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French were equally well served by their military attache in Berlin; however, his reports were ignored. The reverses suffered by the British at the start of the Boer War (1899) can be attributed to their

failure to heed the reports of their military observer in the Transvaal who, as early as 1896, warned of Boer preparations for war and of the weakness of British forces in South Africa.

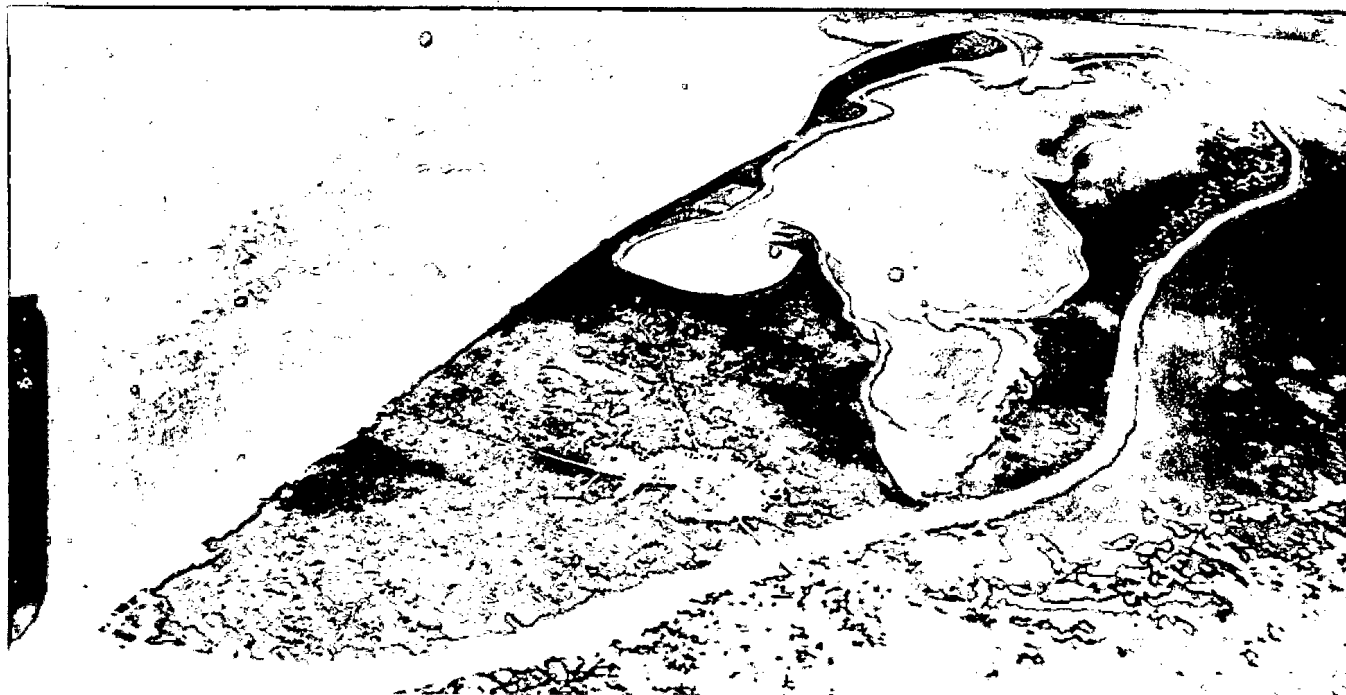
Disputed Islands in the South China Sea: Part II

Pratas

PRATAS ISLAND

Pratas is a single, isolated island at 20-42N, 116-43E. A line drawn on the map from Pratas to Hong Kong to Swatow and back to Pratas forms a nearly equilateral triangle with sides about 170 nautical miles long. About 220 nautical miles to the northeast is the Chinese Nationalist port and naval base at Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

Pratas Reef is a great circular reef about 13 miles in diameter, the eastern two-thirds of which dries at low water forming a great horseshoe. Off the open western end of this horseshoe lies Pratas Island, 1½ miles long, ½ mile wide, and 40 feet high at the treetops. The western two-thirds of the island is composed of two long, narrow arms which nearly meet at the end and enclose a shallow lagoon 1 mile long. A maximum of two tons of



Pratas Island, looking west.

