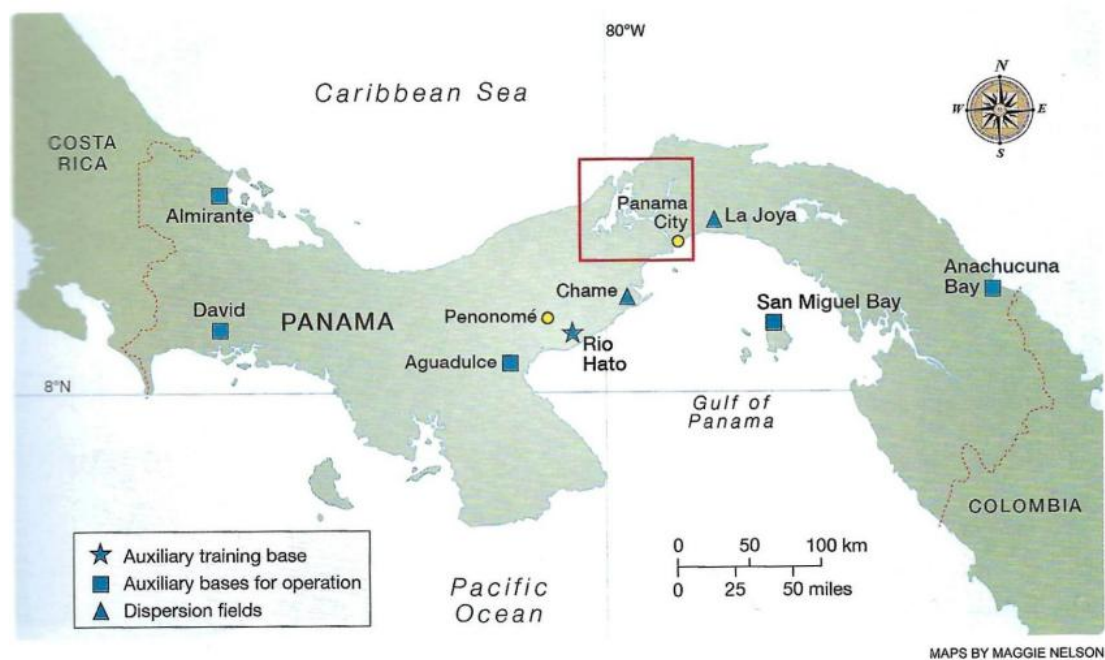


PANAMA IN WORLD WAR 2 – SHORT GUIDE TO OTHER PLACES

PART 2



David Army Airfield

El Morro Island (*Isla el Morro*)

Farfan Radio Station and Housing Community

Fort San Lorenzo

Galeta Island

Gamboa

Gatun Lake Military Reservation

La Joya Airfield

Madden Army Airfield

Mandinga

Paraíso and Camp Paraíso

Paitilla Point Army Airfield and Military Installation

Pocri Army Airfield

Punta Coco Island and Rey Island

Rodman Marine Barracks and Rodman Naval Station

Summit

David Army Airfield

Aka San Jose Field¹ or David Field; this was another auxiliary of Howard Field but located in the far east of Panama, near the city of David in Chiriqui Province, the country's third largest city, near the Costa Rican border. It was built by the US from 1941 under the 1942 agreement for bases outside the Canal Zone², with bomber units based there until 1945. The original 6,000-foot runway (surfaced with sod) was later replaced by a new, asphalt one, 5,800-feet long. By 1944, David Field had both Army and Navy radio towers and operations buildings.³

As now, the airport at David was mostly concerned with internal flights, including as part of the intra-province airmail system instigated in November 1931. In 1935, a single-engine airliner on a flight from David to Panama City, owned by a company from David, crashed, with all seven passengers (including the town's mayor) being killed. This was the country's worst prewar air crash.



A Ford Trimotor refuelling at David in 1933⁴

In 1939, the US Army said that the airfield situation for the Panama Canal Department was "critical". In the Canal Zone there was just Albrook and France Field, and there were just two commercial airfields in the Republic – at Paitilla Point, close to Panama City, and at David. However, its view was that Paitilla Point was thought suitable only for emergency landings, and David was an earthen runway and was used mainly by Pan American Airways.

¹ The city's official name is San José de David.

² For more on this agreement, see <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-and-world-war-2-operating-outside-the-zone-the-1942-agreement-and-the-1947-row/>

³ <https://pacificwrecks.com/airfield/panama/david/index.html>

⁴ <https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/agsnorth/id/7047/>

The Emergency Landing Field Project Board, appointed by the Commanding General of the Panama Canal Department⁵ in September 1939, had submitted its findings, naming the sites required, which included David, as an “emergency field”.

Despite delays with the new Arias Madrid administration that came into office in October 1940, and the eventual Bases Agreement on defence sites outside the Canal Zone not being agreed until 1942, permission was obtained for US forces to occupy a number of the sites considered necessary, and this included David from 5 April 1941.⁶

US Army Air Force (USAAF) units based there were –

397 th Bombardment Squadron	11 December 1941 - 18 August 1942
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with Douglas B-18 Bolo and Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers.

7 th Reconnaissance Squadron	from 11 December 1941
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With B-17 Flying Fortress, and Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers.

40 th Bombardment Squadron	13 November 1942 - 18 February 1943
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with LB-30 Liberator, and B-24A Liberator bombers.

3 rd Bombardment Squadron ⁷	12 March - 1 April 1943; ⁸ 11 June 1943 - April 1944; 8 December 1944 - 28 October 1945
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with B-17 Flying Fortress bombers and, later, B-24D Liberators.

From late 1943, this unit became a *de facto* operational training unit for VI Bomber Command in Panama, but with reduced numbers of aircraft as several were deployed to Guatemala City to operate patrols from there. After a time deployed to Rio Hato, by December 1944, the unit was back at David, with near full strength, all B-24D Liberators, to be eventually replaced before the end of the war in 1945 by new, or newer, B-24.

⁵ The Army command in the Canal Zone, equivalent to an Army Corps.

⁶ By 10 April 1941, there were a total of 10 airfields available for the defence of the Canal strategically located in the Republic.

⁷ This unit had arrived by sea at Cristobal in the Canal Zone on 3 March 1943, with 56 officers and 320 other ranks, but not yet having any aircraft or even a title. They moved to David by air and by convoy, to become the 3rd Bombardment Squadron there. The former members of that unit relocated to Anton Army Airfield and became the 19th Bombardment Squadron.

⁸ The unit's first short stay at David ended when it relocated to Talara in Peru (and then a few days later to Salinas in Ecuador, before again returning to Talara). However, by 11 June 1943 it was back at David.

The base was dedicated for the most part in training and reconnaissance missions over the South-east Pacific coastline, from Honduras in the north, to Peru in the south, as part of the defence of the Canal.

One accident was recorded there, on 13 July 1943, which saw 12 airmen die when their B-17E stalled and crashed on approach.⁹ On 23 May 1945, a B-24D was lost at sea, with just a single survivor.

On 11 December 1943, the only claimed enemy contact was reported. A single B-17E , operating with other Navy and USAAF units, reported contact with a U-boat, but without apparent success.

One of the irritations felt by Panamanians about the presence of US forces during the war involved checks on passengers by US immigration and intelligence officials arriving at Albrook Field, and bound for Panama City, on internal flights from David. As Albrook was within the Canal Zone, such passengers would be asked to produce passports, undergo examination of their luggage, and face interrogation by Army or Navy intelligence officers. This was an apparent violation of Article 40 of the Panama Constitution, which stipulated that any person could freely transit through the territory of the Republic. After constant demands from the Panamanian Government, such measures were relaxed by order of the Governor of the Canal Zone.

At the end of the war, the airfield at David was not one of those included under the abortive Filós-Hines Agreement for retention by the US Army after the war. It was therefore deactivated as a USAAF base in 1945.

During the US invasion in December 1989, it was feared that Manuel Noriega would slip away from Panama City and head for what had been his home province of Chiriqui, where the Panama Defense Forces' 5th Military Zone was headquartered. Despite an offer to surrender the headquarters and commander, the US forces planned an assault

⁹ <https://pacificwrecks.com/airfields/panaama/david/index.html>

for Christmas Day 1989. However, instead of heading for Chiriqui, Noriega took refuge in the Embassy of the *Papal Nuncio* in Panama City. The assault of David still took place as planned at 1100 on 25 December, by the 3rd Ranger Battalion, as the last major action of the invasion, swiftly concluded. Within an hour, the attack on airport was completed and the facility seized.¹⁰

The airfield continued in use for civilian flights to this day, now being known as Enrique Malek International Airport, and about 4 km outside the city.



El Morro Island (*Isla el Morro*)

Although referred to as an island, this islet is in fact connected to the larger Taboga Island by a sandbank, making it accessible at low tide. Taboga lies some 12 miles (20 km) from Panama City, in the Bay of Panama.



