USS Blue Ridge commanding officer passes torch

By MC3 James Norman,
***USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs**

USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) held a change of command ceremony July 27, wherein Capt. Will Pennington relieved Capt. Daniel Grieco, who served as commanding officer of the U.S. 7th Fleet flagship. Grieco served as commanding officer from May 2011 to July 2012.

During his tenure, Grieco was responsible for leading *Blue Ridge* through a 10-week, $9 million selected restricted availability (SRA) utilizing 22,000 man-hours to accomplish the work. SRA is a maintenance period intended to help extend the life of a ship.

"With over 30 years of wearing this uniform, I've never had the privilege to witness a crew that dedicates so much and strives so continuously for such a worthy cause," said Grieco. "That cause being the service of our country and the service of 7th Fleet."

Grieco ensured reliability of satellite and network systems in support of multinational military exercises including; Talisman Sabre 2011, Ulchi Freedom Guardian 2011, Key Resolve 2012 and Terminal Fury 2011-2012.

At the helm, Grieco steamed *Blue Ridge* for more than 30,200 nautical miles, and meticulously executed 18 port calls in 12 different nations.

Grieco achieved basic phase certification in 39 weeks by executing an intensive training cycle comprised of 11 basic phase certifying events, 19 individual certifications and nine limited training team visits. The basic training phase allowed *Blue Ridge* crew an opportunity to certify in every major warfare area by conducting graded drills ranging from damage control and defending the ship in combat training scenarios, to administration and personnel management.

During his speech, the keynote speaker, Commander U.S. 7th Fleet Vice Adm. Scott Swift, showcased the numerous accomplishments of Grieco and crew which contributed to the ship's success during the past 14 months.

"*Blue Ridge* has performed to perfection because of Grieco's focused efforts," said Swift. "Grieco has shown unflagging devotion to the mission, and strong leadership in keeping her fully mission capable."

Grieco's next duty station will be *USS Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) in Norfolk, Va., where he will serve as commanding officer.

Pennington, a native of Wilton, Iowa, graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1989 with a Bachelor of Science degree in economics and gained his designation as a naval aviator in June 1991.

"To the men and women of *Blue Ridge*, I am thrilled to be apart of your team. Your pride and professionalism were evident the moment I walked aboard the ship," said Pennington. "No oncoming commanding officer could ask for more."

Pennington has been recognized as the Commander Naval Air Forces Atlantic Fleet Landing Signal Officer of the Year. His decorations include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal and various other personal, campaign and unit awards. He earned a Masters degree in Engineering Management from Old Dominion University in 2011.

Pennington assumes command of *Blue Ridge* after serving as executive officer for *USS George H. W. Bush* (CVN 77) from March 2010 through April 2012. Previous tours include Aviation TACAIR commander detailer and Strike Fighter Squadron 14 (VFA-14) commander.

Pennington is the 25th commanding officer of the *Blue Ridge* since the ship's commissioning Nov. 14, 1970.

(Center) Capt. Daniel Grieco salutes Rear Adm. Jeffrey Harley, commander of Amphibious Force U.S. 7th Fleet as Capt. Will Pennington watches during a change of command ceremony in Yokosuka, Japan July 26. The ceremony ushered in the arrival of Pennington who relieved Grieco to become the ship's 25th Commanding Officer.
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Aaron M. Pineda

(Left) IT1 Amposta Nhiel, carries the ensign while performing color guard duties during a change of command ceremony aboard U.S. 7th fleet Flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19).
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Aaron M. Pineda