

It is with deep regret I inform you of the passing of Rear Admiral Robert "Bob" Sutton, U.S. Navy (Retired) on 16 November 2020 at age 78. RADM Sutton enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve in 1959, graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1964 and served as a Surface Line Officer until his retirement in 1999 as the Director of the Navy International Programs Office. He was awarded a Bronze Star with Combat "V" for service with the Naval Advisory Group in Vietnam. His commands included USS MITSCHER (DDG-35,) USS PREBLE (DDG-46,) USS THOMAS S. GATES (CG-51,) Naval Forces Central Command (Pearl Harbor,) Naval Logistics Support Force (Bahrain,) Training Command Atlantic Fleet, and Naval Ordnance Center.

Bob Sutton enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve on 29 June 1959. He entered the U.S. Naval Academy on 5 July 1960, where he played starting defensive safety on the legendary 9-1 (#2 in the nation ranked) 1963 varsity football team (lost the Cotton Bowl.) Quarterbacked by Roger Staubach, this team produced five flag officers. Midshipman Sutton played three years varsity football and lacrosse. He was also the class President for two years. According to the Lucky Bag yearbook, his "high enthusiasm, good nature, and quick wit should serve him well." It did. Midshipman Sutton graduated in 1964 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Naval Science and was commissioned an ensign.

ENS Sutton's first duty assignment was a brief stash at Naval Station Mayport, FL before reporting in July 1964 to destroyer USS MCCAFFERY (DD-860) as Damage Control Assistant (DCA,) for a deployment to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean for operations with British and Iranian Navy ships. In May 1966, Lieutenant (junior grade) Sutton reported to the Naval Advisory Group, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) serving as an advisor to a Republic of Vietnam Navy coastal operations group, where he was awarded a Bronze Star with Combat "V." In August 1967 he reported to Naval Schools Mine Warfare, Charleston, SC under instruction before reporting to minesweeper USS PINNACLE (MSO-462) in November 1967 as Executive Officer, deploying from Charleston for a Mediterranean deployment (on her previous Mediterranean deployment, PINNACLE was the first to locate a missing hydrogen bomb from a crashed U.S. Air Force B-52 off Spain.) In January 1970, Lieutenant Sutton commenced study at the Naval Post Graduate School, Monterey, earning a Master of Science degree in Operations Research in 1972. In May 1972 he commenced a training track that included Naval Destroyer School Newport RI and Nuclear Weapons Training Group Atlantic.

Promoted to lieutenant commander in July 1972, LCDR Sutton reported in December 1972 to guided missile destroyer leader USS WAINWRIGHT (DLG-28, later CG-28) as Weapons Officer for a Mediterranean deployment where she identified and tracked four different Soviet submarines with her new Light Airborne Multi-Purpose System (LAMPS) helicopter, and then conducted operations north of the Arctic Circle, vectoring aircraft to intercept Soviet long-range bombers. In December 1974, LCDR Sutton reported to the Naval Ship Weapons System Engineering Station at Port Hueneme as Project Officer for Terrier/Talos long-range anti-air missile systems. In June 1977, LCDR Sutton commenced training at Surface Warfare Officers School Command, Newport RI before assuming duty in August 1977 as Executive Officer for guided missile destroyer USS MITSCHER (DDG-35.) He briefly served as her Commanding Officer from May to June 1978 when MITSCHER was decommissioned after 25 years of service. In June 1978, LCDR Sutton reported to USS CORONADO (LPD-11) as Executive Officer, for a Mediterranean, Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf deployment and preparation for redesignation as auxiliary command ship (AGF-11) to relieve USS LASALLE as flagship for Commander, Middle East Force.

Promoted to commander in March 1979, CDR Sutton reported to the Naval Sea Systems Command in January 1980 as Branch Head for Terrier Missile Development Systems. Commencing a training track in

December 1981, he assumed command of guided missile destroyer USS PREBLE (DDG-46) in June 1982. While he was in command, PREBLE deployed to the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean and earned the Arleigh Burke award for most improved in combat readiness. In November 1984, CDR Sutton returned to Washington DC in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations as Head, Anti-Air Warfare Branch, Surface Combat Systems Division (Op 35.) He was promoted to captain in August 1985.

In September 1986, CAPT Sutton reported as the pre-commissioning Commanding Officer for new-construction AEGIS guided-missile cruiser USS THOMAS S. GATES (CG-51.) Following her commissioning in August 1987, CAPT Sutton commanded THOMAS S. GATES through shakedown, workups and a deployment to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, including a historic first visit since WW2 to the Soviet Black Sea Fleet base at Sevastopol in August 1989 (only the second U.S. Navy visit to a Soviet port since before World War II.) Several U.S. Sailors requested to hold their re-enlistment ceremony on board a Soviet cruiser, which was granted by the Russians, who were unfamiliar with the concept of “re-enlistment” in their conscript Navy.

