



Photo by Chief Petty Officer Marlowe P. Dix

# Admiral Donnelly Turns Over the Helm

by Olivia Logan

Commander, Submarine Forces/Submarine Force Atlantic/ Allied Submarine Command Vice Adm. John J. Donnelly has exchanged those distinguished titles for the simpler one of “vice admiral (retired).” Adm. Donnelly turned over the helm to Vice Adm. John M. Richardson in a Nov. 5 change of command and retirement ceremony onboard USS *Montpelier* (SSN-765) at Naval Station Norfolk.

A second-generation submarine officer from Groton, Conn., Adm. Donnelly retired from active duty after 35 years of naval service as a commissioned officer. “I never expected to stay in the Navy this long or progress this far in my naval career,” he said. “It’s been a tremendous honor to wear this uniform and serve alongside some of the finest people this nation produces.”

Adm. Donnelly graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1975 with a major in physics. He later received a Master of Science degree from the Naval Postgraduate School and attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Seminar XXI on Foreign Politics, International Relations, and National Interest. He served in five submarines, two of them as commanding officer. His shore assignments have included physics instructor at the U.S. Naval Academy; assistant for undersea warfare and strategic issues on the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations Executive Panel; and assistant for plans and liaison for the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Submarine Warfare Requirements.

He was selected for flag rank while serving as chief of staff for Commander, U.S. Seventh Fleet, in Yokosuka, Japan. He went on to become director of combat plans and deputy director for operations and logistics at U.S. Strategic Command; commander of Submarine Group SEVEN, and, finally, deputy commander and chief of staff for the U.S. Pacific Fleet. He assumed command of the Submarine Force in February 2007.

“When I took command as COMSUBFOR, I established three focus areas to align our efforts and improve our Submarine Force,” said Adm. Donnelly. “They were titled operational excellence, the professional development of our people, and the modernization

and recapitalization of our force. We’ve made significant progress in each area. I’ll probably best be known as the guy who introduced women to the Submarine Force and banned smoking, but my folks have accomplished much more than that in the past four years.”

Among Admiral Donnelly’s legacies as COMSUBFOR are:

- Improved command relationships for ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), with Submarine Group Trident replaced by two separate submarine groups, and all SSBNs realigned into two submarine squadrons
- The introduction of cruise-missile submarines (SSGNs), with their innovative new deployment concept
- Continued modernization of the fast attack fleet with new boats of the *Virginia* (SSN-774) class

“Vice Adm. Donnelly, you took leadership skills to new heights as COMSUBFOR,” said Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert, the featured speaker at Donnelly’s ceremony. “Your legacy is that you have made every command better, and led the Submarine Force into the future. You have been a leader who knew how to take care of Sailors, so take great pride in your accomplishments... Your legacy will endure long after retirement.”

“It’s been an incredible 35-year adventure,” said Adm. Donnelly. “I’ve completely circumnavigated the globe. I’ve visited 38 countries. I’ve been fortunate to serve in command four times—that’s exactly three more than my initial stretch goal. I’ll never forget the feeling I had as CO standing atop the sail of my submarine heading for deep water so we could dive and disappear. Only a submariner can fully appreciate the close camaraderie of a submarine crew... I’ll always remember the joy of watching subordinates achieve successes they never thought possible.”

Adm. Donnelly had no immediate plans for his post-Navy career. He and his wife Mimi were headed for New England to “unwind a little bit, travel and visit family” before considering what to do next. “I do know I want to contribute in a positive way using some of the experience and leadership talents I gained in my Navy experience and put it to good use in the civilian sector.”