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the officers sent especially for the maneuvers have an opportunity of seeing the practical exercises of the troops in camp, of observing the appearance of the men, their arms, equipments, etc. and at once returning to their own countries to explain in person the result of their observations and to corroborate, modify, or amplify the report of the military attaches.

At the outbreak of war extra officers (of friendly nations) are usually sent to the army in the field for the express purpose of witnessing the campaign. Thus in the recent war there were four German, one American, and three Austrian officers with the Russian Army, five or six English officers and one American with the Turkish.

MILITARY OBSERVERS

The practice of attaching officers of friendly nations to the staffs of belligerent armies in the field appears to have originated during the renaissance of military art which occurred in the seventeenth century.⁹ This source of information complemented the collection activity of diplomatic and attache personnel, and developed more or less independently until the nineteenth century. From this period on, although remaining a function essentially distinct from that of the attache, attaches occasionally served as observers and, conversely, observers were frequently accorded the title of attache. This latter practice was probably adopted in order to afford the observer additional prestige and diplomatic immunity. Although observers in this category were technically attached to the appropriate embassy or legation, they were actually assigned to the staff of a field commander and functioned independently of the diplomatic mission.

Great Britain and France sent military and naval observers to the United States during the Civil War. This was the first

⁹Cardinal Richelieu was perhaps one of the first statesmen to employ this means of obtaining military information.

time that foreign powers had sent officers to this country to learn rather than to instruct or assist. The foreign officers who had volunteered and served under General Washington during the Revolutionary War had been selected largely on the basis of their value as professional soldiers, and were members of our armed forces rather than neutral observers. However, those who later returned to their native country undoubtedly submitted reports regarding their American experiences.

In 1861 the heir apparent to the French throne, Louis Philippe Albert d'Orleans, Comte de Paris and his brother, the Duc de Chartres, served as volunteers in the Union Army "in order to gain a practical knowledge of military affairs...." They were for a time attached to the staff of Gen. George B. McClellan. Later, in 1864, France sent two army officers to General Grant's staff as observers.

Lt. Col. Garnet J. Wolseley of the British Army, later famous for his campaigns in Africa, visited the Confederate Army in 1861 where he met General Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson, and observed some of the early operations of the war.

The related practice of sending officers to witness the peacetime maneuvers and demonstrations of foreign armies appears to have come into use as a result of the invitational Prussian Army reviews and maneuvers inaugurated by Frederick II during the eighteenth century. These maneuvers were at first attended by officers especially selected for the occasion, and later by attaches as well.

The military successes and failures of the latter part of the nineteenth century amply demonstrated the utility of attaches and observers. Although not always heeded, their reports provided invaluable information in times of crisis. Prussia's success in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 was largely due to the accuracy and completeness of the information furnished by her attaches and observers, and the same thorough reporting contributed materially to her victory over the French 4 years later. As noted previously the

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Spratly Island, named for a British whaling captain, has given its name to the whole group in spite of its intrinsic insignificance. The "poles" in the upper right are the trunks of palm trees which were topped sometime after 1941.

fresh water per day can be produced from wells on the island, and the wells become brackish if overused.

The history of Pratas Island is generally obscure. Although fishermen from China, Taiwan, and Japan have used the island for centuries as a place to dry nets and fish, collect seaweed, and secure fresh water no one permanently occupied the island prior to the twentieth century, and no nation laid formal claim to it. The Japanese began mining phosphorite rock and guano there in 1907.

In 1909 the Japanese guano collector had a brush with investigating Chinese Government officials and, perhaps under pressure, sold out for 160,000 Canton silver dollars. By this time about 10,000 tons of phosphates had been mined and shipped to Japan. The following year the Chinese raised their flag on Pratas and the island was placed under the administration of the government of Kwangtung Province. In 1926 the Chinese Navy established a weather station there which was provided with radio communications.

