

Basic Detail Report



Krait

Vessel number

HV000076

Date

c 1934

Description

KRAIT, the name for a venomous snake in South East Asia, was pronounced "Krate" by the crew but is a properly pronounced 'Krite'. It was originally called the KOFUKU MARU and had been a fishing vessel built in Japan around 1934 for a Japanese firm in Singapore. The 21.33 metre long vessel is carvel planked in teak with holds forward of the engine room, and wheelhouse on deck. Krait's background begins with the story of Japanese fishing industry after World War I. The inter-war years saw Japanese expansion in all sectors of ship construction, with particular emphasis on merchant ship types. Driven by a need to support a population where fish alongside rice is a basic staple, modernisation to achieve self-sufficiency followed. It was noted that in the pre-Second World War days the Japanese fishing fleet was the world's largest (400,000 vessels) with an estimated output in 1936 in excess of 4million tonnes; more than the combined production of the United States, Britain and Norway. The consequent acquisition of a huge and modern domestic fishing fleet delivered parallel opportunities for intelligence gathering and crew familiarisation of foreign waters. The fleet was also used as an instrument of national policy and aggressively pushed with particular consequences for all countries around the Pacific Rim. Japanese expansion into distant waters was noted; from Kamchatka in the northern Pacific Ocean to the Mexican coast, and from the China Sea to the Bay of Bengal with the Japanese whaling fleet rivalling those of other traditional whaling nations in the Antarctic Ocean. From early in the 20 century until 1938 Japanese fishing fleets operated in the grounds off Alaska, allegedly commanded by naval officers posing as fishermen; taking soundings and gathering intelligence of local conditions. This may have given them some advantages when they successfully invaded the Aleutian Islands in June 1942, as a diversionary prelude to Midway. At the same time, correspondents drew attention to the activities of Japanese fishing craft operating on the northern approaches to Australia. Around 1930 conditions in these pearling grounds had changed with the Japanese no longer prepared to work as employees of Australian master pearlers. This change saw Japanese luggers moving down from Palau and Okinawa, where at the time more than 90% of Australia's pearl shell was fished in grounds from 5 to 50 miles offshore, well outside the three-mile limit and thus allowing the Japanese opportunities for charting of coastal waters and intelligence gathering. In spite of the frequent references to these covert activities the results gained by Japanese craft in this way have been questioned, given that most captured Japanese charts were basic copies of old Admiralty charts with no subsequent corrections or soundings, or even older German charts. The adoption of the diesel engine as standard propulsion for small vessels and also from incentives in the form of subsidies paid by the Government to

