

**Captain Alfred Victor Knight OBE DSC RD US Legion of Merit**

**RANR(S) Rtd**

**Honorary Commodore of The Australian National Line**

**20<sup>th</sup> February 1897 to 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1983**

**Member of the League**



Alfred Knight 1944 AWM

**Alfred Victor Knight (1897-1983), naval officer and master mariner**, was born on 20 February 1897 at Dover, Kent, England, son of William Knight, grocer's manager, and his wife Annetta Louisa, née Howgego. Educated at St Mary's School, Dover, Victor was active in the local Scout troop as well as the church choir. He joined the Roberts Steamship Co. as a cadet in 1912 and served his apprenticeship in the tramp steamer *Batiscan*. On 21 April 1915 he was appointed midshipman in the Royal Naval Reserve.

After serving in the armed merchant cruiser HMS *Victorian* on blockade duty in the North Sea, Knight was posted to destroyers, first HMS *Owl* on escort duty to France and then HMS *Crusader* on the Dover Patrol. He was promoted to

temporary acting sub-lieutenant in February 1917 and to temporary sub-lieutenant in February 1918. On 23 April that year he was in HMS *Sirius* during the attack on Ostend (Oostende) harbour, Belgium. The raid, designed to block the port to prevent its use by the Germans as a destroyer and U-boat base, failed in its objective but was a substantial propaganda success. Knight was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his 'great coolness under heavy fire'. He was mentioned in despatches for his actions during a second assault on 10 May. In February 1919 he was promoted to temporary acting lieutenant and appointed to HMS *Northolt*, which was employed on postwar minesweeping duties.

Leaving the navy in January 1920, Knight obtained his master's certificate next month and resumed his career in the merchant navy, sailing on voyages to the Americas and the Far East. He worked for the Booth and Blue Funnel lines, and also for a time with Malayan Customs in their campaign against rubber smuggling. Following a visit to Australia, he was appointed as a lieutenant, Royal Australian Naval Reserve (Seagoing), on 1 January 1923. In 1925 he joined the Union Steam Ship Co. of New Zealand Ltd. On 12 April 1930 at St Nicolas's Church of England, Coogee, Sydney, he married Irene Ethel Pain (d.1967), an artist. He was promoted to lieutenant commander, RANR, in 1931 and to commander in 1937.

Mobilised for full-time duty on 16 March 1940, Knight served at Navy Office, Melbourne, in the trade division. In February 1941 he was appointed commanding officer of the Bathurst-class corvette HMAS *Lithgow*, which was commissioned in June. *Lithgow* swept for mines in Bass Strait, assisted in the destruction of the Japanese submarine *I 124* off Darwin in January 1942, escorted troop convoys to Papua and took part in the campaign to recapture Buna in December. He was appointed OBE (1943).

In February 1943 Knight took command of HMAS *Westralia*, then being converted as a landing ship, infantry. Under his command *Westralia* trained more than 21,000 men in amphibious warfare, transported more than 19,000 men and 30,000 tons of military equipment to forward areas, and took part in the Allied landings at Arawe, New Britain (December 1943), Humboldt Bay, Netherlands New Guinea (April 1944), and Leyte Gulf, the Philippines (October 1944). He was appointed to the United States of America's Legion of Merit (1946). The citation described him as a 'forceful leader' who, by his 'splendid co-operation in the conduct of a vital training programme, aggressive determination and untiring energies ... contributed materially to combined large-scale operations'.

Appointed sea transport officer, Sydney, in November 1944, Knight was promoted to captain in December 1946. He was demobilised on 1 July 1947. Transferring to the Australian Shipping Board (Australian National Line from 1956), he commanded various merchant ships. He was made ANL's first commodore soon after his retirement in 1962 and honorary commodore of the fleet in 1972. On 17 October 1968 at the registrar-general's office, Sydney, he had married Hilda Marian Menlove, née Stevens (d.1975), the divorced wife of D. A. Menlove. He was chairman of the Glebe Island Committee, a director of Altikar Pty Ltd (later associate-director of Multicon & Altikar Engineering Pty Ltd), and an active member of many naval and merchant-navy associations. His recreations included golf and fishing. Survived by the daughter of his first marriage, he died on 22 January 1983 in his home at Double Bay and was cremated following a funeral at the naval chapel, HMAS *Watson*.

*By David Stevens & Greg Swindon , Australian Dictionary of Biography*