

PANAMA IN WORLD WAR 2 – WHAT HAPPENED WHEN

1942

I thought that, as a change from more thematic pieces, it might be interesting to compile something looking at what happened each year.

We will start with some things general in nature, and then look at things linked to specific dates.

1942 was arguably the busiest year for the Caribbean Defense Command and its assigned area of responsibility as an active theatre of war. Although defence of the Canal remained the top priority for the Command, the need to protect both military and commercial shipping became a major concern around this time.

In some ways, this first full year of the war, from an American perspective, was the one with the greatest threats, real and imagined, with the peak of the U-boat campaign in the Caribbean being the greatest direct effect that the war would have on Panama and the Canal Zone. However, no sooner had the US military finally received formal agreement for the use of the many necessary bases outside the Canal Zone, which would only come into full effect from May 1943, than the tide of the war began to change, following the battles of Stalingrad and El Alamein, Operation Torch and Midway. In fact, the following year would see a cap being placed on troop numbers in Panama, with soldiers being redeployed to more active theatres.

After several organisational changes and the establishment of the USAAF in 1942, the Sixth Air Force became the controlling Air Force command authority for USAAF activities in the Caribbean, as well as in Central and South America.

In many ways, the biggest news for Panama in 1942 was the signing of the Defense Sites Agreement in May, accompanied by a parallel exchange of notes in Washington¹. This was

¹ The Twelve-Point Agreement of 1942, an understanding concerning the settlement of 12 outstanding problems in the relations between the two countries:
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v09/d467>

probably helped by President Arias Madrid having been deposed after he left Panama to visit Cuba in October 1941.

Officially coming into force in 1943, the Defense Sites Agreement allowed the lease of what eventually became a total of 134 sites outside the Canal Zone to be used for the protection of the Canal, with the occupation of the sites to end one year after the end of the war². Superseding informal arrangements, the agreements provided for a new, simpler procedure for the US to acquire defence sites outside the Canal Zone³.

While most attention focussed on Army activity outside the Canal Zone itself, 1942 also saw work started on a second and third graving dock at Balboa, a bombproof command centre at Quarry Heights, additional housing in the Naval District headquarters area, additional frame warehouses at the supply depot, two new marine railways, adjacent to the existing drydock at Cristobal, enlarged ammunition depots at Coco Solo and Balboa, as well as enlarging the facilities at the Navy's Coco Solo submarine base and air station and the Balboa operating base.⁴

The height of the U-boat campaign in the Caribbean occurred between February and August 1942, with no fewer than 330 vessels sunk by U-boats and Italian submarines in the Caribbean, its approaches and the Gulf of Mexico. They came close to cutting off vital supplies of oil from Venezuela and bauxite ore (for making aluminium) from the Guianas⁵.

"Panama Hattie" was a film based on Mamie Lee Kelly, owner of the Kelley's Ritz nightclub. Located at Plaza Cinco de Mayo across from the train station and the centre of Panama City nightlife. One of its customers had been Cole Porter, who was taken there when he passed

² These were actually given up in 1948 (after political unrest in Panama). This was despite a caveat in the 1942 agreement that, "If within that period the two Governments believe that, in spite of the cessation of hostilities, a state of international insecurity continues to exist which makes vitally necessary the continuation of the use of any of the said defence bases or areas, the two Governments shall again enter into mutual consultation and shall conclude the new agreement which the circumstances require":

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v09/d467>

³ <https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-WH-Guard/USA-WH-Guard-13.html>

⁴ https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Building_Bases/bases-18.html

⁵ *Panama Canal defenders: Camouflage and Markings of US Sixth Air Force and Antilles Air Command 1941-1945 – Volume 1: Single-engined Fighters* by Dan Hagedorn (Model Centrum PROGRES, 2021).

through Panama. He later immortalised Mamie Lee in a musical, with Ethel Merman as Hattie, which was also made into an MGM movie in 1942 featuring Red Skelton and Ann Southern.⁶

A total of 738,839 measurement tons of Army cargo was received at Cristobal and Balboa during the year, the bulk of it arriving on military transports, with minor tonnages carried by commercial vessels.

The Mobile Force was augmented in early 1942 with National Guard units from the US, including a squadron of the 106th Cavalry Regiment, as well as detachments of medical and engineer troops. Training camps were established at Pacora, Chorrera (which covered a natural approach from the suitable nearby landing beaches and was occupied from 3 August) and Rio Hato.

By 1942, numbers of employees in the Canal Zone had grown to 8,550 Gold Roll and 28,686 Silver Roll. However, these were only a small part of the over 65,000 workers in Panama, employed by the US to work on construction of defence facilities and the soon to be suspended Third Locks project. Only a relatively small proportion of these were “imported” by the US, but they were nevertheless regarded as essential due to the labour shortage encountered in the rapid expansion required by the defence plans.

The apparent anachronistic tropical helmet authorised until 1942 was in fact considered the best military headgear for the region. It was light, permitted free circulation of air,

⁶ <http://www.panamahistorybits.com/article.asp?id=2011-07-15>

In the film, according to IMDb, Hattie Maloney runs a saloon in Panama where assorted characters congregate where they frequently sing and dance Cole Porter numbers. An upper-class gentleman arrives, and sparks fly between him and Hattie. They try and overcome complications between songs. In the film, according to IMDb, Hattie Maloney runs a saloon in Panama where assorted characters congregate where they frequently sing and dance Cole Porter numbers. An upper-class gentleman arrives, and sparks fly between him and Hattie. They try and overcome complications between songs. Adapted from the Broadway musical “*Panama Hattie*”, which opened at the 46th Street Theater in New York on 30 October 1940, running for 501 performances. Ethel Merman played Hattie, and Betty Hutton was Flo. The star performer at Kelley’s Ritz was actually a stripper (or “exotic dancer”) called Jade Rhodora. Her real name was Lou Elma Smith and one of her most famous performances was her “*Beauty and the Beast*” act.

protected the face and neck against both rain and sun, and was the only headgear suitable for use with the mosquito headnet. The combat helmet that replaced it was considered less suitable.

Late in 1942, the Post Exchanges of the Army's Panama Canal Department started to make ice cream using electrically operated mixers and soft freezers. Batteries of hard freezers were also installed. Within a year, all exchanges, even those at the outlying bases, were equipped for the manufacture of ice cream, and messes then started purchasing ice cream from the exchanges.

