].”

From there, the candidates headed home and have just one final requirement before leaving the WOCS program as students: the Warrant Officer Recognition Ceremony to be held Oct. 26 at Fort Pickett. The ceremony allows Virginia-based family members who were unable to make the trip to Indiana, as well as Virginia National Guard senior leaders, the chance to recognize and congratulate the new warrant officers.

“My hope for the graduating class is that they take the fundamentals that have been used to train, advise and counsel them throughout Phase II and III of WOCS, and establish a leadership style that is flexible and agile, and can meet the needs of their commander,” said Sexton.

New warrants recognized in Virginia Ceremony

By Staff Sgt. Terra C. Gatti, Virginia Guard Public Affairs



Newly-appointed warrant officers assemble in front of family, friends and senior leaders from the Virginia Army National Guard and the U.S. Army Reserve for a Warrant Officer Appointment Recognition Ceremony Oct. 26, 2013, at Fort Pickett's 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Terra C. Gatti, Virginia Guard Public Affairs)

FORT PICKETT, Va. — Recent graduates of the Virginia Army National Guard's Warrant Officer Candidate School gathered Oct. 26, 2013, at Fort Pickett's 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute, for a Warrant Officer Appointment Recognition Ceremony. The ceremony took place in front of friends, family members and senior leaders from the Virginia National Guard and the U.S. Army Reserve, and honored the nine graduates of WOCS Class 13-001.

The new warrant officers graduated WOCS in September at a ceremony held near Camp Atterbury, Ind., where the warrant officer candidates completed the third and final phase of WOCS. The Recognition Ceremony allowed loved ones and the commonwealth's senior leaders a chance to recognize the accomplishments of the newly-appointed warrants in their home state.

"You did not get here by chance," said Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Lyles, command chief warrant officer for the Virginia Army National Guard. "You were endorsed and chosen by your commanders, by your senior NCOs, as being the right Soldier to enter into this program and that you have what it took — performance and potential — to fill some of these critical warrant officer positions.

During his remarks, Lyles spoke of the successes and achievements of the warrant officers during their time in WOCS, complimenting them on their superb academic scores as well as their high scores on the Army Physical Fitness Test.

“What I’m most proud about, is the leadership each one of you displayed in Phase III,” Lyles said. “It was not only noticed by myself and the other command chiefs, but it was noted by the cadre and staff who put on the course. That’s a direct reflection that we have recruited and the commanders have endorsed the right Soldiers to fill these positions.”

Brig. Gen. Blake C. Ortner began his remarks by thanking the family members for “allowing your loved ones to serve,” and reminded those assembled that “less than one percent of this nation steps up to serve in the uniform of our military. You’ve taken that role on and in addition, you’ve taken on that next step of taking on a leadership role.”

Ortner also spoke on the important role the warrant officer plays within the U.S. Army.

“You are the subject matter expert,” Ortner told the new warrant officers. “You’re the ones that officers, NCOs and Soldiers are going to look to to understand how the systems work.”

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Phyllis J. Wilson, command chief warrant officer for the U.S. Army Reserve, served as the second guest speaker for the event. She spoke on the similarities between the National Guard and the Army Reserve, saying, “the warrant officer cohort in both the Guard and the Reserve are very small.”

Among the nine graduates of Virginia’s WOCS Class 13-001, eight are assigned to the Virginia Army National Guard and one is assigned to the U.S. Army Reserve.

“We expect great things out of all of these warrant officers in front of us today,” Wilson said.

Warrant Officer 1 Samantha Stone, recent WOCS graduate now assigned as a maintenance warrant officer to 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, says the best advice she could give to those interested in becoming warrant officers is to “know why you want to be a warrant and what you want to accomplish.”

For the new graduates of WOCS, the journey toward becoming a warrant officer began earlier this year. All the Virginia Guard graduates first attended Pre-WOCS, a weekend-long event designed to prepare interested Soldiers in the rigors of WOCS. Phase I of WOCS was completed by the candidates online before they began Phase II. Phase II consisted of five intense drill weekends, held over the course of five months, and included time in the classroom, road marches and sign and song presentations.

For Phase III, the candidates headed to Camp Atterbury, Ind., for a two-week training period. Phase III makes use of the lessons learned in the previous phases and included land navigation, field exercises and additional time in the classroom. After a graduation ceremony held in Indiana, the warrant officers returned home and the Recognition Ceremony marks the end of their WOCS journey.

“My message to you is to do the right thing,” said Lyles. “Make the warrant officer community proud of you and welcome to the warrant officer cohort.”

[Click here to view photos from the Recognition Ceremony.](#)

Soldiers who would like more information on becoming a warrant officer should contact Chief Warrant Officer 2 Joshua Martin, the Virginia Guard’s warrant officer strength manager, at 434-298-6140 or 540-717-4666 or by email at joshua.g.martin5.mil@mail.mil.