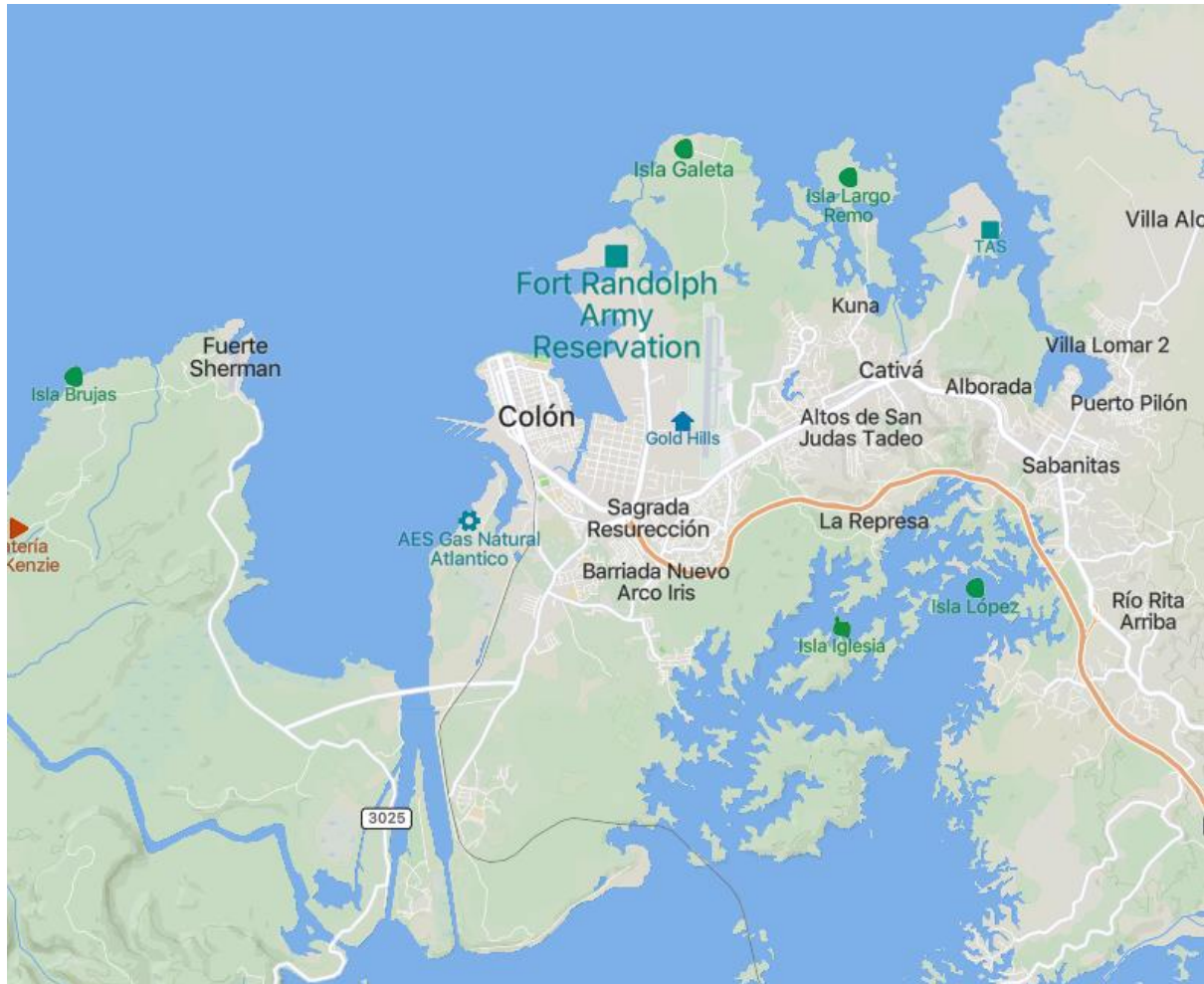


DISTINGUISHING CAMP RANDOLPH AND FORT RANDOLPH

Camp Randolph and Fort Randolph were two distinct areas, although both were on the Caribbean coast of Panama. There follows a brief introduction to the background of both.



