

## **Capt Arthur Michael Downes LCDR, RNR & RANR**

It is with great sadness the family of Captain Arthur Michael Downes LCDR RNR/RANR (ret) informed us he crossed the bar on 24 September 2017 in Sydney, Australia aged 96 years of age.

"Mike" as he preferred to be called was born on 23 July 1921 in Surry England.

In 1937 He commenced his illustrious nautical career at the Thames Nautical Training Collage HMS Worcester. During his time on HMS Worcester, Mike was privileged to have sailed the Cutty Sark when it made its final trip from Falmouth to the collage at Greenhithe. It is our understanding he was the "last man standing" of those cadets who sailed on the Cutty Sark under full sail in 1938.

In August 1939 Mike was called up for war service with the Royal Navy as a midshipmen RNR, serving on HMS Botlea (alias RFA Lambridge) a Q-ship operating in the Atlantic, Indian oceans, the Middle East and the Red Sea. In 1941 he was posted to HMS Walpole an old V&W class Destroyer operating around the English Channel. It was during this period Mike was involved in the chase of German battleships Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and the Prince Eugen during their daring dash up the English Channel to Germany.

From 1942 to 1945 Mike was posted to HMS Tay a River Class Frigate assigned to the B7 "Escort Group" under Capt Peter Gretton. As a LT RNR, he was the HMS Tay's Navigator and ships anti-submarine officer. The most famous convoy he was involved in was ONS5 during April/May 1943. It was a slow convoy from Liverpool to Halifax with 44 ships. During the proceeding battle which lasted over eight days, the convoy was attacked by 4 German wolf packs with a strength of over 50 U-Boats. The convoy escorts, including the B7 Escort Group, successfully managed to sink 7 U-boats with the loss of 13 merchant ships. During the course of this battle HMS Tay assumed the duties of the Escort Commander when Capt Peter Gretton's ship HMS Duncan ran low on fuel and had to leave the convoy. This convoy was regarded as the turning point of Battle of the Atlantic.

In 1945 Mike was posted to HMS Patroller (an American built Ruler class Escort Carrier) as the Navigating Officer deployed to the British Fleet in the Far East. Mike remained on board until he was discharged in March 1946.

During WWII Mike gained not only his RN qualifications as a graduate of the RN's Long Navigation Course and other Warfare related courses, He also gained civilian tickets as 2nd mate, 1st Mate and Masters Certificate in the Merchant Navy.

From 1946 to 1951, Mike returned to the Merchant Navy and served on various Shaw Savills ships sailing mainly from UK to Australia and then on the Steamship Company ships sailing between Fremantle to Cairns.

In late 1951 Mike returned to the United Kingdom for Reserve Officer training

and arrived back in Australia during September 1952. He joined the Royal Australian Navy in 1952 and remained in this service until 1960 as a LCDR RANR. During this time, Mike served in a number of positions, including Assistant & Master Attendant of Garden Island, Deputy Captain of the Port of Sydney & Senior Pilot. He also became Commanding Officer of HMAS Kookaburra, HMAS Sprightly, HMAS Woomera, and HMAS Emu.

In 1960 Mike left full time service with the RAN to set up a business as a Marine Surveyor and Compass Adjuster under the auspices of Capt A M Downes and Associates, a business he successfully conducted for 40 years. Mike was a well-known figure along the NSW waterfront. One of his jobs included inspecting tiles for the Sydney Opera House. Mike was also in constant demand for compass work all over Australia and as far away as Fiji. Mike for many years swung the compasses for many of the numerous Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race boats. On one occasion he nearly ended up heading to Hobart as he was still on board the yacht minutes before the start gun was sounded.

Mike continued to serve in the RAN in a reserve capacity until the late 1970's. During his time with the reserve he completed training on ships such as HMAS Queenborough, HMAS Sydney (III), HMAS Supply formally the RFA Tide Austral, HMAS Stalwart and various shore bases including HMAS Waterhen and Kuttabul.

In 2000 Mike retired from his business however continued with compass work well into his 80's.

We offer our condolences to his Family and friends