

U. S. MAY ACT TO KEEP AIR BASES

Panama Urges Release of Wartime Fields.

By JOHN A. THALE
Times Foreign Correspondent
PANAMA CITY, Panama, Nov. 23.—Observers are expecting the United States to make a definite bid soon to keep permanent possession of some of its wartime bases in the Republic of Panama.



They would form part of the regular Panama Canal defense system. When and if the proposition finally is put up to the Panamanian government, cold turkey, some fine head-butting is likely to take place between the Panamanian and American officials.

Early in the war, when it looked as if the Panama Canal was likely to be Axis target No. 1, Panama leased to us some 83 tracts as temporary defense sites. The agreement is that they are to be returned within at least one year after the signing of a "definite peace treaty" ending hostilities.

We are paying \$50 for each 2½ acres of privately-owned land, \$1 for each 2½ acres of public-owned tracts. Most of the defense base sites are privately-owned. A lot of the private land probably could be bought outright for less than the lease price.

Eager to Get Bases

Panamanian officials say that about 60 of the 83 sites already have been returned to the Republic. Still, in United States hands are some of the larger ones.

The Panamanians currently are acting exceedingly eager to get the bases back. Americans in the midst of a foreign land are not an un-mixed blessing. Also, the Panamanians claim a strong national pride which makes the presence of foreign bases in their midst exceedingly irksome. The Panama Canal zone, they say, is one thing; bases scattered all over their country are another.

In response to recent direct inquiries from the Panama government, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes soothed their feelings somewhat. He said that the United States would comply strictly with the terms of the temporary base agreement.

But in the welter of the diplomatic talk there was also the conditional thought injected that the bases would be returned as per agreement "unless other arrangements were worked out in the meantime."

American diplomatic officials here pussyfoot on the subject of an exact definition of a definitive peace treaty. It is something like the question of when does the "duration" end.

Set Own Return Date

Panamanians have gone ahead flatly on the theory that when the Japanese envoys stepped aboard the battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay, it marked the signing of a definitive peace treaty. That means they say, that the temporary bases must be back in Panamanian hands by Sept. 1, 1946.

Panamanians admit that the Republic has no possible use for most of the bases as such. They just want them out of the country. One of the most-discussed sites still in American possession is the 15,500-acre Rio Hato base, used by liberator bombers.

One influential Panamanian was asked what might be done with it when the United States gives it back. "Well," he replied, "they might make a week-end resort out of it."

More cynical American officials regard the Panamanian love-of-land argument narrowly. They suspect that there is some public breast-basting going on to the end that the net price will be higher when the United States comes around with an offer to buy.

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ATOM COMMITTEE TO QUIZ EXPERTS

WASHINGTON, Nov. 23 (U. P.).—The special senate committee on atomic energy will hold frequent closed-door sessions with atom experts, it was disclosed today.

Public hearings begin Monday, but will be interrupted "from time to time" to permit private questioning of witnesses on still-secret phases of atom-splitting. Committee Chairman Brian McMahon (D. Conn.) announced.

McMahon said the first part of the hearings will be devoted to basic domestic and international problems rather than to any specific legislative proposals.

Witnesses during the first week will include Dr. Vannevar Bush, director of the office of scientific research and development; Maj. Gen. Leslie R. Groves, director of the "Manhattan project" which developed the atomic bomb; and five other atom authorities. They are Dr. Harold Urey, Dr. Irving Langmuir, Dr. Leo Szilard, Dr. E. F. Wigner and Dr. H. D. Smyth.

Representatives of government, industry, labor, agriculture and other groups will be heard later, McMahon announced.

ADVICE ON JOB

Vernie L. Miller, president of the Marion county Building Trades Council, will be interviewed on "Your Job, Today," WIRE, 12:45 p. m. tomorrow. He will discuss the expanding field of employment that is open to qualified men, trained in military service or war work, now seeking jobs.

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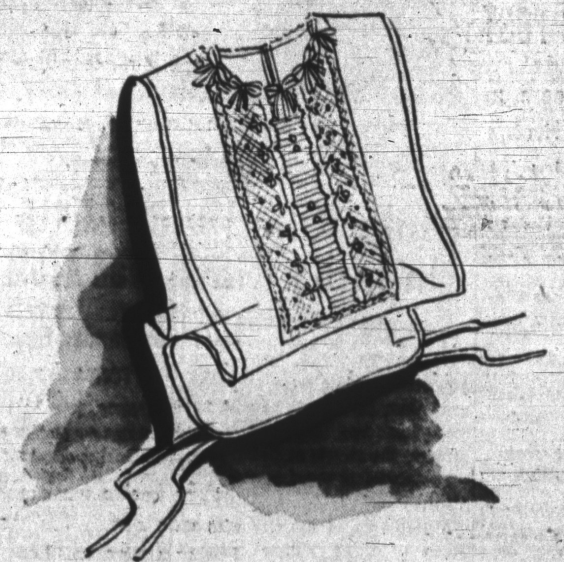


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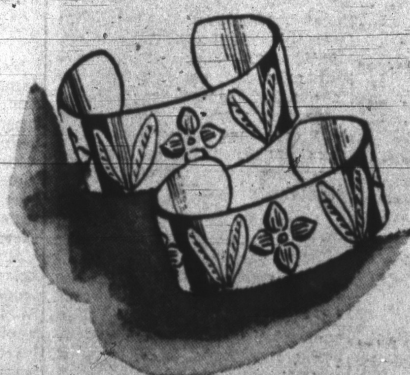


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