In 1942, US military intelligence produced the following list of "subversive or potentially subversive groups"⁷ –

- | | |
|--------------|------------------------|
| 1. Nazi | 8. White Russian |
| 2. Communist | 9. Vichy France |
| 3. Fascist | 10. Korean |
| 4. Japanese | 11. Bulgarian |
| 5. Falange | 12. Syrian |
| 6. Hungarian | 13. Domestic Fascist |
| 7. Ukrainian | 14. Negro ⁸ |

In 2020, Gerald Hamilton Halsall, who was a boy in the Canal Zone during the war, was interviewed, and the transcript published by Florida University⁹ -

"During 1942 my father was employed as a police sergeant assigned to the Gatun Police Station. He came to Panama during the worldwide depression in the 1930's to find employment. During the war, there was a lot of extra duty and unpaid overtime with siren alerts at any time. I remember many times during 1942 and 1943 when the sirens would go off. The blackout required him to get dressed in the dark to report for duty. Sometimes when he was in a hurry, he would look for his uniform pieces with a flashlight, when a blackout was in effect."

⁷ By the Evaluation Branch of the Counterintelligence Group.

⁸ https://fas.org/irp/ops/ci/docs/ci2/2ch1_b.htm#ciops

⁹ <https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/08/13/46/00001/Jerry%20Halsall%20Biographical%20Sketch.pdf>

An informal arrangement in 1942 between the US Provost Marshall and the Commandant of the National Police, provided for the Panamanian police and US military police to jointly patrol certain areas frequented by US troops, for the delivery of arrested personnel to the US Provost Marshall under certain conditions, for the presence of US observers at trials, and for various other arrangements intended to minimise the friction involved in such matters and to provide maximum protection to US personnel.

The three V-Class submarines were withdrawn from Coco Solo in 1942¹⁰, having achieved no combat success, and the smaller S-boat submarines also based in Coco Solo were transferred to Australia.¹¹

A dispute arose between the Panamanian Government and the US authorities over developments at Albrook Field. The Panamanians objected to “the construction of a concrete building, the foundations of which already exist, intended as an airport for Pan American Airways which, Panama insisted, had nothing to do, directly or indirectly, with the use, operation, or protection of the Panama Canal.”¹² President La Guardia was informed that the development was, in fact, a wartime emergency requirement.

Work on the Third Locks Project was suspended in May 1942. Changed priorities on the part of the US Navy saw it postponing indefinitely the construction of the larger battleships for which the new locks would have been necessary, and this effectively ended the Third Locks Project.

The 7th Aero Squadron was first established in the Canal Zone in 1917 and served as a reconnaissance unit until 1942, when it was redesignated as a bombing unit as the 397th Bombardment Squadron. Following the Pearl Harbor attack, the squadron’s B-17 Flying

¹⁰ USS *Barracuda* and USS *Bonita* were scrapped after the war, and USS *Bass* was scuttled to become a sonar target.

¹¹ The submarine base would be decommissioned in 1944:

https://www.public.navy.mil/subfor/underseawarfaremagazine/Issues/Archives/issue_06/silent_victory.html

¹² <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1942v06/d575>

Fortresses were almost immediately deployed to David Field and elsewhere (mainly to Guatemala City Airport) to begin Pacific patrols in early January 1942.

In 1942, the US Congress approved a project to complete more than 900 miles (1,448 km) of the Pan-American/Inter-American Highway), to close gaps and to improve inferior existing roads in order to provide a land route between the US and the Panama Canal. However, successful countermeasures that eliminated the U-boat menace from US waters and ensured uninterrupted sea communication and thus made the Highway militarily unnecessary, and the War Department cancelled its project in October 1943 and the work was stopped.¹³

A US Army assessment in 1942 judged that the men of the National Police had little confidence in their officers and that “if a battle were to turn against them, the majority would run...”. Recommendations for their equipment showed that the US Army still saw them only as an internal security force, and there was no suggestion that they should be trained to participate in Canal defence alongside US troops^{14, 15}

While such a defence had been first considered in 1930, it was not until 1942 that smoke generators were ordered into place to protect certain installations. Thousands of “smoke pot” smoke generators were employed, including on barges in the Canal itself.

A handful of P-70 night-fighters were sent to Panama in late 1942 to try to make up for the shortfall in night defences there¹⁶. Nevertheless, the air defences, in day as well at night,

¹³ *Logistics in World War II: Final Report of the Army Service Forces* - A Report to the Under Secretary of War and the Chief of Staff by the Director of the Service, Supply, and Procurement Division, War Department General Staff (Center of Military History US Army, Washington DC , 1993): https://history.army.mil/html/books/070/70-29/CMH_Pub_70-29.pdf

¹⁴ *Wasting Asset: The U.S. Re-Assessment of the Panama Canal, 1945-1949* by John Major (Journal of Strategic Studies), 2008.

¹⁵ At Rio Hato, from about November 1943, road blocks of an asphalt taxiway connection across the National (by now InterAmerican) Highway, were manned by members of the Policia Nacional of Panama. It is said that this was one of the few Panamanian contributions of armed personnel to the war effort, although the USAAF paid their \$60 per month salaries.

¹⁶ *The Signal Corps: The Test (December 1941 to July 1943)* By George Raynor Thompson, Dixie R Harris, Pauline M Oates & Dulany Terrett (Center of Military History, US Army, Washington DC), 2003.

continued to be considered less than adequate, despite the introduction of radar and air patrols over the sea approaches.

In order to explore the effects of their tactical abilities, a simulated bombing run on the Howard Field runway was conducted in 1942. Explosive charges under one end of the runway were ignited without warning, to see the damage produced and to test the repair crews. The 23-foot (7-metres) diameter crater was filled and other damage repaired within six hours, when the runway re-opened for operations¹⁷.

HEALTH

The Panama Canal Department had been unprepared to handle the great increase in numbers of servicemen that would be sent to Panama from 1942. The chief efforts of the disease control efforts were for the control of mosquitos, the vector for both malaria and yellow fever.

In fact, between April and September 1942, malaria reached epidemic proportions among the increasing numbers of US troops, who were often placed in areas before adequate protection could be put in place. At the height of the epidemic, 111.7 out of every 1,000 men were being treated for malaria, and training and manoeuvres were often cancelled. The rate of infection began to fall as controls and protective measures improved.

However, 1942 saw a considerable increase in both cases and deaths from malaria (the latter reaching the highest rate seen since 1927). The greater number of cases were said to have been contracted outside the “sanitised” areas of the Canal Zone and the Republic, and the increase presumably reflected the increase in new personnel during the expansion of the defences and related construction work, and much of such work taking place outside the sanitised areas. In 1942, 904 cases were report, which equated to 25 per thousand, with three deaths (that is, as many as in the whole of the 1930s).¹⁸

¹⁷ <https://weaponsandwarfare.com/2019/11/18/panama-canal-zone-defences-ii/>

¹⁸ *Report of the Health Department of the Panama Canal for the calendar year 1942* (The Panama Canal press, 1943).

