

Captain Angus Donald Bethune (Don) Capron
1926 – 3rd March 2025
Committeeman 1993-1996
Roll No. 46



Don spent his early years in Artarmon, Willoughby and Chatswood, during the depression living with relatives and went to Crows Nest Junior Technical High School.

After leaving school Don started work as an apprentice fitter with the NSW Railways at Redfern, but after being re-assigned to make shell casings for 25-pounder guns, he quit and four days later joined the Royal Australian Navy aged 17 in 1943.

His first voyage was on **HMAS Kybra** a former West Australian State Ships vessel, which the navy was using as a training vessel. The **Kybra** had wooden decks and Don was introduced to the ancient art of “holystoning”.

Don’s next posting **TSS Canberra**, a Howard Smith passenger vessel 7,707 tons, taken up as a Troop Ship, having previously served as a troop transport in the First War.

Don's father a Merchant Mariner had served on the **Canberra** during the 1930's.

Don sailed from Townsville, escorted by a destroyer to New Guinea. After approximately ten days of acclimatising at **HMAS Ladava**, Milne Bay, he joined another requisition merchant vessel, enjoying the first class passenger accommodation on the RAN supply ship **MV Merkur**, a Burns Philp requisitioned vessel. After a few days at sea Don transferred to **HMAS Shropshire** to complete the second leg of his journey to Manus Island, where he joined the crew of **HMAS Arunta** on the 6th July 1944.

Relying upon multiple vessels for fuel oil, **Merkur** for supplies and **HMAS Poyang** for ammunition, **HMAS Arunta** participated in operations at Morotai, Leyte, Suriago Strait, Lingenyen, Corregidor, Wewak, Brunei and Lutong. During the invasions, Don's action station was A-gun supply crew in the forecastle mess deck.

After the invasion of Leyte Gulf, **HMAS Arunta** withdrew to Manus Island for re-victualling. Her 20mm anti-aircraft guns were replaced with 40mm and she joined the invasion convoy bound for Lingayen Gulf.

On 5th January 1945, the convoy was targeted, by members of the Divine Wind Special Attack Unit, better known as Kamikaze pilots.

HMAS Arunta experienced a near miss on her port side which killed Able Seaman H. Sellick and Stoker Petty Officer R. Hand. The ship was repaired in company of a USN Destroyer before both vessels resumed their positions in the convoy.

From 9th January 1945, **Arunta** participated in the Lingayen Gulf landings before withdrawing to escort **HMAS Australia** to Leyte for repairs. Both ships were suffering damage inflicted by Kamikaze planes. **Australia**, had been hit by five planes, over four days. **HMAS Arunta** returned to action, steaming from Leyte to Corregidor, where she conducted bombardments before sailing for Sydney. After repairs and refitting **Arunta** returned to New Guinea, supporting Australian landings at Wewak, then at Brunei and Balikpapan.

Upon return to Sydney, Don celebrated Victory in the Pacific at Cockatoo Island Dockyard. Soon after, he was assigned various duties including guard aboard a cargo ship, naval policeman and coxswain of a torpedo recovery boat at Pittwater range. Don was next assigned to **HMAS Goulburn**. However, suffering ill health was discharged as Able Seaman.

Don returned to sea as an Ordinary Seaman on **SS Time**, a coal fired, cargo vessel built in 1913 operated by Howard Smiths. After he qualified as an Able Seaman, Don joined an oil tanker and sailed for the Persian Gulf, with three trips to South Africa, before he joined a British freighter which took him around the world via the Suez and Panama Canals.

In late 1950 Don joined **TSMV Manunda** (Adelaide Steamship Company) as an AB, on board he met an Officer who encouraged him to sit for his Second Mates Certificate. After completing the required sea time Don took himself off to England as a passenger on **MV Moolton** to study and whilst on board met his future wife Dorothy.

Before departing Australia Don had contacted an old friend who was working at Australia House London and asked for her assistance. When the vessel reached Colombo, Don received a letter that she had enrolled him into King Edward VII Nautical College. On passing his Second Mates Certificate, Don joined the Indo China Steam Navigation Company as he said for the higher rate of pay. Don then sailed for 18 months without leave to amass his qualifying sea service for his First Mates Certificate and as the vessel was running to Australia he was to remain in contact with family and his girlfriend Dorothy.

Don travelled to London as passenger on the P&O Liner **SS Otranto** and enrolled at Southampton School of Navigation (Warsash). On passing his exams Don paid for a flight back to Hong Kong as he was off pay until he re-joined his next vessel **MV Hang Sang**. After some time sailing in Asia Don felt the call of home and resigned from Indo China SN and was flown home to Sydney.

Back in Australia Don joined the Australian Shipping Board (ANL) before resigning and joining McIlwraith McEacharn Ltd and **SS Kooralya** before transferring to the coastal passenger vessel **TSMV Kanimbla**. Don married Dorothy whilst the vessel was in dry dock in Sydney. Don passed his Masters Certificate after studying at the Sydney Nautical School part of the Sydney Technical School.

In 1960 Don resigned from McIlwraith McEacharn as the passenger vessels were being replaced by aircraft and joined Burns Philp Company running up to the islands. Don then worked as Assistant Wharf Manager for P&O Stevedores to spend more time with his wife and daughter Anne, before in 1967 joining the Maritime Services Board as Master on tugs and the Sydney Pilot Vessel. Eventually, being the sensible man he was, Don retired early in 1981 at 55 as Senior Master to enjoy quality time with his family.

Don spent his last years at the RSL Veterans Retirement Village at Narrabeen, where a number of plaques that he commissioned in memory of the Merchant Navy adorn the walls.

Don and his cousin Robert Mouatt donated their Grandfather Captain Peter Mouatt's (a Master Mariner from the Shetland Islands) collection of Nautical Charts to the National Library of Australia. Don's papers 1946-1991 are in the State Library of NSW.

Information about Captain Angus Donald Capron taken from his biography published in the Merchant Navy news Issues No. 37 & 38, 2025.