

Basic Detail Report



MB 168

Vessel number

HV000791

Date

1937

Primary Maker

Naval Dockyard Garden Island

Description

Along with MB 168, the other two launches were MB 170 and MB 172, while the first one built in the early 1920s went by the name JANET. Drawings show JANET was project number 64 and intended as an officer's launch. The original cabin arrangement featured an open steering position for the helmsman. However later plans for MB 168 show the enclosed wheelhouse, and just refer to the craft as a motor launch. In 1936 Garden Island Dockyard received an order to build additional motor launches for use by District Officers in the Australian Territory of Papua New Guinea. Designated Motor Boats (MB) 168, 170 and 172, they were built at the Garden Island Dockyard Boatshed and launched in 1937. The hulls are carvel planked in spotted gum with a teak cabin, a heavy and robust construction method and the craft are almost 12 metres long. The original intention was for the craft to serve in Papua New Guinea as District Officer's launches, and it is understood that one, two or all three did undertake this and were active in PNG during World War 2. Eric Feldt, who wrote *The Coast Watchers* was a District Officer in PNG prior to WW2, and explained what was entailed in policing this rugged country with few roads where coastal voyages were the favoured form of transport. Feldt provides the context where these boats might have been used: "The district officer was responsible for all forms of government activity in his district, except public health. He was thus, with all local authority in his hands, a power in his district. In particular, the district officer was arbiter of the relationship between Europeans and natives - to him the native came with any complaint of ill-treatment. He was the kiap (a corruption of kapitän, a legacy from the German colonial era) who had power to settle the matter. An able and tactful district officer kept the wheels of the machinery of everyday life running smoothly, but an incompetent one invariably set section against section so that he had a constant turmoil on his hands. Worst of all was the district officer whose wife governed him and his district from the boudoir, but such were, fortunately, rare. These robust boats were typical of Royal Navy craft of this period which had changed little in overall appearance since the early 1900s. However these craft were considered graceful and were readily distinguishable by their flowing lines and four cowl funnel ventilators mounted on the deck head and cabin. The wheelhouse was positioned amidships and accommodation to comfortably seat ten persons was situated aft of the wheelhouse. Entered through a forward hatch was further seating for another eight persons. As fine examples of pre-war wooden boatbuilding skills these boats had carvel hulls built with teak planking and upper works on Australian spotted gum hardwood frames. The overall length was 39 ft 0½ inch, breadth 9 ft 6 inches and a depth

(loaded) of 4 ft 5 inches. In their original configuration they were fitted with chromium plated guard rails. “ After the war, the vessels returned to Australia and classed as Senior Officers' Boats. MB 172 initially served in Darwin before coming to Victoria and NSW and is now at ANMM in Darling Harbour. MB 170's movements are not yet documented, but it remains extant in WA. MB 168 came to Sydney and first used as a tender to the shore base HMAS Rushcutter near Woolloomooloo. Later it was allocated to the General Manager of Garden Island Dockyard. MB 168 was then used as a duty boat transferring stores and personnel between Garden Island and the Garden Island Dockyard boat building and repair facility (ex Halvorsen Yard) at Ryde, which was formerly the Lars Halvorsen Sons main boatyard. In 1989-1990 MB 168 was completely restored by shipwrights at Woodleys in Berrys Bay, NSW, before resuming service with the RAN. 82 years after it was launched MB 168 remains in active service with the RAN, and now forms part of the Naval Heritage Collection. It is moored at Spectacle Island and is a method of transport to and from Spectacle Island and its vast store of archived material. MB 168 provides a platform for ceremonial events such as the "rowing off" of Commanding Officers in the Fleet, VIP harbour transport and also joins events, boat shows and parades on Sydney Harbour representing the RAN.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 11.89 m × 2.9 m × 1.37 m (39 ft × 9.5 ft × 4.5 ft)