Also in 1942, the annual report of the Canal Zone Health Department included a new section, on the Venereal Disease Control program. A special study had been undertaken by the Chief Health Officer to determine ways and means of both combating and preventing such diseases. The Senior Surgeon of the US Public Health Service arrived in the Canal Zone to assist in organising the control program, both for the Canal Zone and the Republic.

In 1942, a general typhoid inoculation program was instituted by the Health Department in the Canal Zone, due to fears of disrupted supplies of chemicals to treat drinking water due to the U-boat campaign. The program extended throughout the Canal Zone, and included contractors working in the Zone.¹⁹

RACIAL TENSIONS

To the pre-existing tensions caused by the Gold and Silver Rolls system in the Canal Zone, the segregation against both black (including that facilitated by the Gold and Silver Roll mechanism), and the policies introduced by the nationalist Arias Madrid administration, was added that arising from the detention of Axis nations – with the Japanese facing particular hostility.

In 1942, a US publication pointedly said that, in the Canal Zone, “only about 75,000 are white; 75,000 are Jamaican negroes; 5,000 orientals; and 50,000 are Indians” (by “Indians” one presumes it meant indigenous peoples).²⁰

In an indication of tensions between West Indians and Panamanians, there were reports that Canal Zone Police had to be stationed in mess halls after riots had broken out in labour camps. It is reported that the rioting continued into 1942, with some incidents lasting days, and involving as many as 3,000 workers at a time fighting with knives, rocks, bottles, and sticks. Involvement of the Canal Zone Police is said to have only further irked “Latin”

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ https://tradocfcoeccafcoepfwprod.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/fires-bulletin-archive/1942/APR_1942/APR_1942_FULL_EDITION.pdf

workers, who resented being under the authority of the black officers who policed the Silver Roll labour force. To prevent fights between Latin American and West Indian workers, officials began to further segregating housing facilities and mess halls.²¹

The US Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) received complaints about the segregation from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the US in 1942, but the Governor of the Canal Zone stonewalled and, to avoid unnecessary publicity involved in public hearings, a small commission was appointed to quietly investigate.²²

In 1942, Signal Corp troops sent to Panama included, for the first time since World War 1, black troops, with the first unit being activated there being the 275th Signal Construction Company, sent to Panama to build a pole line. It was not welcome in the view of the Panamanian Government, and returned to the US after completing its task.²³

A dispute arose when the Panamanian Government objected to the US military releasing some of the internees that had been picked up by the Panama authorities and delivered for internment by the Americans. The US Army was ordered to continue to detain such internees, at least until a more permanent camp could be constructed. It has been claimed that the practice of releasing the internees angered the Panamanian authorities, who wanted the enemy aliens removed from the country²⁴. As long as they remained in Panama there was still the chance they could be released, but should they be swiftly removed the Panamanian government could move to take possession of their unattended shops and farms²⁵.

²¹ American Historical Review (April 2020).

²² Ibid.

²³ *The Signal Corps: The Test (December 1941 to July 1943)* By George Raynor Thompson, Dixie R Harris, Pauline M Oates & Dulany Terrett (Center of Military History, US Army, Washington DC), In January, the 2003.

²⁴ Eventually to Seagoville and "Camp Crystal" in Texas: <https://www.unive.it/media/allegato/dep/n9-2008/Saggi/Friedman-saggio.pdf>

The Crystal City internment camp in Texas has been described as a relief to those internees who had been held in camps in Latin America before being shipped north. Latin American camps and jails, including the US Army-administered Camp Empire at Balboa in the Panama Canal Zone, were said to be far grimmer.

²⁵ <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2131&context=masters-theses>

In April 1942, interned Japanese were sent to internment camps in the US, and arrived in New Orleans on 8 April. Although originally only Japanese males were deported, from November 1942, a new recommendation was that whole families should be deported. This followed situations, such as in Panama, where wives and children left behind found themselves impoverished and a source of anti-American propaganda and resentment.

RATIONING

The first regulations were concerned with tyres, and in February 1942 all those involved in the sale or repair of car tyres and tubes were required to declare what stocks they held. After this they could only sell to buyers who received authority from the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce²⁶. To conserve those tyres already in use, new lower maximum speeds were set. In May 1942, even tighter regulations took effect, and the Government took control of all stocks of tyres and tubes in the country, and only it was permitted to import and sell tyres, tubes and materials necessary for their repair. An Office of Tire and Tube Inspection²⁷ was established²⁸.

Rationing of petrol began in October 1942, with a Gasoline and Tire Rationing Office²⁹ being set up. In 2020, Gerald Hamilton Halsall (see above) said that³⁰ -

“During 1942 many consumer items were rationed as military needs got priority. My father was fortunate to buy a new 1941 Chevrolet for \$1,000 just before the war. Chevy only made a limited amount of cars in early 1942 before factories converted to military production. He was offered \$2,000 for the new car. My father declined all offers because he could not get another car like it. If you had a car during the war you kept it. All cars in Gatun were required to get headlights blacked out with black paint. They allowed a one-inch headlight slit for night driving. It made people drive very slowly at night. Auto gas rationing booklets were issued to limit gas use. To save gas, my father would cut off the car engine to coast into our garage. He was

²⁶ Executive Decree No 27, February 1942.

²⁷ *Oficina de la Inspección de Llantas y Tubes.*

²⁸ Executive Decree No 35, May 1942.

²⁹ *Oficina de Racionamiento de Gasolina y Llantas.*

³⁰ <https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/08/13/46/00001/Jerry%20Halsall%20Biographical%20Sketch.pdf>

really good at coasting into parking spaces. I remember being very unhappy because toys were limited to being made out of wood, paper, or cardboard. No metal, rubber or plastic products or toys. One day the boy scouts came to our house in Gatun to collect aluminium and steel cooking pots not needed by our family. We ended up with two frying pans and one big pot for the duration of the war”.

For three years, from August 1942, the export of coconuts was restricted to ensure adequate supplies of coconut oil for the domestic soap industry. After December 1942, the re-export of all merchandise was prohibited (except to the Canal Zone)³¹. Price controls, plus the reduction in import duties, was matched in 1942 by a government programme to increase domestic production of foodstuffs.³²

JANUARY

In January, the 150th Infantry Regiment took on the Lock and Utility Guard roles in the Canal Zone. The 158th Infantry Regiment, aka “Bushmasters” after its Panama jungle operations, a unit of the Arizona National Guard³³, and a part of the 45th Infantry Division, arrived on 2 January³⁴.

The 301st Coast Artillery Battalion (Separate Barrage Balloon), composed of troops from the Barrage Balloon School, and which had been the first such battalion, arrived on 1 January.

