

Konetzni: Change of command scheduled for April 25

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missioning a quarter of its attack submarines. As he and his staff gained understanding of their requirements, he quickly understood that "doing more with less" was a way of life.

"We really, really worked hard to squeeze every drop of efficiency out of these fabulous ships. There is no way we could reconcile that there are too few attack subs and too many missions."

He says the numbers told the story. Deployed operational tempo (OPTEMPO) and personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO) were rising. Reactor core usage was increasing, and threatening to undermine the long-term viability of some of the ships' designed life. The time between arduous six-month deployments was evaporating - resulting in few and increasingly stressful in port periods. Maintenance opportunities for deployed submarines were not optimum. Important missions went unsatisfied because there simply weren't enough submarines to meet the tasking. Finally, and arguably most telling, the retention rate of his afloat submariners was low while attrition was way too high.

"He certainly challenged some old-school thoughts on how to employ and train submarines and their crews," said Cmdr. Tom Bayley, COMSUBPAC Force Operations Officer.

For deployed submarines, he initiated mini-AORs (areas of Responsibility). Submarines would conduct their missions, have port visits and support tasking in one relatively localized area. He encouraged concurrent training for submarines underway for exercises to maximize the time they were underway. He called for SSBNs to serve in historically attack submarine roles while they were already underway. One major if not controversial undertaking was the initiative to homeport as many as three attack submarines in Guam. The idea has just been recently approved, which doubles the number of available operating days annually for the three submarines stationed there.

For those submarines in between deployments, he directed the staff to investigate reducing demands on the crews during the Inter-Deployment Training Cycle. A short list of initiatives included: consolidating some inspections while deleting others; increasing manning in the intensive engineering departments; improving in port duty section rotations; mandating dedicated, off-ship training so crews could concentrate without distractions; and encouraging an eight-hour in-port work day as well as one half-day off during the work week for crewmembers.

As his force worked on ways to manufacture efficiency, Rear Adm. Konetzni set out to educate the American public as to the current status of their submarine force. And he did so with candor.

"It was more about just educating the public. He wanted to ensure every taxpayer understood that we as a nation were cutting up perfectly good submarines despite the increased appetite for the unique capabilities they offered. It just didn't make sense to him, and he genuinely felt obligated to let Americans know it," said Bayley.

Konetzni worked tirelessly to turn around the premature scrapping of Los Angeles class attack submarines, imploring anyone who would listen.

"There are three basic ways to get to where all of the intellectually-based studies have indicated. First, leadership needs to refuel those Los Angeles class submarines that still have hull life on them. Second, the nation must invest to convert the four older SSBNs to Tomahawk-carrying, SOF (Special Forces) SSGN submarines. Finally, we as a country need to get the submarine build rate up to a level commensurate level, probably approaching two submarines a year," said Konetzni.

After nearly three years of generating public discussion surrounding the disparity, the Defense Department has earmarked money to refuel some attack submarines and to study the feasibility of converting the four older Ohio-class submarines.

Talk to him long enough, and his real passion will become evident: Submariners.

The 'Tribe'

"I've told this to everyone I meet, but the one thing of which I am most proud is the genuine force-wide desire to treat one another like the professionals they are, and that it is truly fantastic to be a submariner in the Pacific Submarine Force," Konetzni said.

When he assumed command in 1998, the first-term retention rate for Sailors afloat was well below 30 percent. Additionally, the attrition rate of Sailors who never made it to the end of their original contract before being directed to leave the Navy, approached 25 percent.

Under Konetzni, the retention rate has more than doubled to nearly 60 percent, while the attrition rate has dropped to roughly 10 percent.

"It has clearly been an area on which he has focused. I can honestly say that he maintained a personal interest in every Sailor's case that passed his desk - and there were just a few," said Capt. Al Gonzalez, Jr., COMSUBPAC Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel Readiness.

"There is a reason he got that nickname 'Big Al the Sailors' Pal': He is," said Capt. Brandhuber, COMSUBPAC Chief of Staff and former Commander of Submarine Squadron Seven.

It was one thing for their leadership to recognize submariners as important, it was another for the Sailors themselves to believe it. In keeping with his feeling that submariners are a special breed, he felt recognition for submarine crewmembers needed to come from the public.

Engagement

The third leg of his theme triad has been engagement. To hear him tell it, submariners must engage allies, the public, other services and even other communities within the Navy.

"As a force, we have been way too closed-off - by our own doing. I truly believe we are doing ourselves a disservice when we don't reach out to those that could benefit from understanding our contributions," said Konetzni.