encourage the fitting of radios, exploration of new fishing grounds and the construction of steel vessels over 100 tons encouraged the opportunity for this to happen. Yet for all their technical developments, Japanese maritime output in naval architecture, marine engineering, navigation and refrigeration remained derivative of western types rather than innovative. This view is supported in the design of Krait, a distinctly English looking ship. It is understood to have been built in Nagahama, on the Island of Shikoku in Japan's Inland Sea with its construction thought to be typical of the type of vessel made at the Hamagami shipyards. It was one of three sister boats built in 1934 for Kotaro Fugisawa, a Japanese fisherman based in Singapore. It was named KOFUKU MARU meaning 'happiness' or 'good fortune'. Krait appears to have been one of a class of ships constructed for the fishing industry to fulfil various roles. It may have originally been rigged for fishing or fitted out as a fish carrier, without fishing gear but larger hold space for fish as cargo. In this later capacity the vessel operated in the Singapore area servicing a fleet of fishing vessels working offshore while in the ownership of the Fugisawa family. It has been suggested that the vessel may have been used at this time by an agency of the Japanese Government as a reconnaissance or intelligence gathering vessel. The appearance of the vessel's name on a Japanese Government list in 1939 prior to the formal entry of Japan into the Pacific War, gives weight to this contention. It was based at Singapore for about seven years where it was part of a fleet that fished in the waters around Singapore, latterly supplying the fishing fleet based around the Anambas Islands to the east of Singapore, returning with the catch, some of it in barges which were towed. Following the opening of hostilities against the Japanese in December 1941, the Kofuku Maru and a number of other fishing vessels which were berthed in Singapore Harbour were seized and impounded by the civil defence authorities and left moored at the basin at Telok Ayer. From here it performed its first significant role from an Australian perspective. In January 1941 Australian Bill Reynolds arrived in Singapore from the Malaysian peninsula where he had been moving ahead of the advance and destroying resources before they fell into Japanese hands. He had been a tin miner in the region, but before that was an experienced seaman and had been a master mariner. In Singapore he quickly concluded the only escape was by sea, and went looking for a craft to escape from the region without being easily detected. One of the Japanese fishing boats appeared to be a good choice, and through the civil defence authorities whom he knew, he was able to secure the Kofuku Maru from the abandoned fleet. With local help he got it working again. After he cleared from Singapore on 12th February 1941 he picked up two colleagues nearby, Alec Elliott and Harold Papworth. Heading away from Singapore he went east first, and then back to the west and down the Durian Strait where he came ashore in Sumatra and learned of the plight of evacuees stranded on Pompong Island. This was to the east of where they were in the Indragiri River estuary. He then headed across to help evacuate them back to Sumatra. "THE FALL OF SINGAPORE" is a private account by civilian George Fitsimon (Cliff) Clifford and records his experiences of the desperation and harrowing period in Singapore prior to the Japanese taking the island, and the subsequent exodus of civilians and military personnel out into the islands immediately to the south of Singapore. In this first hand report, Krait's actions are recorded briefly in just one paragraph, taking him from Pompong Island to Sumatra, however in the chain of events that allowed Clifford and others to escape, it was a key link. If Reynolds had not taken Krait to rescue people, it is probable that Clifford and others eventual successful escape from the region would not have happened. From Sumatra Clifford eventually found refuge on HMAS Hobart which sailed for Ceylon from Padang on the western coast. He then served in the British Army in India, and ended up back at Singapore as the war ended. The

story begins in Singapore and Clifford describes his attempts to repair an airstrip in the face of Japanese attacks. He then abandons this, pays off his workers as best possible, then seeks a means of escape from Singapore, eventually boarding the Kuala. Soon after leaving Kuala and other ships were bombed and sunk around Pompong Island. Many lost their lives during the bombing, but a number survived stranded on the island. How long we were on the island I don't quite remember, but it must have been 8 or 9 days, and then we saw the fishing boat arriving. At first we thought it was the Japanese and then we found it was an officer and picked crew of the "Tanjong Penang", and they said that they would take the injured off the island and would send someone back to pick the fit persons up. As I had shoes and the coral was covered with oil, it was necessary to load the "Tanjong Penang" up with casualties. Some of the "Queen Alexandra" nurses had lost their nerve and did not want to go on the boat, but I was rather insistent that, if they were damaged or hurt by the bombs, they had to go as this was their only chance to get away. When we had loaded all we could gather of the wounded, we were rather loaded. There was only about 30 of us left on the island - most of us being fairly fit, including myself. About 3 days later, we were approached by Reynolds and Elliott who had pinched a Japanese fishing boat and were picking up blokes like myself from the various islands. Elliott used to be with the Ford Company and Reynolds was a tin miner in the old days of Singapore. I knew that neither of them were seafaring men, but they knew what they were doing, saving lives, that's about what they did. We scrambled on board and were glad to be away from the island. We made for the [Indragiri] River and a breeding ground for the kuia, a big fish which was caught twice a month by the Singapore and Indonesian fishermen. They only run twice a month for 2 days on each occasion. We went about 4 miles into the river where we were met by a village. The village was deserted until we had been there about 10 minutes to a quarter of an hour, and then we found that the population of the village, which was mostly Chinese and Malays, had come back. They had thought we were Japanese. Clifford and other survivors disembarked and Reynolds then headed out again. Reynolds decided to adopt a Chinese identity, renaming the vessel Suey Sin Fah (star shaped flower) to avoid alarming evacuees who recognised it as a Japanese operated craft. Reynolds was also convinced that the Japanese had probably not attacked the vessel because they were recognizing it as one of their own craft and were not suspicious. Returning to Sumatra on 24th February, Reynolds had a chance meeting with Major Ivan Lyon of the Gordon Highlanders, who was similarly organising the escape of groups of refugees. At this meeting Lyon and Reynolds both recognised and discussed the potential of the vessel as a future means of slipping back in and through Japanese held waters to mount a raid. Reynolds continued to evacuate survivors from islands nearby through early March, and overall rescued just over 1500 evacuees. By mid-March the Japanese had occupied the Indragiri area. He then began a gradual passage out of Indonesian and Malaysian waters, heading to the north and using as a disguise the fact that his craft was a Japanese vessel. On the 24th of March they cleared the Straits of Malacca and two days later were in the Indian Ocean heading west. On 31 March they arrived in Ceylon. From there he took Krait to India where repairs were carried out. In April Lyon also arrived in the region, he had made an escape under sail on an Indonesian fishing vessel, and went looking for Reynolds and Krait. Meeting up again, the two collaborated on the plan to use Krait to undertake a sabotage mission back into Singapore. In India in May 1942 they convinced Special Operations Executive (SOE) to support their plan, but it was indicated that this mission should start from Australia. Arrangements were then made to send it to Australia as deck cargo from India, and it went on board the P&O liner Ballarat later in 1942. Reynolds renamed the vessel Krait after a small