In January, tests were conducted to determine if smoke from burning buildings in Red Tank, Pedro Miguel or Paraiso would prevent the use of anti-aircraft automatic weapons to defend the Canal, and it was concluded that this would not be a problem, and so the preventive destruction of the buildings would not be necessary. However, additional tests

³¹ Executive Decree No 42, December 1942.

³² Control over rents in Panama City and Colón was authorised in December 1943.

³³ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26478372>

³⁴ It transferred to Australia in January 1943, as part of a Regimental Combat Team (RCT) with the 158th Artillery Battalion for operations in the South-West Pacific:

<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entryname=OKLAHOMA%20NATIONAL%20GUARD>

showed that any burning buildings adjacent to the locks would clearly illuminate potential targets, such as the lock walls and gates. Therefore, a thin metal fence was put in place as a precaution.³⁵

A War Department directive called for the formation and training of combat units for potential use as a striking force either in Panama or elsewhere in the Caribbean region.³⁶

An emergency inter-American meeting was held in Rio de Janeiro which failed to establish a binding commitment and instead produced a weak resolution encouraging the various governments to break off relations with the Axis. At that time, it was not clear who might win the war, and several countries with traditionally strong ties to Germany and Italy (notably, Chile, Argentina, and to some extent Brazil) were reluctant to risk these relationships by taking the wrong side.³⁷

The first seven-mile-long (11.3 km) stretch of the Trans-Isthmian Highway (aka the Boyd³⁸-Roosevelt Highway) opened in January 1942.³⁹

The 210th and 218th General Hospitals of the US Army embarked for Panama, to join the Station Hospital there⁴⁰.

³⁵ *Security and Defense of the Panama Canal, 1903-2000* by Charles Morris (Panama Canal Commission).

³⁶ *Security and Defense of the Panama Canal 1903-2000* by Charles Morris, Panama Canal Commission: <https://original-ufdc.uflib.ufl.edu/AA00047733/00001/6j>

³⁷ *A History of the United States Caribbean Defense Command (1941-1947)* by Cesar A. Vasquez (Florida International University, FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations No. 2458, 2016): <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/2458>

³⁸ Augusto Samuel Boyd Briceño had been briefly President from December 1939, when President Arosemena died in office, serving until after the following elections and leaving office 1 October 1940. The Trans-Isthmian Highway was therefore begun during his short administration.

³⁹ It was completed in December 1944 (but with traffic limited only to authorised military traffic). This was the first transcontinental highway in the Americas, albeit that Panama is only around 40 miles across at its narrowest point. In the modern form of the *Transistmica*, it continues in use today.

⁴⁰ <https://www.med-dept.com/articles/ww2-military-hospitals-zone-of-interior/>
Construction of three new military hospitals in the Canal Zone had been authorised in the \$50 million 1939 expansion programme

A peace agreement ended war between Peru and Ecuador over a century-old boundary dispute. Peru had easily prevailed, there having been no evidence of Axis involvement or influence.⁴¹

In January 1942, Ecuador had granted permission to proceed with essential construction of advance bases for the US in Ecuador (at Salinas⁴² and Galapagos Islands), with specific agreements to be signed after Lend-Lease details had been settled⁴³. Flying-boat bases were begun simultaneously at the Galapagos Islands (initial, informal approval was received from Ecuador on 14 January) and the Salinas peninsula⁴⁴ (an agreement with Ecuador which allowed the Commanding General of the CDC to construct landing fields at Salinas had been signed on 24 January), to be followed during Spring 1942 by the establishment of a base for PT boats on Taboga Island in Panama, and another flying-boat base at Fonseca in Nicaragua – this being abandoned in favour of another location in Nicaragua, at Corinto.

On 7 January, one of the new radar sites reported an “unidentified, four-engine bomber” near the new auxiliary aerodrome at Aguadulce. four P-40C fighters were scrambled to intercept, but found nothing. A subsequent inquiry established that the only four-engine aircraft in the region, a B-17 bomber, had not been in the air, the US Navy had not yet received any of its four-engine PB2Y Coronado flying-boats, and none of the Pan American Boeing SA.307 airliners (which operated to Albrook Field) were in Panamanian airspace. Intelligence analysts considered if it could have been one of the Focke Wulf Condor airliners operated by Cruzeiro do Sol (successor to German-controlled Condor in Brazil) and delivered in 1939. However, these remained grounded in Rio de Janeiro due a lack of spares. G2 intelligence at Quarry Heights was left with just one other possibility – a Japanese Navy four-engine long-range flying-boat, operating from a tender. However, as unlikely as this

⁴¹ This was the “War of ‘41” (*Guerra del 41*), but the dispute rumbled on, with further short conflicts in 1981 and 1995, before a definitive peace agreement was signed in 1998.

⁴² Initially, the Salinas peninsula was scheduled to be a base for patrol boats; but it was changed to a seaplane refuelling base before construction was completed, and it was developed into a naval auxiliary air facility, servicing and housing a complete patrol squadron. Aviation activities were removed in May 1944, leaving an emergency refuelling unit with rescue boat service. It was eventually handed by to Ecuadorian authorities in February 1946: https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Building_Bases/bases-18.html

⁴³ https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Building_Bases/bases-18.html

⁴⁴ Salinas is a peninsula on the western tip of Ecuador, fronting on Santa Elena Bay.

might seem, it could not be confirmed or rejected, as the Japanese destroyed nearly all the relevant records near the end of the war.⁴⁵

On 9 January, General Order 381⁴⁶ from the Panama Interceptor Command provided a summary of the expected form an air attack would take. This, it said, was likely to be by low-flying (in fact, very low flying, as little as 10 feet or three metres) torpedo bombing and/or dive bombing, likely launched “lengthwise” against the locks and Madden Dam, and from the Gatun Lake side of the Canal. It was predicted that fighters would find it difficult to combat the attackers, and the best defence would be from anti-aircraft ground fire and barrage balloons.⁴⁷

On 11 January, Panama Railroad’s SS *Ancon* and SS *Cristobal* were taken over by the US Army Transportation Service. After modification in San Francisco,⁴⁸ *Ancon* was used for four months ferrying US troops to reinforce Australia as the Attack Transport USAT *Ancon*.⁴⁹

On 21 January, the Commanding General of the CDC notified the US Minister in Costa Rica that men had been sent to the Sixaola River area to survey a possible landing field, permission having been obtained from the Costa Rican Government to do so⁵⁰.

On 24 January, the submarine S-25 was lost after a communication mix-up resulted in it being rammed by one of its own submarine chaser escorts. Just the three crew who had been on the sail at the time of the collision survived.⁵¹

⁴⁵ *Panama Canal defenders: Camouflage and Markings of US Sixth Air Force and Antilles Air Command 1941-1945 – Volume 1: Single-engined Fighters* by Dan Hagedorn (Model Centrum PROGRES, 2021).

