



Submarine commander never lost a man

By Elaine Ayala- Express-News
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As highly decorated as retired Navy Capt. Eric L. Barr Jr. was during World War II, the submarine commander always said his greatest accomplishment was never losing a man.

The longtime San Antonian died Monday. He was 98.

"He was a perfect gentleman," said Najmieh Barr, his wife of 24 years. "He had a lot of integrity and honesty, the core things he learned at the Naval Academy."

They were values he also learned at home from his father, Eric Barr Sr., who graduated from the same prestigious school in 1911.

Barr, the son, followed in 1934, serving on the USS Detroit, USS Cushing, the experimental sub S-20, the USS Tarpon and the USS Pickerel.

Barr attended submarine school in 1938, out of his native New London, where he met his first wife, the late Patricia Eleanor Thomas. The couple had three daughters.

Qualifying for command of submarines in 1941, Barr served aboard the USS Kingfish as an executive officer in 1942 and was promoted to lieutenant commander. That submarine sank 11 Japanese ships and received 400 depth charges.

But it was his service on the USS Bluegill, beginning in 1943, that Barr regarded with most pride. On April 27, 1944, it sank the Japanese Navy cruiser Yuhari, according to the USS Bluegill website. It was the sub's maiden patrol.

Barr is ranked 17th of 465 WWI submarine skippers for the number of ships sunk the website states.

Barr retired as a captain in 1947 and received two Navy Crosses, two Silver Stars, a Bronze Star and eight submarine combat awards, among many others.

Afterward, he enjoyed several careers in the oil and defense industries.

He worked for the Electric Boat Co., General Dynamics, Rebikoff Oceanics, Standard Oil of New Jersey and Ecco Standard Eastern in Saigon, Manila and Hong Kong.

Barr worked in Tehran, helping the Iranian Navy repair its fleet, and for Bell Helicopter, also in Iran. He was evacuated during its revolution in 1979. He worked in Israel and Saudi Arabia as well.

"If anyone wanted to know where the next hot spot was," said his daughter Patricia Barr Eberly of San Antonio, "it was where Eric was."

An engineer by training, Barr was president of the American Society for Industrial Security when George H.W. Bush was director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Eberly said. The two interacted.

Another daughter, Nina Barr Wiling, said, "Another piece of history has died with him."

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