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Punahou Grad, Navy Captain Earns Star

By Commander U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs

PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii – Punahou School alumnus, Tom Copeman, was promoted to the rank of rear admiral May 30 in a ceremony held at the Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet (COMPACFLT) Boathouse, overlooking historic Pearl Harbor.

The 1977 graduate received his new rank insignia from his wife, Judy, and his mother, Eileen. Rear Adm. Copeman's children, Cara and Tommy, as well as his father, Thomas H. Copeman Jr., a retired Navy commander, were also in attendance.

Officiating at the standing-room-only ceremony was Rear Adm. John Bird, Pacific Fleet deputy commander and chief of staff, who spoke about the significance of Copeman's new rank, past and present accomplishments and the importance of family.

"Today's ceremony is about love of service, love of country and love of the Navy. It's about dedication, loyalty and sacrifice," Bird said. "The Copeman family has a longtime heritage of serving the Navy – 80 years of collective service from Tom's grandfather to his father and his own."

Capt. Thomas H. Copeman, his grandfather, commanded five ships, earning a Silver Star during the Gilbert Island Raids aboard USS Brown (DD 546) in 1943 and two Bronze Stars for other Pacific actions in the Marianas and Philippines campaigns.

His father, Cmdr. Thomas H. Copeman Jr., served aboard destroyers and cruisers throughout his 22-year Navy career. He commanded USS Fidelity (MSO 443), served a year in Vietnam, and taught at the U.S. Naval Academy.

Like his father and his grandfather, Rear Adm. Copeman, according to Bird, is of "exceptional character" and is "uniquely qualified" to be a leader in today's Navy.

"The Pacific Fleet is the largest, most-dynamic and toughest (area of operations) in the Navy. Tom's job here is large, dynamic and tough, and he has performed superbly. His great sense of humor and positive attitude make us all feel better about our jobs," Bird said. "Today he will be empowered by his new rank. He must use it wisely to the betterment of the Navy and our country."

Upon receiving his new rank insignia, the new rear admiral and 26-year veteran thanked all in attendance to include his family and all who have provided him with guidance, mentorship and leadership throughout his career, specifically remembering one important shipmate.

“When I was thinking about this day, I thought about the one person professionally who has had the greatest impact throughout my career as a mentor, friend and sounding board. We all have a person like this in our professional or personal lives and the next time a promotion or other noteworthy achievement come your way, reflect for a moment on who that one person is or was and thank them.”

Copeman earned his Navy commission in April 1982. His career highlights tours aboard cruisers and destroyers in both the Atlantic and Pacific fleets. Leadership tours include USS Champlain (CG 57), where he served as the executive officer, and USS Benfold (DDG 65), where he served as the commanding officer. In 1999, Benfold earned a Battle “E” award for the most combat-ready unit in Commander, Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) SEVEN. Later, Copeman commanded DESRON TWENTY-EIGHT, deploying as the sea combat commander for the George Washington Carrier Strike Group to the Arabian Gulf in support of operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. He is currently assigned as deputy chief of staff for operations and training for the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Since graduating Punahou, Copeman earned a bachelor’s degree in biology from Creighton University and a master’s degree in administration from Central Michigan University. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff course, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and the Armed Forces Staff College, and he has completed the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Seminar XXI program on national security affairs.

Additional military awards include a Legion of Merit (five awards), Defense Meritorious Service Medal (three awards), Navy/Marine Corps Commendation medal (two awards), a Navy/Marine Corps Achievement medal and various other unit and campaign awards.

For a view of Rear Adm. Copeman’s complete bio, visit www.cpf.navy.mil/bios/copeman.shtml.