⁴⁶ Antiaircraft Defense Against Low Flying and Dive-Bombing Aviation.

⁴⁷ *P-38 in Latin America* by Dan Hagedorn (Aviation Art & History, 2022).

⁴⁸ Including over 1,500 metal standee type bunks. *Troopships of World War II* by Roland W Charles (Army Transportation Society), 1947. https://history.army.mil/documents/WWII/wwii_Troopships.pdf

⁴⁹ The US Army did not have an exact equivalent of the Navy’s “United States Ship” (USS) for commissioned vessels or “United States Naval Ship” (USNS) for Navy-owned, non-commissioned auxiliaries “in service”. The Army also did not have an equivalent of the Navy’s “in commission” distinction from ships “in service”. The term “United States Army Transport” (USAT) was applied (or sometimes not) to the large troop and cargo vessels owned by the Army and it was never applied to other vessels. The mine planters were “US Army MP” abbreviated USAMP before the name. Most Army vessels, as with smaller non-commissioned Navy yard and utility craft, had no prefix at all: <https://ianewatts.org/u-s-army-harbor-boat-service-watercraft-designations/>

⁵⁰ No lease or formal agreement was ever in place for the Sixaola site, and the USAAF continued to use the airfield on the basis of an agreement with the landowner (a subsidiary of the United Fruit Company) and cooperation of the Costa Rican Government for the rest of the war:

<https://www.afhra.af.mil/Portals/16/documents/Studies/51-100/AFD-090601-032.pdf>

⁵¹ <http://www.lost52project.org/S-26-Home.html> <https://ussnautilus.org/the-loss-of-uss-s-26-ss-131/>

FEBRUARY

The Caribbean Defense Command (CDC) was officially activated in February 1942.

The Gatun tank farm on the Atlantic side, and the Arraijan farm, on the Pacific side, were started in February, and a multiple pipeline connecting them, which was completed in 1943.

The first U-Boats began operating in the Caribbean in February 1942. After running down operations off the US East Coast, they then intensified their operations in the Caribbean, with the struggle being labelled as the Battle of the Caribbean (or Operational *Neuland* by the Germans)⁵². Operations began on 16 February, with the primary targets to be the tankers and bauxite freighters as well as the oil refineries on the islands - note, with no mention of the Panama Canal.

In February 1942, \$185,000 in funding was approved for an extension of the “Old France Field” runway and new road communications. The names for the two sites, Old France and New France, were to be used well after the war, they being collectively named France Field (and France Air Force Base after the US Air Force was established in the late 1940s).

The smoke screen defences were first tested by the Chemical Warfare Service at Pedro Miguel Locks in February, and this revealed that an effective screen could be laid down in 30 minutes.

In February, the Panama Canal Department quartermaster set up an Army Transport Division, which dealt with ocean-going shipping and rail transportation, and an Area Transportation Division, which operated and maintained the smaller ships and harbour craft employed locally to forward troops and supplies to outlying stations. The Army Transportation Division relied extensively upon the facilities and personnel of the Canal establishment, with its modern piers and warehouses at Cristobal and Balboa and on the

⁵² The Italian submarines operating near the Lesser Antilles in 1942 did not venture as far into the Caribbean as the Germans: *The U-Boat War in the Caribbean* by Gaylord T M Kelshall (United States Naval Institute Press, 1994).

Panama Railroad. On the other hand, the Army Transportation Division had to procure, man, operate, and maintain its own local fleet, and its primary mission was to serve US military installations that could be reached most conveniently by water. Its fleet included 50 purse seiners fishing boats, procured by the Chief of Transportation on the US West Coast for the Aircraft Warning Service, were delivered to Panama in the Spring of 1942. By 1 June, the Panama Canal Department had 197 harbour boats in operation. The local activation in July of the 160th Quartermaster Boat Company, stationed at Corozal, developed into a unit with competent marine officers after a period of training under licensed personnel.

In February, an unfortunate accident saw the large Free French submarine *Surcouf* sunk after a collision with a freighter on Caribbean side of the Canal, 80 miles (128.7 km) from the Canal Zone⁵³.

In February 1942, a memorandum drafted for the Caribbean Defense Command outlined a theoretical attack by a Japanese task force consisting of aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, and submarines. The final assessment of the exercise was simply that the Canal and its waterways were susceptible to attack, and that it was necessary to bring in both additional heavy bombers and experienced personnel to operate them⁵⁴.

On 6 February, CDC headquarters issued yet another warning to its far-flung units, including the warning that Japanese attempts on the Canal "...may be expected within a short time".⁵⁵

Separate figures would be reported for air force and ground forces personnel numbers after February 1942, when the ground force strength was 35,822.⁵⁶

By February, air patrols over the Caribbean and Pacific from Panama included B-18 bombers from David (which also involved aircraft operating from Guatemala and Ecuador) and PB

⁵³ *The U-Boat War in the Caribbean* by Gaylord T M Kelshall (United States Naval Institute Press, 1994).

⁵⁴ <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3672&context=etd>

⁵⁵ American Aviation Historical Society Journal, Winter 2016.

⁵⁶ *Security and Defense of the Panama Canal, 1903-2000* by Charles Morris (Panama Canal Commission).

Catalina flying-boats from the Canal Zone operating out to, and from, as far away as the Galapagos Islands in the Pacific. It was felt that the greatest threat from air attack (or landings) came from Pacific, rather than the Caribbean side. In addition, by February, air patrols using B-18 bombers were operating over the Caribbean coasts, not just that of Panama, but also other Central American coasts together with the coast of Colombia. However, during 1942, patrols were limited to daylight hours due to inexperience in night flying, lack of suitable facilities at the airfields and a lack of radar-equipped aircraft.⁵⁷ In addition, a shortage of US Navy patrol aircraft into 1942 had meant that US Army aircraft continued to be used to supplement patrol activity, until they could be gradually replaced by Navy aircraft.

In February, Harbor Entrance Command Post (HECP) installations were approved and installed so that Navy forces could operate jointly with the Army. General Marshall had approved these installations on 23 June 1941, but they were not installed until after the US entry into the war. The purpose of HECP was to act as a localised intelligence section to disseminate information of activities in defence sea areas and take decisive action to “operate elements of harbor defense against the enemy in those defensive coastal areas”.⁵⁸

On 2 February, the US and Ecuador signed a Hemispheric Defense Agreement for the duration of the “emergency”, with a proviso that it would remain in force until a later date if aggression by a non-American power (that is a power from outside the Americas) against an Americas power should exist.⁵⁹

The US Navy eventually took over the Transit Guard functions for ships passing through the Canal from 20 February, using Marines from Rodman or Coco Solo. The Navy employed five or six officers and around 350 marines, with 25 to 30 sailors attached.

