

## Robert Edwin Traister

It is with deep regret that I inform you of the passing of Rear Admiral Robert Edwin Traister on 2 March 2026 at age 88. Rear Admiral Traister entered the U.S. Naval Academy in June 1956 and served as a surface line and engineering duty officer until his retirement in May 1994 as deputy commander, Surface Ships, Naval Sea Systems Command. He also served in command of Naval Shipyard Pearl Harbor and as deputy commander, Surface Combatants, Naval Sea Systems Command.

After a year at Bowdoin College, Maine, Robert Traister entered the U.S. Naval Academy on 25 June 1956. According to the *Lucky Bag* yearbook, Midshipman Traister was a “fine brigade boxer and battalion football halfback” with a “spirit and determination which gained him top honors in anything he undertook.” He was also “a gentleman in the truest sense.” He graduated with a bachelor of science in naval science and was commissioned an ensign on 8 June 1960.

In June 1960, Ensign Traister reported to the destroyer USS *John Paul Jones* (DD-932) at Newport, Rhode Island, for a tour of duty that included circumnavigation of South America as part of Exercise UNITAS. He was promoted to lieutenant (junior grade) in December 1961 and the same month reported to Naval Destroyer School, Newport, for duty under instruction. In July 1962, Lieutenant (j.g.) Traister was assigned to radar picket destroyer USS *William R. Rush* (DDR-714) at Mayport, Florida. His tour included operations with Task Force 135 enforcing the quarantine of Cuba as part of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October to December 1962. He was promoted to lieutenant in June 1964 and the same month reported as a student to Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, graduating in 1967 with a master of science in mechanical engineering.

In June 1967, Lieutenant Traister reported to the staff of Commander Cruiser-Destroyer Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, as maintenance information analysis officer. He was promoted to lieutenant commander in June 1969.

Redesignated as an engineering duty officer, he was assigned to Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, Bremerton, Washington, in September 1969 as planning and estimation superintendent. In March 1971, he was assigned to the Resident Supervisor of Shipbuilding, Culver City, California, as assistant project officer.

In April 1972, Lieutenant Commander Traister reported to the flagship of the U.S. Sixth Fleet, guided-missile cruiser USS *Springfield* (CLG-7) as engineering officer. During this period, *Springfield* spent most of its time away from its homeport of Gaeta, Italy, operating in the Eastern Mediterranean in reaction to the October 1973 Yom Kippur Middle East War. In November 1973, Traister cross-decked to USS *Little Rock* (CLG-4), when *Little Rock* relieved *Springfield* as Sixth Fleet flagship.

In November 1974, Lieutenant Commander Traister reported to Naval Sea System Command in Washington, DC, as assistant test and trials manager for the DD-963 (*Spruance* class) program. He was promoted to commander in September 1975

In August 1978, Commander Traister was assigned to Supervisor of Shipbuilding Conversion and Repair, Groton, Connecticut, as SSN-688 (*Los Angeles* class) program manager

representative. This is presumably when he earned a ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) deterrent patrol pin. He was promoted to captain on 1 February 1982.

In July 1982, Captain Traister reported to Naval Shipyard Puget Sound as repair officer/production officer. In December 1985, he assumed duty as commander, Naval Shipyard Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. On 27 July 1987, he was designated a rear admiral (lower half) for duty in a billet commensurate with that rank. He was promoted to rear admiral (lower half) in July 1988.

In July 1988, Rear Admiral Traister assumed duty as fleet maintenance officer on the staff of Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In July 1990, Traister reported to Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEASYSCOM), Washington, DC, as deputy commander, Surface Combatants. In April 1991, he became NAVSEASYSCOM deputy commander, Surface Ships. He was promoted to rear admiral (two-star) on 1 August 1991. He retired from active duty on 1 May 1994.

Rear Admiral Traister's awards include the Legion of Merit (two awards); Meritorious Service Medal (two awards) Navy Commendation Medal; Navy Achievement Medal; Navy Unit Commendation; Battle Efficiency Ribbon; National Defense Service Medal (two awards); and the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal. He also earned an SSBN deterrent patrol pin. (Note, service transcripts often lack the service member's last award, so it is possible he has at least another Legion of Merit.)

Following his retirement from active duty, Robert Traister continued his professional career, working with Westinghouse at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington State, a site established during the Manhattan Project in World War II to produce plutonium for the development of the atomic bomb. There, he was involved in efforts related to the cleanup and long-term storage of nuclear materials. He later worked with Boeing, where he was responsible for building and converting ships used for the Sea Launch program, which transformed ocean-going vessels into platforms capable of launching satellites from the sea. His work took him around the world, including time living in Russia with his wife, Janet, where he worked alongside former Russian military engineers.

The U.S. Constitution gives Congress the authority to "provide and maintain a Navy." From the moment a ship is launched, the ocean is trying to sink it, placing a premium on "maintenance," which was Robert Traister's forte and passion. He proved equally adept at the entire life cycle of surface ships and submarines—design, construction, operation, maintenance, and disposal. He began his career in surface line, first with a "good deal" UNITAS circumnavigation of South America, followed by dangerous duty during the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962, enforcing the quarantine and tracking Soviet submarines (one of which came dangerously close to firing a nuclear torpedo at U.S. destroyers that were dogging the sub). It's not clear from the record when he switched to engineering duty officer, but from the time he graduated from Naval Postgraduate School, he held such jobs. Although mostly ashore, the work was no less time-consuming, and he did serve as engineering officer for two consecutive Sixth Fleet flagships, including during high-tempo operations during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. He served in a succession of shipyard and fleet maintenance tours, but was also involved in trials and testing of the *Spruance*-class destroyer, and construction of early *Los Angeles*-class nuclear

submarines. His stellar performance led to command of the Pearl Harbor shipyard and then flag rank. As a flag officer, he held key positions at Naval Sea Systems Command as deputy commander for Surface Combatants and then all Surface Ships during a particularly challenging period in the early 1990s. The severe post-Cold War "Peace Dividend" budget cuts necessitated the premature decommissioning and disposal of numerous surface ships while the Navy was still trying to design the ships of the future. As with any flag officer tour, it required extensive sacrifice of time with family, for which the Navy should be grateful. His distinguished service had profound impact that continues to this day.

*Naval History and Heritage Command*