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# THE GALÁPAGOS

## Pacific Guardians of the Panama Canal

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THROUGHOUT diplomatic and naval records of the United States is found scattered evidence of efforts made by farseeing national leaders to insure outposts in the West Indies and Caribbean as bases for the protection of the Isthmus of Panama. This was accomplished in the early days of our history by cordial agreements with the friendly nations having possessions in the Caribbean. Later, the popularity of our "Manifest Destiny" policy was instrumental in obtaining for the United States permanent bases in that area.

The lessons learned from time to time gave conclusive proof of the value of this protection for our foreign and intercoastal trade. For instance, during the Civil War there were times when few ships could be spared by the Navy Department to convoy and protect our merchant ships carrying on the very profitable trade between the east coast and California. As a result, this shipping came to a standstill at times, and the Navy Department was deluged with requests and even demands from the most influential shippers for adequate protection. Later, when the Confederate commerce destroyers were dispersed and more ships were available for convoy duty, this trade resumed its normal volume. Had the Union forces been able to operate from permanent bases in the Caribbean there would have been little interruption in this trade.

The Pacific side of the Isthmus has, until the recent world conflict, presented an entirely different picture. At no time have the United Nations had a potential enemy to be feared in the Pacific. Now, however,

there is a real threat in the Pacific and the Panama Canal is an important objective of the enemy. Destruction of the Canal would undoubtedly hamper our operations more than any other move by an enemy.

In view of the capabilities of modern weapons of warfare it is doubly important that an outlying base on the Pacific side of the Canal be made available for hemisphere defense. Bases established on the west coast of Central America and Mexico with perhaps secondary bases on one or more of the outlying Mexican Islands would serve for protection from the northward and westward. The Galápagos Islands, located approximately 800 miles southwest of the Panama Canal and 600 miles west of the South American coast, are strategically an ideal location for an advanced base. The purpose of this paper is to reveal in more or less detail the practical possibilities of these islands as a naval base.

The Galápagos group roughly covers an area 135 miles square. In this area there are five of the larger islands, most of which offer anchorages and two or three of which offer possible locations for naval bases. The possibilities of each of the larger islands will be discussed individually.

*San Cristobal Island (Chatham Island).*—This easternmost island of the group is practically barren on the northern and northeastern sides. Wreck Bay, although quite small, affords excellent anchorage for small craft. What might be called the seat of the Island government is located here. A detachment of Ecuadorian soldiers (about 25) is stationed here. The commanding officer of this detachment acts

as the commandante of the port of Wreck Bay and of the islands as a whole. A doctor is stationed here but late in 1940 there were no hospital facilities and very little medical equipment. A small dock extends from shore from which stores are handled from dugouts or skiffs. The bottom here is lava rock and is an excellent foundation for the construction of a larger dock. A road leads from this bay to Progreso, a small settlement about 4 miles up in the hills from the dock. The terrain of the land around this settlement affords sufficient room for a large landing field. Fresh water is in abundance the year round and could be easily piped to barracks, hangars, etc. Fresh fruits (most of which grow wild), vegetables, and melons grow here in abundance. The climate is particularly healthful and pleasant. Being at an altitude of several hundred feet and well drained, the location is free from the swarms of mosquitoes, flies, and insects that infest some of the lower damp locations in the islands. Radio reception at Progreso is remarkably good. However, for the purpose of convenience the present government radio station is located at Wreck Bay.

H. O. 174 gives excellent directions for entering Wreck Bay. It might be added that Dalrymple Rock can be passed very close as 25 fathoms has been sounded completely around it within 50 or 75 yards. Between Terrapin Road and Wreck Bay there are several anchorages for small craft. A British cruiser of the *Achilles* type anchored 2 miles northwest of Wreck Bay in 1940, while the crew went ashore and loaded skiffs with avocados, limes, etc. A series of many astronomical observations taken over a period of two years indicates that the area between Kicker Rock and Hobbs Reef is very poorly charted (H. O. 1798 and 1801) and for that reason bearings on the shore, using these charts, have little value. There is nothing particularly inviting to Freshwater Bay, on the south

side of the island, as an anchorage except the proximity of fresh water.

*Santa Maria Island (Floreana Island).*— Santa Maria Island lying approximately 50 miles to the southwest of San Cristobal Island offers, on the north and western sides, beach spaces and landing areas suitable for an aviation base. The shelving beaches at Black Beach Road and at Postoffice Bay are suitable for the construction of seaplane ramps, and the level ground adjacent to these beaches is quite sufficient for the construction of landing fields. Fresh water is in abundance a short distance back from the beaches and could be readily piped down. Proper drainage of the fresh water sloughs near by would rid the region of the hordes of mosquitoes which now infest the place. Fresh fruits and vegetables have been successfully grown wherever flat ground prevails. Various parties have attempted settlements a short distance inland from Postoffice Bay and Black Beach Road and very productive truck gardens were established. Internal strife between these parties eventually was the cause for their evacuation. However, the headquarters sites for these parties were very well located and now present an excellent location for barracks, radio station, etc. The Ecuadorian government usually has two or more soldiers established in a camp near Postoffice Bay. They were originally stationed there in an attempt to keep peace between two factions of settlers, that of Dr. Richter and his wife and that of the notorious German Baroness Von Wagoner, who had illusions of being Queen of the Islands. At Postoffice Bay there is a staunchly built barrel mounted on a heavy post. This is the original location of the whaling vessels' mailbox. The barrel has been often renewed or reconditioned by various scientific or naval expeditions, some of which have mounted name plates on the post. Usually the post is whitewashed and makes an excellent mark for approaching Postoffice Bay.