The former, which was renamed Camp Colner in 1942, was to go on to become a residential area for a “Silver Roll” population, becoming a suburb of Silver City, renamed Rainbow City after its residents were polled on adopting that name as an official one. It went on to become one of the first parts of the Canal Zone to revert to the Republic of Panama following the 1977 Torrijos-Carter Treaties and, after 1979, it changed name once more, to the Spanish equivalent – *Arco Iris*.¹

¹ <https://www.elistmopty.com/2017/10/una-historia-bien-interesante-de-los.html>

By contrast, Fort Randolph was one of the original Coast Artillery Corps defence sites for the Canal, being established from 1911 on Islas Margarita and Galeta – which were peninsulas despite being known as *islas* - near what would become the US Navy base Coco Solo. It was built on Margarita, which had been connected to the mainland by a railway causeway, so that the eastern breakwater of Limón Bay could be built, and faced Fort Sherman across the bay. Expanded in 1933, and again in 1940, it housed coastal artillery, together with the necessary barracks, housing, and other facilities. However, all the big guns had been removed by shortly after World War 2, with the base being placed on a standby basis. From 1953 part of the site was transferred to the Navy,² but by the 1960s, it was largely unused.

Like the former Camp Randolph, Fort Randolph was an early transfer back to Panama, this also taking place in 1979.³

CAMP RANDOLPH

This was an area in Colón Province, on the Caribbean coast of Panama, and was originally assigned to the US Navy. By 1935, the Navy had transferred the site to the Canal Zone authorities and it became the second suburb of Silver City.

It acquired a new name in 1942, being named for a Lieutenant Commander Richard T Colner of the US Navy Corps of Engineers. The name change resulted from the fact that the offices of the Construction Engineering District of Panama occupied the site, and Colner had been the Department Engineer in the Canal Zone when he died in 1933.

Before World War 2 nearly all materials required in the Canal Zone were supplied by the Army's Post Construction Quartermaster, but wartime demand meant that other sources had to be found.⁴ Almost all the basic tools being used by the troops in early 1942 came from the Special Items Projects (SIP)⁵, with it being common practice for troops to "borrow"

² <https://www.navycthistory.com/NSGStationsHistory.txt>

³ http://william_h_ormsbee.tripod.com/bases_summ_p11.htm

⁴ By so-called "midnight requisitioning", that is by stealing or otherwise acquiring materials unofficially.

⁵ A series of projects were approved in the years before the Pearl Harbor attack, being known as "Special Item Projects" or SIPs. There were about 45 of these emergency projects, mostly concerned with locks structures, installing emergency equipment and generally preparing for wartime conditions. Some, such as SIP 30, which was concerned with camouflage, also included non-locks structures, such as the fuel storage tanks at la Boca

a concrete mixer, wheelbarrow, trowels etc from SIP warehouses when concreting was required.

Camp Randolph, and later Camp Colner, became the wartime hub for all construction activities in the Zone,⁶ and from where all sorts of construction tools and materials could be obtained. There was a sawmill at Camp Randolph that could supply lumber. However, as large construction projects were completed (or otherwise ended), and Panama lost its high-priority status for materials, “red tape” began to appear, with proper channels for obtaining supplies being through the Canal Zone Government’s Post Engineer.

CAMP COLNER

As mentioned, the former Camp Randolph was renamed this in 1942, and at the time was home to the Canal Zone Government’s Construction Engineering District. It was adjacent to Silver City and, at the end of the war in 1945, the Army transferred Camp Colner to the Canal Zone Government and the area became Silver City’s second suburb (see below).⁷

SILVER CITY / RAINBOW CITY / ARCO IRIS

After being transferred to the Canal Zone Government in 1945, the former Camp Colner became the second suburb of what was known as (unofficially) “Silver City”. This name derived from the fact that “city” was intended to house segregated workers on the “Silver Roll”, the lower-paid non-US workers whose accommodation was separate (and of a lesser quality) than that of “Gold Roll” US employees.⁸

and Mount Hope tank farms; with other control houses and other structures camouflaged as part of the project. Most of the SIP had only wartime use and were removed or abandoned postwar – though a few had a longer life. However, as most interfered with the efficient use of the Canal they would be removed.

