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May 1956

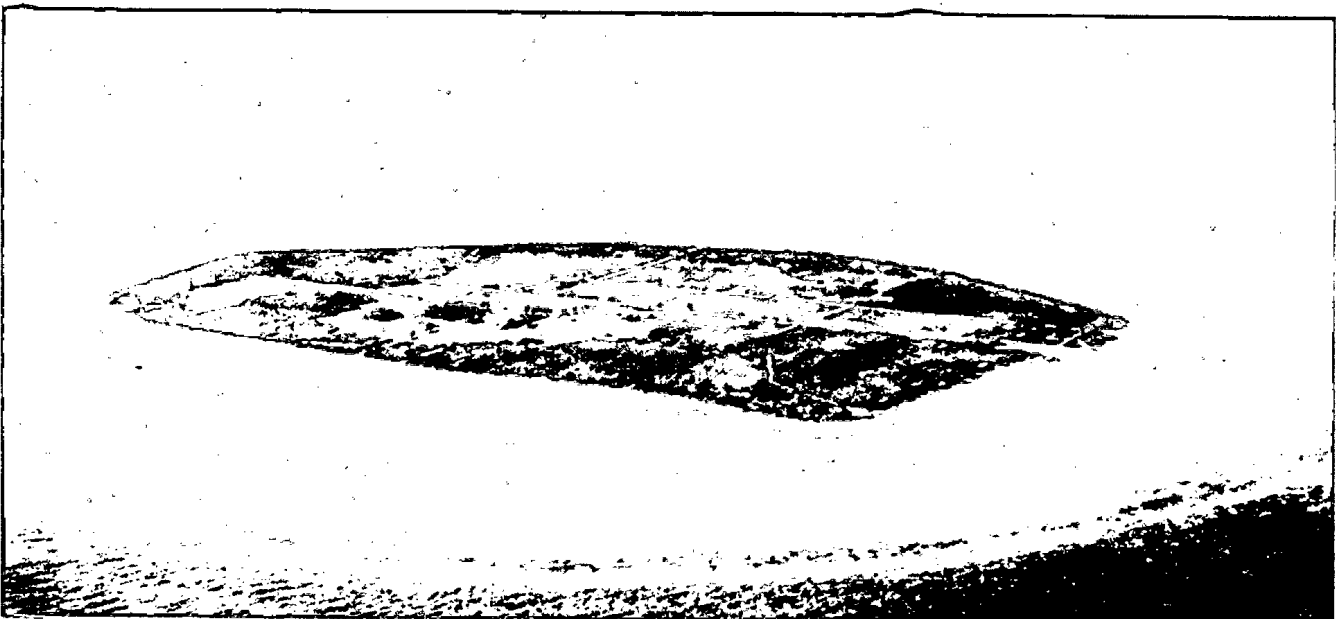
present equipment) to antisubmarine warfare operations involving either carrier- or shore-based aircraft, but the carrier aspect of this capability may decline slightly during the next 2 years as equipment becomes more dated and submarine operational techniques improve. Shore-based ASW aircraft strengths are expected to remain at substantially present levels as new equipment is phased into service

to replace existing aircraft stocks.

Physical limitations inherent in present aircraft carriers will preclude the development of a carrier-based air defense capability against high-speed jet aircraft until completion of the CLEMENCEAU. Until that time the French Naval Air Arm will be capable of providing air defense to the fleet only when it is operating within range of French shore bases.

## Disputed Islands in the South China Sea: Part I

*Recent Chinese Communist moves in the Paracel Islands have focused attention upon the three groups of disputed islands in the South China Sea: Pratas Island, the Paracel Islands, and the Spratly Islands. This is the first of two articles covering these islands. The Paracel Islands have been selected for discussion in the first article because it is there that the most significant activity is currently centered.*



Neatly patterned roads distinguish French-occupied Pattle Island, which is about ½ mile long and 30 feet high. Note the stone pier at the right.

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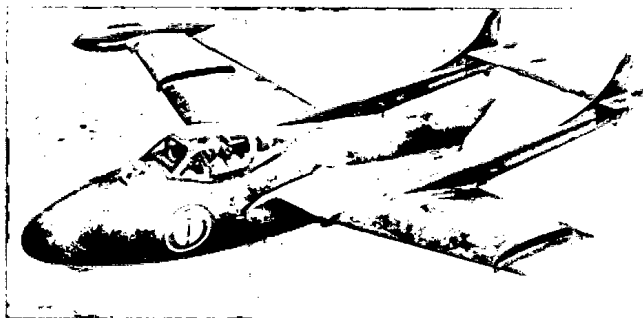
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of apparently vigorous support of its naval air arm.