*Santa Cruz Island (Indefatigable Island).*—Santa Cruz Island offers little in the line of a location for a base except at Academy Bay. Here may be found good anchorage for small craft with considerable flat ground behind the beach. The bay might prove of value as a protective anchorage for small craft during a prolonged period of northerly swells. The east and north sides of this island offer nothing in the way of anchorages. However, small anchorages may be found on the western side. A Danish family has been established for several years on this island and shortly after the German invasion of Norway some young Norwegian college boys established themselves here. There is usually a camp of two soldiers on the island. Fruits and vegetables thrive wherever they are planted on the southern side of the island.

*San Salvador Island (James Island).*—James Bay on the western side of this island offers perhaps the best location for an aviation base. The anchorage is excellent for small craft or seaplanes. The sloping beach could be made over into seaplane ramps with very little work and there are several locations on the low table land adjacent to the beach where large landing fields could be constructed with little effort. In fact there are flat level lava flows upon which planes could land now without any improvement. Excellent fresh water flows from springs a short distance back in the hills. There is an abundance of flat tillable soil near by. Some distance back in the hills there is located a dry salt lake, where salt in a very pure state can be mined. The Norwegian lads previously mentioned were engaged in bringing salt down to James Bay for the purpose of salting fish in late 1940. Wild goats and burros infest this island. These animals were evidently domestic animals abandoned here. With no predatory beasts to diminish their numbers, both the goats and the burros have multiplied into large numbers. They are, however, very timid and wild and are

even difficult to shoot with a high-powered rifle. Occasionally passing fishermen or the soldiers encamped on the island will set traps for these animals to obtain their hides. Wild doves and birds of many descriptions are found in the thickets and groves.

*Isabella Island (Albemarle Island).*—This island, although it is the largest of the group, offers nothing in the way of a base location. There are several anchorages but the contour of the land in the immediate vicinity of these locations and the lack of fresh water preclude the establishment of bases. Both the eastern and northwestern coasts of this island are remarkable for the extreme depths of water found close to shore; from 200 to 1,000 fathoms within a quarter of a mile from the beach.

Cartago Bay is perhaps the best anchorage, being quite large and having a large area of good holding ground. Heavy swells prevail here at times, though, and it is a rather uncomfortable anchorage. Anchorage may be made between the projecting fingers of Albemarle Reef on the northern tip of the island but none but the most experienced and confident local pilots would dare to use this anchorage.

A very small but excellent anchorage is located in a well-protected cove about 3 miles southeast of Cape Berkeley, the northwestern tip of Albemarle Island. Here in from 7 to 18 fathoms, depending on the proximity of the beach, one may anchor fully protected from all winds and seas. The anchorage is very small and not more than one vessel the size of a destroyer could anchor here. This anchorage is remarkable for the complete blanketing of radio transmissions. Countless efforts have been made to transmit radio signals from this location on several frequencies but to no avail. The rest of Banks Bay, except for this cove, offers nothing in the way of anchorages, the water dropping rapidly to over 1,000 fathoms a short distance from the shore line.

Several of the smaller islands and rocks offer at best only temporary anchorages, but most of them are dangerous to approach because of the extreme depth of water so close to the shore line and anchorages should not be attempted except by well-experienced local pilots.

Bases established in this group of islands for either surface or air patrols would extend the patrol area of the present Canal Zone based craft by a considerable distance. At the same time their distance from the Canal Zone would offer no peculiar difficulties in keeping the bases supplied with stores and fuel. The healthful year-round climate of the Galápagos, so unusual as compared to other tropical bases, is a decided asset as is the fact that storms and hurricanes are unknown there. The lack of shallow water for operating areas is decidedly a detriment to their use as a submarine base, but there is no reason why submarines could not operate from there on patrol lines.

From casual conversations with various Ecuadorean army officers, government officials, and civilians it appears that there is a general feeling of good will among the people, or at worst, a feeling of indiffer-

ence toward the prospect of the United Nations using the islands as an advanced base. There is a decided anti-Axis attitude among the people. This is partly an aftermath of the resentment the Islanders and the Ecuadorean government had against the German government for using the islands as a base for raiders during the last war.

The islands could be developed into a very productive region once modern and permanent settlements were established and reliable communication with the mainland ports begun. The salt mines alone on San Salvador Island offer a much desired product on the coast. Perhaps in no place in the Eastern Pacific is there such an abundance of fish. Here, close to the great shipping lanes of the world, could be established a tremendous fish canning industry. These assets of the government of Ecuador could be quickly developed in times of peace.

There is no doubt that this potential Helgoland of the Gulf of Panama has been appraised by the pro-Axis powers. Now is the time for the governments concerned to act and secure a most strategical outlying base for the protection of the Canal.