During the 19th Century a British shipping company, the Pacific Steamship Navigation Company, used the islet from around 1853, having bought it in 1840 to take advantage of its abundance of fresh water. There remains

¹⁰ https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Monographs/Just_Cause.pdf
<https://armyranger.com/operation-just-cause-panama/>

a cemetery¹¹, and a monument constructed by that company. The company established a coal store and water tanks for replenishing its vessels and others.¹²

During World War it 2 played host to a unit of PT boats, with Taboga itself being the main base for these craft, and El Morro the training centre.¹³ There was a concrete pier to which wooden floating piers were attached.

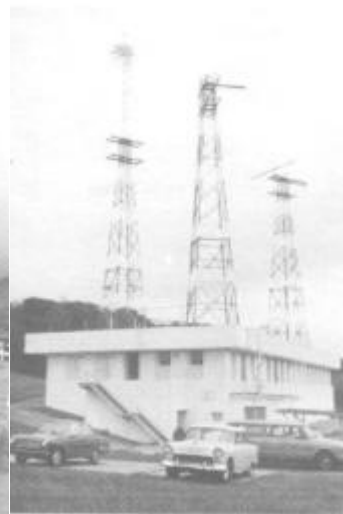
In the 2000s there was a plan to build a hotel on El Morro, but this did not come about, and the islet remains a haven for pelicans and other wildlife, which is a national park.



El Morro, as it is today



Recreation area at Farfan in the 1960s



Receiver building at Farfan in the 1960s

¹¹ Said to contain those who died of fever during the California Gold Rush and initial canal-building periods – Taboga having had a sanitorium established by the Panama Railroad Company in the 19th Century.

¹² <https://www.taboga.panamanow.com/history/history.html>

¹³ For more on the PT Boats, see <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-in-world-war-2-pt-boats-and-taboga-island/>

Farfan Radio Station and Housing Community

As part of the defence construction program in the Canal Zone, in late 1940 work began on the Farfan Radio Station (US Naval Radio Station (R) Farfan) on an 860-acre (348 hectares) site south of the Rodman naval base, on the southern (eastern) bank of the Canal entrance.¹⁴ It was completed in 1942. This included five steel towers, a two-storey bombproof operations building, and housing. The site contained the receiver equipment, the transmitter being at Summit. It also handled commercial traffic for shipping using the Canal. Later it also housed the terminus of the Inter-American Naval telecommunications Network (IANTN).¹⁵



Officers' quarters in the housing area

In 1947-48, family housing was built on the Farfan Radio Station site, becoming an annex to Naval Station Rodman,¹⁶



¹⁴ The Canal can be confusing as, while it takes traffic east-west, it actually runs more or less from the south (the Pacific end) to the north (the Caribbean)...

¹⁵ Naval Communications Bulletin, 1968.

IANTN resulted from bilateral agreements with a number of South American states and began operations in the 1960s and provided secure communications between the navies of the countries involved. It was superseded by satellite-based communication in the 1980s.

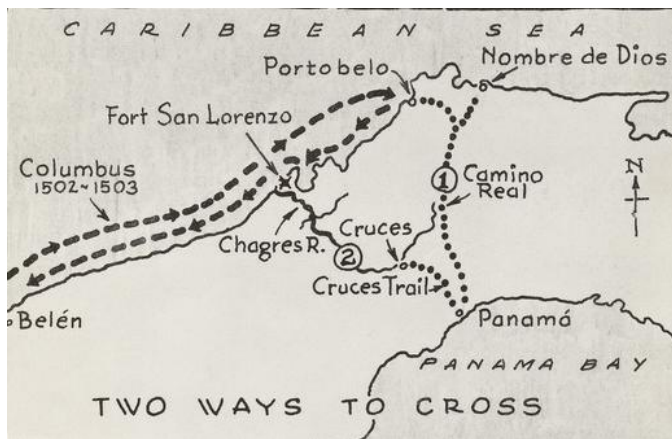
<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2254259/inter-american-naval-telecommunications-network-secretariat-celebrates-50th-ann/>

¹⁶ <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022175/00001/pageturner#page/47>

Fort San Lorenzo

This ruined fortress, about 8 miles (13 km) west of the city of Colón, had existed on a promontory on the Caribbean coast overlooking the entrance to the Chagres River since the early 17th Century.

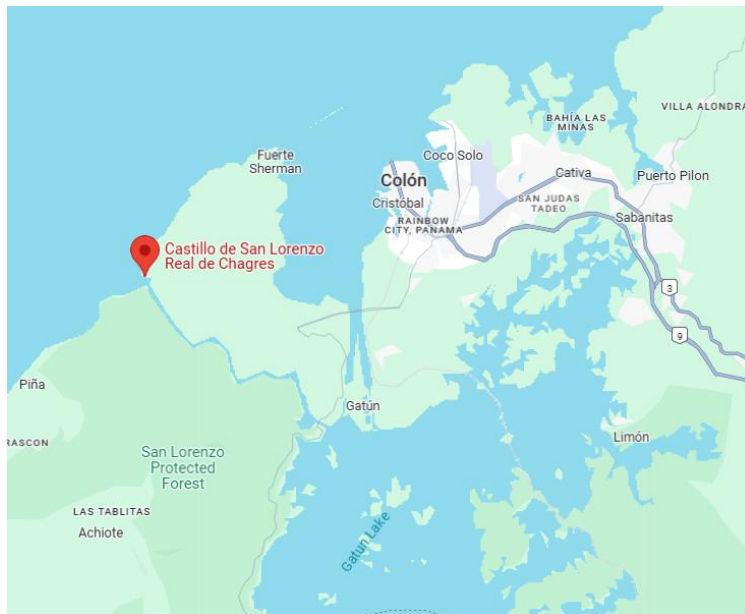
Originally outside the boundary of the Canal Zone, this was expanded in 1916 to include the mouth of the river, and the small town of Chagres saw its 400-500 inhabitants relocated to a new village some 8.2 miles (13.2 km) along the coast.



Map showing Spanish Colonial routes across the isthmus¹⁷

Despite having been designated as a National Monument since 1908, the area around Fort San Lorenzo was originally

incorporated into the Fort Sherman Military Reservation in 1911 and, during World War 1, a radio listening post was set up there.



During World War 2, in 1942, a searchlight and 3-inch (76 mm) anti-aircraft guns.

In addition, in World War 1 there was also Battery AQ with two 4.7-inch (119 mm) guns, replaced by 75 mm in 1919, placed there (until

1946) to prevent German U-boats from sending raiding parties up the Chagres River

¹⁷ <https://original-ufdc.ufliib.ufl.edu/AA00056895/00001/61j>

towards the Gatun Dam. The Army also built a pontoon bridge across the adjacent river just above its mouth.

The bridge and gun position were dismantled after the war and Fort San Lorenzo returned to be a sight-seeing area and a picnic ground.¹⁸ Some effort was made to prevent the jungle reclaiming the site, undertaken by off-duty US troops from the nearby Jungle Operations Training Center,¹⁹ with major efforts made in 1955 and 1965, the latter aimed at clearing the brush from the walls and repairing certain areas which for many years had been hidden from view by dense jungle growth.²⁰



Plate 21 Spanish-built FORT SAN LORENZO is on a sandstone headland which has been a landmark

US Army photo of San Lorenzo in 1958

In 1958, the US National Park Service published a survey of Spanish Colonial sites in the Canal Zone.²¹

This described the site as follows –

The masonry ruins of Castillo de San Lorenzo el Real are at the mouth of the Chagres River, on a small sandstone peninsula rising almost vertically about 80 feet above the sea. From this headland, there is a commanding view of the adjacent coast, the Caribbean, and the lower reaches of the river. The area encompassed by the fortifications is roughly 100 yards wide by some 200 yards long.

It was described as having two levels, with a third level a little way inland, with a parapet to mount a battery to protect the fort from landward attack.

¹⁸ <http://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/VAP/Sherman/fspage2.htm>

¹⁹ http://william_h_ormsbee.tripod.com/bases_summ_p13.htm

²⁰ <https://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/VAP/Sherman/fspage2.htm>

²¹ <https://original-ufdc.uflib.ufl.edu/AA00056895/00001/1j>



The fort was returned to Panama on 1 October 1979 following the signing of the 1977 treaties²² and, in 1980, UNESCO declared the fort and the nearby town of Portobelo a World Heritage Site.²³

Galeta Island

This is an island located on the Atlantic side of Panama, just east of Colón. Galeta Island was part of Fort Randolph and the site of a US military communications facility from the 1930s until it closed on 30 June 1999, and then it was turned over to the government of Panama in December 1999.²⁴



In fact, use of the site dated back to 1925 when the Department of the Navy and the Panama Canal Company (PCC) jointly developed a radio compass station to provide lines of bearing to commercial and naval ships approaching the Atlantic terminus of the Panama Canal. The resulting Toro Point Station was commissioned in May 1925, on the approaches to the western breakwater of Limón Bay. It consisted of a radio compass house, barracks, married quarters for the Chief-in-Charge and a concrete seawall. It was renamed Naval Communication Unit 33 (or NAVRADSTA 33 in the abbreviations so loved by the US forces).²⁵

²² However, the access road to the site passed through Fort Sherman, which remained in the control of US forces, limiting access to the area which, in any case, continued to be used for jungle and special operations training.

