

NAVWAR's New Commander: Rear Adm. Okano Takes Charge as Rear Adm. Small Retires



Rear Admiral Seiko Okano, left, relieves Rear Admiral Doug Small as commander, Naval Information Warfare Systems Command (NAVWAR) during a change of command ceremony. *U.S. Navy | Ramon Go*

By Lily Chen, NAVWAR Public Affairs, Aug. 9, 2024

Naval Information Warfare Systems Command (NAVWAR) conducted a change of command and retirement ceremony at its headquarters in San Diego, Aug. 9, where Rear Admiral Seiko Okano relieved Rear Admiral Doug Small as commander of NAVWAR with family, friends, colleagues and industry partners in attendance.

Vice Admiral John Wade, commander of the 3rd Fleet, was presiding officer of the ceremony. "I've known Rear Admiral Okano for many years now. This is the fourth change of command where she's followed in Rear Admiral Small's footsteps," he said. "There is no better person to sustain and increase the momentum he's made with NAVWAR. I look forward to serving with you and the NAVWAR team as we continue bring capability forward."

A native of Evanston, Illinois, Okano is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy where she earned a bachelor's in aerospace engineering. From there, she earned a master's in space systems engineering from the Naval Postgraduate School, where she was also selected for transfer to the engineering duty officer community in 2001. Her operational tours include gunnery and fire control officer, and electrical division officer on USS Belleau Wood (LHA-3) which she deployed to Somalia; and Amphibious Force 7th Fleet flag aide in Okinawa, Japan. During Operation Iraqi Freedom she served on Joint Crew

Composite Squadron One in Tikrit, Iraq to assist with defeating radio-controlled improvised explosive devices.

Okano has also had several tours in acquisition, starting with Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center, San Diego; Missile Defense Agency, Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System; Military Satellite Communications Wing, Space and Missile Systems Center; and Naval Surface Warfare Center, Port Hueneme, California. Her previous assignment was as program executive officer for Integrated Warfare Systems in Washington, D.C.

“This is an opportunity of a lifetime to lead this exceptional organization, one that stands the watch day and night for our Navy’s Information Warfare capabilities and fights every day to ‘own the domain,’” said Okano. “We are living in a time where information dominance is critical to national security. In this dynamic environment, our mission is clear: to deliver and sustain superior Information Warfare capabilities, enabling our Navy to fight and win in the information age.”

As NAVWAR Commander, Okano will oversee 11,000 civilian and military personnel who design, develop and deploy advanced communications and information capabilities for the Department of the Navy. She is also taking over as head of Project Overmatch, a high-level initiative to deliver rapid integration systems and field a new naval operating architecture.

According to a recent economic impact report released by the San Diego Military Advisory Council and the University of San Diego Knauss School of Business, NAVWAR’s total gross regional product in fiscal year 2022 was between \$3.14 to \$3.38 billion. With both direct hiring and contracting work, over 18,000 jobs have been created. NAVWAR was also named the top cyber employer in the San Diego region by the Cyber Center of Excellence, with nearly 3,500 jobs dedicated to the rapidly growing field of cybersecurity.

“Central to our mission is the incredible team of professionals who make up NAVWAR. Your expertise, dedication, and commitment are the backbone of our operations,” said Okano. “We will continue to strengthen our partnerships across the Navy, with other branches of the armed forces, with our allies, and with the private sector. By working together, we can harness the full power of our collective capabilities and stay ahead of emerging threats.”

After a nearly 40-year career in the Navy, Small has officially retired from military service. Throughout his four years at NAVWAR, a continued priority of his has been empowering the workforce. With reverse mentoring groups, Ask Me Anything’s and kaffeeklatsches, Small has always been keen on hearing from employees and engaging in open dialogue to enact positive change in the command. Under his leadership, NAVWAR was named the No. 1 place to work in the Navy in the 2023 Best Places to Work in federal government rankings, a reflection of his emphasis on employee engagement. He also stood up the Project Overmatch team after direct orders from the Chief of Naval Operations, bringing experts together from across the Navy to support this top priority.

“The maritime domain is growing in importance, and by extension so is our Navy. To ensure peace and prosperity and deter conflict, we need to be a position of strength. Part of that vital work is to ensure that our systems are integrated. That has been Rear Admiral Small’s body of work throughout his career,” said Wade. “I want to thank him for his leadership, management and technical expertise over the years, all growing in increasing complexity and depth.”

Wade presented Small with the Distinguished Service Medal in recognition of his exceptional meritorious service to the United States as NAVWAR commander, where his groundbreaking leadership led to the delivery of more capable leading-technology systems. The award was conferred on behalf of the President of the United States and the Secretary of the Navy.

Wade also awarded the NAVWAR workforce with a Meritorious Unit Commendation from the Secretary of the Navy, in recognition of their distinguished service to accelerating critical warfighting capability to the Fleet at an unprecedented rate.

“I want to say thank you to the entire NAVWAR workforce. We’ve been through a lot together, and it’s been my honor to have served as your commander,” said Small. “Be proud of the amazing work you do here and keep holding onto the mission together. You will be in good hands with Rear Admiral Okano, and I can’t wait to see what else you all will accomplish.”