

# Basic Detail Report

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**ANMS1286[013]**

**Title**

Letter to Major General Denzil Macarthur-Onslow

**Date**

1980

**Medium**

Paper based material

**Name**

Letter

**History**

In September 1962 Steve Stevenson and Max Hayman, both ex Services Reconnaissance Department (S.R.D.) operatives were on a timber buying trip to British North Borneo. While there they saw a vessel lying at anchor in Sandakan Harbour which looked remarkably like the KRAIT, the vessel used in Operation Jaywick in WWII, except that it was now named PENANG. Enquiries to the owner, Mr Barret and Police Inspector John Walne (an ex-member of S.R.D.) established that the vessel was indeed the KRAIT. Mr Barret told the men that he had changed the name of the vessel because of the "unsavoury reputation she had acquired through her illegal activities in the South China Seas area, this caused him some embarrassment". On their return to Sydney, Stevenson, then President of the "Z" Special Unit Association, advised the Association of the discovery and it was decided to acquire the vessel and return her to Australia. Authority was given to Stevenson and Hayman on their next trip to North Borneo to negotiate with Barret for the purchase of the vessel. The then Governor of British North Borneo, Sir Lionel Foot, heard of the situation and helped facilitate negotiations with Barret who appeared reluctant to sell the vessel. Sir Lionel then arranged for the British Government to contribute towards the purchase price. On returning to Sydney, preparations were completed to launch a public appeal chaired by the then Lord Mayor of Sydney, Mr Harry Jenson, and funds were raised to purchase the vessel. This appeal was strongly supported by the Sydney SUN Newspaper. Trustees were appointed and the necessary administrative details were completed. The Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol would have use of the vessel for use in training and would be responsible for the operations and maintenance. Harold Nobbs, at that time the Officer Commanding the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol, went to North Borneo to finalise the purchase and arrange for the return of the KRAIT to Australia. However, due to her mechanical condition the vessel was loaded aboard the P & O vessel SS NELLORE and returned to Brisbane Army Depot, without any charge by the P & O Company Australia. After unloading, the vessel was transferred to the Water Transport Division of the Army and was thoroughly cleaned with steam hoses internally, mechanical repairs effected, hull scraped and painted overall. This work was done in conjunction with volunteers from the Army Depot, members of the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol and members of the "Z" Special Unit Association to prepare her for the return trip to

Sydney. Over the next 17 years, KRAIT was maintained entirely by voluntary help from members of the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol. From time to time, donations "in kind" were received from various individuals, companies and groups interested in the welfare of the vessel. KRAIT had been consistently used by the RVCP for search and rescue work, safe boating courses and numerous public appearances and cruises. By 1981 it was clear that KRAIT required extensive repairs and restoration, an endeavour beyond volunteers. A target of £250,000 (over \$2 million in today's currency) was set and The KRAIT Appeal Fund started extensive fund raising efforts. It was established that the KRAIT would be housed at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra once the restoration had been completed. Responsibility for KRAIT was transferred to the Australian War Memorial in 1985 but due to storage and display restrictions in Canberra, KRAIT has been cared for by the Australian National Maritime Museum since 1987.