but highly venomous Asian snake, and Lyon provided the name Jaywick to the proposed raid. The genesis of Special Operations began on the formation of British Commandos in 1940, with the specific objective of raiding occupied coastal Europe. These Special Forces were irregular military personnel who had been recruited from Army, Navy and Royal Marines. Managed by the Special Operations Executive (SOE), the first operations were launched by the Folbot Troop, using canoes known as Folbots, after the company which made them. This group became the Special Boat Section when attached to the submarine bases in Alexandria and Malta. The latter supported the first raid carried out in June 1941: a railway tunnel was blown up on the Sicilian coast by parties paddling ashore in canoes and returning to a waiting submarine HMS Urge. Thus commenced a series of similar raids against bridges, railways and aqueducts with occasional duties to land or recover agents for intelligence services. On one of these rescue missions 200 Australian soldiers were evacuated from Crete to waiting submarines. Other elements of the military forces came together to prosecute raids and operations against land and sea targets including: Royal Marines Boom Patrol Detachment and the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties. The SOE presence in Australia began as an outgrowth of Force 136, part of Group B from Ceylon. Force 136 eventually set up a base in Australia with the strong support of the Commander-in-Chief of Australian Forces, General Sir Thomas Blarney, initially under the name of the Inter-Allied Services Department (1SD). This unit set up initially in South Yarra, a suburb in Melbourne, where it was decided that the operation known then as Jaywick should be jointly mounted by Navy and SOE, with the former providing assistance and guidance, but the operation being controlled and funded from London. Z Special Unit was suggested as name for this group with a brief to co-ordinate and administer operations from sabotage to intelligence gathering. After his arrival in Australia, Lyon further refined his plan for using the Krait, and advanced the plan through intelligence circles. On 17 July 1942, Lord Gowrie arranged for Lyon to meet Commander R.B.M. Long, the Director of Naval Intelligence in Melbourne. Commander Long was the established SOE contact in Australia. Long recommended Lyon's plan to Admiral Royle and the Naval Board. Royle reluctantly accepted the plan to attack Singapore, which was eventually taken up as Operation Jaywick under the control of Lieutenant Colonel G S Mott, Chief of the Reconnaissance Department. The group undertaking the raid was known as Z Special Unit. While Krait was waiting to be shipped from India and then underwent its necessary modifications in Sydney, a crew was assembled and trained. Commander Long selected Sub-Lieutenant Hubert Edward "Ted" Carse, RANVR as the Navigator for Krait. Naval Intelligence Division (NID) selected a mixed crew of navy and army personnel. By early September 1942, the members of Operation Jaywick were encamped at Camp Z, a secret training camp at Refuge Bay north of Sydney, undergoing a variety of commando training. Krait arrived in Sydney late in 1942 and was overhauled and modified at Garden Island. Reynolds was originally in charge of Krait while it was in Australian waters, but it was then under the overall command of Special Operations. He later left the group and in a separate operation returned to the Indonesian area. He was captured and later executed by the Japanese. Krait seen in profile, 1943. This view shows the starboard water tank, vent over the galley, and the almost invisible radio aerial. Early in 1943 Krait motored north to Refuge Bay and shortly after left to go up the coast and around to WA. During this voyage the ship suffered some mishaps and remained in some of the ports it called at for periods. During one stop over Lt. Col. Mott decided to test the effectiveness of the plan by raiding a tightly guarded allied port. He mentioned the idea to Lieutenant Sam Carey of the AIF, who chose Townsville for the attack. On 20 June 1943 five canoes crewed by two men each, made their "attack" (Operation Scorpion) on