Aquilon aircraft are now being delivered to the Naval Air Arm and organized into squadrons of 16 aircraft each. These squadrons, of necessity, will be shore-based until such time as the CLEMENCEAU becomes operational sometime in 1959. To date these squadrons have become carrier-qualified through operations from British carriers. Aquilons will form the primary air defense capability of the Naval Air Arm for some time to come.

In addition to constructing new carriers the French have evidenced some interest in the conversion of the obsolete carrier DIXMUDE into an assault helicopter aircraft carrier (CVHA). Presumably this conversion would be patterned after that of USS THETIS BAY, now undergoing conversion.

Although hampered in the past by the lack of extensive submarine training, the difficulties encountered in ASW training are slowly being overcome and the pilots are becoming proficient in the conduct of this type of operation. Shore-based P2V aircraft are slowly being equipped with Magnetic Airborne Detection (MAD) equipment, and electronic shortages which pre-



French Navy carrier fighter Aquilon (Sea Venom).

viously limited the use of P2V's are being overcome. Crews have become proficient in the use of their aircraft and equipment.

The French Naval Air Arm's growth to date, exclusive of recent aircraft orders and Aquilon deliveries, may be attributed directly to the aid furnished the French Navy through the Mutual Defense Assistance Program. Programmed deliveries through MDAP have been, in the main, completed although some P2V's are still scheduled for delivery. Present indications are that the French Government will continue to support the development of its naval air arm, at least through 1958.

Developed primarily in the past 6 years as an ASW weapon, the Naval Air Arm is now capable of making an effective contribution (within the limitations of its



Marignane. Aquilons (Sea Venom) and Vampires parked in front of the hangars.

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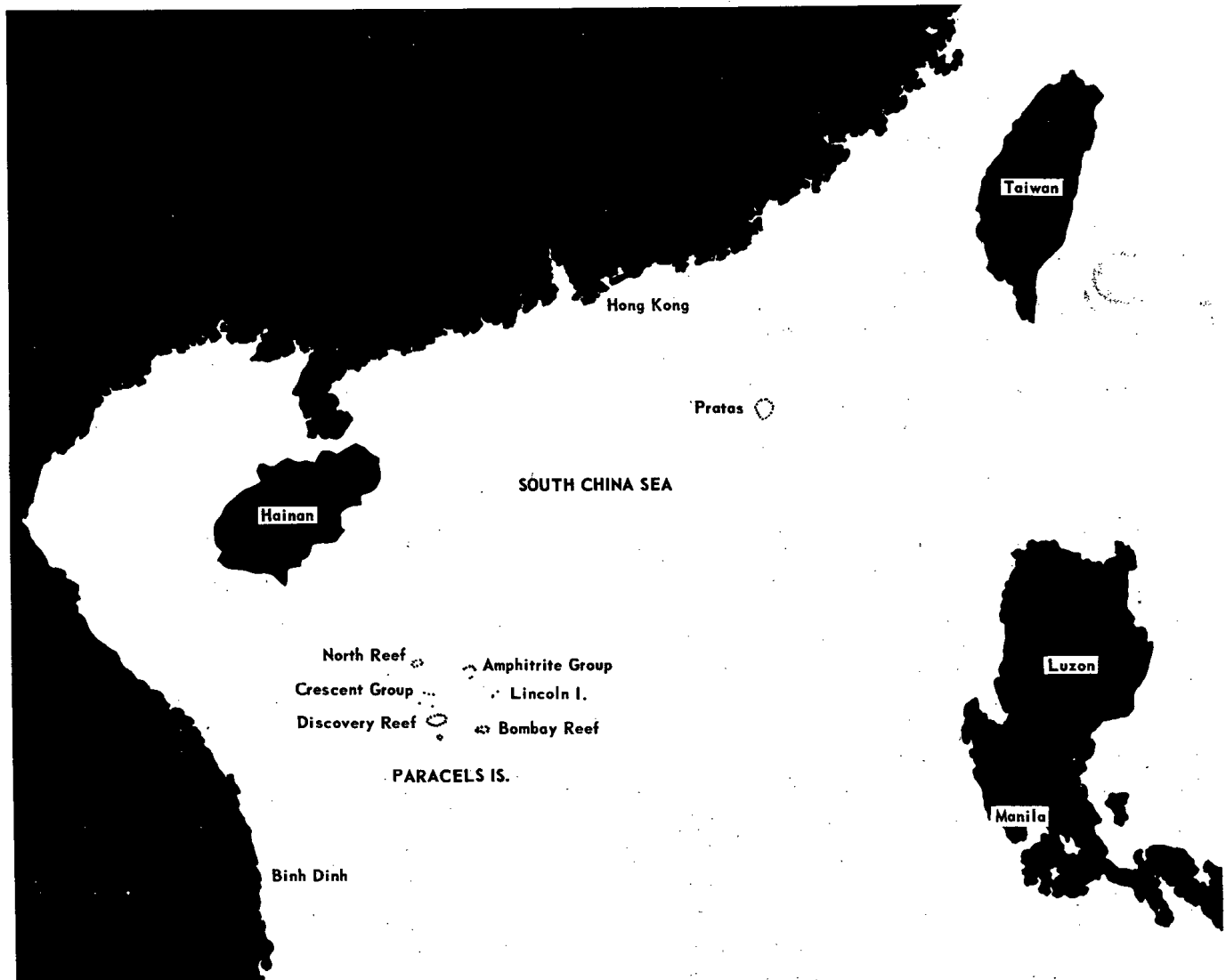
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There are about 25 islands in the South China Sea whose ownership is disputed by several nations. Considered solely for their intrinsic value, the islands are hardly worthy subjects of dispute. Their combined area is less than 10 square miles, they nowhere rise more than 40 feet above sea level, and they have never supported a native population. In addition, they are located among some of the most danger-

