

# Robert Roy Sampson, USN

Born	13 Jun 1907	New Haven, Connecticut
Died	13 Aug 1983 (76)	Beaumont, Texas



*Capt. Robert Roy Sampson*

## Ranks

21 Aug 1934 Lt. (jg).  
19 Jul 1939 Lt.  
Cdr.  
1 Jan 1951 Capt.

## Decorations

Silver Star  
Legion of Merit

## Warship Commands listed for Robert Roy Sampson, USN

Ship	Rank	Type	From	To
USS Hamilton (DMS 18)	Cdr.	Destroyer	1944	???
USS J. William Ditter (DM 31)	Cdr.	Destroyer	28 Oct 1944	28 Sep 1945

## Career information

Robert Roy Sampson was born to Robert John Sampson and Susanna B. Johnson Sampson on June 13, 1907 in New Haven, Connecticut where he lived until entering the U. S. Naval Academy in 1927. His extracurricular activities there included track and choir.

Upon graduating in June of 1931 and commissioning as an Ensign, USN, Roy reported to the USS TEXAS (BB 35) ported in San Diego where she was the flagship for the entire fleet and later flagship of Battleship Division 1. Roy was a junior officer in the 7th (AA) division and also an editor of the ships newsletter.

In May, 1933 he was ordered to report to the USS CHAUMONT (AP 5) for transport to Cavite, Philippine Islands, for duty as assigned there. The Chaumont was a troopship with a regular schedule from the West Coast to P.I. and China. On board the Chaumont, he met Virginia F. Kennedy, daughter of Lt. Col. S. B. Kennedy, USMC, who was reporting to the Fourth Marines in Shanghai, China. Two years later, Roy and Virginia were married in Shanghai.

On August 16, 1933 Roy reported aboard the USS FULTON (PG 49), a gunboat which patrolled the south China coast from Hong Kong to Canton with infrequent voyages to

Cavite. An engine room fire nearly destroyed the Fulton at sea off Hong Kong in March, 1934 and she was towed to Hong Kong and Manila Bay where she was decommissioned.

On May 23, 1934 he reported on board the USS SACRAMENTO (PG 19), another gunboat ("The Galloping Ghost of the China Coast") which was based in Shanghai and operating nearby. On August 21, 1934, Roy was promoted to Lieutenant (jg).

On June 25, 1935, Roy reported to the USS AUGUSTA (CA 31), the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet, also based in Shanghai. A few days later she sailed to Tsingtao and participated in exercises and gunnery practice for the rest of the summer. The Augusta visited Bangkok, Singapore, North Borneo, and the Philippines that fall.

Conditions in China during this period included communist-bandit activities along the Yangtze River valley, the spread of communism along the south China coast (where the Chinese government requested gunboat help), and piracy in the Canton area. However, life for the "China Hands" was very good in Shanghai's International Settlement during the period Roy and Virginia were there and they enjoyed China very much. A lot of their home furnishings were rugs, furniture, and other items they brought back as well as many of their stories.

In February, 1936 Roy and Virginia left China via commercial steamship, the SS President Hoover, for the United States and Roy reported on April 16, 1936 aboard the USS ARKANSAS (BB 33) as Turret Officer and based at the Norfolk Navy Yard in Portsmouth, Va. That summer was a midshipman cruise to England, Sweden, and France before returning to Annapolis, then to Boston and a Naval Reserve training cruise before overhaul in Norfolk. The next year held another midshipman cruise to Europe and operations out of Norfolk covering Boston to the Caribbean. Roy was detached in March, 1938.

On June 9, 1938, Roy reported to the Naval Training Station, Naval Operating Base in Norfolk as an instructor (subjects not known). He was promoted to Lieutenant as of 7/19/1939.

On June 1, 1940, he reported aboard the USS HAMILTON (DD 141) as Executive Officer. The Hamilton was a four-stacker destroyer and started convoy duty with the Grand Banks Patrol in 1939 escorting ships as far north as Iceland and Greenland. She continued this until converted to a fast minesweeper in June, 1941 (losing a stack). Reclassified DMS-18, she resumed patrolling the East Coast and North Atlantic. When the war started for the United States (12-7-41) she worked against U-boats from New York to the Canal Zone.

On June 19, 1942 Roy assumed command of the Hamilton and the orders were addressed to Lt. Commander Sampson. In November, the Hamilton was a part of Operation Torch, the U. S. invasion of North Africa, and supported the Southern Attack Group landings at Safi and Morocco on the Atlantic.

On November 11, 1943, Commander (no dates for these last two promotions in his personal file) Sampson assumed additional duties COMINDIV 19, a group of five DMS's with flag in the Hamilton. Relieved of COMINDIV 19 and assigned additional duty as COMINDIV 4 (four DMS's), the Hamilton moved to San Diego via Norfolk and the canal and then to Pearl Harbor for training. She took part in the invasion of Kwajalein Island the last of January, 1944 screening transports and providing fire support to the island.

In March, Mine Division Four (flag in Hamilton) swept Seeadler Harbor, Admiralty Islands, before the invasion and continued with anti-submarine duty. For this sweep under shore battery fire Roy received a letter of commendation from the Task Force Commander. In June they swept Saipan Harbor in preparation for that battle. At the end of the month, Roy was detached and sent back to the US to take command of a new minelayer. I suspect the Hamilton was his favorite ship and he and Virginia remained long time friends with a couple of its officers and their wives.

