

Donald James Kannitzer

Born: October 14, 1925
Hometown: Seattle, WA
Class: 1945
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: December 28, 1944 /
between Leyte and Mindoro
Islands
Date / Place of burial: December 28, 1944 / Lost At
Sea between Leyte and
Mindoro Islands
Age: 19



Cadet-Midshipman Donald J. Kannitzer, a graduate of the San Mateo, CA Basic School, signed on aboard the *SS John Burke* as Deck Cadet on October 5, 1944 at Honolulu, HI. The ship sailed on October 10 loaded with ammunition bound for the Philippines. It is unknown how Donald Kannitzer came to be in Honolulu as this was not a normal port for taking new crew.



SS John Burke hit by Kamikaze

By December 28, 1944 the *John Burke* and its crew were part of a convoy of merchant ships and landing craft en-route from Leyte to Mindoro loaded with ammunition for the new air bases to be built there. According to the Deck Log Book of the *USS Bush (DD 529)*, one of the convoy's escorts, the convoy came under a Japanese kamikaze attack at about 1012 (Local Time). At 1020 Val (Aichi D3A) dive bombers crashed into the *SS John Burke* and *SS William Sharon*. The After Action Report of the Commander, LST Group Forty Three, who was in charge of all of the LST's in the convoy stated,

“Within two minutes after the JOHN BURKE had been hit she exploded and left no evidence. Debris from this ship killed 3 Army personnel and 1 Navy, wounded 23 Army and Navy on ships in the vicinity. LST 750 suffered heavily with several serious casualties and some ship damage.”

When the attack began, the Medical Officer of the *USS Bush* Lieutenant George Johnson, MC, USNR began filming the attack with his 16mm movie camera. This film captured the last moments of the *SS John Burke*. The *SS John Burke* was one of two ships with Kings Pointers aboard that were lost with all hands in the Mindoro invasion. The other was the *SS Lewis L. Dyche*, whose Third Assistant Engineer was Kings Point graduate Peter Chung Ying Chue.



SS John Burke Exploding

Cadet-Midshipman Donald J. Kannitzer was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Philippine Liberation Ribbon, the Pacific War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.



SS John Burke Explosion

Donald J. Kannitzer was the youngest of Julius S. and Marie L. Kannitzer's three sons. His twin older brothers, Lyle and Clyde, were four years older than Donald. Donald's father was a baker at the Ballard Baking Company.

According to his uncle, Ernest Frey, Donald was an excellent student who was well known for his good citizenship qualities. He applied himself with determination in the pursuit of high marks in his scholastic studies. Donald's favorite form of relaxation was to go fishing. He was sought out by his classmates

because of his character and flawless conduct record. He was a source of pride to his family. Ernest Frey offered the following about his nephew.

“The aim of every man should be to secure the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole.”