

A tribute to Vice Admiral Albert H. "Big Al" Konetzni Jr



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Vice Admiral Albert H. "Big Al" Konetzni Jr.

On 16 July 2004, the submarine family wished a fond farewell and happy retirement to VADM Al Konetzni

"Big Al, the Sailor's Pal..."

Keynote: There's a reason they call him "Big Al"..... He's big... musta been built when meat was cheap, cause there sure is a lot of him. As a submariner, the first thing you say to yourself is "Man, I'll bet he banged his head on a lot of overhead gear in rough seas." The man is slightly smaller than Oklahoma. But, there is something special about the man.

Wherever Big Al goes, he leaves a wake of total and absolute respect. You don't find that a lot these days. Raghats are not given to gratuitous compliments and are painfully accurate in assessing their leadership in conversations among themselves. It would take a master magician to pull the wool over the eyes of the United States Navy's enlisted population. They don't sit on selection boards or authorize awards and heavy chest hardware...but they recognize deep draft leadership and those in command that they would readily follow when going in harms way.

Vice Admiral Al Konetzni has become a household word and enlisted leadership standard on both coasts. You can't be a closet sonuvabitch and pull that off. No, Big Al was big, in more ways than physical stature. His career made a difference. He was, and remains a credit to his shoulder boards. From the bridge to the lower engine room flats he commanded respect earned by "giving a damn" about his men. In the heady world of heavyweight command with its demands, awesome level of responsibility and rarified air,



damn few men take the time... devote the personal time, this gentleman did to be where his raghats congregated and to share with them their unique moments of meaningful remembrance and their celebration of their service.

Big Al was everywhere. He lent his personal touch to the validation of our naval service. And by so doing, personally touched the happy bastards who "served aft". Men who wore dungarees have something in common with elephants. We never forget. And you can bet your goddam thirteen-button blues, we won't forget this fine officer whose career, as we raghats say, "Is a credit to his hometown, state, country, himself and most importantly to the Mother who bore him." When good officers are remembered by old stove-up barnacle-encrusted boatsailors tossing down beers in the dimly lit gin-mills of the seaports of the world, the name **Konetzni** will be fondly remembered and toasted all around. That Horsefly, is true immortality... Naval immortality.

I would like to leave you with my personal remembrance of the Admiral. Two years ago, there was a submariner's memorial service in the National Cemetary at Arlington. It was a rainy, nasty day. Gray, overcast... cold,drizzling rain... the kind of day, that when the fainthearted roll over and look out the window, reset the alarm, and go back to sleep. Admirals roll over, look out the window, think of what the weather will do to the crease in dress canvas trou... reset the alarm and go back to sleep.

Not Big Al... he could have graciously bowed out and everyone there would have fully understood. But he was there. He delivered a stem-winding oration to a very abbreviated audience of old long-ago subvets. WHY? Because, dammit he's a heavy weather sailor and every sonuvabitch out there in the rain recognized it. He said he would be there, and he was. That silent statement said more to us than anything some feathermerchant PR spin manipulator could have cobbled together on his or her best day. We were just a bunch of sailors in the rain... in the presence of true leadership in the best American tradition. America can ill afford the loss of this caliber of leadership.

Admiral, if it means anything, Godspeed Sir... from an old diesel-qualified raghat who once shook hands with you... in the rain. --**DEX Armstrong**

USN Bio: Rear Admiral Albert H. Konetzni, Jr. attended Archbishop Stepinac High School in White Plains, New York. In 1962, he entered the United States Naval Academy where he graduated with merit and received a commission in 1966. Following graduation from the Naval Academy, Rear Admiral Konetzni attended Naval Submarine School in New London, Connecticut followed by Nuclear Power School in Mare Island, California and completed his nuclear training at Naval Nuclear Power Prototype Training in West Milton, New York. In 1968, he reported to USS MARIANO G. VALLEJO (SSBN 658) (Gold) for his initial submarine assignment, and in 1970 he reported to the United States Naval Academy and served as a Company Officer.





In 1972, Rear Admiral Konetzni reported to the pre-Commissioning Unit WILLIAM H. BATES (SSN 680) under construction in Pascagoula, Mississippi and served as Engineer Officer through commissioning until 1976. Following that tour, Rear Admiral Konetzni served as Executive Officer, USS KAMEHAMEHA (SSBN 642) (Gold) from June 1976 to December 1978. In December 1978, Rear Admiral Konetzni reported to the Naval Military Personnel command and served as Submarine Placement Officer and Executive Officer Detailer. His first command tour was onboard USS GRAYLING (SSN 646) from August 1981 until May 1984.

Rear Admiral Konetzni served as Deputy Commandant of the U.S. Naval Academy from August 1984 until May 1987. He commanded Submarine Squadron SIXTEEN from May 1987 until July 1989. After his squadron command, he served as Senior Fellow of the Chief of Naval Operations Strategic Studies Group. Rear Admiral Konetzni then served as Deputy Director of the Submarine Strategic Division in the Office of the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Undersea Warfare) from July 1990 until April 1991. From April 1991 to April 1993, he served as Chief of Staff to Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet.

His next assignment was as Director, Attack Submarine Division (N872) at the Pentagon from June 1993 until February 1994. From February 1994 to November 1995, he served as the Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel to the Bureau of Naval Personnel for Total Force Programming and Manpower (PERS-5) and Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Personnel Policy and Career Progression (PERS-2). Prior to his current duties, he served as Commander Submarine Group SEVEN in Yokosuka, Japan from December 1995 to April 1998. Rear Admiral Konetzni assumed his current duties as Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet in May, 1998.



