

Basic Detail Report



Commissioner

Vessel number

HV000322

Date

1943

Primary Maker

Green Point Naval Boatyard

Description

COMMISSIONER was launched as ML 426 in March or April 1943; the actual date is not properly recorded. The Green Point Naval Boatyard at Mortlake on the Parramatta River was run by the firm Concrete Constructions. The company had submitted a proposal to build 20 Fairmiles and set up the yard in what is now known as Wangal Reserve. ML 426 began its patrol service for the RAN from Cairns on the North Queensland coast. It later survived a cyclone at sea while escorting a convoy during a transfer to Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. It was then laid up for repairs after being rammed in that port by HMAS KATOOMBA. Returning to duty around Papua New Guinea ML 426 undertook routine patrols and tasks without taking part in any significant actions. At the end of the war it was decommissioned and sold by tender in 1947. The vessel was taken over by the Melbourne Harbour Trust, named COMMISSIONER, and converted for use as a port inspection vessel, and for school and other excursions. In 1977 it went to Brisbane and then Mackay in north Queensland. Linking the identity of some Fairmiles from the original RAN vessel to their post-war life has often been uncertain. COMMISSIONER however, has been positively identified as ML 426 through the register numbers carved in a foredeck beam. In 2009 COMMISSIONER remained in use as a private motor launch. The original hull shows details of its prefabricated assembly method, but the superstructure and fitout were modified and replaced after its war service ended. The Fairmile Class-B was designed by WJ Holt of the British Admiralty early in World War II. It was developed from the Fairmile Class-A, overcoming all the serious shortcomings of that design. The Class-B is 34 metres (112 ft) long and an excellent sea boat, able to perform a wide variety of duties consistent with its concept as a high speed motor launch. Fairmiles served with many Commonwealth navies during World War II, acting variously as anti-submarine craft, convoy escort, commando and advance army support, hydrographic survey vessels, and air-sea rescue craft. Their speed, shallow draft and manoeuvrability made them ideal for stealth operations and they were often called upon to bombard enemy camps and strongholds close to shore. The Fairmiles wooden construction was cleverly designed to suit mass production, much of it without the need for qualified shipwrights. Sections could be fabricated in many factories and brought together at the boatyard for assembly. Alternatively, in a production line operation (the method used at Green Point) specialised teams worked on specific tasks on each vessel, moving on

from one craft to the next. Green Point Naval Boatyard, working with less than 10 qualified shipwrights who oversaw 750 personnel from trades unrelated to shipbuilding, could build a Fairmile in just over 17 weeks, faster than any other yard in the world.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 34.14 m x 30.48 m x 5.49 m x 1.3 m, 83.66 tonnes (112 ft x 100 ft x 18 ft x 4.25 ft, 85 tons)