⁵⁷ The only two successful anti-submarine combat missions of the Sixth Air Force in the Panama Sea Frontier involving the sinking of U-boats were that the 45th Bomb Squadron was credited with sinking the U-654 off Colón on 22 August 1942; and the 59th Bomb Squadron damaged U-153 on 6 July 1942 (it being later sunk by the destroyer, USS *Landsdowne*): *Security and Defense of the Panama Canal 1903-2000* by Charles Morris, Panama Canal Commission: <https://original-ufdc.uflib.ufl.edu/AA00047733/00001/6j>

⁵⁸ *A History of the United States Caribbean Defense Command (1941-1947)* by Cesar A. Vasquez (Florida International University, FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations No. 2458, 2016): <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/2458>

⁵⁹ <https://www.afhra.af.mil/Portals/16/documents/Studies/51-100/AFD-090601-032.pdf>

MARCH

In early March, the former SS *Cristobal*, now being used by the US Army, arrived at Noumea, New Caledonia with troops and artillery, before being ordered back to New York to be converted to a troopship.

On 5 March, the *New York Times* reported that protection for the civilian population in the Canal Zone was being provided against possible air attack, saying that 431 air raid shelters were being built.

Early in March, both the US Secretary of War Stimson and Robert Watson-Watt, the British radar expert, examined Panama defences and reported the existence of disturbing weaknesses. By March, there were eight early warning radar stations in operation in Panama, with six more under construction. However, there were concern that equipment in use at these stations was inadequate for early warning and "quite useless" for purposes of controlled interception.

In March, the Coast Artillery Command directed that smoke generators be installed immediately and, by the end of the month, the Miraflores and Pedro Miguel installations were complete. The Pedro Miguel smokescreen was tested in April, and the first smoke barges were installed at Miraflores Locks that month.

150th Infantry Regiment, a unit of the West Virginia National Guard, it was mobilised on 17 January 1941 and was sent to Panama in March 1942, serving there until the end of the war.⁶⁰

10 RP-36A Hawk fighters⁶¹ were transferred from Panama to Fortaleza Air Base on the north-east "hump" of Brazil, though they were not officially taken-on-charge on paper until August, to be followed by P-40E (and later still by P-40K, P-40M and P-40N, mostly brand-

⁶⁰ Ibid. It also provided detachments for service in the Galapagos Islands, in Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru

⁶¹ The "R" prefix denoting their "Restricted" status, usually meaning obsolete or obsolescent.

new examples). While essentially the RP-36A were for use as fighter-trainers⁶², the aircraft were intended as a boost to Brazilian Army Aviation morale.

On 25 March, the Panamanian Government instructed its Ambassador in Washington to do everything in his power to obtain the suspension of direct purchases of merchandise in New York for the US Army in the Canal Zone. Such purchases were harming local merchants and commission agents who, until then, had been supplying the Army. However, in reality, it would have been impossible to maintain in Panama sufficient stocks of all the merchandise needed by the US Army and, in any case, the bonded warehouses in Panama and Colón were already providing a maximum service, and it was not possible to obtain additional storage space.

The XXVI Fighter Command USAAF was established on 6 March.

APRIL

The 120th Signal Radio Intelligence Company divided itself between Panama and Trinidad in order to intercept clandestine Axis radio transmissions.⁶³

On 15 April, a new Security Command took over responsibility for the Lock Guard and Utility Guard functions, with the Mobile Force sole responsibility being land defence of the Canal up to the locks enclosures.

An agreement was then signed on 24 April, allowing the US to construct a suitable landing field at Talara in Peru⁶⁴, while also placing the Capitan Montes airbase there into operation.

⁶² All but two remained tacitly on strength in May 1945, when the high-time aircraft had 11,846 hours on its airframe.

⁶³ *United States Army in World War II.: The technical services* by George Raynor Thompson, Dixie R Harris, Pauline M Oates and Dulany Terrett (US Army, Office of Military History, Department of the Army, 1957)

⁶⁴ On land on a sub-lease from a Canadian company, the International Petroleum Company, which had also built the airport there. This was later cancelled in March 1943, and for the rest of the war the US military dealt directly with government officials under the original 24 April 1942 agreement. The agreement over use of Talara lasted for the duration of the war, after which the facilities reverted to Peruvian control (without charge).

MAY

The vehicle bridge at the Miraflores Locks became operational in May 1942, to reduce pressure on the ferry service.

36 barrage balloons sites were planned for the Pacific end of the Canal, and all were operational in May, 20 at Pedro Miguel and 16 at Miraflores Locks.

The Third Locks project suspended.

The first USAAF bombers reached the newly-built base on the Galapagos Islands.

The Defense Sites Agreement was signed this month.

On 19 May, the G2 intelligence department of the CDC claimed that it has been “ascertained from a definitely reliable source” that four German-built Condor long-range bombers had been “recently received in South America and that no trace of them has appeared since”.⁶⁵

The VI Fighter Command USAAF was redesignated as VI Fighter Command in May.

From 19 May, a new alert system was introduced, with revised alert and blackout instructions –

- A normal blackout had lights shielded from 2300 to 0545 (it had been 1830 to 0545 since 7 December 1941)⁶⁶;
- An “alert” blackout would be ordered when an attack was imminent, with all lights shielded in the hours of darkness; and
- A complete blackout was to be in place when the siren sounded, with all outside lights extinguished and all inside lights shields or put out.

⁶⁵ *P-38 in Latin America* by Dan Hagedorn (Aviation Art & History, 2022).

⁶⁶ As now, being so near the equator, year-round there are around 12 hours daylight: 0600 to 1800.

On 29 May, the TACA airline approved the development of the airport at Puerto Cabezas by the US military and the US submitted a formal request to the Nicaraguan Government for the occupation, use and improvement of the new base. The Government approved the arrangement in June.⁶⁷ On 31 May, a 10-year lease (with an option for renewal for a further 10 years) was signed between the US Army and a lumber company which had acquired the site, with the US to pay a nominal \$1 under the lease, this lease being approved by the Nicaraguan Government in an exchange of notes on 2 June.⁶⁸

JUNE

Having arrived in December 1941, in June the 150th Infantry Regiment was being used to guard the Miraflores Locks and associated facilities (five officers and 219 men); the Pedro Miguel Locks, including operating the smoke generators (five officers and 165 men); and the Gatun Locks, again including operating smoke generators, and forming the Transit Explosive Guard (seven officers and 209 men).⁶⁹

Until June 1942, U-Boats had only entered the outer reaches of the Panama Sea Frontier. Then the SS *Merimack*, carrying supplies to the isthmus, was torpedoed about 60 miles (96.5 km) off Couzimmel Island - a mostly undeveloped Mexican island off the Yucatan Peninsula. This was followed by the loss of two more merchant vessels near Swan Island off Honduras, and three more near the Colombian islands of Old Providence and St Andrews. A further vessel was sunk some 85 miles (136.8 km) from Colón on the Atlantic end of the Canal.