Within 2 months of the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War (7 July 1937) the Japanese Navy seized Pratas Island. Twenty-nine members of the staff were captured and taken to Taiwan. According to reports from survivors they were ill-fed and so

cruelly interrogated that two died. The survivors were set adrift in 2 demasted fishing boats and drifted for 5 days before reaching Swatow and freedom.

During the latter part of World War II, Pratas Island received some attention from United States air and naval forces. The Action Report of Task Group 38.5 for January 1945 reads: "During the afternoon of 15 January, in completely closed in weather, 8 VTN and 4 VFN found and destroyed the (presumed) radio and weather station on Pratas Island. One lone OSCAR under camouflage netting was burned near an apparent grass emergency strip."

In May 1945 USS BLUEGILL reconnoitered the island and found it deserted. A shore party destroyed the light tower on the eastern tip of the island, 2,000 gallons of fuel oil, and the two food and ammunition dumps. The report of SubDiv 182 added that this was "the westernmost advance of US forces to date."

Between 2 October 1946 and 4 February 1947 the navy of the Republic of China rehabilitated the weather and radio station. At present 101 Nationalist personnel are on the island, including about 60 marine security forces. The island is under the Maritime Affairs Department of the navy and the garrison com-

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Southwest Island of North Danger Reef is typical of the lesser islands in the Spratlys. Nearby Northeast Island is about the same size, treeless but brush-covered.

mander is concurrently the director of the Pratas Island administration. The navy provides logistic support twice a year, in the spring and fall.

Both the Nationalists and the Communists claim the island, but no Communist authority has ever set foot there. Since Pratas is over 200 miles from the nearest other Nationalist territory and only about 130 miles from the Communist-held mainland, it must be considered vulnerable to Communist attack.

THE SPRATLY ISLANDS

In the singular, Spratly (or on some charts: "Spratley" or "Storm Island") is a single, small islet of coral and sand not over 8 feet high and 500 yards long located at 8-38N, 111-54E. In the plural, the term Spratly Islands has had various and ill-defined usage. In this article the rather sweeping definition offered by the Japanese in issuing their claim to the islands, 31 March 1939, will be used. This applied the term "Spratlys" to all the islands within a 70,000-square-mile area lying between 7-00 and 12-00N. and 111-30 and 117-00E. Over half of this area is taken up by the largely uncharted area of scattered reefs and shoals known as "the dangerous ground."

It is a remarkable fact that these islands, which at least six nations have

troubled to claim, have a total land area of less than 1 square mile divided among about a dozen widely scattered islands.

Like Pratas and the Paracels, the Spratlys have been visited by native fishermen for centuries, but the first formal claim to them dates from 1864. A British memorandum of reply to the U.S. Ambassador in London, dated 12 October 1955, reads in part:

Two of the islets, Spratly and Amboina Cay, were visited in 1864 by Her Majesty's ship RIFLEMAN of the Royal Navy, and on October 25, 1877, a license was granted by Her Majesty's Government to a British subject and a United States citizen to hoist the British flag on these two islands and to work them for guano. These rights were renewed in 1889 by the Crown to the Central Borneo Company. Her Majesty's Government have never acknowledged the various claims that have been made since this date by other countries. With regard to other islands listed within this group, the view of Her Majesty's Government had been that, with one possible exception, all except the two already mentioned are reef and shoals, some of them being listed as covered at all states of the tide, and therefore uninhabitable and incapable of appropriation and occupation.

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The last sentence quoted from the British memorandum appears to reflect some ignorance of the geography of the area. There are actually about eight other islands which are capable of appropriation and possible occupation. Itu Aba, in particular, was used by the Japanese in World War II.

Southwest Cay of North Danger Reef and Thitu Island have water wells. Nam-yit and Loaita are probably habitable and Northeast Cay of North Danger Reef, Sand Cay, and West York may be marginally habitable.