This is one theme, however, where he feels he was not able to achieve everything he wanted. Returning to his mantra that the country has insufficient number of attack submarines, Konetzni points to the need to bolster stability through presence and engagement.

"It's simple math. When today's typical threshold for submarine employment is critical, real-world missions, it's not unusual for engagement exercises to get cut. It is tough to forge relationships when you repeatedly turn down our Pacific partners in peace," Konetzni said.

Saying Aloha

In retrospect, Konetzni views his tour with satisfaction, despite the tragic accident involving USS Greenville.

"I grieve for those lost and their families, and there is no doubt it was terrible for everyone involved," said Konetzni. He also felt strongly about the Navy's decision to conduct a Court of Inquiry as the mechanism by which the event could be investigated in a forum ensuring full public disclosure.

"The Navy's openness in seeking the facts and finding accountability was the right thing to do. We will learn from this tragic accident and truly work to ensure this can never happen again."

Over the past three years, a tremendous amount of change has influenced the Pacific Submarine Force.

"I think that each person seemed to play just the right role and make just the right contribution to really affect change for the positive. I get the sense that everyone from the deck plate up have been emotionally invested in changing the way we viewed ourselves and what we do," said Konetzni.

"I don't think people really start to buy into anything until they're invested - heart and soul. I'd like to think the Pacific Submarine Force is only going to get started, because I think there has been a shift. I wish I could be around here to watch it happen, but duty calls."

Rear Adm. Konetzni, Jr. has been nominated for appointment to the grade of vice admiral and assignment as deputy commander and chief of staff, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, Norfolk, Va.

The COMSUBPAC change of command is scheduled for April 25 at Naval Station Pearl Harbor. For more information, visit www.csp.navy.mil.



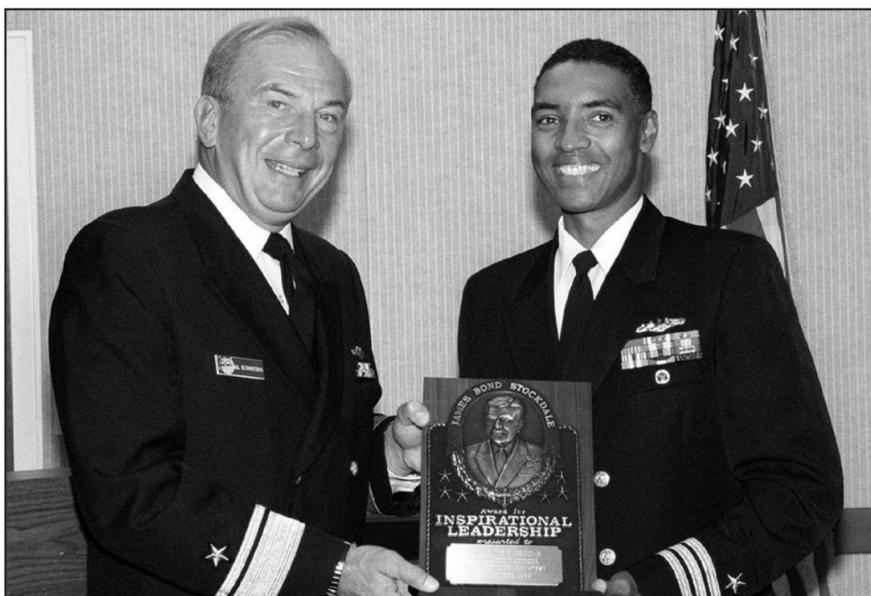
SUBPAC photo

Rear Adm. Konetzni renders a salute after assuming command of SUBPAC on board USS Indianapolis (SSN 697) on May 8, 1998.



SUBPAC photo

Rear Adm. Konetzni addresses the crew of USS Florida (SSBN 728) while the submarine stops in Pearl Harbor during a mid-patrol port visit.



SUBPAC photo

(Left) Rear Adm. Konetzni poses with former commanding officer of USS Asheville (SSN 758), Cmdr. Bruce Grooms, following the presentation of the Vice Adm. James Stockdale Leadership Award. While assigned as COMSUBPAC, submariners earned all three Pacific Fleet Stockdale awards.

(Below) Pacific Force Submariners ring in the new millennium and the Submarine Centennial on Jan. 1, 2000 by marching in the Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade. Earlier that day, USS Topeka made history by "straddling history" when it observed the millennium at the intersection of the international dateline and the equator while submerged to 400 feet.



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