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

⁶ On the Atlantic end of the Canal there were also outlying camps, including Camp Escobal, Camp Piña, Camp Jones, Monte Liro and Camp Chagres – each was a small township of its own, with a PX, aid station, mess hall and quarters, with men usually living in these camps for months at a time.

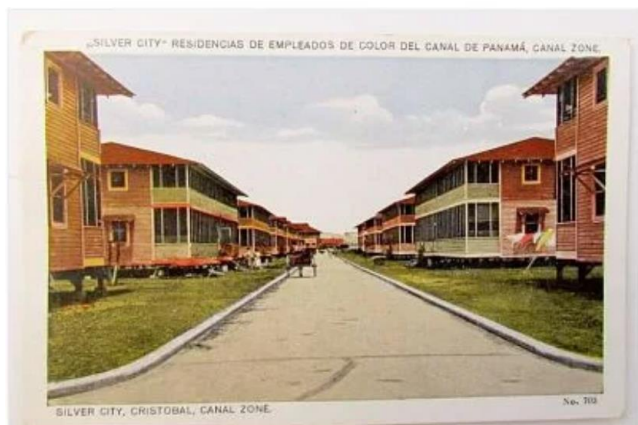
⁷ The first had been “Silver City Heights” in 1933. Despite the name, the difference in elevation was minimal.

⁸ According to the official hierarchy, Balboa and its suburbs, close to Panama City and at the Pacific end of the Canal, were for employees on US Rate (Gold Roll) salaries. The more peripheral neighbourhoods of La Boca, Paraiso and Pedro Miguel, were for Local Rate (Silver Roll) employees. At the other end of the Canal Zone, Cristobal, New Cristobal, and Margarita were for Gold Roll, and Rainbow City was their Silver Roll counterpart. Gatun and Gamboa, in the centre of the isthmus, midway along the Canal, were mixed, albeit themselves segregated. The most exclusive area in the Zonian urban hierarchy was Balboa Heights, which was reserved for the Governor and the highest-ranking employees of the Canal Company. By contrast, Silver Roll townsites were described as grey and impersonal. The terms themselves derived from the fact that the Gold Roll

Silver City lay between Mount Hope and Folk River⁹, near the harbour at Cristobal and the Navy base at Coco Solo, and had been developed as segregated housing from the 1880s, originally as a small settlement called Guava Ridge. There was another settlement, a little separate and on the shores of the bay, known as Camp Bierd and mainly housing dock workers.¹⁰ By 1907, there were already nearly 2,500 inhabitants, and its school, with 166 pupils, was the largest “colored” school in the Canal Zone.

It was immediately after World War 1 that the first permanent town for Silver Roll workers was established there, on landfill from the construction of Fort Davis, and being built 1919-21.

It would be also be known as Silver Town, Cristobal Silver Townsite, and “The Folks River End of Manzanillo Island”, until, in the late 1920s, the residents adopted the (still unofficial) name of Silver City, a name which had been in use from at least 1921.



Postcard of Silver City in the 1930s

Nearby there would the town of Margarita, which would be for US-rate or Gold Roll employees.

After the transfer in 1945, the original Army buildings of Camp Colmar were replaced by “experimental housing” designed for Silver Roll workers.

The population of Silver City had been swollen in 1940 by people relocating after the serious fire in Colón in 1940. On 13 April 1940, the largest fire in the history of that city broke out,

employees had been paid in gold, and at a higher rate, with others being paid in silver, and at a lower rate. It served to also provide a distinct form of segregation akin to “Jim Crow” in the southern US states,

⁹ Known as Fox River until 1915.

¹⁰ It was largely demolished after World War 2, but with some former Navy barracks continuing in use as housing and referred to as “Vatican City”, for reasons unknown.

reportedly caused by the charcoal fire of a washerwoman setting fire to a basket of dry clothes. As elsewhere in the country, many of the buildings of the city were built of wood and this, combined with strong winds, meant the fire took a firm hold.¹¹ In all, it destroyed 283 buildings over an area of 23 city blocks of the city which were affected and losses were estimated at around \$500,000. In April, the New York Times reported that 10,000 inhabitants had lost their homes, with hundreds of wooden-framed tenements destroyed.¹² However, despite the intensity of the fire there was no loss of life or serious injuries.