PT Boat Squadron 2 redeployed from the Canal Zone to a combat area. Its ultimate destination was the island of Tulagi, north of Guadalcanal. However, before deployment, it was ordered for eight boats to form a new Squadron 3⁷⁰, also for deployment to Guadalcanal.

⁶⁷ The agreement was that the US military would vacate the site it six months after the war.

⁶⁸ <https://www.afhra.af.mil/Portals/16/documents/Studies/51-100/AFD-090601-032.pdf>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ The previous Squadron 3 had been destroyed in the invasion of the Philippines.

The Battle of Midway in June removed much of the fear that Pearl Harbor could be duplicated in the US or Panama⁷¹.

Verbal agreement to begin the air base at Talara in Peru.

Rest leave for silver employees was authorised by regulations of 12 June, and the former regulations governing sick leave allowances were amended to authorise the granting of rest leave to "alien" employees not otherwise entitled to vacation leave privileges, providing they had five years or more of continuous service and an excess five of 30 days sick leave to their credit. Sick leave was earned at the rate of 1.44 days per month.⁷²

On 30 June, the Governor of the Canal reported that, in the preceding 12 months, 11,331 workmen had been brought into the Canal Zone, half of them from El Salvador. By this time, in June 1942, the total of unskilled and semi-skilled workmen, the so-called "Silver" employees⁷³, numbered 65,786.

JULY

The 61-mile (98.2 km) Rio Hato link of the Inter-American (Pan-American) Highway, from La Chorrera to Rio Hato was completed.

In July, the former SS *Cristobal*, now a troopship, was in Suez, where she was exposed nightly to air raids, but survived to start the long voyage to Britain, carrying Italian prisoners of war from North Africa bound for Durban and the UK.

⁷¹ <https://media.defense.gov/2010/Nov/05/2001329891/-1/-1/0/AFD-101105-019.pdf>

⁷² Annual Report of the Governor of the Panama Canal for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30 1944 (US Government Printing Office, Washington, 1946).

⁷³ As during the Canal construction period, "Gold" employees were US ones. This was only one example of the discriminatory practices employed by the US during both during construction of the Canal and during World War 2. Until the end of World War 2, the Canal Zone operated under a form of "Jim Crow" society, where the category of "gold" represented white, US workers and the title "silver" represented the non-white, non-US workers on the Zone. There were even separate entrances for each group at the Post Office.

The War Department announced a curtailment of assignment of forces to the Panama Canal Department, setting the ground forces ceiling at 47,000 – with the Commanding General at the time considering that the reduction in garrison strength in the Caribbean theatre had been reduced below the limits of safety in the Panama sector.⁷⁴ The resulting reorganisation would see, in November, the 551st Parachute Infantry Regiment of what became the Striking Force assigned to the Sixth Air Force. At the time there remained the belief that in some Central or South American states anti-government elements could still make a move to seize power.

Throughout the entire course of the war the Sixth Air Force engaged in only two combat engagements against U-boats in the Caribbean, damaging one in July 1942 and sinking another in August 1942. The bulk of its patrol operations were conducted without major contact with the enemy, and its war passed relatively quietly in and around Panama.⁷⁵

On 7 July, an agreement was signed which provided for the detail of a US military officer to serve as an adviser to the Panamanian Minister for Foreign Affairs⁷⁶.

On 8 July, the US and Peru signed the Hemispheric Defense Agreement, which included provision for joint use of defence installations, existing alongside the 24 April agreement over the use of Talara, which the Ecuadorian Government approved on the same date.⁷⁷

AUGUST

US Naval Station Taboga overhauled PT Boats and provided operational training for crews, being formally opened on 1 August. However, work was only half-completed by the end of August, when the base was commissioned; with it being 90% completed by the end of 1942.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Security and Defense of the Panama Canal, 1903-2000* by Charles Morris (Panama Canal Commission).

⁷⁵ <https://weaponsandwarfare.com/2019/11/18/panama-canal-zone-defences-ii/>

⁷⁶ <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1942v06/ch63>

⁷⁷ <https://www.afhra.af.mil/Portals/16/documents/Studies/51-100/AFD-090601-032.pdf>

⁷⁸ https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Building_Bases/bases-18.html

A 400-bed hospital was commissioned, having been built adjoining the Coco Solo base. Construction had begun in Autumn 1941 and it was commissioned only partially completed. All the buildings were of temporary frame construction, one-story high, and well ventilated.⁷⁹

The US Navy air base at Salinas in Ecuador was commissioned as NAS Salinas in August. Panagra started its first scheduled commercial all-express cargo service by an international carrier certified by the US Civil Aeronautics Board. Due to the need to airlift freight in support of the war effort, the airline converted a couple of its DC.3 airliners into freighters, and started the first all-cargo route of any US airline when it inaugurated a route between the Canal Zone and Lima,⁸⁰ and in two-and-a-half months it had transported nearly 80,000 lb (36.3 tonnes) of cargo by means of this new service.⁸¹

The air base at Talara in Peru was virtually complete by August.

A contract was awarded in August for two 33-mile-long pipelines between the Atlantic and Pacific ends of the Canal, and construction began in October 1942. The former SS *Ancon* was acquired by the US Navy on 7 August, and was commissioned as USS *Ancon* (AP-66) on 12 August.

On 19 August, the tug *Alhajuela* was struck by a US Navy PBY flying-boat from VP-24 squadron and burst into flames. The PBY had been attempting to take off at night from Coco Solo. Six Canal employees were killed in that accident and eight of the 10-man crew of the aircraft also perished. The tug was towed to Mount Hope dry dock and rebuilt, and returned to service nine months later.

On 21 August, XXXVI Fighter Command USAAF was established.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ <https://www.panam.org/pan-am-stories/429-background-notes-on-pan-am-cargo>

On 21 August, a “friendly fire” incident occurred at Balboa, when the S-17, an old, World War I-vintage submarine surfaced in the outer harbour but failed to display the necessary recognition colours required in unrestricted waters. The commanding officer of the 45th Bombardment Squadron dropped four bombs which straddled the submarine causing damage that took seven days to repair. A subsequent investigation cited the submarine for carelessness, and the USAAF personnel for being “over-eager” in attacking the submarine without allowing it time to recognise their mistake and fly the correct colours⁸².