Rear Admiral Konetzni is entitled to wear the Legion of Merit with a silver star, the Meritorious Service Medal with two gold stars, the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with two gold stars, and the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal. He was also awarded the Order of National Security Merite Cheonsu Medal by the Republic of Korea in December 1997. He holds a Master's Degree in Industrial Personnel Management from George Washington University and is the coauthor of the book "Command at Sea."

Shipmates:

"VADM Al Konetzni is one of my best memories of 22 1/2 years in the navy. He was my engineer on the PCO William H. Bates and also my qual walkthru officer when I qualified after commissioning. I now look at him as my friend and shipmate. I would follow him to the ends of the earth and do anything that he requested. I have heard over the year how he never lost his humanity and caring for the everyday sailor. I feel the the Navy and the country is losing a shipmate that the shoes will be hard to fill. Eng, may Missy and your days be full of happiness and joy and you next duty station be exciting and fullfilling. God Bless."

-- James Fox, EMCS(SS), Ret

"Big Al had no hesitation at Submarine Birthday Balls or conventions in taking off his dinner dress jacket, when he was done speaking and putting on his SUBVETS VEST. He also shows up at 40 School Street unannounced with his COB Bud Atkins and buys rounds till closing."

-- John "Gumba" Carcioppolo

"I received my invitation to his retirement which I will be attending next Friday, 18 July... He has also followed it up with a few emails and phone calls to me to make sure that Betty and myself will be there...That's the kind of person that he is..."

I first met him when I was COB on the USS Ray and he was Commanding Officer of the USS Grayling, pier Mike, Charleston, SC... I was his first Command Master Chief when he was Commodore of Subron 16 in Kings Bay, Ga... I am attaching a picture (below), taken when he retired me in 1988, and he was a Captain back then...

As Commodore, he would not travel without his CMC, so I got to do a lot of traveling with him...One instance, we had boarded the plane at the Jacksonville International Airport in Florida, we both were in our blues, and he made the comment that folks thought that I outranked him, because of all the gold (I had 8 hash marks) and he only had 4 bars... (see photo to right - click photo for full size view)



He was the best CO I ever had, always had the "door open policy", and if I ever went to his office, and he wasn't there, would find him

out on the pier with his sailors...

He did love his Arturo Fuente cigars but I don't know if he still smokes them as he did take up running... Will take my camera with me to Norfolk and hopefully get some good pictures...

Here is a picture (click for full size view) taken the night before my retirement... Big Al had a cookout at his home for all our staff, boat sailors and anyone else that wanted to come... He had arranged to have 2 wild pigs cooked for the party along with everything else... He seemed to have an "open door policy" even at his home... He had just presented me with a book on the Naval Academy and you can see in the picture his ever present cigar...I don't believe the cup has coffee in it...<grin>



Warmest regards, Admiral"

-- John O'Connor, RMCM(SS), USN, RET (cobber)

"I talked with the Admiral for only a brief few moments at the 1999 USSVI Convention, but like any one else who has had the privilege of a handshake from the gentleman, you know that it's the Navy's loss now that he's retiring...

Our shipmates out there who served under him have seen him to be the best example of where "respect" in our submarine force and Navy could be found; "Big Al, the Sailors Pal" is more than a ditty - it's correct!

Congratulations on your retirement Admiral! Best Regards..."



-- John Clear EMC(SS) USN Ret.

"I was on board USS TOPEKA (SSN 754) at 2359 on December 31, 1999. Earlier that week we had been told we had to cut short our port visit and get to where the International Dateline and the Equator cross for what basically amounted to a publicity stunt. Most of the crew didn't like the idea but orders is orders and away we went.

We made the crossing and made history (much credit due to the Navigator, LT Mike

Bratton) and then pulled in to Yokosuka, Japan. Admiral Konetzni was there on the pier for us and he gave a speech that said "it's my fault you guys had to . . . do that [stunt], I'm to blame, don't be angry at the Navy, be angry with me if you want to be angry at somebody."

That took away all feelings of animosity throughout the ship, being able to point to an individual and say "he did it" rather than "the Navy did it." The crew already greatly respected Adm. K, but that day we all loved him."

* * * *

"Another memory I have of him was when he rode the TOPEKA for a short time and offered me one of his cigars. He didn't know me from anybody, I was just another E-6 in the engine room, but he joked with me and we enjoyed those cigars for an hour or so.

Thank you for being such a fine man and a fine sailor Admiral, you will be sorely missed by the Navy. Thanks for 5-section duty, thanks for the cigar, and thanks for your service to our country. "

Sincerely,

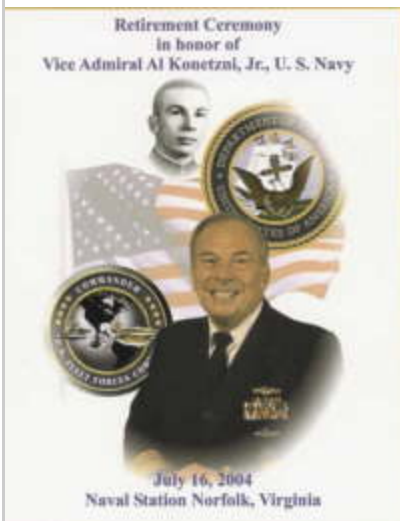
MM1(SS) Frederick T. Smith, USN

Additional Photos from John (Cobber) O'Connor (click photos for full size view):





Retirement Ceremony Images from John "Cobber" O'Connor (click on images for full size):



If you'd like to share a memory of Big Al, please contact the [webmaster](#).