In the months following the fire, additional tenement-type buildings were built in Silver City, to provide homes for those still homeless, these being adapted during the 1950s, reducing the numbers of families in each and to extend their useful life.

In the 1950s, the painting of the buildings in a variety of colours led to it being known as “Rainbow City”. In 1952, the Silver Roll residents¹³ were surveyed and the name Rainbow City was adopted officially on 1 May 1952.

The early 1950s also saw improvements to conditions and facilities in Silver City, as well as a major construction effort from 1951, and it was at this time that the houses were painted in different colours, in order to make up for the fact that they were of identical design.

It was already the largest civilian town in the Canal Zone, with the 1954 census showing a population of 4,845, and with more children than the combined total populations of the nearby towns of Margarita and New Cristobal (another former US-rate/Gold Roll township).

¹¹ <https://www.elistmopty.com/2018/04/sucedio-un-dia-como-hoy.html>

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/1940/04/14/archives/10000-lose-homes-in-fire-at-colon-windswept-flames-consume-hundreds.html>

¹³ In April 1952, Canal Zone Governor F K Newcomer asked the Panama Canal Review magazine to poll residents on a suitable name for the place, this being the only time the Canal Zone Government ever asked any residents to vote on their preference for the name of their town. The poll was conducted as a house-to-house canvass using Boy Scouts, with ballots distributed to each of the approximately 1,280 households in town. They were given six proposed names to vote on: Silver City, Rainbow City, Folks City, Manzanillo, Granada, and Mindi.

It was one of the first parts of the Canal Zone to revert to the Republic following the 1977 Treaties and, after 1979, it changed name once more, to the Spanish equivalent – *Arco Iris*.¹⁴



FORT RANDOLPH

Established by the US Army on Islas Margarita and Galeta from 1911, this site was close to Coco Solo, where the US Navy would have a submarine base and airfield, and was based on Margarita, which was linked to the mainland by a causeway that had been used in the construction of a long breakwater across Limón Bay. As there was thought to be no suitable rock on the Atlantic side it had been decided to haul rock from the Pacific side of the isthmus, from the Sosa Hill quarry, a distance of just over 50 miles (80.4 km).¹⁵

The two *islas* formed a narrow peninsula, on the Atlantic coast north-east of the city of Colón, surrounded by a coral reef. Four coastal artillery batteries were built there beginning in 1912, and it was formally established as Fort Randolph on 18 September 1917.¹⁶

The original forts built in the Canal Zone, including Fort Randolph, housed the heaviest guns for the defence of the Canal.¹⁷ These original defences had been authorised in 1911, at a

¹⁴ <https://www.elistmopty.com/2017/10/una-historia-bien-interesante-de-los.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/Photos/photoof414.htm>

A breakwater was proven necessary by a storm in 1915 which destroyed some 6,000 feet (1,828 metres) of the then 9,500 feet (2,895 metres) long wooden trestle construction built out into Limón Bay. The causeway was completed in 1916.

¹⁶ *Guarding the Gates: The Story of Fort Clayton - Its Setting, Its Architecture, and Its Role in the History of the Panama Canal* by Susan I Enscoe, Suzanne P Johnson, Julie L Webster, and Gordon L Cohen (ERDC/CERL Monograph 00-01, Construction Engineering Research Laboratory, US Army Engineer Research and Development Center, September 2000): <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA388262.pdf>

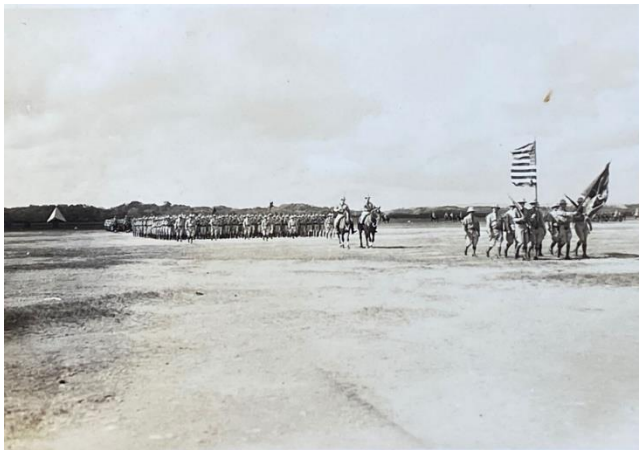
¹⁷ https://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/pcm/usmilitary_and_canal.aspx

cost then of \$14.1 million (this cost including installation of Army-controlled submarine mines). Begun in 1913,¹⁸ by 1917 the defences and troop levels had reached their World War 1 peak.¹⁹



