

Jap Island Captured By Sub Bluegill Now At M. I.

To find "Bluegill Island" you need a new map and a large scale map. A large scale map, because "Bluegill" is only a mile and a half square, in the Karimata Straits between Borneo and Malaya. A new map because "Bluegill," formerly Pratas Island, has been a United States possession only since May 29, 1945—when officers and men of the

submarine Bluegill stormed ashore and raised the national ensign on a Japanese flagpole, to "Colors" sounded on two Jap bugles.

Bluegill Island thus became the only Jap territory to be captured by the action of a single submarine alone, and at that time it marked the farthest westward advance of any United States forces.

Pratas had been used by the Japs as a weather and radio station; and by our submarines, on the way home to Australia from Philippine patrols, for target practice. They bombarded Pratas repeatedly — as consolation for a fruitless patrol or in high spirits as the result of a successful one.

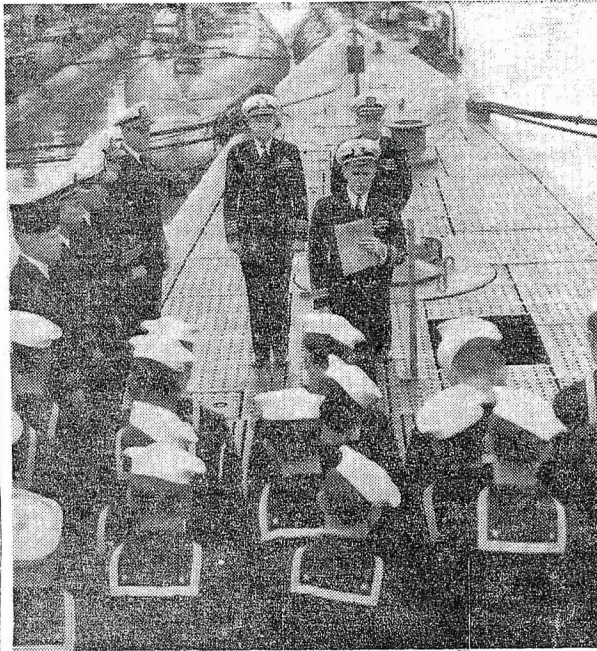
Under this annoying periodic fire the Jap garrison fled, and ten days later, when Bluegill's men stormed ashore in their rubber fold boat, not a Jap could be found. Six buildings were found, including a radio shack, all badly damaged by bombardment; a light tower and a radio tower remained. Comdr. Eric L. Barr Jr., the Bluegill's commanding officer, in his report, writes an interesting description of the landing party's findings:

"All buildings had been well

constructed of concrete, but were now damaged beyond repair. Adjacent to the pump building was a tennis court. At the southwest edge of the clearing was a pigsty, and around the periphery of the settlement were boxes for weather recording equipment. At the north edge of the opening were two wooden guns guarded by two stuffed soldiers and an arch with a plaque bearing some Jap writing. Under this a path lined with inverted saki bottles led to a small shrine which had two small adjacent doors, like those of a cupboard, opening out to the path. Opening the doors revealed offerings of bread fruit, melon, a money box, and two bottles of water from which protruded two green plants. The plants and fruit were still green which indicated recent occupancy estimated from 10 to 14 days.

"Our investigation completed, we assembled around the flag pole, and at 1022 on May 29, 1945, a handful of soldiers and sailors stood at solemn attention while the Stars and Stripes slowly ascended the flag pole and two captured Jap bugles blared forth. The land they now stood on was U. S. territory! A plaque was then affixed to the base of the pole certifying the capture of the island by the crew of the USS Bluegill."

The capture of Bluegill Island marked a climax to the fighting career of the submarine. In previous patrols she had sunk 13 ships, including a Japanese cruiser, and damaged four more, totaling 63,059 tons. Now in command of Lt. Comdr. Edwin G. Weed, USN, Belvedere, Calif., she has joined the Inactive Fleet at Mare Island Naval Shipyard.



THE U.S.S. BLUEGILL, submarine which captured a Japanese Reserve Fleet at Mare Island Naval Shipyard. (Official U.S. Navy Photo)