vessels in Townsville Harbour. It was a significant success and proved that the raid was possible. Changes to personnel occurred as the vessel motored to Cairns. Krait was thoroughly overhauled in Cairns, where the Deutz engine that had broken down completely was replaced by a new 6 cylinder Gardiner diesel shipped from Tasmania. A new propeller was procured, together with an old dingy, and the boat's ropes were tarred. In order to provide some protection against air attack, the foredeck was also covered with a four inch thick 'cement plastic' compound, which weighed two tonnes. The latter feature had a short life, however, as the increase in weight reduced the boat's freeboard to less than one foot, and was found to hamper the boat's handling characteristics. It was removed and in its place, the deck was painted flat grey to reduce the boat's visibility from the air. In August, a new silencer was fitted to the boat. This projected through the covering of the aft compartment a few feet behind the wheelhouse, and can be seen in a number of images of the boat. Krait left Thursday Island on 13 August 1943 arriving at the US base at Exmouth Gulf where they refuelled and repairs were carried out by the submarine repair ship USS Chanticleer. Here they picked up a spare propeller, (which was not taken on the raid) canoes and a new compass. It was loaded for the operation with two Brens, eight Owens and eight Sten guns, 14 Smith and Wesson revolvers, 200 grenades, 45 limpet mines and 150 lbs of explosive. It was also said to have carried three 44 gallon drums of kerosene on deck and other small drums for the auxiliary engine, as well as four new Folding canoes and three older folding canoes. The crew on departure for Operation Jaywick was as follows:- M.M. Berryman, AB RAN (PA2717) K.P. Cain, L/S, RAN (B1506) H.E. Carse, Lt. RANVR A. Crilly, Cpl. (QX19907) D.M.N. Davidson, Lt., RNVR W.G. Falls, A/S, RAN (S6503) A.W. Huston, A/B, RAN (B3312) A.M.W. Jones, A/B, RAN (F3383) Ivan. Lyon, Major, (VB66175) F.W. Marsh, A/B, RAN (B3666) J.P. McDowell, StkR., RN (B2275) R.G. Morris, Cpl., RAMC R.C. Page, Lt. (NX19158) H.S. Young, Tel., RAN (S3428) On 2 September 1943, In September 1943 Krait sailed from Exmouth Gulf headed for the South China Sea through Lombok Strait under the command of Major Lyon. After a 22 day trip it arrived at Subor Island, 11 km from Singapore. Six men in three folding canoes were launched from Krait under cover of darkness, and on the evening of 26 September they entered Singapore Harbour undetected. Using limpet mines the commandos sank or damaged over 37,000 tons of Japanese tankers and freighters. They then rendezvoused with Krait six days later, on 2 October. The Japanese were not aware that Singapore Harbour had been attacked by Allied special forces, but attributed the incident to local saboteurs led by some Europeans. They increased their security and arrested, tortured and killed a number of local residents. Krait arrived back in Exmouth Gulf on 19 October 1943, having been closely approached at one stage by a Japanese patrol boat as they approached Lombok Strait. The patrol vessel steamed alongside for some minutes before breaking off and leaving them to motor on. Their guise had proven successful. Following return to Australia Krait was sailed to Darwin where she was taken over by the Lugger Maintenance Section (LMS) of SRD. Krait continued to be used by the SRD, taking part in Operation Muggler, establishing a series of supply points along the north western coast of Australia to support future operations against occupied Timor. The final operational mission was conducted off the coast of Timor, where it was used in an unsuccessful attempt to evacuate two SRD operatives. However the mission failed, and Krait returned to Darwin, with the task being successfully carried out several days later by another craft. In late 1945, arrangements were made for all SRD vessels to be handed over to the British Borneo Civil Affairs Unit ((BBCAU). Krait made its way to the Headquarters of the SRD at Ambon, where it was by chance present at the surrender of the Japanese forces on Ambon in September 1945. From this period to November 1945 it