On 22 August, a B-18 achieved the only sinking of a U-boat by a bomber from the VI Bomber Command based in Panama. The bomber from the 45th Bombardment Squadron caught U-654 about 150 miles north of Colon at conning tower depth and attacked. Joined by five other B-18 from the squadron, they altogether dropped a total of 48 depth charges.⁸³

SEPTEMBER

A new 200-bed naval hospital built on the north side of the new Trans-Isthmian Highway, about three miles (4.8 km) from NAS Coco Solo, was commissioned. It would be later enlarged by the addition of temporary wards of frame construction, to provide an additional 500 beds. A second 400-bed hospital was built adjoining the operating base on the Pacific side. Construction began in Autumn 1941 and it was commissioned in August 1942, although only partially completed. All the buildings were of temporary frame construction, one-story high, and well ventilated.⁸⁴

Due to non-compliance during practice air raid alerts, from 1 September the Canal Zone Police were authorised to arrest offenders.

The form “Report of Contact of Venereal Disease”, stocked by the Panama Canal Department, was instituted in September.

⁸² <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3672&context=etd>

⁸³ However, the loss of the U-boat (with all 44 crew) was not confirmed until postwar.

⁸⁴ https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Building_Bases/bases-18.html

Further Navy Seabees⁸⁵ arrived in September and served in the 15th Naval District. Due to the difficulty of procuring civilian labour for work in outlying areas, they were used mainly at the advance bases. However, some were stationed within the Zone, to operate power houses and perform specialised maintenance work⁸⁶.

The Corinto air facility in Nicaragua was established in September (being begun by a civilian contractor), with patrol observation aircraft to be stationed there from January 1943 and construction work was completed (by Seabees) during 1943⁸⁷.

In September, a Cesar Vallarino was arrested as he left the Canal Zone for Lima and found to have 5 letters concealed in his shoe. The letters made reference to large transfer of US funds to Lima for the firm of Vallarino y Gallardo, of which he was an agent. He confessed to a wilful attempt to evade censorship laws. He was released and allowed to proceed to Lima after two days⁸⁸.

OCTOBER

In October, for the first time in six months, there were no losses to U-Boats in the Gulf of Mexico and Panama Sea Frontier areas⁸⁹. In fact, after January 1943, U-Boats were never again a major threat in the Caribbean

NOVEMBER

By November, the new flying-boat base was partially completed at Corinto, Nicaragua despite lacking any formal agreements signed prior to construction. It was garrisoned by a

⁸⁵ US Naval Construction Battalions. Currently, the US Navy describes their function as providing responsive military construction support to Navy, Marine Corps and other forces in military operations, constructing base facilities and conducting defensive operations. Seabees also perform specialised construction such as water well drilling and battle damage repair.

⁸⁶ https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Building_Bases/bases-18.html

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ <https://ncisahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/VALLARINO-Cesar-Arrest-of-while-enroute-Lima-Peru-from-the-Panama-Canal-Zone-8-December-1942.pdf>

⁸⁹ However, in November, losses to U-Boats rose in the Trinidad area

detachment of 185 men to guard against submarine bombardment, surface raid, or any other types of action.⁹⁰

In November 1942, the fleet of ferries in use across the Canal was increased⁹¹ to improve efficiency. It had been a 24-hour service since 1935, and had been relocated to the Balboa area in 1932 – having begun with two ferries and making the crossing near the Pedro Miguel Locks, with a crossing time of one hour

A refuelling base for seaplanes and small surface craft was installed at Puerto Castillo in Honduras, in November.

In November, the former SS *Cristobal*, now a troopship, took part in the invasion of Casablanca as part of Operation *Torch*.

The Army strength of the Panama Canal Department reached a wartime peak of 68,000 in November, after which numbers reduced once more.⁹² This was despite the War Department having announced a curtailing of assignments to the Department in July 1942, setting a ceiling for ground forces at 47,000 – the new ceiling made units available for transfer out, to more active theatres.

Most of the 501st Parachute Infantry Battalion, stationed in Panama since mid-1941, moved to the Pacific in late 1942. However, Charlie Company was detached, forming the nucleus of the 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion at Fort Kobbe, before the main element arrived by troopship in early 1943, and thus provided a base of experienced officers and NCO from which to start their training in the jungles of Panama in January 1943.⁹³

⁹⁰ *A History of the United States Caribbean Defense Command (1941-1947)* by Cesar A. Vasquez (Florida International University, FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations No. 2458, 2016):
<https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/2458>

⁹¹ *The Presidente Porras*.

⁹² *Security and Defense of the Panama Canal, 1903-2000* by Charles Morris (Panama Canal Commission).

⁹³ https://dothaneagle.com/eufaula_tribune/news/history-of-the-551st-parachute-infantry-and-their-demise-at-the-battle-of-the-bulge/article_03b2b41e-d314-11e8-8776-bb24e86db10f.html

On 9 November, Lieutenant General Frank M Andrews relinquished command in Panama to Lieutenant General George H Brett, who would remain in charge until October 1945.

On 12 November, patrol gunboat USS *Erie* lost off Curacao after being torpedoed by U-161.

DECEMBER

By December, all the 37mm anti-aircraft guns had been replaced by new 40mm Bofors guns.

The Japanese War Ministry approved a plan in December 1942 and issued orders for the construction of 18 very large submarines, the I-400 Class⁹⁴. Originally conceived in 1942 to attack US coastal cities, the *I-400* submarines and the aircraft they were to carry were central to an audacious, top-secret plan to stop the Allies' Pacific advance by disguising the floatplane bombers with USAAF insignia and attacking the Panama Canal.

On 18 December, an 800-foot (244 metres) anti-torpedo net at a depth of 40-feet (12.2 metres) began to be installed at Madden Dam.

SHIPPING LOSSES IN THE PANAMA SEA FRONTIER IN 1942

June 69,508 tons

July 5,630 tons

Total 75,138 tons

The Panama Sea Frontier patrol and threat area covered both Pacific and Caribbean regions. It stretched from the Mexico/Guatemala border out to the Galapagos Islands and down to a point at 5° of latitude on the coast of South America. On the other side, it stretched from the Mexico/British Honduras border to Punta de Gallinas in Colombia on the north coast of

⁹⁴ 400-feet (122 meters) long, 5,220 tons (4,735 tonnes) displacement. It could travel 37,500 nautical miles (69,450 km) at 14 knots while surfaced, equivalent to going 1½ times around the world without refuelling. See also: <https://www.stripes.com/news/researchers-unravel-the-mystery-of-japan-s-400-foot-aircraft-launching-submarine-1.258067>

South America, and around 90 miles (144.8 km) west of Aruba. In doing so, the Panama Sea Frontier encompassed the coastlines of British Honduras, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and Colombia.

PANAMA-FLAG CASUALTIES TO U-BOAT ATTACK IN 1942

54 ships were lost

Ray Todd

Panama City

Republic of Panama

11 February 2023