

MEET THE CREW

of the P.C. Stryker, Jr., Sub Base and Nimitz Silver Dolphin Chapter

May 2000

Biography: Captain Eric L. Barr, Jr.

Captain Eric L. Barr, Jr., was born on 2 May 1912 in New London, CT, to Ellen Isabel Culver and Captain Eric L. Barr, U.S. Navy. Eric Barr, Senior, graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1911 and served as CO of submarine E-1 (SS-24), ex-*Skipjack*, in World War I. E-1 was the smallest submarine to cross the Atlantic under its own power. Eric Barr, Jr. sailed in E-1 out of New London with his father as a boy in 1917 and in H-boats out of Submarine Base, San Pedro, CA, 1919-1922.

Barr graduated from Roosevelt High School in Seattle, Washington, in 1928. He studied post-graduate courses at the San Diego Army-Navy Academy in 1928-1929. In 1929 he served as Cadet (Ordinary Seaman) in the U.S. Merchant Marine in SS *California*, of the Panama Pacific Line.

Barr entered the U.S. Naval Academy on 19 June 1930. While at the Academy he made summer cruises aboard the battleship USS *Wyoming* (BB-32) in 1931 to Europe as a Midshipman 3/c and in 1933 to Funchal Madeira and the U.S. East Coast as a Midshipman 1/c. He graduated and was commissioned as an Ensign, U.S. Navy, on 31 May 1934.

Barr served in USS *Detroit* (CL-8), New London - San Diego, CA, July 1934 - June 1936. He became a "Shellback" in a Fleet Exercise centered on Panama.

Barr served in USS *Cushing* (DD-376) at Bremerton Naval Shipyard, Seattle, WA, -

San Diego, June 1936 - December 1937. He was a "Plank owner". He was promoted to LT(jg) in 1937.

Barr attended Submarine School New London, January - June 1938. The school boats were R-boats.

After graduation, he served aboard S-20 (SS-125) (4 officers) in New London, CT, June - September 1938. S-20 was an experimental submarine, New London and Portsmouth, NH.

While in New London in 1938, Eric Barr, Jr., married Patricia Eleanor Thomas.

Barr served aboard USS *Tarpon* (P-4, SS-175) (five officers), October 1938 - January 1941. In *Tarpon*, Barr qualified in submarines. The ship completed overhaul at Mare Island Naval Shipyard, CA, and joined the seven ship P-Boat Division at Pearl Harbor in November 1938. In November 1939 the Division joined the

Asiatic Fleet and operated out of the Philippine Archipelago. In Spring 1940 the Asiatic Fleet submarines moved up to Tsingtao, China, and then moved back in the Fall. Wives and other dependants were evacuated because of the growing Japanese menace. The Fleet and the submarines cruised the archipelago extensively.

Barr served aboard USS *Pickrel* (P-6, SS-177), January - September 1941, in the Philippines. In these troubled times, *Pickrel* simulated war conditions: the OOD dived from the bridge on aircraft and ship sightings; they made torpedo approaches on shipping. Barr qualified for Command of submarines in September 1941 at the Fleet Anchorage at Tawi-Tawi. He returned to the States on a



passenger ship in a tense time: the ship was in “darken ship” condition and full of evacuees.

Barr served aboard O-3 (SS-64) (three officers), at Submarine Base New London, October - December 1941. O-3 was a school boat which made two trips a day. In November 1941 Barr was promoted to LT. On Sunday, 7 December 1941, Barr was in the Division Office, Submarine Base New London when the news of Pearl Harbor was received. When he received orders the next day to Deep Sea Diving and Salvage School, he - ready to fight the enemy - questioned them as they were obviously cut before the Japanese attack. He was told to “carry out your orders”.

Barr attended Deep Sea Diving and Salvage School at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., January - May 1942. He graduated as a Diver 1/c.

Barr served cfo (in connection with fitting out) as PXO *Haddo* (SS-255), Electric Boat, Groton, CT, June - July 1942. He served as Prospective Executive Officer but the assignment was short-lived. On Sunday morning, 31 July 1942, while witnessing *Gunnel* (SS-253) make a “deep dive” off State Pier, New London, COMSUBLANT’s barge came alongside *Gunnel* as she surfaced and fetched Barr.