was used as transport for intelligence gathering missions to islands in the area including Buru, Aru, Ceram, Banda and Saparua. During this period Krait carried several Japanese prisoners as well as army survey teams and a naval intelligence officer. Krait was then sailed to Labuan where it was handed over to the BBVCAU. Ivan Lyon and SOE organised a subsequent raid codenamed Rimau, and a number of the Jaywick personnel volunteered for this raid, which was once again targeted toward sinking enemy shipping. The operatives were inserted by submarine and as part of the plan seized a local fishing craft to replicate the manner of Krait's success, operating in the area in a craft that's expected to be there and use this to disguise their true purpose. However shortly after in an encounter with Japanese forces their group was exposed and had to abandon the mission. They separated into smaller groups and some were killed. The pickup arrangements put in place were unsuccessful and the remaining survivors were eventually captured and imprisoned, and in the last month of the war they were executed. The history of Krait after the war: Following its use by the BBVCAU, Krait was sold to River Estates, a logging company based on the east coast of Borneo. At around this stage Krait received the engine deckhouse with which it is currently fitted, and the interior bulkheads were removed to create one large hold, where there had been four previously. The hull was painted white, and it was renamed Pedang. After its existence was made known to veterans groups in Australia in the late 1950s, a fundraising campaign was raised to return her to Australia. Krait arrived back in Sydney in 1964, to be maintained and operated for the next 20 years by the Australian Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol. For the next twenty years Krait was used to instruct Boy Scouts and Sea Cadets in the art of seamanship, to participate in rescue duties and assist charities at fundraising activities. It was also used as the backdrop for a number of television shows, such as ABC's Patrol Boat, and in the movie Gallipoli. During this period it was moored at Church Point. Around 1967 a funnel, mainmast, companion ladders and bunks were fitted. In 1972 a further major refit was undertaken. This saw the addition of a docking keel, new stanchions extending from the sawn-off frames, and bulwark planking laid. The engine was extensively overhauled in 1978 with the air start removed. By 1981 the condition of the boat's hull had deteriorated markedly. A fundraising campaign was initiated with the Support of the Sun Herald Newspaper, and a Krait Public Museum Fund and Committee was formed and given tax exempt status to organise the work and represent the boat. Work on the hull was to be conducted at Ballina. During the journey to Ballina, however, the Krait encountered heavy seas, and after a pump failed and water flooded the forward hold, the intervention of the water police was required. The work at Ballina saw sections of the hull (see Identification of Hull Planking Timber - June 2014 - WRT02 /2014) re-built with eucalypt and the bulwark stanchions replaced. The planking was donated by Associated Country Sawmillers. Much of the teak decking that was removed was fashioned into 40 picture frames, which were then sold for \$200 each. The entire cost of the re-build totalled \$170,000 (Silver 1992 p.145). Krait on her arrival in Sydney. Note the semi-circular hatch cover on the foredeck (since removed and stored in the AWM's Mitchell Annex), and the single raised longitudinal foredeck Following the re-planking, Krait travelled to Brisbane to take part in the publicity for the Commonwealth Games. While she was in Brisbane a number of items were apparently stolen, including her compass, navigational charts and a copper snake which had been taken on the Jaywick voyage (Silver 1992 p 147). In December 1982, it returned to Sydney to new moorings at HMAS Penguin, near Balmoral Beach. Between 1962 and 1982 Z Special Unit veterans lobbied frequently for the Memorial to accept Krait for display in Canberra. Even in 1962, however, the Memorial's Board of Management had refused to accept the boat, stating that: It is

