REAR ADMIRAL ZIRKLE TAKES COMMAND OF NATO SUBMARINES FORCES

It was announced from Northwood, UK on 16 January that Rear Admiral Matt Zirkle, United States Navy, relieved Rear Admiral Bob Kamensky, United States Navy, as Commander, Submarine Forces NATO (COMSUBNATO) and Deputy Chief of Staff, Submarines, for NATO Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM), at an informal ceremony at the Headquarters in North West London.

During nearly two years in command, Rear Admiral Kamensky led COMSUBNATO during a major expansion of NATO submarine operations. COMSUBNATO is the Alliance’s command for all submarines assigned in support of NATO operations and exercises, including boats from both NATO and non-NATO partner nations.

As one of MARCOM’s Deputy Chiefs of Staff, Rear Admiral Kamensky also represented MARCOM at numerous key Allied and partner port visits and led several change of command ceremonies of Standing Naval Forces. He also provided leadership for the US element of the MARCOM and NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCIA), as well as sailors from Commander Submarine Group 8 representatives based in Northwood.

Said Rear Admiral Kamensky: “My career as a submariner in the US Navy has featured many highlights, but I feel uniquely fortunate to complete my service here, leading such a remarkable team of submarine professionals from throughout NATO, and all of our multi-service US personnel assigned here in Northwood. I will miss my Allied submarine team and my US team, and am comfortable knowing that they are in excellent hands, with Rear Admiral Zirkle set to lead them forward.”

COMSUBNATO, manned by about thirty officers and petty officers, with representatives from all thirteen submarine-operating NATO nations, is responsible for development of submarine-related policies, plans, doctrine, tactics and procedures.

More importantly, COMSUBNATO is NATO’s only submarine operating authority, responsible for operational tasking and waterspace management of all assigned submarines. Additionally, COMSUBNATO serves as an “honest broker” to deconflict submarine operations within its area of responsibility.

Over the past two years, COMSUBNATO has held operational control of over forty submarines from six countries supporting Operation ACTIVE
ENDEAVOUR. The command has also executed three major submarine intensive exercises involving fourteen submarines from ten nations.

In the past year, the International Submarine Escape and Rescue Liaison Office (ISMERLO) was consolidated to a single location in Northwood, providing cost savings and improved mission capability to global submarine search and rescue operations.

Said Rear Admiral Zirkle: “Submarines are a vital piece of the strategic picture, and I am looking forward to leading this talented team of professionals. I commend Rear Admiral Kamensky for his accomplishments of the past two years and am very grateful for the excellent turnover. I am assuming command of an extremely capable organization and am excited to support the execution of MARCOM’s mission.”

Zirkle is a graduate of the University of California at San Diego and holds a BA in Mathematics and Computer Science and an MBA in Marketing from Cornell University. He has previously served as Chief of Staff to Commander Task Force Iraqi Maritime and Navy Crisis Action Team Chief. Additionally, he has held command of nine US Navy reserve units.