²³ <https://www.worldheritagesite.org/list/Portobelo-San+Lorenzo>

²⁴ <https://stationhypo.com/2017/12/30/nsga-galeta-island-republic-of-panama-closed-june-30-1999-all-dod-depart-december-31-1999/>

²⁵ Ibid.

The island was shared with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) from 1967, which still maintains a small research and education facility at Punta Galeta in what had been a USNSGA (Naval Security Group Activities) operations facility.²⁶



Administration Building NSGA Galeta Island

Postwar, Galeta Point became the site of a highly sophisticated US Navy satellite communications system, and an important location for defending the Atlantic sector of the Panama Canal; and the US Navy constructed several of the buildings later (and currently) occupied by STRI.²⁷

From the 1930s until 1952 it was a radio station designated NAVRADSTA Galeta Island, Panama. Between 1952 and 1958 it became NAVCOMMUNIT 33, NAVRADSTA Galeta island, Panama.



In 1959, it had become a Naval Security Group Activity (NSGA) site and a Wullenweber antenna array²⁸ was constructed on the site, becoming a state-of-the-art Cold War defence facility – part of a worldwide network of signal intelligence analysis. Sailors who were stationed at Galeta Island lived a few miles away in the Navy base of Coco Solo. NSGA Galeta Island was decommissioned

²⁶ <https://stri.si.edu/facility/punta-galeta>

²⁷ <https://www.navycthistory.com/NSGStationsHistory.txt>

²⁸ A large circular antenna array used for radio direction finding, for use to triangulate radio signals for radio navigation, intelligence gathering and search and rescue.

on 30 June 1995²⁹, some four years before the entire site was handed over to Panama.³⁰



Entrance to the NSGA site in 1983³¹

A new radio facility was established about a mile west of the original site, with a new operations building and a Circular Disposed Antenna Array (CDAA). It became operational in October

1965. The Coco Solo Annex of the US Naval Station Panama Canal was transferred to NSGA Galeta Island in 1968.³² By 1973, the station personnel complement included 15 officers, 238 enlisted and 51 civilians, and had become the largest US Navy command in the Canal Zone. However, it began to be scaled back scaled down from 1974.³³



NSGA Galeta Island and its CDAA.

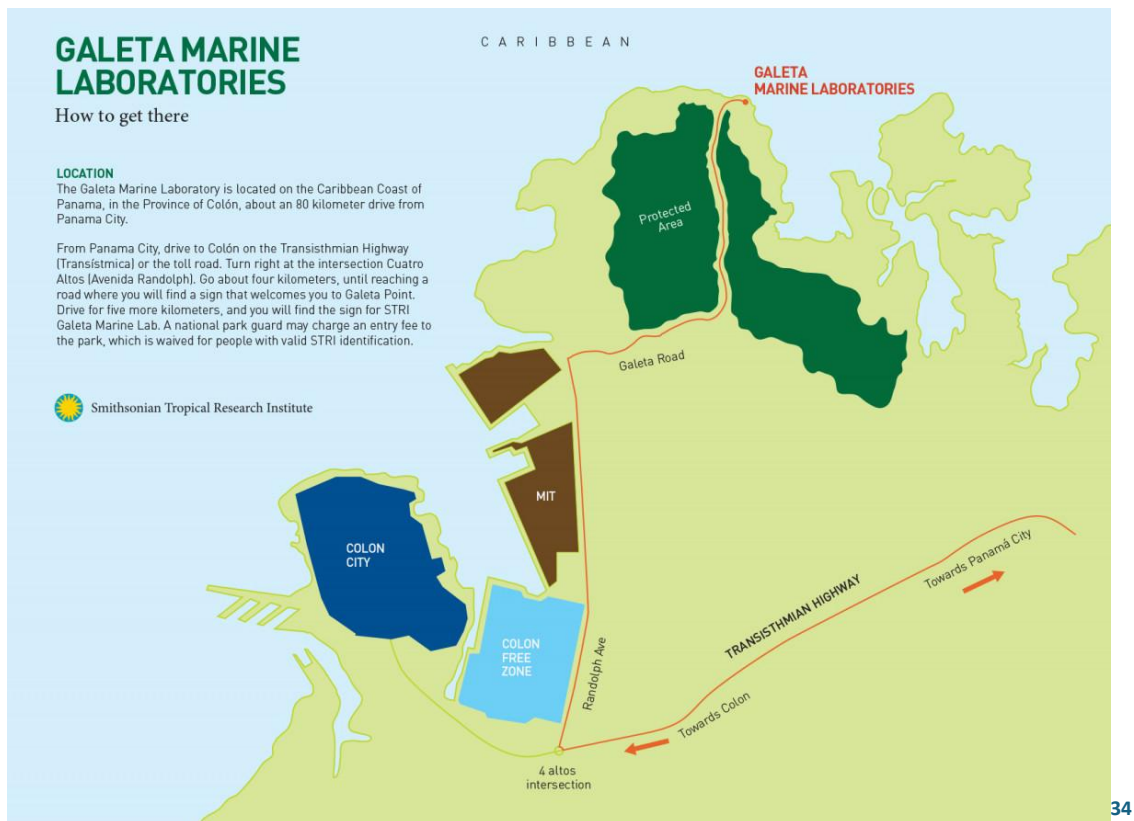
²⁹ The booklet for the decommissioning ceremony is available at https://www.navycthistory.com/galeta_stephen_craddick.html

³⁰ <https://galetaisland.com/about/>

³¹ https://www.navycthistory.com/galeta_willy_williams.html

³² Having been maintained on a caretaker status by Rodman since the closing of the closing of the Coco Solo Naval Air Station in 1958.

³³ <https://www.navycthistory.com/NSGStationsHistory.txt>



34

Gamboa

Gamboa was a small township on the banks of the Canal's Lake Gatun, one of a handful of permanent townships created by the Canal Zone authorities for employees and their dependents. It was built near the site of an earlier village called Santa Cruz, and construction took place in 1911, initially just for Silver Roll (i.e. non-US) employees. In the early years some of these inhabitants, and the township's commissary, occupied railway box cars. Population numbers declined and remained low until the 1930s (there were just 251 inhabitants then the Canal Zone authorities were considering moving the Dredging Division there in 1933).

Housing at Gamboa was expanded as part of the expansion programme in the lead up to World War 2. The modern town at Gamboa was built between 1933 and 1943, with the Canal's Dredging Division relocated from Pedro Miguel in 1936, with \$2.7 million approved for the move and creation of the new township. The move was said to be for the sake of logistical simplicity. It was to include schools, churches, post office, clinic,

³⁴ <https://stri.si.edu/facility/punta-galeta>

fire station, theatre and sports complex. By 1942, the population had reached its peak of nearly 4,000.



The Gold Roll residents were housed on the ridge of Cerro Santa Cruz hill, away from the banks of the Canal and the Rio Chagres, and in wooden-built multi-family houses, and a much healthier environment. Silver Roll employees were housed in a separate part of town called Santa Cruz.³⁵



The former Gold Roll housing

During the expansion of defences and troop numbers in 1940-42, some US Army personnel had to be accommodated in Gamboa due the shortage of suitable housing. It is reported that US personnel continued living in Gamboa until the total withdrawal of the US military from Panama in 1999.

³⁵ Aka *Gyambo'* (but called Santa Cruz by the Canal Zone authorities), this was located in the northern half of Gamboa.

For more on the discrimination and segregation practices of the Canal Zone, see <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-in-world-war-2-war-discrimination-and-segregation/>

The town declined in importance and size from the 1970s, and the closure of the passenger services of the railway in the 1980s made the town even more remote than before.