In September 1989, CAPT Sutton reported to Naval Sea Systems Command as Director Fleet Introduction and Life-time Support Program for AEGIS (PMS-400F.) At some point, CAPT Sutton was designated a Weapon Systems Acquisition Manager and later an Acquisition Professional.

In June 1990, CAPT Sutton assumed command of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, then headquartered at Pearl Harbor, HI. While there, he was selected for rear admiral (lower half.) With the commencement of Operation Desert Shield in August 1990 following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, he deployed with his staff to Bahrain. However, when Commander U.S. SEVENTH Fleet arrived in mid-August to assume responsibility as Commander U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, RDML (select) Sutton assumed responsibility as Commander U.S. Naval Logistics Support Force (Task Force 150.3) responsible for coordinating logistics support for six carrier battle groups, two battleships, and numerous other ships. When Commander SEVENTH Fleet departed in April 1991 to return to the Western Pacific, RDML Sutton was redesignated as Commander U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (Rear) in April 1991. He was promoted to rear admiral (lower half) in August 1991.

In August 1991, RDML Sutton assumed command of Training Command, U.S. Atlantic Fleet. In July 1993, RDML Sutton assumed command of the Naval Ordnance Center. In October 1995, RDML Sutton assumed duty in the Office of the Secretary of the Navy as Director of Navy International Programs and was promoted to rear admiral (upper half) on 1 February 1996. RADM Sutton retired on 1 February 1999.

RADM Sutton’s awards include the Legion of Merit (5,) Bronze Star with Combat “V”, Meritorious Service Medal (2,) Navy Commendation Medal, Order of Bahrain First Class, Combat Action Ribbon, Navy Unit Citation, Battle Efficiency Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal (2,) Southwest Asia Campaign Medal with one bronze star, Vietnam Service Medal with one bronze star, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation, Republic of Vietnam Civil Actions Unit Citation, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, Kuwait Liberation Medal (Saudi Arabia,) Kuwait Liberation Medal (Kuwait) Medal.

Following his retirement, RADM Sutton went to work as Director of Air Surveillance and then Vice President and Director of the Systems Engineering and Ranges Business Groups in the Systems Division of ITT Industries, providing contract support to Navy and Army ranges. In 2005 he became President of BecTech, an engineering solution consulting firm. He served on the Board of Directors of both the Surface Navy Association and the National Capital Council of the Navy League, also serving as Chairman

of the Naval Affairs Committee for the U.S. Navy League (National.) He also supported the Anchor Scholarship Foundation and Project Healing Waters Fly-Fishing program. I have no information at this time regarding memorial or funeral services.

According to his U.S. Naval Academy yearbook entry, Bob Sutton wanted to fly airplanes. For whatever reason he didn't do so, instead, devoting a major portion of his career to the science of shooting down airplanes. He gained combat experience early as an advisor to the Vietnamese Navy during some of the heaviest fighting of the war, gaining the upper hand in stopping Communist infiltration of men and supplies along the South Vietnamese coast. He subsequently demonstrated superb leadership in multiple ship and shore command assignments. He was a leader in the development and improvements in surface-to-air missile technology to defend the fleet from the very serious Soviet Navy bomber/anti-ship missile threat, culminating in the operational deployment of the AEGIS phased array radar and missile system, which gave U.S. surface ships a decisive capability to defeat air threats that still serves the U.S. Navy very well to this day. His visit to Sevastopol in command of THOMAS S. GATES in 1989 was a signature event in the end of the Cold War. Perhaps his toughest assignment came as a frocked one-star naval component commander for U.S. Central Command in Desert Shield when all other component commanders were three-stars. Although this mismatch was resolved by assigning SEVENTH Fleet as the component commander, RDML(sel) Sutton was given an even more herculean task to manage the immense logistics support effort for the U.S. Navy during Desert Shield and Storm. Although facetiously (and completely unfairly) maligned as COMNAVLOGJAM, the performance of Naval Logistics Support Force led superbly by Bob Sutton was absolutely critical in supporting the largest U.S. Navy operation since World War II; his efforts ensured victory. Demonstrating a "never quit" character, honed on the gridiron, Bob Sutton served our Navy and nation with extraordinary dedication and distinction, clearly taken from us far too soon. But we will remember.

Rest in Peace Admiral Sutton.

Very respectfully,

Sam

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