Boardwalk towards the jungle at Fort Randolph

It was named for Brigadier General Wallace Randolph, the first Chief of Artillery following the establishment of the Coast Artillery Corps of the US Army in 1901. The Fort was a Coast Artillery Corps establishment, with the Army responsible for defence of coasts and harbours, as in the Continental US, despite such harbours, as with the Canal, being of prime importance and use chiefly to the Navy.



Troops parading at Fort Randolph in 1941-42

In an embarrassing incident for the Army, in an exercise in 1924, US Marines made a successful landing at Fort Randolph and Coco Solo, capturing those places and therefore making possible the destruction of the locks should the attack had involved a genuine foe.²⁰

¹⁸ The first unit, the 81st Company, Coast Artillery, arrived on 22 December 1913 and went into camp at what became Fort Amador on the Pacific end of the Canal route.

¹⁹ Though not all. For example, Fort Randolph was only completed in April 1920. It was only after World War 1 that it had emplacements added for 14-inch calibre M1920 railway guns.

²⁰ *The Safety of the Panama Canal* by Elbridge Colby (The Military Engineer, July/August 1939): <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44566797>



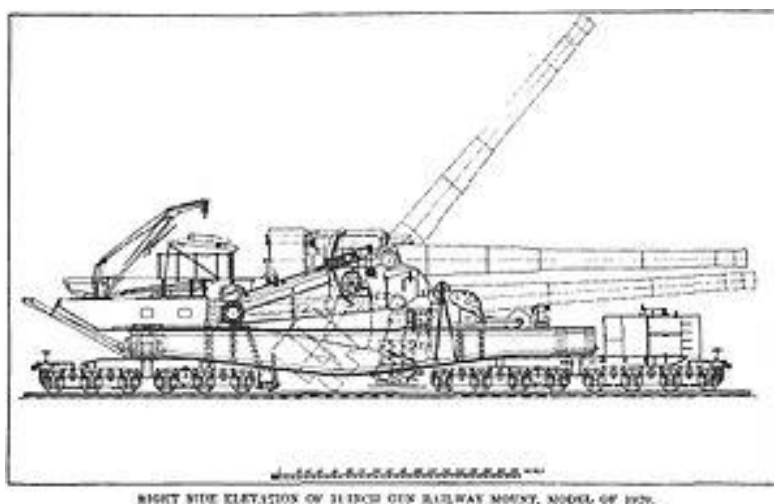
The PX (on right) and bank (on left) at Fort Randolph



D Battery Searchlight from the coast artillery located at Fort Randolph taking part in the 1936 Carnival, with a "Big Ears" listening device following

Due to improvements in naval armour, there were plans between the wars for 16-inch guns to be placed at Fort Randolph, but the project was subsequently abandoned.

However, the Fort was expanded in 1933 to 3,691 acres (1,493 hectares) and again in 1940, when all Canal defences were being considerably expanded and improved as international tensions heightened, and war had broken out in Europe. During 1940, with the expansion of troop numbers, tentage and temporary barracks had to be used, and Fort Randolph was one site where temporary barracks were constructed.



The Fort included coastal artillery barracks, housing, and other facilities,²¹ as well as the Batteries Tidball, Zalinsky, Webb and Weed – with a mix of 14-inch and 6-inch guns and 12-inch mortars, as well as being able to host a 14-inch railway gun. The troops were housed in two-story wooden barracks with normal capacity of 25 to 100 men.

THE BATTERIES HAD THE FOLLOWING WEAPONRY

Battery Webb had two 14-inch gun 1912-1948,

Battery 1 had firing points for the two 14-inch railway guns between 1928 and 1946²²

Batteries Tidball and Zalinsky were 12-inch mortar batteries, having four each 1912-1943

Battery Weed had two 6-inch gun until 1912-1946

Battery X (or 4A) had four 155mm guns on Panama mounts from 1940²³

Batteries 2C and 5A had four 155 mm guns each

Battery AW had 4.7-inch guns, replaced by 75 mm guns in 1919

Battery Weed had two 6-inch guns, and four 75 mm beach defence guns from the 1930s

Battery 5 was an anti-aircraft battery with three 3-inch AA guns on the mainland to the east of Margarita.