COMSUBLANT said, “Meet Captain, *Kingfish*, your new commanding officer.” (This was V.L. “Rebel” Lowrance, later VAdm.) The CO of *Kingfish* responded “You are the Executive Officer. Go home and pack your sea-bag. Be on board 0700 tomorrow morning. Inspect the ship. Report ready for sea and war. Underway 1800 Tuesday 2 August, day after tomorrow. Welcome aboard.”

And so Barr served aboard USS *Kingfish* (SS-234) as Executive Officer and Navigator from August 1942 - May 1943. *Kingfish* sailed through the Panama Canal to



USS *Kingfish* (SS-234)

Pearl Harbor. Barr made *Kingfish*’s first three War Patrols, all successful, out of Pearl Harbor and Midway Island and to Japanese home waters and the East China Sea. Barr was promoted to Lieutenant Commander. In March 1943 *Kingfish* received a severe depth-charging during her 3rd Patrol near the Babuyan Islands (off the northern tip of Formosa / Taiwan). She was knocked to the bottom, 354 feet deep. She was the worst beaten-up submarine to return from patrol as of that date. Mare Island Shipyard had to cut-out and replace the pressure hull over the engine rooms. For the three war patrols in which Barr was XO, *Kingfish* sank eleven ships for a total of 49,400 tons while receiving 400 depth charges.

Barr reported cfo *Bluegill* (SS-242) in June 1943 as Prospective Commanding Officer at Electric Boat, Groton, CT. He served aboard *Bluegill* until October 1945. *Bluegill* was commissioned at the Submarine Base New London on Armistice Day, 11 November 1943. Barr was *Bluegill*’s only WWII CO. In January - February 1944, *Bluegill* transited from New London, CT, to Milne Bay, New Guinea, through a hurricane, Key West, Panama, and the Galapagos Islands. On 27 April 1944, during his first war patrol and his first attack as CO, Barr sank the Imperial Japanese Navy cruiser *Yubari*.

Let the Editor quote Theodore Roscoe: “While the destroyer hunt was getting under way, the Imperial Navy lost to submarine torpedoes a man-of-war of another class. This was a vessel rated as a light cruiser (CL) - the third of her ilk

to be downed by a submarine that year.

“One April day the submarine *Bluegill* was patrolling in the vicinity of the Sonsorol Islands, southwest of Palau (Caroline Group, north of Western New Guinea, east of Mindanao, Philippine Islands). It was *Bluegill*’s maiden patrol, and the first command patrol of her captain, Lieutenant Commander E. L. Barr, Jr.

“*Bluegill* was after big game. A member of Commodore Fife’s Brisbane Force, she was reconnoitering Sonsorol and keeping her periscope peeled for enemy shipping in the neighborhood. Located about midway between Palau and Morotai, the Sonsorol group was suspected of harboring Japanese naval units. *Bluegill*’s investigation corroborated the suspicions.

“April 27 [1944] was the submarine’s testing day. On that date she sighted a cruiser and a destroyer prowling off the tiny island like two carnivores against a patch of jungle. The cruiser disappeared behind the island. Barr drove *Bluegill* forward to attack the destroyer.

“While the submarine was making the approach, the cruiser suddenly reappeared from behind the island, moving at top speed. Barr managed a quick-change set-up on the T.D.C. [Torpedo Data Computer], swung to the firing course, estimated the time to a fraction, and fired six torpedoes. He observed a smashing hit in the cruiser’s fire room - a blast of smoke and flame - heard two more timed explosions as *Bluegill* burrowed under.

“So *Bluegill* beat the DD priority by 1,000 tons. Her cruiser victim, the only warship of its class, was the Imperial Navy’s *Yubari*. Sunk off Sonsorol, the light cruiser *Yubari* was no better than a dead goldfish at the bottom of the Emperor’s fishpond. Death knows no class.”

Barr and *Bluegill* made six war patrols out of Brisbane / Fremantle, Australia, all successful but the 4th (no target). During *Bluegill*’s 3rd patrol Barr was promoted to Commander. Barr was a wolf-pack commander on *Bluegill*’s 3rd patrol (*Bluegill* and *Angler*), 4th patrol (*Bluegill*, *Bream*, and *Barbel*), and 5th patrol (*Bluegill*, *Bashaw*, and *Croaker*). *Bluegill*’s 5th and 6th patrols consisted of Life Guard duty and “seek out and destroy” missions. On 29 May 1945, *Bluegill*’s 6th patrol, Barr and *Bluegill* captured Bluegill Island (Pratas Reef), South China Sea. Under Barr’s command *Bluegill* sank 13 ships for 51,059 tons, damaged four more for 12,000 tons, and received 369 depth charges. Barr is ranked 17th of 465 WWII submarine skippers for the number of ships sunk.²

