U.S. 7th Fleet holds change of command ceremony

From U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs

Vice Adm. Scott R. Van Buskirk was relieved by Vice Adm. Scott H. Swift during a change of command ceremony held by U.S. 7th Fleet on board the command flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) Sept. 7.

"It has been the thrill of my career to briefly command in the best job of our Navy and watch this fleet in action. My heartfelt appreciation for the wonderful dedicated service, friendship, and support you all have provided," said Van Buskirk. "There is no better leader to guide 7th Fleet than Vice Adm. Scott Swift. His operational experience is unmatched, and his most recent job as the Pacific Command operations officer means that he is already attuned to all of the complex issues in this region."

Adm. Patrick M. Walsh, commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, praised Van Buskirk for his outstanding leadership of the U.S. 7th Fleet during the past year.

Van Buskirk oversaw U.S. naval operations in the 7th Fleet area of responsibility, encompassing more than 48 million square miles from the Kuril Islands in the north to the Antarctic in the south, and from the International Date Line to the Indian Ocean. The area includes 35 maritime countries and the world's five largest foreign armed forces - China, Russia, India, North Korea and Republic of Korea (ROK). Five of the seven U.S. Mutual Defense Treaties are with countries in the area - Republic of the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, ROK, Japan and Thailand.

During his tenure, Van Buskirk led U.S. 7th Fleet forces in the largest humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operation in history, Operation *Tomodachi*. At its peak the Navy had 22 ships, 132 aircraft and more than 15,000 personnel dedicated to assisting Japan's Self Defense Forces in the search and recovery efforts.

Walsh presented Van Buskirk with the Distinguished Service Medal for his service.

"When I stood on this deck almost a year ago, my guidance to the fleet was simple – maintain course and speed and execute the three persistent priorities that had served the fleet so well: maximizing warfighting readiness, maritime partnerships, and force posture," said Van Buskirk. "I can say with complete confidence that our forces are ready, our forces are present throughout the theater, and our partnerships are stronger than they have ever been."

Swift, a native of San Diego, Calif., assumed command of 7th Fleet, following a tour as director of Operations, U.S. Pacific Command.

"I assume command today full of confidence, born in the knowledge of how well 7th Fleet has been led by Adm. Walsh and Vice Adm. Van Buskirk," said Swift. "We are a global force for good. That truth is born out by Vice Adm. Van Buskirk as he has left the 7th Fleet area of responsibility a better place than what he found. I am confident we will do the same."

(Right) Vice Adm. Scott R. Van Buskirk addresses the audience, while Vice Adm. Scott R. Swift listens at the U.S. 7th Fleet change of command ceremony held on the flight deck aboard the command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) Sept. 7. Swift relieved Van Buskirk as commander of U.S. 7th Fleet, the Navy's largest numbered fleet covering 48 million square miles of the Pacific and Indian Ocean, from the International Date Line to the waters east of Africa.

U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Kenneth R. Hendrix

Van Buskirk's next assignment will be as deputy chief of Naval Operations for manpower, personnel, training and education in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and Chief of Naval Personnel, in Arlington, Va.

There are 60-70 ships, 200-300 aircraft and more than 40,000 Navy and Marine Corps personnel assigned to the 7th Fleet. This includes forces operating from bases in Japan and Guam and rotationally-deployed forces based in the United States. Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, is embarked aboard *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19), forward deployed to Yokosuka, Japan. The flagship commands and controls the fleet and fosters military-to-military relationships through scheduled port visits and military exercises.

Navy communications satellite launch countdown begins

By Katherine H. Crawford,
Office of Naval Research

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Department of the Navy began counting down the final days to a Sept. 27 launch of its new joint tactical satellite, which will bring on-the-go communications to the battlefield.

The Tactical Microsatellite (TacSat)-4, funded by the Office of Naval Research (ONR) and developed by the Naval Research Laboratory (NRL), is scheduled to begin transmitting data 30 days later.

"TacSat-4 fills a Navy and Marine Corps capability gap by enabling 'comms on the move,'" said Bob McCoy, an ONR senior scientist. "That is a unique feature of this system-no other Department of Defense (DoD) satellite system can relay information from the satellite all the way down to warfighters' portable communications packs and handheld radios."

It enables warfighters to use a regular handheld radio for mobile communications without having to stop and set up an antenna in the field. This eliminates downtime and maintains connectivity to the base of operations at all times, so one is never out of touch, said John Moniz, ONR program officer for Expeditionary Warfare Command, Control, Computers and Communication, whose work could potentially benefit from TacSat-4.

The fourth-generation microsatellite, TacSat-4, is smaller - weighing 990 pounds as opposed to the industry average of approximately 4,300 pounds and is less expensive than a conventional system. It is designed to support traditional satellite communications, providing two hours of coverage, up to three times per day in multiple theaters, worldwide in a 24-hour period.

"This gives additional capability and more communications channels to where there's a 'hot spot' in the world," McCoy said.

TacSat-4 communication is also flexible and faster, providing dynamic channel assignments within 24 hours during normal operations rather than the typical several days. It offers a smarter, more efficient way of assigning channels.

The satellite will carry an ONR-sponsored payload built by NRL on infrastructure funded by the former DoD Office of Force Transformation and built by NRL and the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. The Operationally Responsive Space Office funded the launch, which is managed by the Space Development and Test Directorate, a directorate of the Air Force Space and Missile Systems Center, and performed using a Minotaur-IV rocket built by Orbital Sciences.

ONR provides the science and technology necessary to maintain the Navy and Marine Corps' technological advantage. Through its affiliates, ONR is a leader in science and technology with engagement in 50 states, 70 countries, 1,035 institutions of higher learning and 914 industry partners. ONR employs approximately 1,400 people, comprising uniformed, civilian and contract personnel, with additional employees at the NRL in Washington, D.C.