Submarine Group 7 holds change of command ceremony

By Lt. Lara Bollinger, Submarine Group 7 Public Affairs

Submarine Group 7 held a change of command ceremony at the Fleet Theater on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, June 6.

During the ceremony, Capt. Phillip G. Sawyer relieved Rear Adm. Robert L. Thomas, Jr. as commander Submarine Group (CSG) 7, who also assumed responsibility as commander Task Force (CTF) 74 and 54.

The official party salute as colors are presented during the 42nd change of command ceremony for Commander Submarine Group 7 here at the Fleet Theater June 6. Capt. Phillip G. Sawyer relieved Rear Adm. Robert L. Thomas, Jr.
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Devon Dow

Vice Adm. Scott R. Van Buskirk, commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, was the honored guest and key speaker during the ceremony. In his speech, Van Buskirk commended Thomas for a job well done in his capacities as CSG 7, CTF 74 and 54.

"Robert has taken all of these difficult jobs and made them look easy," Van Buskirk said. "With the largest area of operations of any in the submarine force, and responsibility for some of the most challenging and sensitive operations our nation's military conducts anywhere, Robert Thomas has excelled in leading his people to tremendous success."

Under Thomas' command, CTF 74 and 54 achieved operational success of more than 30 submarine deployments and 45 special submarine missions. As the theater anti-submarine warfare commander for 7th Fleet, Thomas brought tactical and operational expertise to bear across multiple warfare areas.

Through his leadership during Operation Tomodachi, CSG 7 enabled U.S. operations in an unprecedented radiological environment. Thomas' engagement with important regional allies greatly advanced the combined warfighting capability of the U.S. Navy and allied naval submarine forces.

Thomas expressed his gratitude to his counterparts and mentors in the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces, and the Sailors, civilians and families who are a part of what he fondly calls the "tribe."

"Thanks to the tribe - the 200 members of the CTF 74, 54, and Submarine Group Seven command," said Thomas. "Our Sailors, our civilians, our families... what you do in the common defense of Japan, and for security in Asia is just not to be beat." Thomas said.

According to Thomas, this change of command ceremony represents renewal.

"Capt. Sawyer takes command, so we have the renewal of a fresh start today for CTF 74. It's also the renewal of the bright future that we have with our partnership; the U.S. Navy and the Kai Jo Jie Tei (Japanese navy)," Thomas said. "And it's a renewal of the enduring friendships, as I see so many members of the Yokosuka community [here today] as we start out [Sawyer's] command tour."

Thomas will report as vice director for operations, on the joint staff in the Pentagon.

Sawyer, a 1983 graduate of the United States Naval Academy, recently served as vice commander, Naval Mine and Anti-Submarine Warfare Command since July 2010.

Feedback from fleet prompts enlisted review board changes

From Chief of Naval Personnel Public Affairs

WASHINGTON - Responding to requests made to the chief of naval personnel (CNP) during his visit to 5th Fleet operating forces, the Navy announced changes and clarification to the Enlisted Retention Board (ERB), June 9.

CNP Vice Adm. Mark Ferguson addresses military members and civilians an all-hands call. Responding to requests made to CNP, the Navy announced ERB changes and clarification June 9.
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Marc Rockwell-Pate

Naval Administrative Message NAVADMIN 180/11 extends the deadline for Sailors to request a rating conversion and updates how these requests will be considered. Additionally, the new message provides eligibility clarification for Sailors not scheduled for Perform-to-Serve (PTS) adjudication in fiscal year (FY) 2012, and creates an additional exemption for Sailors enrolled in or selected for commissioning programs.

As CNP Vice Adm. Mark Ferguson explained, "Based on feedback from our deployed forces, we have revised the conversion application timeline and process to retain the best Sailors in their rating, and have given our Sailors more time to complete their conversion packages."

One of the most visible changes in the updated guidance surrounds how conversion applications will be handled. Specifically, these requests will not be reviewed until after the ERB has selected Sailors for retention, and only those Sailors who were not selected for retention within their rate will be considered for conversion. In doing so, ratings will be able to keep their most qualified candidates, while still providing Sailors an additional opportunity for continued service in another rate.

Also, based on the difficulties described by deployed Sailors in meeting previously announced conversion application deadlines, CNP has directed the ERB to accept all submissions received prior to the board's convening date of Aug. 15. This will allow Sailors to obtain the results of certain tests, such as the ASVAB, to be included in their applications for conversion.

Initial ERB eligibility guidance excluded Sailors who were subject to PTS adjudication in FY12. This created some uncertainty in the fleet regarding Sailors who are not subject to PTS, but who are in an ERB-eligible paygrade and rating. NAVADMIN 180/11 clarifies ERB eligibility to include E-4 to E-8 Sailors who are not subject to PTS adjudication, regardless of their End of Active Obligated Service as extended ("soft" EAOS, or SEAOS) date.

Finally, an additional exemption has been authorized for those Sailors currently enrolled in or selected for an enlisted commissioning program.

The ERB will enable the Navy to shape our future manpower requirements in a fair and transparent manner. Board members will include a diverse group of professionals representing different ratings, geographic locations and warfare perspectives who will rely on their best judgment and fleet perspective throughout the process.

To learn more about the Enlisted Retention Board, visit http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/boards/enlistedcontinuation/Pages/default.aspx.