What is now the Summit Rain Forest Hotel was built on what had been the area's golf course, part of the Gamboa Golf and Country Club which opened in January 1939. The Dredging Division of the Panama Canal Authority remained based there.³⁶

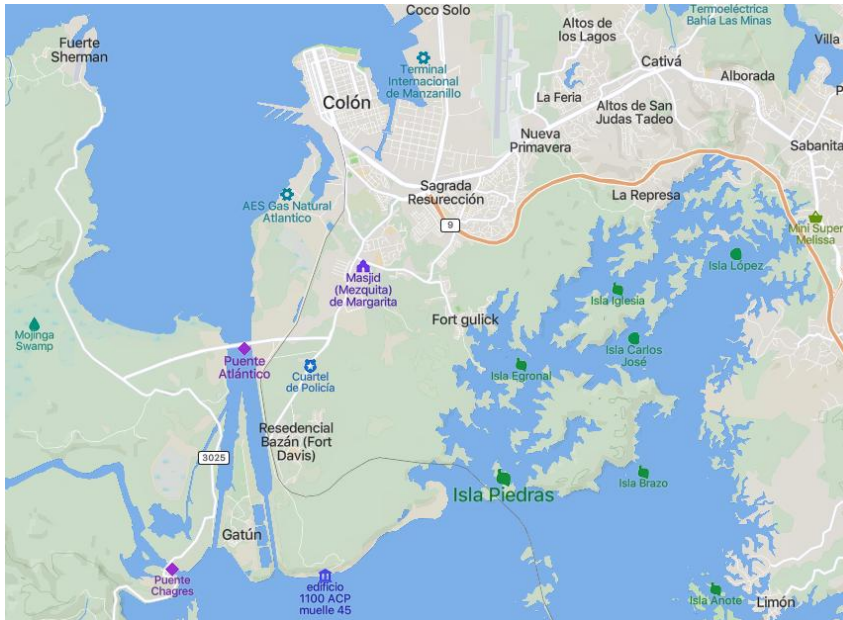


The Gamboa Rainforest Resort (which I can thoroughly recommend (except for the mosquitos if you linger on a terrace at night!))

³⁶ As does, as I write, the now retired floating crane “Titan”, aka Herman the German”; which originally helped manufacture U-boats in Nazi Germany. For its story, see <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-in-worl-ward-2-blimps-crash-boats-peashooters-and-herman-the-german/>

Gatun Lake Military Reservation

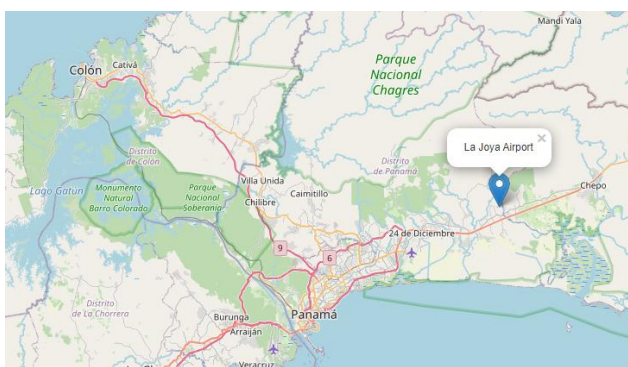
This consisted of an areas that included the islands of Zorra and Piedras and another unnamed one in Gatun Lake³⁷, established by an Executive Order 8782 of 12 June 1941. It comprised about 1,864 acres (754 hectares). The islands involved lay in the northern arm of Lake Gatun



The northern arm of Lake Gatun, the largest island is Isla Zorra, the second largest being Advent (Advenimiento)

La Joya Airfield

This was a USAAC/USAAF landing field to the north-east of Panama City, about 5 miles (8 km) from the town of Pacora in the east of the country. It hosted fighter aircraft during World War 2.



³⁷ The islands were listed in 1946 as *Advent, Egronal, Banana, Man go, Zorra, Iguana, Piedras, Terapa* and *Brazo*, “together with certain small unnamed islands” in Canal Zone Order No 2 of 1 December 1946. This new Order, which supplanted the 1941 one, was made following authority for the issuance of orders affecting military and naval reservations in the Canal Zone being delegated to the Secretary of War by Executive Order 9746 of July 1946.

There were two landing strips, known as La Joya #1 and La Joya #2, and being expanded former emergency landing fields.

A privately-owned parcel of land, it had been identified by the Panama Canal Department as one of 10 sites for new USAAC³⁸ airfields in the Republic of Panama. It was earmarked as one of several “auxiliary airfields”. Like several others, it was occupied by agreement even before the 1942 Bases Agreement was signed, so that the USAAF moved into the site on 4 April 1941, with official permission to occupy and improve it being granted by the new Panamanian President on 17 January 1942.

There were two landing strips, known as La Joya #1 and La Joya #2.

The first fighters to arrive were P-40 Warhawks of the 43rd Pursuit Squadron in January 1942.³⁹ It exchanged its P-40 for P-39 Airacobras in August.⁴⁰ Other units that used the base included the 24th Fighter Squadron, at least on a couple of occasions in 1942, and the 51st Fighter Squadron in March-June 1944.



P-40 Warhawk, said to be pf the 31st Fighter Squadron, at La Joya

La Joya was not one of the sites that the US Army wanted to retain in the Republic after the war. However, it was still being occupied by the US military as late as August 1946,

³⁸ The US Army Air Corps (USAAC) would become the US Army Air Forces (USAAF) in 1941.

³⁹ On 13 June, it was redesignated as the 43rd Fighter Squadron. It was not the entire unit, as flights had been deployed to Surinam and Trinidad.

⁴⁰ The flights in Surinam and Trinidad retained P-40C.

being specifically mentioned in newspaper reports of the time.⁴¹As with all other US bases outside the Canal Zone, it would be abandoned by the end of January 1948.⁴²

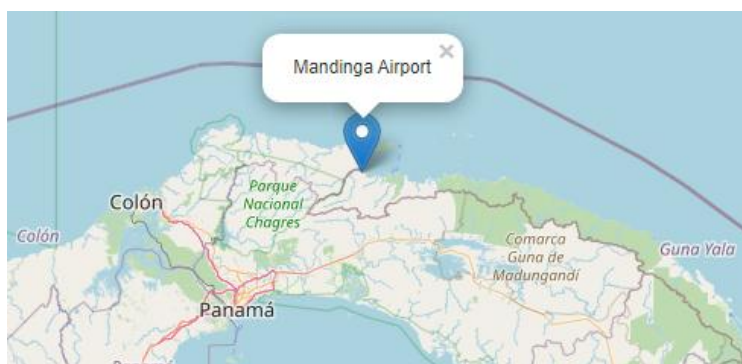
There continues to be a single landing strip at La Joya, on what is now the outskirts of the township of Paso Blanco. Nearby is the notorious La Joyita penitentiary.

Madden Army Airfield

Established in 1944 and used as a base for fighters, this base was covered in Part 1 under “Calzada Larga and Madden Army Airfield”.

Mandinga

This was the site of blimp base from August 1944, with detachments from US Navy Fleet Airship Wing 2, Headquarters Squadron 2. This was some 75 miles (120 km) from the main naval base at Coco Solo. In 1943, a temporary lighter-than-air base had been established by the Navy at Mandinga and two other sites in Panama and neighbouring Colombia for operations over the Caribbean⁴³, Mandinga covering the eastern approaches to the Canal.⁴⁴ However, such anti-submarine patrols were ended that same year, with Mandinga and the other bases closed down or placed on a caretaker basis.⁴⁵



⁴¹ <https://original-ufdc.uflib.ufl.edu/AA00010883/06189/1x>

⁴² For more on the 1942 Bases Agreement, and the abrupt evacuation of such bases postwar, see <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-and-world-war-2-operating-outside-the-zone-the-1942-agreement-and-the-1947-row/>

⁴³ The others were Chorrera in Panama and Barranquilla in Colombia.

⁴⁴ <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/b/building-the-navys-bases/building-the-navys-bases-vol-2.html>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

There remains an airport at Mandinga, which is in Guna Yala region on the Caribbean coast. It has a single runway, and is basically an airstrip, with no facilities provided for the commercial handling of passengers and cargo. It is a remote area, even today, part of the territory of the Guna indigenous people, one of the country's three politically autonomous *comarcas* of the Guna.

In 1931, the Chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee carried out an inspection of the Panama Canal Department, the Army command in the Canal Zone, and indicated the need for additional airfields in the Republic. Seven sites were identified, including Mandinga. All of the sites identified were on private land and so no formal agreement with the Panamanian Governments was needed. In fact, between 1931 and 1941, the USAAC made use of a total of 60 fields in the Republic, most remaining just that, unimproved fields.⁴⁶

In January 1939, the War Department notified the Panama Canal Department that \$200,000 had been made available for the establishing of airfields in the Republic under the Air Corps Augmentation Program. By this time, amid rising tensions, the situation regarding airfields in Panama was regarded to be "critical" by the USAAC. In February, a list of 10 sites was drawn up, this again including Mandinga. The US Army continued to press for access and use of Mandinga in the lengthy discussions with the Panamanian Government, which ended with the 1942 Bases Agreement.⁴⁷ It was eventually occupied by the USAAF with effect from 20 January 1942.⁴⁸ It was described as having three 3,000 feet (914 metres) runways.

⁴⁶ <https://www.afhra.af.mil/Portals/16/documents/Studies/51-100/AFD-090601-032.pdf>

For example, a USAAC Keystone B-6A biplane bomber made a forced landing there in 1936 after suffering engine failure: https://www.joebaugh.com/usaf_serials/1930.html

⁴⁷ See <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-and-world-war-2-operating-outside-the-zone-the-1942-agreement-and-the-1947-row/>

⁴⁸ The USAAC became the USAAF in 1941.



