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Author Captain J.H.Oliver, Commander F.H.Schofield, Major R.H.Dunlap, USMC
 Contents Military value of certain coastal positions in the vicinity
 of the Panama Canal.

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U. S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE,

Newport, Rhode Island,

November 11, 1911.

SUBJECT: Military value of certain coastal positions
in the vicinity of the Panama Canal.

1. The military value of coastal positions in the vicinity of the Canal Zone depends:--

- (a) Upon their usefulness to us.
- (b) Upon their usefulness to our enemies.

2. The usefulness of any of these positions to us or to our enemies depends upon the relation these positions bear to the security of the canal, and to the security of the lines of communication converging on the canal. The freedom of the canal from attack depends upon the operations of the fleet. The security of the canal if attacked in the absence of the fleet, depends upon its fixed defences and upon the mobile forces in the vicinity.

(a) Usefulness to us of coastal positions in
Vicinity of Panama Canal.

3. If the fleet is operating in the defence of the canal or in defence of the lines of communication converging on the canal, the permanent base within the canal zone will meet its needs in that vicinity.

4. A large fleet, such as ours must be in time of war, requires a commodious anchorage to which it may proceed when occasion demands. If such anchorage lies behind fixed de-

fences it is a great convenience. But if such anchorages are not defended by permanent fortifications their use is not thereby denied to the fleet. Temporary defence by mines, submarines, and artillery, of the type suitable to temporary bases, will give a reasonable degree of security. The presence of the fleet, fit for service, in the strategic area of the anchorage will make such an anchorage secure until the fleet is defeated. If defeat follows a general engagement the natural effort of the defeated will be to reach a fortified base. We cannot afford to equip and fortify two bases in the same vicinity on the chance that a defeated fleet might have a choice of destination in its efforts at escape. The effort and resources necessary to the establishment of such a second base can be more efficiently applied to the strengthening of the fleet in other ways.

5. If the fleet is distant from the canal, or if the fleet is destroyed, the defence of the canal will devolve upon local forces. Such defence is strictly a military, as distinct from a naval problem; but it would appear that the chances of successful defence will be greater if all effort is concentrated within the area of activity of the local mobile forces and the fixed defences of the canal zone. The guarding of detached positions is expensive, as they require to be of exceptional strength.

Our studies, though not conclusive, indicate that there are no detached positions near the canal zone, other than those now being fortified, the defence of which would add more

to the security of the canal then would the employment of equal forces and resources within the canal zone.

(b) Usefulness to Our Enemies of Coastal Positions in Vicinity of Panama Canal.

6. An enemy operating in force against the Panama Canal from the Atlantic side would require a West Indian Base. If his lines of communication are secure he will desire a base as near his objective as possible. Almirante Bay and Chiriqui Lagoon are commodious anchorages about one hundred and fifty miles from Colon. If we do not occupy or defend them we may expect an enemy to use them. If we exclude the enemy from them he will select a less convenient harbor. The inconvenience to him resulting from our denying to him of these particular anchorages will not deter him from his purpose.

7. Porto Bello is of no importance as an anchorage or as a rendezvous for a fleet. It is a possible landing place. It is believed that the difficulties of a land approach to the canal from Porto Bello and the comparative ease of opposing such an approach by local mobile forces make fixed defences at Porto Bello unnecessary. Porto Bello should be included in the plans for defence of the canal by local mobile forces.

8. On the Pacific side of the Isthmus there are anchorages in the vicinity of the Perlas Islands, the Islands of Taboga and Taboguilla, and in San Miguel Bay. Any one or all of these anchorages might be most useful to an enemy fleet. An enemy could not occupy any one of them in the

presence of a superior fleet. In the absence of our fleet their successful defence would not interpose an effectual bar to operations on the mainland. As permanent injury to or the capture of the canal must be accomplished, if at all, by land operations, it would appear unwise to attempt to deny these outlying anchorages to possible enemies. The policy of denying where there are many places to deny is futile.

9. The fortifying of the islands of Taboga and Taboguilla would enlarge the sea room of a fleet issuing from the canal and seeking to form for battle. If the effect of the guns of Perico and Flamenco, supplemented by the menace of mines and torpedos, will not be sufficient to enable the fleet to form, then there might be real need for a powerful battery on Taboguilla. When, however, the remoteness of possible enemies in the Pacific is considered it will be seen that there is no present urgent need for fortifying Taboguilla.

10. We conclude:--

That from the standpoint of the needs of the fleet, no additional localities in the vicinity of the canal need be acquired or occupied at present. We have the treaty right to acquire from Panama, by lease or purchase, additional localities when needed for naval purposes.

That, as a defensive measure, we cannot expend resources efficiently in denying to an enemy detached positions in the vicinity of the canal zone.

And, finally, that our efforts and resources for the local defence of the canal can be most efficiently employed if concentrated within the canal zone.

NOTE: The foregoing paper was prepared from a study by Major R. H. Dunlap, U.S.M.C. which study comprehended the work of the "Summer Conference 1911".

James H Oliver
Wm K H L Howard,

R. H. Dunlap.

U.S. Naval War College,
Newport, R. I.
Nov. 15, 1911.

APPROVED.

R. P. RODGERS.

Rear Admiral, U. S. N.,
President.

