

Basic Detail Report



Penguin

Vessel number

HV000396

Date

1907

Primary Maker

Tsugitaro Furuta

Description

PENGUIN was launched as MERCIA for Hodels Ltd. The builder Furuta is understood to have been born in Wakayama prefecture (near Osaka) in Japan, where the majority of the Japanese came from who were working in the pearling industry in the early years of the 20th century at Thursday Island. The first three luggers he built were GEISHA, MINA (now TRIBAL WARRIOR HV000408 and the oldest extant lugger) in 1899, and KISHU. British

Register of Ships records show he built at least 41 luggers and the last noted was CHARM in 1930. The proprietor of Hodels Ltd was Frederick Charles Hodels. In his evidence to the 1908 Royal Commission into the Pearl Shelling Industry he explained that at that time he owned two pump boats and two beche-de-mer boats, indicating he was one of the numerous small operators in the Thursday Island pearling community. Hodels sold his business including MERCIA to the Wyben Pearling Company Pty Ltd in February 1911 - which was owned by Burns Philp & Co. Wyben Pearling Company operated MERCIA for nearly three decades until it was requisitioned by the government for war service in the 1940s. It is clear from the military correspondence files in the National Archives of Australia that the Australian Army had control of MERCIA well before February 1943, when they finally updated the shipping register entry. The correspondence shows Lt Col Elliott served a Form S2 to Wyben in August 1942 requiring that they produce all of their luggers with a view to their impressment. MERCIA was handed over shortly afterwards. Wyben did attempt to keep some of their luggers out of the hands of the military but they had all been rounded up by early December 1942. MERCIA appears as No 4 in a list (dated 16/12/1942) of 60 luggers impressed by the military, noting its value as 1250 pounds less 219 pounds for repairs, a net value of 1031 pounds. All the luggers put into military service underwent a conversion, at an average cost of 23 pounds and 10 shillings each. A report dated 19/11/1942 notes that MERCIA arrived at Thursday Island on 25/8 /1942 and departed for Daru on 8/12/1942, arriving on 14/12 having travelled via Badu to pick up a cargo of palm leaves. An appendix to another report notes that MERCIA (now given No 39) had received the full general conversion, but the work included more extensive repairs, caulking and considerable rigging was renewed. The same report lists the work undertaken for the general conversion which included removing

excess machinery and items associated with diving, as well as stripping internal fittings, bunks, water tanks, etc., removing ballast, lowering the cabin sole and increasing cargo space from 5-7 tons to 12-15 tons, making hatches and covers, surveying the hull and general work on the rigging and windlass. The 19/11/42 report also notes it was despatched uncoppered as an experiment to test a bitumen coated hull. MERCIA was officially acquired by the Commonwealth on 11 Feb 1943 from the Wyben Pearling Company for 1250 pounds and used by the RAAF in Port Moresby and given the registration number 015-45. After the war, the vessel was sold to Mr W.R Albert (4th Aust Heavy W/T Section AIF) for 100 pounds on 30 Aug 1945. The shortage of boats at the end of the war, and the high price of shell, meant that there was a concerted effort to round up the remaining boats during the period 1945-50 and get them back into work. Many were scattered about in New Guinea, having been sold 'as is where is' by the military. In 1946 and 1948 the vessel is mentioned in Thursday Island records again. In 1948 the boat licence was issued in the name of Bowden Pearling Co, who re-registered it on 2/11/1948. Whilst working for Bowdens, the pearling registration number was A31. In 1957 the MERCIA had a new engine installed and was re-registered and re-measured at this time. It continued working with Bowdens up to 1960 but they went bankrupt in 1961 and records show it did not have a pearling licence issued again by the Thursday Island Shipping Master until the 1966-67 season. The MERCIA was then renamed PENGUIN, given the new registration number A61, and licensed to the Aucher Pearling Shelling Company Pty Limited. PENGUIN was later acquired by the Commonwealth Government and returned to a standard pearling vessel rig. It was placed with the Dauan Island Council for use as the island service vessel. When it was decided that PENGUIN should be replaced with a more modern vessel, the Queensland Maritime Museum was approached by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1981, and advised that the Dauan Island Council would agree to PENGUIN being made available to the QMM provided it was maintained permanently with its Dauan Island colours and number. PENGUIN has been restored and rebuilt by QMM and is now on display with its red and white colour scheme, white star on a black circle insignia and the number A61 at their Southbank museum site in Brisbane. Text prepared from information supplied by the Queensland Maritime Museum. Prepared with assistance from the Register of Australian and New Zealand Ships and Boats compiled by Mori Flapan; www.boatregister.net

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 15.54 m x 14.17 m x 4.27 m x 1.83 m (51 ft x 46.5 ft x 14 ft x 6 ft)