US Navy airship on convoy duty in the Western Atlantic during World War 2 (National Archives photograph)

Mandinga was one of the 22 defence sites outside the Canal Zone that the US Army wished to retain after the end of the war (of the total of 134 it had

occupied during the war), and it was included in the list compiled for the 1947 Filóshines Treaty (aka the Defense Sites Agreement of 1947). However, under popular pressure, the National Assembly rejected the Treaty and all the bases occupied by US forces were vacated by the end of January 1948.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ http://william_h_ormsbee.tripod.com/bases_summ_p14.htm

There had been airships over Panama before. In early 1931, the US Navy airship USS *Los Angeles*⁵⁰, by virtue of a special waiver of the proviso prohibiting her use on military missions, participated in fleet exercises, as a military aircraft, testing the defences of the Panama Canal.

Although attacked and theoretically destroyed by aircraft from the carrier USS *Langley*, the airship discovered one of the “enemy” convoys before being taken under attack, and otherwise proved her value as a scout on extended patrols. This was not the airship’s first visit to Panama, already in 1928, it had made the first non-stop flight from New York to the Canal Zone.

During these exercises, including the flight from Lakehurst to Panama via Guantanamo, Cuba, and her return to home base, *Los Angeles* set a record for extended operations away from a hangar or base unequalled by any airship up to that time.

In July 1934, another US Navy airship, USS *Akron*, undertook a practice mission, intercepting two cruisers whilst flying between Panama and Hawaii. One of the ships carried President Roosevelt, and aircraft from the airship dropped the latest newspapers and magazines for the President.⁵¹

Paitilla Point Army Airfield and Military Installation

In 1904, with the formation of the Canal Zone, Punta Paitilla along with other adjoining areas that were on the outskirts of Panama City passed into US control, although one part was returned to Panama in 1914, in exchange for land in Colón – though in 1920, some of the returned land was made part of the new Military reservation.⁵²

⁵⁰ Built by Zeppelin in Germany, the USS *Los Angeles* was used for training and experiments, including the first use as a flying aircraft carrier, launching and recovering a UO-1 biplane with a trapeze arrangement in 1929.

⁵¹ *Kite Balloons to Airships...the Navy's Lighter-than-Air Experience* edited by Roy A Grossnick and designed by Charles Cooney (Published by the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air Warfare) and the Commander, Naval Air Systems Command, Washington DC. Government Printing Office, 1986): <https://alcpres.org/military/Ita/>

⁵² Until after the 1936 Treaty was in force (in 1929) the US was able to require any additional land outside the Canal Zone for the operation and security of the Canal pursuant to the 1904 Treaty.

The Military Installation was established by Executive Order in 1920.⁵³ Covering an area of 50 acres (20.2 hectares) to the north-east of the city. It had two gun positions and searchlight positions. During World War 2, it would host four 155 mm guns, as well as four 75mm guns, as well as a searchlight position.⁵⁴

Established in 1944 and overlooking Panama Bay on the Pacific, the airfield was another base for fighters for the defence of the Canal. It was part of the Military Installation, itself a sub-station of Fort Grant (which occupied the Fortified Islands linked by a causeway into the bay, and Taboga).

The airport at Paitilla Point was constructed in 1929 and, in 1931, following the successful coup, the new government ordered three aircraft to form the new Panamanian Air Force, led by Captain Marcos A Gelabert, a pioneer of aviation in the country. However, in due course, Gelabert acquired the aircraft with an intention to establish an airmail service to David, the central provinces, and Bocas del Toro, establishing a short-lived airline in 1933, with operations from Paitilla starting in 1934. Nevertheless, he continued his efforts, with a new company, *Transportes Aéreos Gelabert*, up until World War 2, despite time in a Mexican prison after a fatal accident⁵⁵, and crashing one aircraft on take-off from Paitilla in 1938.

In 1935, the New York Times reported that Paitilla was "*considered unsafe for the landing of larger and faster aircraft, and was not illuminated for emergency landings at night*". Hence, commercial aircraft, such as those of Pan American Airways, would use Albrook.

By early 1939, the US Army considered that the airfield situation for the Panama Canal Department was "critical". In the Canal Zone, there was just Albrook and France Field, and there were just two commercial airfields in the Republic – Paitilla Point, and at

⁵³ <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022175/00001/pageturner#page/67>

⁵⁴ <https://www.northamericanforts.com/East/cz.html>

⁵⁵ Bringing an aircraft back from the US, a poor blind and deaf man was somehow beheaded by the aircraft, as a result of which he had to serve time in prison in a Mexican prison.

David in Chiriqui Province (see above). Furthermore, Paitilla Point was thought suitable only for emergency landings.

World War 2 was to put an end to commercial aviation in Panama, with no Panamanian civil aircraft were allowed to fly over the Canal Zone. Several of the Gelabert's aircraft were impressed for use by the USAAF.⁵⁶

During the war, a practice firing range for anti-aircraft automatic weapons was established at Paitilla Point.

An interesting incident was reported on 3 September 1945, when three light aircraft owned by the *Compania Chiricana de Aviacion* were immobilised by US troops. Having allegedly been flown in the day before and without Army permission. The troops placed a truck and oil drums to prevent use of the airstrip. At the heart of the incident was a long-running campaign begun the previous April to have civilian aviation returned to the airfield. A government minister had given the company permission to operate services between Paitilla Point, David and Chorrera.⁵⁷

Still being controlled by the US Army, Paitilla was not included in the defence sites in the Republic that were at the heart of the dispute between Panama and the US military following the war, nor was it included in the abortive Filós-Hines Treaty of 1947, which sought to keep a number of defence sites outside the Canal Zone in US hands. However, in lobbying for approval of the Treaty, President Jimenez Brin highlighted some of the benefits that he said could accrue to Panama. These included a highway from Rio Hato to the border with Costa Rica; and the return to Panama of Punta Paitilla and areas on the island of Taboga.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ At the time Gelabert and his company had registered - a Hamilton H.47 Metalplane (registration R-12), a Sikorsky S.38B flying-boat (RX-10), a Lockheed 5 Vega 5C (RX-14), a Stinson A trimotor (RX-17), a Vultee V.1A (RX-19), a Luscombe 8A Silvaire light cabin monoplane (RX-25). Of these, the Silvaire, the H.47 and the Stinson A would be impressed by the USAAF.

⁵⁷ *Panama American*, 3 September 1945.

⁵⁸ <https://www.laestrella.com.pa/nacional/publicando-historia/211212/asumo-responsabilidad-me-incumbe-enrique>

In 1948, it was said by the State Department that Paitilla Point was no longer needed as a military reservation either for defence purposes or for the peacetime operation of the Canal. Accordingly, if the authority of US Congress could be obtained, the US would transfer to Panama free of cost all of its rights, title and interest in Paitilla Point.⁵⁹

One of the provisions of the Remón-Eisenhower Treaty of 1955 allowed for the transfer to Panama, at no cost, such rights and titles of land located within its national territory, when the US determined that such lands are not necessary for the operation and protection of the Canal. This would lead to various transfers, including in Colón and of Punta Paitilla.⁶⁰ The latter was eventually returned to Panama on 30 October 1957.

Postwar, the airfield was used as the public airport for Panama City until 1999, when traffic transferred to the former Albrook Field, and the site was redeveloped.

In 1952, the Paitilla airport was renamed after Gelabert, after he was killed in an air crash in May 1952 at the age of 44. After the airport closed on 1 January 1999, with the former Albrook Air Force Base replacing it as Panama City's second airport, this too was renamed and became the Marcos A. Gelabert International Airport.



Photo said to be of battle damage at Paitilla Airport in 1989⁶¹

At the time of the US invasion in December 1989, Paitilla was still in use as an airport, and US Navy SEALs missions included securing the Learjet 35A executive jet

⁵⁹ *Memorandum by the Assistant Chief of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs* (711.19/1-2048), 20 January 1948. Subject: General Relations Between the United States and Panama: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v09/d467>

⁶⁰ <https://elfarodelcanal.com/tratado-remon-eisenhower-un-peldano-hacia-la-soberania-total/>

⁶¹ <https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/1990/oct/04/cover-war-beneath-the-waves/>

Manuel Noriega kept at the airport.⁶² Incidentally, the *Papal Nunciatura*, where Noriega sought asylum, is also in the Punta Paitilla district.



Paitilla Airport



Aerial view in 1976

All traces of both the Military Installation and airport are long gone, and the area has been radically redeveloped, with skyscrapers, and high-end residences.