“Off northwest Mindoro, *Bluegill* (Commander E.L. Barr, Jr.) [*Bluegill*’s 3rd patrol] held the undersea line. On October 18 [1944] she held it to the extent of one of the best patrol scores in the area. [Entering] into her bailiwick was [a large troop convoy bound for Leyte, PI] the sort . . . she had been looking for. Barr sent . . . the torpedoes boring in. Down went the transport *Arabia Maru*, 9,480 tons. Down went *Chinzei Maru*, 1,999 tons. Down went *Hakushika Maru*, passenger-cargoman, 8,150 tons. Cost to the enemy’s Philippine supply line: 19,629 tons.”³

“In an adjacent area [to Hué, Indo-China] *Bluegill* (Commander Eric Barr) [*Bluegill*’s 5th patrol] sank *Honan Maru* on March 28th [1945]. These were the last big tanker-sinkings scored by submarines in the Pacific War.”⁴

On 6 June 1945 *Bluegill* left the war zone for overhaul at Bethlehem Steel, Hunters Point, San Francisco. VJ Day, 15 August, found *Bluegill* still in overhaul. She completed overhaul

in October 1945 and transited to Mare Island for moth-balling and the Reserve Fleet.

Barr served as Electrical Officer for moth-balling all submarines Pacific at Mare Island Naval Shipyard. He retired as a Captain, US Navy, on 1 March 1947. He had been awarded two Navy Crosses (1st and 3rd *Bluegill* patrols), two Silver Stars (one for *Kingfish* patrols 1-3 and one for the 2nd *Bluegill* patrol), the Bronze Star (5th *Bluegill* patrol), eight Submarine Combat Awards, (three aboard *Kingfish* and five aboard *Bluegill*), the Navy Commendation Medal (6th *Bluegill* patrol), the Navy Unit Commendation (1st and 3rd *Bluegill* patrols), and the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation.

After Navy retirement, Barr worked for 17½ years at Electric Boat in Groton, CT, and General Dynamics in New York, NY, from February 1947 - August 1964.

Barr then worked at a number of different jobs between June 1964 - December 1982.

- June 1964 - November 1966, Rebikoff Oceanics, Inc., a subsidiary of Chicago Bridge & Iron Co., in Chicago and Ft. Lauderdale, FL. He participated in the Navy's *Sea Lab I* off Bermuda and *Sea Lab II* off La Jolla, CA.
- November - December 1966, Standard Oil of New Jersey (later EXXON) in New York, NY, and at Creole Petroleum in Venezuela.
- December 1966 - June 1970, Esso Standard Eastern in Saigon, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Singapore, Manila, and Hong Kong.
- August 1971 - February 1972,



Captain Eric Barr, Jr., July 1999

Stanwick International, Inc., Tehran and Fleet Base Bandar Abbas, Iran. Fleet maintenance and repair for the Iranian Navy.

- October 1974 - May 1977, Computer Sciences Corporation, Tehran, Iran. He managed Iranian Navy systems and developed a Navy Master Plan. He also managed Iranian Ministry of Commerce programs.
- June 1977 - February 1979, Bell Helicopter International Logistics Division in Tehran, Iran, systems engineer. He was evacuated home during the Iranian revolution.
- April 1980 - July 1981, Negev Airbase Constructors at Ovda Airbase, Israel.
- July 1981 - May 1982, Management Support Associates (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) at Ramon Airbase, Beersheva, Israel.
- October - December 1982, Moaibed Crescent Hamco, Ltd. in Dammam/Jubail, Saudi Arabia.

Barr has lived continuously in San Antonio since December 1982. His beloved wife of 46 years died of cancer in February 1984. They have three children, Patricia Eleanor Barr, Erica Anne Graham, and Nina Ellen Willing.

Barr married Najmieh Zarghani-Shiraz, his lovely bride of 13 years, in San Antonio 27 September 1986.

¹ Roscoe, Theodore, *United States Submarine Operations in World War II*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1949, p. 375.

² Blair, Clay, Jr., *Silent Victory: U.S. Submarine War Against Japan*. New York, NY: Bantam Books edition, 1976, pp. 883 and 984.

³ Roscoe, p. 412

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 454