

Munsch Assumes Command of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa



The change of command ceremony of Allied Joint Forces Command Naples (JFC Naples) from Adm. Robert P. Burke to Adm. Stuart B. Munsch took place at JFC Naples, Italy, June 27, 2022. The Change of Command Ceremony at JFC Naples symbolizes the continuity and unity that is NATO and comes during a time of a changed security environment in Europe. *U.S. Marine Corps / Master Sgt. Scott McAdam*

ALLIED JOINT FORCES COMMAND NAPLES, Italy – U.S. Navy Adm. Stuart B. Munsch relieved Adm. Robert P. Burke as commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa (NAVEUR-NAVAF) during a change of command ceremony held onboard Joint Forces Command (JFC) Naples Headquarters in Naples, Italy, June 27, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. Sixth Fleet Public Affairs said in a release.

U.S. Army Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, commander, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), and U.S. Air Force Gen. Tod D. Wolters, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and commander, U.S. European Command (EUCOM), served as the presiding officers of the ceremony.

Townsend commenced the official remarks and reflected on Burke's steadfast leadership as the commander of U.S. Africa Command's maritime component.

"At U.S. Africa Command, we fully appreciate how important sea lines of communication are to Western economies and to our ability to project power," said Townsend. "It is also apparent to me that our adversaries appreciate these facts as well. Every day, they are competing with us, the United States, NATO and our other allies and partners to gain an edge in the maritime domain."

Townsend spoke to NAVAF's critical role in stemming malign activities in Africa, highlighting Burke's unwavering support to African partners to promote maritime security and stability across the continent.

"In the face of these challenges, and arguably a more complex portfolio than Europe, Bob Burke ensured that NAVAF was always at the right place at the right time to maximize our strategic impact and provide seamless support to our allies and our partners," said Townsend.

Townsend noted that despite heavy operational demands and fiscal pressures, Burke didn't just hold the line, he advanced America's interests in Africa and every facet of the maritime domain.

During his remarks, Townsend also welcomed the incoming commander, Munsch.

"You have an impressive resume of operational experience, and your time at key strategic positions in the Pentagon is going

to pay off for us here,” said Townsend. “I know that NAVAF has steady hands on the helm.”

Wolters also praised Burke and his wife Barbara for 39 years of dedicated service during the ceremony.

“Barbara, we know that you have delivered to us, one of the most spectacular commanders in the history of conflict, and we thank you so much for facilitating the extraordinary accomplishments of your husband, and we thank you so much for the sacrifices that you’ve made in the past,” said Wolters. “Bob, I am so proud of you. We’re old shipmates, I’m going to miss you. We talked a lot on the phone because there has been a lot of late night duty and the one thing that you knew about Bob Burke is that 1000 percent of the time, he was going to be ready. Bob, we wish you and Barbara the calmest of seas and the bluest of skies, as you press back to Florida and congratulations on 39 years of superior service. Well done my friend.”

Wolters acknowledged the tremendous responsibilities that Burke managed during his tenure as commander of NAVEUR-NAVAF as well as his many NATO duties as the commander of JFC Naples, chief among them being Operation Allies Welcome and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which he called Burke’s most important task.

“For me as the SHAPE Commander, the single human being on planet earth that is most responsible for deterring our sovereign soil and the effectiveness that we’ve been able to sustain to this point is Bob Burke,” said Wolters.

Burke touched on his role in the current geopolitical situation in Europe, underscoring the gravity of the moment and the continued work that will be required from the NAVEUR-NAVAF team.

“We are living through a seminal moment in trans-Atlantic security. You have been front and center for the U.S. response

to that reality, playing key roles in the most fundamental recalibration of the U.S. Navy in Europe I've seen in 40 years of service," said Burke. "I am so grateful for your commitment to service, teamwork, learning and innovation – all of which ensures this inspiring team of teams stands ready to fight and win should the need arise."

During his tenure, Burke assumed operational responsibility for naval forces and activities in a wide expanse of territory, including 93 countries from the North Pole to the Cape of Good Hope and eastward from the mid-Atlantic to the Caspian Sea. In addition to overseeing units and personnel typically assigned to Commander, Navy Region Europe, Africa, Central and U.S. Sixth Fleet, Burke also led multiple carrier strike groups as well as amphibious ready groups and marine expeditionary units. Burke and the NAVEUR and SIXTHFLT teams established Task Force 61 Naval Amphibious Forces Europe/2d Marine Division (TF-61/2) to synchronize Navy and Marine Corps efforts across Europe and Africa.

Under Burke's leadership, Naval Forces Europe enhanced interoperability with NATO allies and partners through some of the largest and most successful multinational exercises and activities, including BALTOPS, Formidable Shield, and the Project Neptune Series, Allied multi-carrier operations, and unprecedented support to NATO enhanced air policing missions.

As the commander of Naval Forces Africa, he bolstered relations throughout the African continent, spearheading projects like Women, Peace and Security and the expeditionary sea base USS Hershel "Woody" Williams' (ESB 4) circumnavigation of the African continent. Williams' circumnavigation also featured the first voyage repair availability of the ESB platform in South Africa. Additionally, NAVAF facilitated the regional Express Series exercises, Obangame in Western Africa, Cutlass in Eastern Africa and Phoenix in Northern Africa, as part of a comprehensive strategy to provide collaborative opportunities

amongst African forces and international partners that addresses maritime security concerns, including interdiction operations.

“Together, you are maintaining an unprecedented level of activity throughout the European Command and Africa Command areas of responsibility and demonstrating that our collaborative network at sea remains the Joint Force’s asymmetric advantage,” said Burke.

Munsch, a native of North Dakota, recently served as director for Joint Force Development, J-7, Joint Staff, Washington D.C. Other notable assignments include serving aboard USS Will Rogers (SSBN 659), USS Jefferson City (SSN 759), USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63), on the staff of Commander, Cruiser Destroyer Group 5, and USS Tucson (SSN 770). He also commanded USS Albuquerque (SSN 706) from 2002 to 2005, followed by duty in the Pentagon as the military assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense and then as executive assistant to the Director, Submarine Warfare, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV N87).

“In some way, this tour represents coming full circle for me. My father was in the Navy for one enlistment, but it gave him a lifetime of stories,” said Munsch. “And his favorite place to visit was always Italy, and in particular, Naples because of the people and of course because of the food.”

Munsch thanked Burke for his enduring contributions and outlined his goals upon assuming command as NAVEUR-NAVAF and JFC Naples.

“I would like to thank the Burkes, you have been most gracious both professionally and personally to ease us into this transition. Thank you so much,” said Munsch. “I look forward to working with [JFC Naples and NAVEUR-NAVAF] to deter and defend, to advance our interoperability and strengthen our alliance.”

In closing, Burke thanked Sailors and leadership for their extraordinary work and urged all hands to continue to confront emerging challenges with steadfast resolve.

“Our two headquarters here in Naples continue to punch well above their weight. It’s what we’ve needed and what we’ll continue to rely on as our margins for error are getting thinner and two revisionist powers continue to exploit their perceived advantages,” said Burke. “Uncertainty is the new normal, leaving us with the imperative to always press the advantages that we have while staying ready for anything, from any direction, at any time.”

For over 80 years, NAVEUR-NAVAF has forged strategic relationships with allies and partners, leveraging a foundation of shared values to preserve security and stability.

Headquartered in Naples, Italy, NAVEUR-NAVAF operates U.S. naval forces in the EUCOM and AFRICOM areas of responsibility. U.S. Sixth Fleet is permanently assigned to NAVEUR-NAVAF, and employs maritime forces through the full spectrum of joint and naval operations.