⁶² *Maritime Sabotage: Lessons Learned and Implications for Strategic Competition* by Alexander Powell, Elizabeth Yang, Annaleah Westerhaug, and Kaia Haney (Center for Naval Analyses memorandum, 2021): <https://www.cna.org/reports/2021/10/DRM-2021-U-030772-Final.pdf>

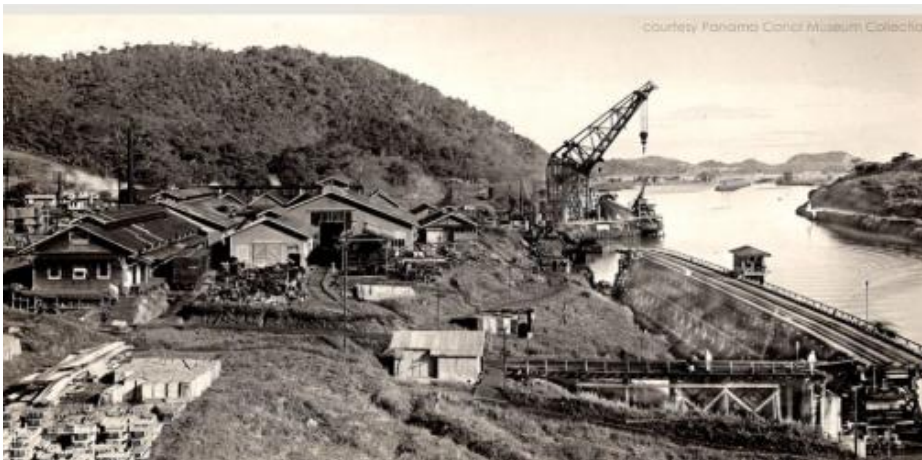
The SEALs suffered a relatively high casualty rate, with four killed and nine wounded, leading to criticism of the planning and command and control of the mission.



Punta Paitilla today

Paraiso and Camp Paraiso

This was a former township just north of the Pedro Miguel Locks.⁶³ A segregated community, it was headquarters of the Canal's Dredging Division from 1913 until later relocated to Gamboa in 1936 (see above). However, in 1918 the Gold Roll Americans were moved to Pedro Miguel, leaving Silver Roll workers at Paraiso.⁶⁴



The Dredging Division base at Paraiso

The area fell within the Curundu Military Reservation (originally misspelled Corundu), and Camp Paraiso was a sub-post of the reservation.

⁶³ Paraiso means "paradise" in English but, sorry to say, the name is somewhat misleading...

⁶⁴ For an explanation of the Gold and Silver Roll segregation system, see <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-in-world-war-2-war-discrimination-and-segregation/>



Troops parading at Camp Paraiso

It was abandoned as a settlement by 1938 and became a military post in November 1939, housing troops of the 5th

Infantry Division (nicknamed “The Bobcats”) guarding the Canal facilities as Camp Paraiso. It closed as a military camp in 1943⁶⁵ and, in 1944, the Army quarters were reused as it became a township once again. The Army theater and post exchange became the town’s clubhouse, the commissary was reopened, and a new school was built for the elementary grades. During the 1950s it continued to grow in size and importance.



66

As with many other places in the Canal Zone (and outside of it, in the case of San Jose Island), Camp Paraiso had a connection to chemical warfare, with it being one of seven chemical weapons storage magazines, which would have been chiefly, if not solely, for mustard gas.⁶⁷ There are also records said to indicate “field tests” (in addition to the more comprehensive testing undertaken on San Jose), and involving infantry stationed at Camp Paraiso.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ The 5th Infantry Division was eventually redeployed for combat in Europe in 1945.

⁶⁶ <https://www.houseofmirthphotos.com/pages/books/1192/john-t-curran/wwii-panama-canal-zone-camp-paraiso-photo-album>

⁶⁷ In 1940, the Army’s Chemical Warfare Service acquired additional storage space for gas and gas masks under a program codenamed “Mercury”: <https://www.revistaenvio.org/articulo/1386>

⁶⁸ <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/2058/chapter/20#373>

For more on chemical weapons, San Jose etc, see <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-in-world-war-2-mustard-gas-and-chemical-defences/>

Following the 1977 treaties, the area reverted to Panama in the 1980s, after the canal Zone ceased to exist in 1979.

It had been a stop on the trans-isthmus trail in Spanish Colonial times, lying just 8 miles (12.8 km) from the old centre of Panama City. It became a stop on the railway in the 1850s, though then a very small village. When the US began its efforts to construct the Canal, the area was occupied, with many of the French-era buildings restored. By 1905 it even had a Coca Cola bottling plant⁶⁹, taking advantage of the nearby spring (which had been the reason for the original inhabitation). The same spring supplied fresh water to many townships during the construction period.



Pocri Army Airfield

aka Pocri Auxiliary Aerodrome; like others, this was established in 1944 as a fighter base and an auxiliary airfield to Howard Field.⁷⁰ It was located in the Azuero peninsula, in Los Santos province, on the eastern edge of Panama Bay (and is now covered in housing). It was about 10 miles (16 km) from the nearest large town, Las Tablas, and 92 miles (148 km) from Panama City. In 1947, it consisted of two parcels of land or a total 157.2 hectares (388 acres).

⁶⁹ <https://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/Photos/photoof80.htm>

⁷⁰ It no longer exists, having been built over.



As with La Joya (see above), Pocri was included on the list of 10 sites for potential new airfields outside the Canal Zone. At the time the site was said to largely owned by the Panamanian Government. While included in the 134 new defence sites outside the Canal Zone covered by the 1942 Bases Agreement, Pocri was one of the places occupied by the US Army, by permission, before the agreement was signed. In the case of Pocri, this was occupied from 7 April 1941.



P-39Q Airacobra of 28th Fighter Squadron

From 22 February to 2 August 1944, a detachment of the 28th Fighter Squadron flew P-39 Airacobra fighters from here.

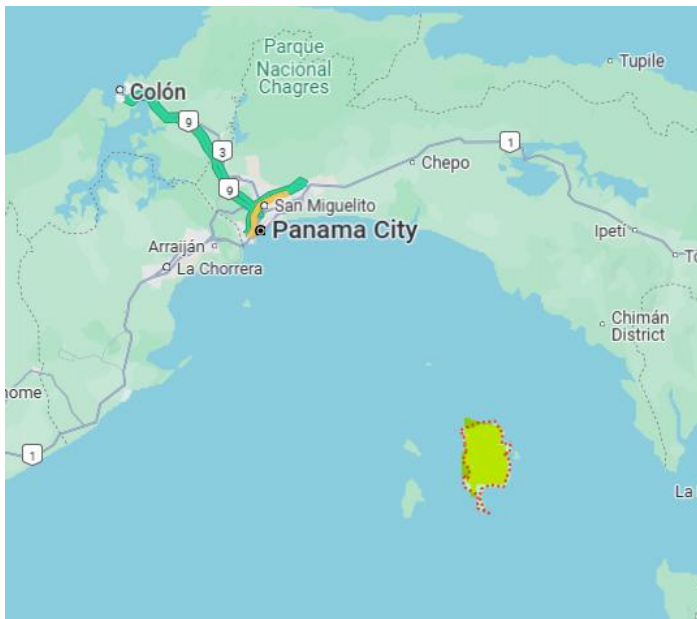
Pocri was also one of the relatively small number of defence sites that the US Army wanted to retain after the end of the war. The US proposed that it be retained for a further 10 years, with a renewal option.⁷¹ However, this plan was rejected by the National Assembly, so that all such US bases were vacated by the end of January 1948.⁷²

⁷¹ *We Answer Only to God: Politics and the Military in Panama 1903-1947* by Thomas L Pearcy (University of New Mexico Press, 1968).

⁷² See <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-and-world-war-2-operating-outside-the-zone-the-1942-agreement-and-the-1947-row/>

Punta Coco Island and Rey Island

There was an airfield on Rey Island (*Isla de Rey*) in the Pearl Islands (*Perlas Archipelago*) in the Bay of Panama, some 66 miles (107 km) south of Panama City. It was located on the southernmost part of the island, which was the largest of the archipelago lying in the Gulf of Panamá, and occupied from 1 April 1942. Also present was an Air Warning Station (AWS), and was used as a base for the Air Rescue Boats of the 12th Emergency Boat Squadron (ERBS)⁷³, and a US Army radio station. Fighters deployed from Albrook Field, including the 24th Fighter Squadron, used the airfield.



Map showing position of Rey Island

The airfield was one of those defence sites outside the Canal Zone that the US earmarked for continued retention after the war, and was included in the list under the 1947 Filó-Hines Agreement⁷⁴ that was rejected by the National Assembly in 1947. Retention would have been for 10 years, with an option to renew the lease. At the time, the site was said to consist of two parcels with a total area 272 acres (100.05 hectares)



Air Rescue Boat P-258 operated from Punta Coco from around 1943. A 42-foot (12.8 metres) boat built by Hunt Marine Service of Richmond, California⁷⁵

⁷³ For more about the “crash boats”, see <https://raytodd.blog/2024/06/30/panama-in-world-war-2-blimps-crash-boats-peashooters-and-herman-the-german/>

⁷⁴ <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1947v08/d791>

⁷⁵ <https://aaafcollection.com/items/documents/view.php?file=000020-01-00.pdf>

In 2014, the US funded a naval base at the southern tip of the island, as part of a strategy to monitor and detect the flow of illegal drugs. However, shortly after construction the Panamanian Government decided to turn the site into a prison, said to be a key part of then-President Varela administration's strategies to combat urban gangs and organised crime. A month later this plan was cancelled, with the prison being instead said to be used for people involved in criminal acts the Las Perlas Archipelago until they were sent to Panama City. However, a year later several prisoners remained, and others had been sent there, with the centre now seen as a maximum-security jail.⁷⁶ The plight of the prisoners prompted an intervention from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), and a resolution from the Organisation of American States (OAS).⁷⁷ In 2018, the Government was still arguing that the 6-cell facility complied with all security and human rights requirements.⁷⁸ By 2023, there 10 "very high-profile" prisoners at Punta Coco



The Punta Coco jail in 2020

The airstrip remains, and can be seen beside the prison site in the photograph above.



