

# U.S. MILITARY ASHTRAY MUSEUM - HISTORICAL REPORT



## **Artifact: Commander-in-Chief U.S. Atlantic Fleet 4 Star Admiral Ernest J. Kings Ashtray 1941**

### **Research & Findings:**

The subject ashtray was matched to a high-resolution photograph taken by famed WWII photographer George Strock in January 1941 for Life Magazine. This same photograph was later acquired by Getty Images. George Stock captioned this photograph in his archives as: **“Admiral Ernest J. Kings Ashtray”**. The photo was taken one month before Admiral King took command of the newly established U.S. Atlantic Fleet, meaning this ashtray was made in preparation of his arrival. Clearly seen in this high-resolution photograph are multiple sand cast “field” defects and other identifiable markings that are unique to this specific ashtray, meaning that other ashtrays that were made from the exact same sand cast mold would have different sand cast “field” defects and markings. The Museum was able to acquire one other example from this same sand cast mold, and this example has clearly different field cast defects. This alone positively identifies this artifact as not only having belonged to Admiral Ernest J. King but is in fact the exact ashtray attributed to Admiral King in the George Strock January 1941 photograph.

<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/admiral-ernest-j-kings-ashtray-news-photo/50455755>

The January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1941 George Strock / Life Magazine/ Getty Images photograph was taken just after this artifact was removed from its sand cast mold, with the inner mold ring still in place, and slightly cocked out of position indicating an unsuccessful attempt was made to remove it prior to the Getty Images photograph being taken. Additionally, in our inspection of this ashtray, we discovered clear machine lathe markings in this same area, indicating the necessity to repair damage in this area. It was common that multiple copies of the same artifact were made from the same sand cast mold as commanders wanted their custom ashtrays located in multiple stations aboard their Flagship. For example, in his private quarters (cabin), private mess, wardroom, bridge (helm), log room as well as other locations on board ship. However, the fact that this ashtray is designed for only two users at the same time, it strongly lends itself towards being made for use in the Admirals most private of locations, either his private quarters or mess. Without question, this ashtray can truly be labeled a “One of a Kind” artifact and is the only example in the entire U.S. Military Ashtray Museum, or to our knowledge in any other collection, that carries this unique distinction of having a high-resolution war date photo match as part of its provenance.

Incredibly, and even without considering the conclusive provenance attained from the WWII George Stock photo, the unique markings cast into this artifact, its design style, manufacturing technique and material used in its construction tell their own conclusive provenance story. The markings permanently cast into this ashtray identifies the county and branch of service (“United States and the Navy” by the U.S. Navy hat badge in the center), the commander that used the artifact and his position in that command (“Admiral King as the Commander-in-Chief”, explained later in the report), rank (“Full Admiral” by the 4 stars on the lower flange), command (“Atlantic Fleet”, which is cast on the upper flange) as well as era (“WWII”, by the metallurgy report, design style, manufacturing technique and material used in its construction).

In the center base of the artifact is a U.S. Navy Officers hat badge, with the eagle facing to its left. Starting on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1941, by U.S. Navy regulation the eagle on the U.S. Navy hat badge insignia started facing to its right.

<http://hawsepipe.blogspot.com/2010/01/us-navy-commissioned-officer-hat-badge.html>

The U.S. Atlantic Fleet was established by President Teddy Roosevelt in 1906 and was discontinued in 1922. It was reestablished as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's secret buildup to WWII on February 1st, 1941. The only Admiral to serve in the U.S. Atlantic Fleet with the rank of 4 stars prior to the change of direction of the eagle on the U.S. Navy hat badge on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1941 was Admiral Ernest J. King. The Admirals position in that command was as the Commander-in-Chief.

Our research showed that Admiral King took command of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet on board his Flagship, the USS Texas, for what would prove to be the longest continuous battle of WWII, the Battle of the Atlantic. Three months later, on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1941, the Admiral King switched his flag to the Heavy Cruiser USS Augusta and that ship remained his Flagship for the rest of this command. From August 5<sup>th</sup> to August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1941 and with Admiral King on board, the USS Augusta became the Presidential Flagship and the location for President Roosevelt to meet with England's Prime Minister Winston Churchill for the "Atlantic Charter" summit. Admiral King remained in command of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet until December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941 when he was promoted to the highest position in the U.S. Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) for the remainder of WWII and until December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945. An additional interesting fact, this is the only example in our collection with "cursive writing" cast into it. Artifacts like these were extremely desired objects. It was common place that at the end of a command, especially for a prominent figure like Admiral King, that they were either gifted too, or even commandeered by, an officer or a sailor close to the Commander. Therefore, although it is possible, in our opinion it is doubtful that this ashtray would have used by Admiral King after December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941 when he left the Atlantic Fleet and was promoted to CNO.

#### **Report Conclusions:**

Commander: **Admiral Ernest J. King, United States Navy**

Rank: **4 Star, which until December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944, remained the highest rank in any branch of the U.S. Military**

Command: **Commander-in-Chief United States Atlantic Fleet**

Use Dates: **February 1st, 1941 through December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941**

Use Location: **Atlantic Theater of Operations.**

Special Event(s): **Used during the longest battle of WWII, the Battle of the Atlantic (Feb 1<sup>st</sup> to Dec 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941). Used aboard Admiral King Flagship, the Battleship USS Texas (Feb 1<sup>st</sup> thru April 22nd, 1941). Used aboard the Heavy Cruiser USS Augusta (April 23rd thru Dec 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941), which also served as the Presidential Flagship for Roosevelt for the Atlantic Charter Summit with Prime Minister Winston Churchill (Aug 5<sup>th</sup> to Aug 14<sup>th</sup>, 1941)**

Provenance: **Photo match to a George Strock WWII image, along with conclusive research evidence**

Quantity: **1 of 1**

Manufacturer & Date: **Unidentified U.S. Navy repair ship, manufactured between December 1940 and January 1941, prior to Admiral King becoming CIC, U.S. Atlantic Fleet**

Material: **Naval brass, from spent round or used bearing**

Manufacturing Technique: **Sand Casting**

X

Signed, Curator: U.S. Military Ashtray Museum, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Client: [REDACTED]

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