ous reefs in the world and most of them can be approached only by lighters or small boats.

In spite of this physical insignificance, these islands have become important in the game of power politics, and seven nations maintain claims of sovereignty over some or all of them. The fact that two of these claimants are Communist nations--Red China and Vietminh--makes



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Newly collected guano is piled on the paved areas left by previous occupants. Workmen are visible and the volleyball court (see text) is in the upper right.

the area of interest to us. If Communist China can successfully maintain its claims and occupy and administer the Spratly Islands, as it has begun to do in the Paracels, it will have extended its legal and actual power into Southeast Asia nearly 9° latitude south from Hainan Island. This is more than the distance from New York to Charleston. Such an advance would ominously echo the pattern followed by Japan which in its southward move successively occupied Pratas, the Paracels, and the Spratlys in 1937-39.

#### THE PARACEL ISLANDS

In discussing these small coral islands enumeration is difficult because there is no clear-cut point at which land ceases to be sandbar or dry reef and becomes a full-fledged island. In the case of the Paracels, there are about 15 which are clearly large enough to merit the name "island." Most of these lie in two groups: the Crescent Group, dominated by Pattle Island; and the Amphitrite Group, dominated by Woody Island. Triton, Lincoln, and Passu Keah Islands lie isolated to the south. The largest island is Woody, which is about 1 mile in diameter and 30 feet high.

Altogether the Paracel Islands dot an

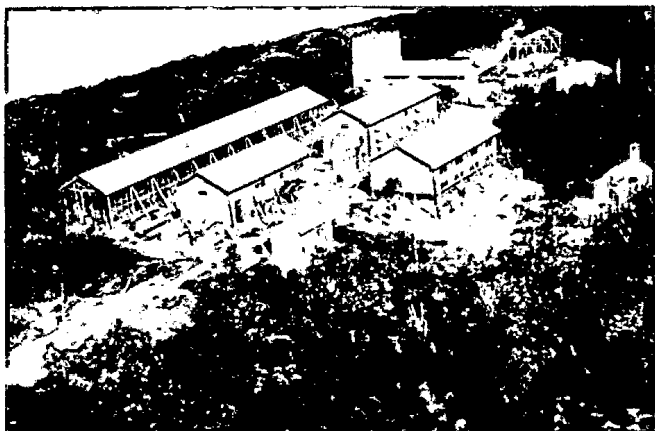
area of about 650 square miles of sea. Lying on the natural shipping lane from Singapore to China, these islands and the numerous associated reefs present a serious hazard to navigation. Most ships bypass the area, either to the east or west, but numerous still-visible wrecks bear tragic testimony to the fact that fog, typhoons, and faulty navigation have made the Paracels a maritime graveyard.

