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HMAS Ovens



HMAS *Ovens* was the third of six Oberon Class diesel electric patrol submarines built for the Royal Australian Navy at an initial cost of \$9 million. The Oberon Class, or 'O' boats as they became known, were built by the Scott Shipbuilding and Engineering Company in Greenock, Scotland. Designed for quiet running, the Oberon's were both anti-surface and anti-submarine vessels, capable of thirty-day patrol cycles. To remain submerged for lengthy periods a 'snort' system was incorporated into their design to allow batteries to be recharged and to expel stale air.

The first Australian Oberon class submarines provided the RAN with an anti-submarine warfare training platform, however, this soon changed to an operational role when their full potential as a patrol submarine, capable of operating virtually undetected for months at a time, was exploited.



HMAS Ovens was one of six Oberon Class diesel electric patrol submarines built for the Royal Australian Navy

HMAS *Ovens* was launched at Greenock on 4 December 1967 by the Viscountess Slim and was commissioned on 18 April 1969. Sea acceptance and weapons trials commenced in May and on completion of these she began her maiden voyage to Australia arriving in Sydney on 17 October 1969.



Class	Oberon Class
Type	Submarine
Pennant	S70
Motto	Silence is Golden
Builder	Scott's Shipbuilding, Greenock, UK
Laid Down	17 June 1967
Launched	4 December 1967
Commissioned	18 April 1969
Decommissioned	1 December 1995
Dimensions & Displacement	
Displacement	2,070 tons
Length	89.9 meters
Performance	
Speed	15 knots (submerged)
Complement	
Crew	63
Propulsion	
Machinery	2 English Electric main propulsion motors with 2 Admiralty standard range diesel generators
Armament	
Torpedoes	6 x Mk8 & Mk23 Torpedo tubes (forward) 2 x Mk20 Torpedo tubes (aft) 6 x Mk48 torpedo tubes and encapsulated Harpoon anti-ship missiles (later)

In April 1970, *Ovens* was one of an international fleet of 45 vessels that assembled in Sydney to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the landing on the east coast of Australia of the explorer Captain James Cook. This was followed by her participation in a variety of multinational exercises designed to forge closer regional links with Thailand, New Zealand and Singapore. In January 1972 she became the first RAN submarine to join the ANZUK force based in Singapore before returning to Australia in June that year.

Between 10 September 1973 and 30 October 1975 *Ovens* was decommissioned and underwent her first major refit at Cockatoo Island Dockyard, Sydney. Oberon Class submarine refits were complex in nature and involved removing the boat's 480 cell battery, accommodation fittings and all electrical and mechanical machinery with the exception of the main motors. Normally the submarine was placed on a slave dock where it would remain for approximately 60 weeks while the hull was examined for traces of corrosion before undergoing preservation. During that refit *Ovens* became the first of the RAN's submarines to be fitted with a new long-range passive sonar system.

Recommissioning on 31 October 1975, *Ovens* undertook a period of post refit trials before taking part in exercises off Australia's east coast and deploying for South East Asia in May 1976.

Over the next four years *Ovens* continued to operate around the Australian coast and throughout the Pacific, participating in numerous regional exercises which saw her visit such places as New Zealand and Hawaii where she took part in the RIMPAC series of exercises.



The crew of HMAS Ovens at HMAS Platypus

On 10 March 1980 *Ovens* ended her second commission when she was again taken into the hands of Cockatoo Island Dockyard for a major refit which included updating her weapons and sensors. That refit was adversely affected by a dockyard strike in August and September 1981 and an ongoing campaign by dockyard employees for a shorter working week. Consequently *Ovens*' refit did not complete until 12 August 1982.

Following a period of post refit trials, in company with HMAS *Hobart* and HMNZS *Otago*, *Ovens* returned to Sydney before sailing for sea acceptance trials in September 1982. With trials and a safety certification complete, *Ovens* underwent an inspection by the Fleet Commander on 12 October, while berthed alongside HMAS *Platypus*, which was followed by a rededication ceremony.

During *Oven's* third commission she regularly deployed throughout the Pacific and to Hawaii where she was a frequent visitor and participant in the RIMPAC exercises. She was awarded her Mk 48 torpedo weapons certification in 1982 and in November 1985 she conducted the first of the RAN's sub-surface firings of the Harpoon anti-ship missile, scoring a direct hit on a distant, small remotely-controlled surface target on the US Navy's Pacific Missile Range Facility (PMRF), near Hawaii.