⁷⁶ <https://www.panamatoday.com/punta-coco-panamanian-alcatraz-penitentiary/>

⁷⁷ <https://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/nacion/panama-obligado-cerrar-penal-de-punta-coco-solicitud-de-la-oea-1015958>

⁷⁸ <https://www.mingob.gob.pa/el-centro-de-detencion-preventiva-de-punta-coco-cumple-con-las-normas-de-seguridad-y-de-derechos-humanos/>

Rodman Marine Barracks and Rodman Naval Station

Rodman lay on the opposite bank of the Canal entrance from Balboa, at the Pacific end. The Port of Balboa had become crowded, so that the new base was built on the other side of the entrance.



Photo of Balboa Naval Station taken before 1937

In 1932, a licence was granted for the construction of the first west bank naval

facilities, these being completed in 1937 as the Balboa Naval Station, Canal Zone, with the Naval Ammunition Depot commissioned in 1937. The base was renamed Rodman Naval Station in 1950.⁷⁹ It was built on former tidal marsh, with various fills coming from dredging of the Canal between 1913 and 1930. Its role was to provide fuel, provisions, and other support to military ships passing through the Panama Canal.⁸⁰

Additional housing was constructed in 1941 as part of a military build-up in preparation for what would be US participation in World War 2.⁸¹

By 1943, there was a 600-acre (240 hectare) site providing fuel, provisions and other support to US and Allied ships.⁸² It included the Farfan Receiver Station and the Arrajan Tank Farm.

Balboa Naval Station included a deep draft port facility, housing units, warehouses, munitions bunkers, and other buildings. It expanded and contracted over the years to

⁷⁹ It was named for Captain Hugh Rodman, former Marine Superintendent and Superintendent of Transportation of the Isthmian Canal Commission:

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022175/00001/pageturner#page/45>

https://data.fs.usda.gov/research/pubs/iitf/GTR_IITF41.pdf

⁸⁰ https://data.fs.usda.gov/research/pubs/iitf/GTR_IITF41.pdf

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² https://members.tripod.com/william_h_ormsbee/bases_summ_p03.htm

encompass other naval holdings, which included an Ordnance Department, Marine Barracks, Camp Rousseau, and the nearby Lacona and Cocoli housing communities.

Built south of the naval station was Farfan Radio Station.



Supply building at Rodman Naval Station in 1985

Until 1999, the base served as the hub for all US naval activities in Central and South America, as well as the Canal Zone, although its importance waned after the

1960s. It provided fuel, supplies, and all types of support to US and allied military ships passing through the Panama Canal. It was also responsible for providing security for US Naval Forces transiting the Canal (including submarines and other vessels) and for temporary maintenance and refueling for US and allied warships. During the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 it provided 24-hour logistical support.



The photo shows a battalion of US Marines from the Rodman Naval Base marching down Central Avenue as part of the November 1946 parade.

It is said to have been at its peak in the 1960s, when it hosted the Southern

Detachment of the Atlantic Fleet (CINCLANTFLT Detachment South), the naval component of the US Southern Command responsible for Southcom naval exercises. Also, there was the Navy Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS) for naval and coast guard personnel throughout Latin America and the

Caribbean.⁸³ Rodman also hosted several other Navy small commands in Panama, including Naval Special Warfare Unit 8 (Navy SEALs), and Naval Small Craft Unit 26.



Rodman Naval Station in 1985

In 1999, it was one of the last US-controlled areas transferred to Panama, reverting to Panama with a transfer ceremony on 11 March 1999.⁸⁴

Part of the larger site was originally called the Naval Ammunition Depot, Balboa but this was renamed as the Marine Barracks in 1941⁸⁵ and continued in use to 1998.⁸⁶

Part of the Rodman Naval Station was renamed as the Vasco Núñez de Balboa Naval Base for use by Panama, and the nearby PSA Panama International Terminal for container shipping opened in 2010.⁸⁷

⁸³ https://data.fs.usda.gov/research/pubs/iitf/GTR_IITF41.pdf

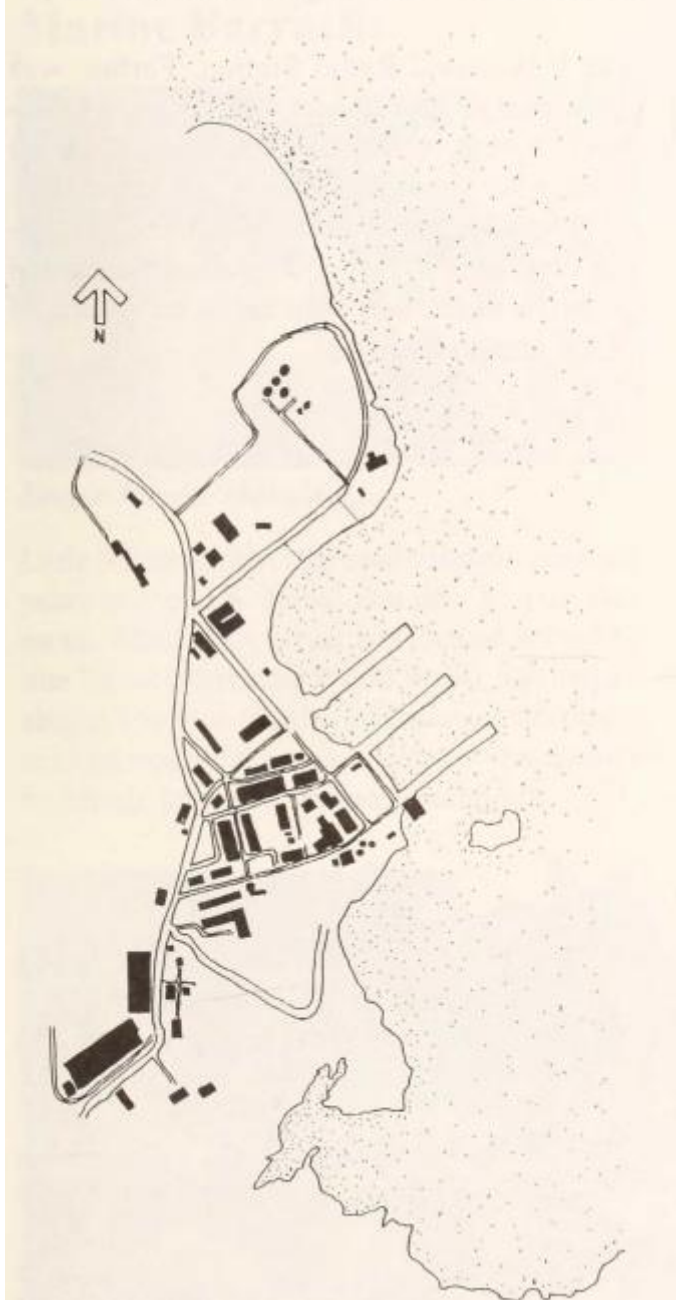
⁸⁴ http://william_h_ormsbee.tripod.com/milprop_transf_p12.htm

⁸⁵ http://william_h_ormsbee.tripod.com/bases_summ_p03.htm

⁸⁶ <https://www.northamericanforts.com/East/cz.html>

⁸⁷ *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>

U.S. Naval Station - Rodman



1970 map of Rodman Naval Station

MARINE BARRACKS, LATER THE US NAVAL STATION PANAMA CANAL–MARINE BARRACKS

Construction of the Marine Barracks, later the US Naval Station Panama Canal–Marine Barracks, began in December 1935, and was ready when Balboa Naval Station was commissioned in 1937. By 1939, the complex had about 40 buildings and structures including officers' quarters, barracks, magazines, mine storage and assembly buildings, an oil house, and an equipment building. Because of its isolation, recreational facilities were provided including an athletic field, swimming pool,

bowling alleys, tennis and handball courts, movie and pool rooms, and the Canal Zone's first post exchange (PX) store. However, a connecting road was added in 1940, and between 1941 and 1943 many additional buildings and facilities were added, including temporary barracks.

During the war, marines from the Barracks took over the Transit Guard role from the Army, with detachments aboard ships in transit to guarantee security and prevent sabotage.