²¹ <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022175/00001/pageturner#page/63>

²² The two 14-inch railroad guns were brought to the Canal Zone in 1929 for use, both at Fort Randolph and Fort Amador in the Pacific side, being able to use the trans-isthmus railway, and connections to the two forts to be able to move between sites.

These had a greater range than earlier examples of the same calibre – double at 48,000 yards.

²³ A form of gun mount for fixed coastal artillery developed in Panama during the 1920s, with gun mounted on a central concrete pier surrounded by a full or partial concrete-embedded steel rail, thus allowing easy wide traverse.

There was also a searchlight position, with other searchlights installed on small islands to the east.²⁴



The post exchange (PX) at Fort Randolph in the late 1930s

Records show that present at Fort Randolph in 1940-41 was the US Army mine planter USAMP *General J Franklin Bell*. Arriving in June 1940, this was used to sew the sea mines used in the defence of the Atlantic entrance to the Canal and Cristobal harbour, the mines themselves being controlled from Fort Sherman on the other side of Limón Bay.²⁵



A PX boat from Fort Randolph delivers merchandise to troops in an outlying area of the Canal Zone, circa 1943.

²⁴ <https://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/Photos/photoof414.htm>

²⁵ <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA562276.pdf>

She was renamed as USAMP *Brigadier General John J Hayden* in 1941.



Photographs from an album of a soldier stationed at Fort Randolph in the 1930s

Even before World War 2 had ended the big guns were being taken out of service, with the mortars being the first to go. By 1948 all the guns had been removed and, following World War 2, Fort Randolph was placed on standby basis.

In 1953, part of the Fort Randolph Reservation was transferred to the Navy, to be used by the Naval Security Group Activity; this including barracks, family housing and administrative facilities.²⁶

However, by the 1960s, Fort Randolph was unused except for military training exercises by the Army's Non-Commissioned Officer Academy based at Fort Sherman and operated by US Special Forces, and for Army special training and maneuvers, especially by a Special Forces unit based at Fort Gulick. It was also where the Fort Randolph Riding Club was located, this being used by the Canal Zone Horsemen's Association.

By the 1970s, the military reservation had decreased in size, and had been declared inactive. The site was transferred to Panama on 1 October 1979,²⁷ as one of the first US assets to revert in compliance with the Torrijos-Carter Treaties of 1977. It would become owned by

²⁶ <https://www.navycthistory.com/NSGStationsHistory.txt>

²⁷ http://william_h_ormsbee.tripod.com/bases_summ_p11.htm

the Municipality of Colón, with its batteries completely abandoned and left at the mercy of the jungle that surrounded it.²⁸



*The remains of Fort Randolph
in 2006*

Left largely undeveloped, in the 2000s there were plans for Chinese investors to develop a new major container terminal on Isla Margarita, which would be the fourth such terminal, after Cristobal, Manzanillo and the Colón Container Terminal. However, the original contract was suspended in 2013, after insufficient development had taken place (it was said to have been only 16% completed), but in 2022 it was reported that the original 2013 Law had been amended to allow the concession granted to the Panama Colón Container Port (PCCP) company to run to 2042, with the concessionaire now being Nortarc Management Group (with an estimated \$1.2 billion investment); and this would involve the Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), one of the largest shipping companies in the world.²⁹

²⁸ *Old North American military bunkers located in the corners of the Panama Canal for tourist purposes* by Eva Lisary González Pinilla (Universidad de Panamá, Departamento de Historia, Panamá): <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1437-106X>

²⁹ The original concession was intended to run from 2013 to 2033.
<https://www.critica.com.pa/nacional/reemplazan-empresa-de-china-en-puerto-de-isla-margarita-629554>
<https://www.prensa.com/economia/concesion-de-puerto-en-isla-margarita-sera-hasta-2042/>



Margarita in 2016



Artist's impression of planned container terminal

Ray Todd
Panama City
Republic of Panama
1 November 2024