July through September, 1944 consisted of travel and temporary duty at the Sound School in Key West and the Mine Warfare School at Yorktown after which he entered temporary duty fitting out the USS Ditter. On October 28, 1944 Roy commissioned and assumed command of the USS J. WILLIAM DITTER (DM 31), the "Fighting J. Willie". The Ditter was laid down as a destroyer (DD 751) and converted during construction to a minelayer by adding mine rails and 120 mines and deleting the torpedo tubes for weight compensation. The Ditter was used like a destroyer and never laid a mine. Fleet Admiral Nimitz wanted some fast (35+ knots) support ships trained in all aspects of mine warfare and with great firepower, so the Navy converted 12 Sumner Class destroyers under construction.

The Ditter, built at Staten Island, completed her shakedown off Bermuda and sailed from Norfolk to the Pacific during January and February, 1945. She arrived at Okinawa on March 25th and began hazardous minesweeping operations. By invasion day (April 1) she and other minecraft had swept channels and laid marker buoys. On April 12th she was assigned picket duty off Okinawa and on June 6th, she was attacked by kamikazes. She shot down five, but a sixth glanced off her stack and a seventh hit her port side killing 10 men and injuring others. Damage control kept her afloat and she was towed to Kerama Retto for temporary repairs. She was sent back to New York and arrived there July 12, 1945. Discussions about repair and refitting were underway when V-J Day arrived and it was decided to scrap the ship. Eleven months old, she was decommissioned September 28, 1945.

On November 6, 1945 Roy reported for duty as Executive Officer of the NROTC Unit at Rice Institute, Houston, Texas. While there, he received the Silver Star and the Legion of Merit for his duty on the Ditter.

#### Citations:

##### SILVER STAR

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. J. WILLIAM DITTER in action against enemy Japanese forces in the vicinity of Okinawa on June 6, 1945. When his vessel was seriously damaged by two hostile suicide planes crashing on board, Commander Sampson skillfully fought his ship to destroy five attacking Japanese aircraft and, by his courage and determination, valiantly directed his crew in exerting every effort to save the DITTER from possible loss. His aggressive leadership and unwavering devotion to duty reflect the highest credit upon Commander Sampson and the United States Naval Service."

##### LEGION OF MERIT

"For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. J. WILLIAM DITTER in action against enemy Japanese forces in the vicinity of Okinawa from March 23 to June 21, 1945. Demonstrating initiative and tactical ability, Commander Sampson operated his ship safely for extended periods of time in dangerous and incompletely charted enemy waters. His professional skill and courageous devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service".

On November 6, 1947 he reported to the USS MANCHESTER (CL 83) as Executive Officer with a home port of Boston. She was a new ship, commissioned a year earlier, and finished her shakedown cruise in March, 1947. She completed a Mediterranean cruise from June to the end of November, and made another deployment with the Sixth Fleet from February to June, 1948.

Following the Manchester, Roy's future duties allowed him more time at home; either because assignments were shore duty or his ships spent less time at sea.

On October 1, 1948, Roy reported to the Naval Mine Depot in Yorktown, Virginia as the Executive Officer. This facility was responsible for the manufacturing, storing, and shipping of mines and other munitions. It was a heavily wooded area on the York River, gave a comfortable country lifestyle, and was the favorite posting for the Sampson

family. Like the Hamilton, Roy and Virginia kept several long term friendships with other officers from NMD. Roy was temporary commanding officer for six weeks in late 1949.

After his promotion to Captain as of January 1, 1951, Roy was transferred and reported as Commanding Officer of the USS **MULIPHEN** (AKA 61) on April 26, 1951. This was an Attack Cargo Ship (amphibious support) with a home port in Norfolk and made a steady schedule of Caribbean and Mediterranean deployments.

On August 2, 1953 he assumed command of Mine Squadron Six and additional duties as Commander of Mine Division Sixty-One based in Charleston, South Carolina.

From Charleston he moved across the country to Pocatello, Idaho where he assumed command of the Naval Ordnance Plant on December 9, 1953. This plant repaired and relined big guns from ships with most of the work being done by civilian employees. There were few naval and marine personnel. The plant was sold shortly after he left in September, 1956.

On October 10, 1956 Roy assumed command of Landing Ship Flotilla Two under Commander, Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet and based at Little Creek near Norfolk, Va. Again, information on groups like this does not show up on the internet and there is nothing in family papers.

Toward the end of this tour Roy was on Project 572 or Mission BAFOX as commander of the Joint Task Group. This group of ships, an icebreaker, landing craft, and a large commercial tanker, were a test group sent into the ice fields of Foxe Basin (Arctic) to formulate supplying the DEW Line. The tanker, "Mission Los Angeles" was the largest ship to penetrate that part of the world.

On November 29, 1957, he reported to take command of the Texas Group, Atlantic Reserve Fleet in Orange, Texas. This was a group of mothballed ships in the fresh water of the Sabine River.

During 1959 the Navy determined that there was a glut of higher ranking officers and decided to retire many Captains not selected for flag rank. Roy was not selected for continued service and was released from active duty on June 30, 1960, completing 29 years of naval service. His service decorations included the Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Navy Unit Commendation, American Defense Service Medal, American Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, Victory Medal World War II, Navy Occupation Service Medal (Mediterranean), and the National Defense Service Medal.

Roy had been active in The Rotary Club of Orange and he and Virginia, an avid golfer, were involved members of the country club there. They remained in Orange after retirement and enjoyed a good social life somewhat like that found among naval officers. Roy went to work as the Executive Secretary of the Orange County United Fund, remained in Rotary, and volunteered with the Boy Scouts and the Red Cross. Life was very satisfying.

Roy died August 13, 1983 following heart surgery in Beaumont, Texas. Virginia remained in Orange several years, and then moved to the Houston area near both her son and daughter and her grandchildren. She died in February, 1997 and both she and Roy are buried at Arlington National Cemetery in a space adjacent to that of her parents and brother.

Robert K. Sampson  
April 6, 2009