obvious that the Krait after 17 years' service in the Islands since the War would bear little similarity to the vessel used in the Singapore raid and would therefore be unacceptable to the War Memorial. This view was reiterated in 1969, when the Board of Trustees further noted that the Memorial could not accept Krait because of its size and the problems associated with conservation and vandalism. In January 1982 however, the AWM Council agreed to accept Krait, provided that certain conditions were met. These were that the Krait Appeal Committee fully restore the vessel, and that all costs associated with its transport to Canberra be met by the Committee, and that a building be provided that was in keeping with the architecture and environment of the War Memorial. The then Director of the AWM, Air Vice Marshal Fleming, subsequently notified the Chairman of the Krait Public Museum Fund Committee that the Memorial would be able to receive the Krait any time after December 1983, when an extension would have been made to the building. The Krait Public Museum Fund Committee then investigated the feasibility of moving the vessel, obtaining a report from Brambles on the subject. Brambles indicated that the vessel could be moved to Canberra on a 12 axle platform trailer, with the wheel house removed to allow clearance under bridges the cost of a special purpose building in Canberra to house the boat was at that stage estimated to be \$750,000. At that stage, the prominence being given to one relatively minor aspect of Australia's wartime history was questioned, and in subsequent discussions which took place over the next three years, the National Capital Development Commission rejected the suggestion that a single purpose building be constructed, instead favouring a multi-purpose building. At the same time, the AWM's conservators recommended against the process of removing the vessel from the water, believing that any consequent shrinkage of planking would impose considerable strain on the corroded iron fastenings. Comparisons in this regard were made with a schooner at the Vancouver Maritime Museum - the St Roch, which was at the time facing a similar problem. In the 30 years subsequent to the AWM's investigation of the St Roch, however, the entire vessel has been stabilised, and it is now the centre point of the Museum. The Council agreed in 1984 accept the Krait, on condition that it remain in a temperate sea water environment, and that it be held in trust with the Sydney Maritime Museum until the ANMM was established. Krait was finally acquired by the Australian War Memorial on 4 December 1985 and in September 1986 the Memorial entered into a 10 year agreement with the newly created Australian National Maritime Museum, with the provision that the ANMM insure, maintain, operate conserve and restore the vessel at their expense. The Krait has been on loan to the ANMM since the expiry of the original loan. Revised loan agreements have included the provision that the annual interest from the Krait Fund be paid to the ANMM as partial assistance towards the Krait's annual maintenance cost. The AWM Council recognised at the time that it was unfeasible to move Krait to Canberra, and in view of this, commissioned a large scale Krait model and a special gallery. In 1987 most of the Volunteer Coastal Patrol material was stripped out below decks, and small additions, such as the cathead beam had been fitted, to bring the vessel into an appearance similar to that which it may have had during the War. Krait has been on display at the museum wharves since the museum opened to the public in 1991. It is currently moored at the marina and pontoon berths of the ANMM. It is kept in running order and operated on special occasions, or put on display for special events at the heritage pontoon. ANMM maintain the vessel in cooperation with AWM. In 2017 a major programme of remedial work was undertaken at Woolwich Marina under Michael Bartley Shipwrights, and much of this work was monitored by the late Warwick Thomson, formerly the ANMM Fleet surveyor. Significant repairs were made to the planking and internal structure, a new deck,

hatches and bulwarks were put on, all to the correct configuration. The research that developed this configuration also brought attention to considerable fitout needed to fully interpret what Krait was like in 1943. Krait returned from Woolwich in excellent condition in March 2018, and from June onwards the fitout work required was undertaken by ANMM Fleet and contractors. On the 26th September 2018 KRAIT was a centrepiece for an event marking the 75th anniversary of the night the folding canoes entered Singapore Harbour. In the longer term it is proposed to house Krait in an out-of-water display in its own permanent structure providing controlled environmental conditions, and extensive interpretation of the vessel for its 9143 raid and other important and significant aspects of its long history.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 21.33 m x 3.35 m x 1.5 m, 35.27 tonnes (70 ft x 11 ft x 4.95 ft, 36 tons)