In 1986, *Ovens* visited Melbourne as part of the Australian fleet's visit to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the title 'Royal' being granted to the Australian Navy and shortly after deployed once again for Hawaii and participation in RIMPAC '86. *Ovens* returned to Australia following brief goodwill visits to Apia and Fiji.

During the next twelve months *Ovens* operated in Australian waters making numerous visits to local ports and participating in a broad range of exercises. In March 1987 she conducted a successful Mk 48 torpedo war-shot firing against the former RAN corvette HMAS *Colac* before deploying briefly to Western Australia. A visit to New Zealand followed in August before she returned to Sydney to prepare for her third and final major refit.

Ovens was taken into the hands of Cockatoo Island Dockyard on 23 September 1987 and remained in refit until 11 April 1990. During that time a significant work package was undertaken which included a rebuild of her communications centre, repairs to her pressure hull and conversion of her numbers 3 and 5 main ballast tanks.

Soon after the completion of that refit, *Ovens* celebrated the 21st anniversary of her first commissioning and the following week 25 members of her crew represented the Australian Submarine Squadron in the 75th anniversary ANZAC Day march in Sydney.

Post refit trials followed before *Ovens* again rejoined the fleet, where she participated in further exercises off the Australian coast.

In 1991 *Ovens* deployed for exercises with the United States Navy and Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) in Asian waters where she visited Guam and Japan. Goodwill visits to Hong Kong and Singapore followed before she returned to Sydney in May for routine maintenance. The remainder of the year saw *Ovens* participating in exercises off the east coast of Australia with other Sydney based units of the RAN.

1992 began with a safety assessment by the Submarine Sea Training Group, followed by workups and participation in Exercise KANGAROO 92 in waters off Darwin. The remainder of the year saw *Ovens* participate in further exercises off the eastern seaboard before sailing for Western Australia waters and deploying to South East Asia for Exercise STARFISH 92. Following brief goodwill visits to Singapore and Malaysia, *Ovens* returned to Western Australia where she called at Albany before transiting the Great Australian Bight and returning to Sydney in November.

January 1993 began well for *Ovens* when she was awarded the Submarine Fighting Efficiency Shield and the Mk 48 Firing Proficiency Shield by the Maritime Commander Rear Admiral R.A.K. Walls, AO, RAN. It was the third time that *Ovens* had won the Mk 48 Firing Proficiency Shield and an occasion that her crew were particularly proud of.



Rear Admiral R. Walls, AO, RAN presenting Lieutenant Commander M. Sander, RAN, Commanding Officer of *Ovens*, with the Submarine Fighting Efficiency Shield

Over the next six months *Ovens* was involved in local exercises and spent a brief period in the hands of Cockatoo Island Dockyard for a mid-cycle survey. This was followed by work-ups, an operational readiness evaluation, and passage to South East Asia, via Adelaide, for participation in Exercise STARFISH

93. Short visits to Singapore and Bali followed before *Ovens* returned to Sydney in October.

In November 1993 *Ovens* was welcomed by the people of Hobart, following her participation in exercises conducted in the south Tasman Sea. She then returned to Sydney for a period of routine maintenance.



HMAS Ovens outboard of her sister ship Otway alongside Darling Harbour, Sydney, with festoon lighting rigged to celebrate Christmas

The following year *Ovens* was involved in exercises off the east coast of Australia before deploying to Hawaii to participate in RIMPAC 94. Goodwill visits in the South Pacific were undertaken during her return voyage to Australia and in August she underwent a short period of maintenance in Sydney before undertaking trials off the NSW coast. A short deployment to Western Australian waters followed and while berthed at HMAS *Stirling* the boat was opened to inspection by visitors which proved very popular.

Ovens' final year in commission began with routine exercises off the NSW coast followed by a brief visit to Newcastle and a deployment to New Zealand where she operated with ships of the Royal New Zealand Navy and French Navy.

On Friday 4 August 1995, *Ovens* sailed from HMAS *Platypus*, Sydney, for the last time to home-port and decommission in Western Australia. Her departure from Sydney generated significant interest in the media and during her northerly voyage to Western Australia she called at Mackay, Townsville, Darwin and Fremantle before arriving at HMAS *Stirling* on Monday 28 August. While in Fremantle she was opened to visitors and although it was not known at the time, this popular trend would continue when she was spared from the breakers yard to become a museum piece in Fremantle after decommissioning.



HMAS Ovens being towed away from HMAS Stirling after her decommissioning

HMAS Ovens decommissioned on 1 December 1995 at HMAS Stirling. During her 26 year life she operated in the world's three major oceans and travelled in excess of 410 000 nautical miles.



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