According to the Communist Chinese press, the German Government set out to survey the islands late in the nineteenth century but withdrew upon the protest of the Chinese Government. The same source states that in 1907 the Chinese Government dispatched "high military personnel to survey them and gave permission for private bodies to reclaim the islands." In 1930 France made a general claim that the Spratly Islands were a part of the French Union,

and in 1933 the French "Journal Officiel" recorded a series of formal claims to individual islands which had been visited by French naval units between 7 and 13 April 1933. The dispatch boats ASTRO-LABE and ALERT hoisted the French flag and buried bottles containing the announcement of the French claims on each of the six islands they visited: Spratly, Aboyna, Itu Aba, Deux-Iles Group (North Danger Reef), Loaita, and Thitu. They found Chinese on four of the islands apparently "living happily in the midst of banana and coconut trees, sweet potato fields, and turtles."

Japanese civilians, however, had been active in the Spratlys long before this. In November 1918 the Rasa Shima Phosphate Corp. sent out exploratory expeditions that found deposits on several of the islands, and in 1925 the mining of guano and phosphate was begun. The strange pattern of holes on Spratly Island is believed to be the result of geological exploration and may date from this period. The earliest known aerial photographs



Ruins of Japanese-built facilities on the east end of Itu Aba.

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(1941) as well as recent ones show these holes.

Small-scale operations continued on the islands except for the depression years of 1931-36, the period during which the French made their landings and voiced their claims. The phosphate and guano interests tried repeatedly to get the Japanese Government to take over the islands. Their last attempt, which coincided with Japanese plans for expansion into South-east Asia, was successful. In March 1939 the Japanese announced annexation "of the seven Spratly Islands" and placed them under the Governor General of Taiwan. On 20 April a spokesman of the Japanese Imperial Navy said:

The annexation has nothing to do with naval operations. The islands have been included in Japanese possessions formally only because Japanese go there for guano. At present there is no indication of making use of the islands from naval viewpoints. They contain no good harbors. That is why other powers have not annexed them before now (sic) and we have found no place suitable for a seaplane base.

France protested promptly and ineffectively and subsequently offered to arbitrate the question, which the Japanese refused to do.

A surveying party sent by the Japanese to the Spratlys selected Itu Aba as the most usable of the islands. By late 1941 they had completed a substantial amount of construction on that island including about 40 buildings, several excavations, three to five radio towers, two possible pipelines, a pattern of roads, and a 441-foot pier. Also observed at that time was a 21- by 500-foot excavation presumably designed for some sort of underground storage. In 1941 and 1942 the Japanese apparently used Itu Aba as an advanced fuel depot as well as a weather and radio

station. It became less important as the war moved on to other areas, but during the early stages it was of some value to the Japanese in their advance into South-east Asia.

On 1 January 1945 the submarine USS HOE bombarded Itu Aba and set fire to buildings on the north end of the island. In May, planes of the 13th Air Force attacked the installations.

After World War II the Chinese Nationalists occupied the islands. They had 127 navy personnel there in 1948, probably stationed on Itu Aba Island. They withdrew about the same time that their Paracels outpost was abandoned, probably in April 1950. On 17 May of the same year, President Quirino of the Philippines at a press conference declared that the Spratlys should belong to the Philippines. This called forth a blast from the Chinese Communists in the following strident tones:

...this preposterous propaganda of the Philippine Government in regard to Chinese territory is clearly the product of the instructions of the U.S. Government. Philippine provocateurs and their American backers must abandon their adventurous scheme or else it will of necessity lead to serious consequences.

So far as is known, since 1950 all the Spratly Islands have been unoccupied except by transient fishermen and possibly by occasional smugglers.

The Japanese claim having been renounced by the Treaty of Peace, sovereignty over these little islands is now claimed by Communist China, Nationalist China, France, Vietnam, Great Britain, the Philippines, and possibly by the Viet Minh. It remains to be seen which of these powers will be the first to attempt to secure its claim by actual occupation.