

## Fleet Admiral Ernest Joseph King



Ernest Joseph King was born in Lorain, Ohio, on November 23, 1878. As a young boy he read an article in the *Youth's Companion* about the Naval Academy which stimulated his interest towards a Navy career. Upon graduating from Lorain High School in 1897, he was appointed to the Naval Academy by Representative Kerr of the Fourteenth District of Ohio. When he left home, his father, a railway mechanic, gave him a round-trip railway pass in case he might change his mind. He never used the return portion, although he kept it for many years.

In the Summer of 1898, during the Spanish American War, King served as a Naval Cadet in the *USS San Francisco*, flagship of the Northern Patrol Squadron, for which he received his first decoration, the Sampson Medal. He graduated with distinction in the Class of 1901, and served the two years at sea -- then required by law -- before being commissioned Ensign on June 7, 1903.

His assignments during his first sea cruise included service in *USS Eagle* surveying Cienfuegos, Cuba, in *USS Cincinnati*, a protected cruiser in the Asiatic Fleet during the Russo-Japanese War, in *USS Illinois*, flagship of the European Squadron, and *USS Alabama*, flagship of the second Division of the Atlantic Fleet.

His first shore duty came in 1906 when he went to the Naval Academy as an instructor in Ordnance and Gunnery for two years, followed by one year on the Executive Staff. Officers who were midshipmen at that time still remember him as a strict but fair duty officer.

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There followed another sea cruise of three years beginning as Aide on the Staff of Commander Battleship Division Two, Atlantic Fleet in *USS Minnesota*, one year as Engineer Officer of *USS New Hampshire* and one year on the Staff of the Commander in Chief Atlantic Fleet in *USS Connecticut*.

His next shore cruise started in 1912 in command of the Engineering Experimental Station at Annapolis. After two years, in 1914, he went to sea again, this time in destroyers in command of *USS Cassin*, then as aide to Commander Torpedo Flotilla Atlantic Fleet, Commander Sixth Division of the Flotilla. In 1916 he went to the staff of Admiral H. T. Mayo on which he served during WWI while the Admiral was Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet.

In 1919, Admiral King, then a Captain, became head of the Postgraduate School at the Naval Academy. Following that tour of duty, he commanded *USS Bridge* for a short period. In July 1922, he commenced a series of assignments which placed him in intimate contact with submarine operations when he was assigned to duty on the staff of Commander Submarine Flotillas, Atlantic Fleet, and as Commander Submarine Division Eleven. In 1923 he took command of the Submarine Base at New London with additional duty as Naval Inspector of Ordnance in Charge of the Mine Depot there. It was during this period in September 1925 that he was in charge of the salvage of *USS S-51* which was sunk off Block Island.

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Having had sea duty in destroyers, submarines and battleships, Captain King now began his career in Naval Aviation which was then taking its place in the Fleet. In 1926 he took command of the aircraft tender *USS Wright* with additional duties as Senior Aide on the Staff of Commander Air Squadrons, Atlantic Fleet. In January of 1927, he reported to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola for flight training and was designated naval aviator 3368 in May of that year. He rejoined *Wright* on completion of this training. When *USS S-4* was sunk in December of that year off Provincetown, however, he was again assigned to command of her salvage operations.

Upon completion he returned to his command of the *Wright*, and had a short cruise as Commander Aircraft Squadrons, Scouting Fleet, until 1928, when he went ashore as Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics. In 1929 he assumed command of the Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia. In June of 1930 he went to sea in command of *USS Lexington* for a two year cruise in that ship. He then had a year in the senior officers' course at the Naval War College. In 1933, with the rank of Rear Admiral, he became the Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics until 1936. During the next five years, except for the year 1940 on the General Board he commanded Aircraft Base Force, Aircraft Scouting Force, and as a Vice Admiral in 1938, Aircraft Battle Force. In February 1941, he was given the rank of Admiral as Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet and on 30 December of that year he became Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Fleet. In March 1942, the President by Executive Order, combined the office of Commander in Chief and the Chief of Naval Operations, and Admiral King assumed those combined duties on 18 March, when he relieved Admiral Stark as Chief of Naval Operations, the first and only officer to hold such an assignment. On 17 December 1944 he was advanced to the newly created rank of Fleet Admiral.

In 1945, when the position of Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet ceased to exist, as an office established by the President pursuant to Executive Order 99635, Admiral King became Chief of Naval Operations in October of that year. In December he was relieved by Fleet Admiral Nimitz. From that time he served in an Advisory Capacity in the office of the Secretary of the Navy, and as President of the Naval Historical Foundation. He died at the Naval Hospital, Portsmouth, New Hampshire on 25 June 1956.

## PROMOTIONS

Graduated from the Naval Academy - Class of 1901

Ensign - June 7, 1903

Lieutenant (junior grade) - June 7, 1906

Lieutenant - June 7, 1906

Lieutenant Commander - July 1, 1913

Commander - July 1, 1917

Captain - September 21, 1918

Rear Admiral - November 1, 1933

Vice Admiral - January 29, 1938

Admiral - February 1, 1941

Fleet Admiral - December 17, 1944

## DECORATIONS AND AWARDS

Navy Cross

Distinguished Service Medal with two gold stars

Spanish Campaign Medal

Sampson Medal

Mexican Service Medal

Victory Medal, Atlantic Fleet Clasp

American Defense Service Medal, with bronze "A"

American Campaign Medal

World War II Victory Medal

National Defense Service Medal