Lt Commander Roy Dykes The Whitchurch man's campaign for the Arctic convoy medal

Mr Dykes was born in 1921 in Ilford, Essex, before later moving to Leigh-on-Sea. On the outbreak of war, Roy Dykes joined the Royal Navy and started the war as a sub-lieutenant but worked his way up to lieutenant commander aboard HMS Honeysuckle, which was assigned to Arctic convoy duty. This was escorting supplies and war material from Scotland to the Soviet Union in order to help Soviet troops on the Eastern Front. Winston Churchill personally described the route which the convoys had to take as "the worst journey in the world".

He made 16 journeys there and back. His corvette, HMS honeysuckle, was part of convoy PQ16 and once rescued all 65 crew members from the merchant ship Lowther Castle, aside from the captain who chose to go down with his ship. When Roy Dykes was 93 he said his time in the convoys was the hardest of his life. "The decks would be very slippery with ice, and the ship would be rolling, but you daren't touch the rails because if you did, you would lose your skin, The hardest part was trying to get some rest. We had 24 hours of daylight and we were constantly attacked, not by single aircraft but hundreds at a time." Despite the hardship he found love and he married his wife Iris in 1941 and the couple had two children - Maureen and Stephen.



Roy Dykes during the war (Basingstoke Gazette)

After the war however, the members of the Arctic Convoy were not honoured by the British government with a medal, due to the strained relations with the Soviets and the descent on the Iron Curtain across Europe. The Russians, however, presented their own medal to those who had served on the Arctic Convoys as well as subsequent ones to mark the 40th anniversary of the campaign.

However the British veterans refused to give up the quest for a British campaign medal of their own, particularly Commander Eddie Grenfell, Lt Commander Roy Dykes and Merchant Navy veteran Jock Dempster. They campaigned for 16 years to Parliament and despite setbacks such as Parliament only initially permitting a lapel badge, his persistence paid off and the Arctic Star medal was created in March 2013.

He was presented with his medal at a special ceremony in Downing St, , during a presentation at 10 Downing Street. But by then he was 92 and had few fellow comrades left with whom he could share the occasion. It was estimated that of the 66,000 who took part in the Arctic Convoys, as few as 200 were still alive to receive the medal.



Roy Dykes with Arctic Star medal (Basingstoke Gazette)

Following the war, Mr Dykes trained to become an accountant, and worked for a company in Oxford Circus, London, before taking early retirement. He moved to Norfolk with his wife, before settling in Whitchurch in the 1980s to be near his daughter. After he moved Roy Dykes maintained an active role in Whitchurch. He was a leader of a Scout group and raised thousands of pounds with his wife for Guide Dogs for the Blind, as well as becoming a councillor and later Mayor of Whitchurch. Roy Dykes also joined the Royal British Legion. He eventually became the president of the Whitchurch branch and maintained close ties with the Overton cadet branch when it merged in 2014. The grandfather-of-four also enjoyed showing his Petit Basset Griffon Vendeens at Crufts. He worked up until December 2015, spending one day a week doing the tax for a company in Basingstoke. He died aged 96 on April 27th 2016.

He has been honoured with a memorial bench in Whitchurch (at the entrance to Bere Mill). It's designed to look like a ship picking its way through icebergs. Each end of the bench has an anchor on it, which allows dog walkers to attach their pets to the bench while they have a rest. A wonderful reminder of Roy Dykes' fondness for dogs.



Roy Dykes memorial bench (photographed by John)