In 1943, all marines in Panama were consolidated as Marine Barracks, 15th Naval District, being renamed Marine Barracks, Rodman, Canal Zone in 1976, and Marine Corps Security Force (MCSF) Company, Panama in 1987.⁸⁸

Marine numbers were reduced after the war, but in 1989 they were increased, and their involvement included crossing the Canal to Balboa Harbour to disable Manuel Noriega's yacht, in support of the US invasion.⁸⁹ They



Marine Barracks at Rodman built in 1965⁹⁰

RODMAN AMMUNITION SUPPLY POINT (RASP)

The Rodman Ammunition Supply Point (RASP) was designed to store munitions and was built between 1933 and 1937, being upgraded in

1942. Originally, the munitions supply point was part of the Balboa Naval Complex. However, in 1956 it was transferred to the US Air Force, and in 1976 to the US Army. After the US withdrawal in 1999, it was to become an Eco-Park.⁹¹

Summit

The first naval installation autonomous from the Panama Canal Company, and for the exclusive use of the US Navy, was Balboa Naval Radio Station, established in 1914 and inaugurated in 1918 as the first high-powered station. However, the first radio station in the Canal Zone had been at Colón for the US Navy in 1904. By the 1920s, these had been joined by another at the submarine base at Coco Solo. These three stations were

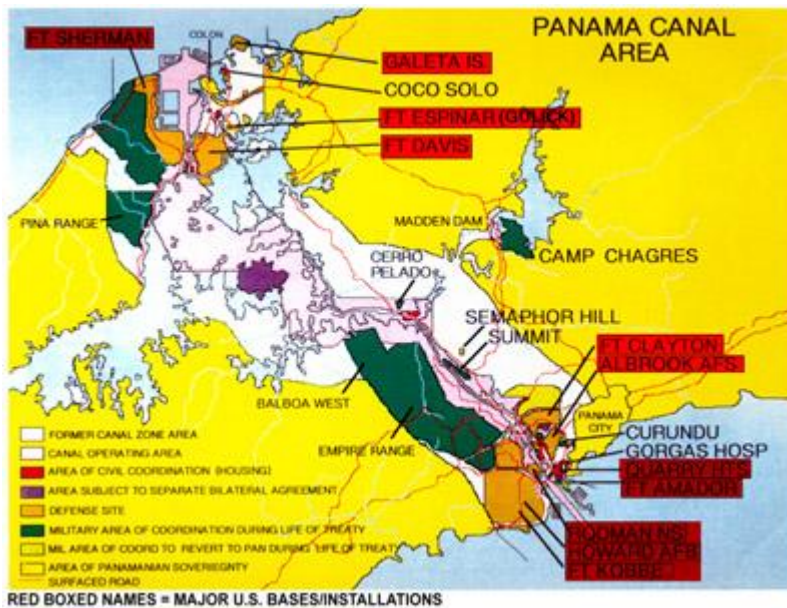
⁸⁸ https://www.marines.mil/portals/1/Publications/Just%20Cause%20Marine%20Operations%20in%20Panama%201988-1990%20PCN%2019000313400_1.pdf

⁸⁹ https://data.fs.usda.gov/research/pubs/iitf/GTR_IITF41.pdf

⁹⁰ <https://www.loc.gov/resource/hhh.cz0020.photos/?sp=2>

⁹¹ https://data.fs.usda.gov/research/pubs/iitf/GTR_IITF41.pdf

said to form links in a comprehensive communications chain from the times of World War 1.⁹² They also handled commercial and cable services to ships using the ports and the Canal.



In fact, “Balboa” station “NBA” (its original callsign being “NPJ”)⁹³, had its transmitter at Summit, about halfway along the route of the Canal, with the receiver station at Farfan across the entrance of the Canal from Balboa.

A further station, NAVRADSTA Darien, (1914-1935) provided crucial support for naval operations in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Its primary function was to facilitate long-range radio communication, ensuring reliable and secure channels between the Continental US, naval vessels, and other military installations in the Caribbean and Latin America. Despite its name,⁹⁴ this was actually located alongside the Canal, around halfway along its route (and hence close to its replacement at Summit). Construction began in 1914, with the station operating in 1915, with three 600-foot (183 metres) towers in a triangular arrangement. Darien was replaced by Summit in 1935, and decommissioned on 31 December 1937.⁹⁵

However, the Navy expansion in the Canal Zone lagged behind that of the Army and, prior to 1939, Navy buildings on the Atlantic side were limited to a naval air station⁹⁶ and submarine base at Coco Solo, a radio station at Gatun and a smaller base at

⁹² <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1916/july/naval-radio-stations-panama-canal-zone>

⁹³ US Naval Communications Station, Balboa (later NAVCOMMSTA BALBOA).

⁹⁴ The Darién is the province which borders Colombia, far from the Canal Zone.

⁹⁵ *Darien Radio Station – Then and Now* by James Massot Henderson (2022).

⁹⁶ On 1 July 1931, NAS Coco Solo was redesignated Fleet Air Base (FAB) Coco Solo. The redesignation of both the squadron and its home port indicated a change in mission from coastal defence to fleet aircraft, and its flying-boats took part in operations with the fleet in the Caribbean.

Cristobal. On the Pacific side, the 15th Naval District headquarters was established at Balboa, there was an ammunition depot on the west bank of the Canal, and a radio station at Summit. A half dozen fuel tanks at either end of the Canal, and a few other, minor installations had also been built.⁹⁷ During the war, an all-new radio station would be established at Farfan with five steel towers, a two-story bombproof operations building, and housing facilities.



Summit transmitters c. 1945-46⁹⁸

The Naval Radio Station, Summit, Canal Zone was constructed in 1935⁹⁹ and, during World War 2, it was enlarged considerably

with new housing, transmitter building, a bombproof transmitter and receiving building, and two masts of 300 and 800 feet (91.4 and 244 metres). The latter tower required around 135,000 cubic yards of excavation to level the surrounding terrain, to allow placing of the ground grid system.¹⁰⁰



⁹⁷ *Historic Resources Assessments: Department of Defense Activities 1993* (Panama Canal Treaty Implementation Plan Agency, Washington DC, 1995)

⁹⁸ <https://nbaersplayground.com/braga/webpics2/HighFreqBld.jpg>

⁹⁹ <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-7399-reservation-naval-radio-station-summit-canal-zone>

¹⁰⁰ *Historic Resources Assessments: Department of Defense Activities 1993* (Panama Canal Treaty Implementation Plan Agency, Washington DC, 1995).

It lay inland, about one third of the distance from Balboa on the Pacific coast and Coco Solo on the Caribbean, and about 13 miles (20.9 km) by road from the headquarters and communications centre at Balboa.¹⁰¹ It was located on the opposite side of the Gallard Highway and trans-isthmus railway from the Summit Experimental Gardens.



Barracks and enlisted men's mess in 1968

Due to its relative isolation, by the 1960s it would have its own recreational facilities, including a swimming pool and theatre, as well as all the usual accommodation, mess, Navy Exchange store etc.



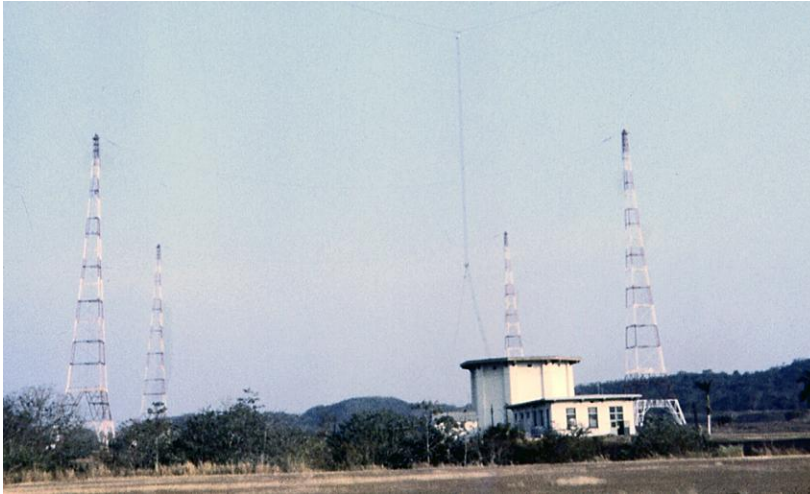
Man working on one of the transmitter towers in 1950



Summit in c. 1945-46

It later became the Naval Communications Station Balboa VLF. The 1977 treaties listed those defence sites which remained for the exclusive use of the US forces and were under their complete control until 1999. Another list was for "Military Areas of Coordination", necessary for US forces to use for the purposes of communications, military training, and for housing and support. The US retained ultimate responsibility for this sites. Summit Naval Radio Station was in the latter list.

¹⁰¹ <https://www.navy-radio.com/commsta/panama/bulletin-6812-16.JPG>



Summit in the 1960s¹⁰²



Entrance gate at NAVRADSTA (T) Summit.

Ray Todd

Panama City

Republic of Panama

24 January 2025

¹⁰² <https://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/Photos/photoof900.htm>