In January of this year the Danish freighter BIN TANG (2,315 GRT) ran aground on North Reef at almost the same spot where the TAIKINSHAN (2,284 GRT) broke up in early 1952. The BIN TANG remained aground for several weeks, but she was fortunate enough not to be hit by severe weather and was successfully lightened of cargo and refloated with the aid of a tug. During the time she was aground, the BIN TANG was under the surveillance of several junks, possibly coming from the new Chinese Communist outpost on Woody Island, which will be discussed later in this article.

Although these islands have been used for centuries by fishermen who have stopped there to dry fish, dry nets, collect seaweed, gather firewood, and get fresh water, they have not supported any permanent settlements. The earliest reported official claim to the islands is

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The white crenelated tower was the administration building when the Japanese held the island. Five new buildings and the beginnings of a sixth one are conspicuous.

supposed to have been made by the Empire of Annam in 1816.<sup>1</sup> According to French claims, the French Navy explored the islands in the late 1800's and erected a marker on Pattle Island. In 1909 the Chinese Empire announced annexation of the islands on the grounds that they had been used by Chinese fishermen for generations. They were made a part of Kwangtung Province along with Pratas Island. In 1917 Seiju Hirata, managing director of a company located in Formosa, visited the Paracels and claimed to have discovered them. Within 4 years a Japanese company (possibly Hirata's) was exploiting the guano deposits on several of the islands and had built offices and dormitories for the guano workers.

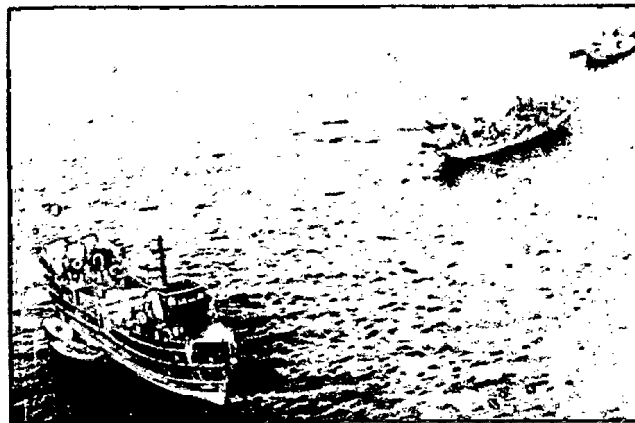
The buildings on Woody Island by 1933 consisted of a 1-story headquarters 63 by 18 feet, two dormitories 90 by 15 feet, shops, kitchens, and a messhall. The Japanese maintained a distillation plant for water and supplemented it with four reservoirs for water from rain catches. They also had a light, push-car railroad for guano handling (reportedly totaling 1-2/3 miles) connecting with tracks on the 1,200-foot-long pier. Five years later the French added some buildings including a cement blockhouse to be used as a police station, a boathouse, and a sick quarters.

It was in 1937 that the French began to

<sup>1</sup>Or 1812 or 1865, according to other sources.

reassert their claims to the Paracels. In that year they sent an expedition of several ships and two seaplanes to explore the islands and they erected a lighthouse on Pattle Island. Then, in the summer of 1938, having heard of the Japanese seizure of Pratas Island, they sent a garrison of 55 Annamite gendarmes under French officers to occupy the islands and proclaimed the Paracels to be possessions of France. On Pattle Island, in addition to the lighthouse, they built a cement blockhouse for a police headquarters, a cement storehouse for provisions, a thatched village, and other minor buildings. They collected water from the roof of the police station and supplemented this with well water. Reportedly there were also two wells and several rainwater tanks on Robert Island and two somewhat brackish wells on Duncan Island.

On 8 July 1938, 4 days after the French announced the sending of their gendarmes to the islands, the Japanese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs handed a note of protest to the French Ambassador. Ironically, the Japanese, who then occupied a large part of the Chinese mainland, based their protest on the grounds that the French were violating Chinese sovereignty. Even before the Japanese protest reached the French Foreign Office, however, Dr. Wellington Koo, then Chinese Ambassador to France, had already pre-



These Communist junks, photographed off Woody Island on 10 March 1956, are typical of the craft used to support the Chinese development there.

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sented his protest at the Quai d'Orsay. The Chinese and Japanese were in agreement that the Paracels were Chinese territory. In Japan, the press bitterly attacked the French action and in a superb demonstration of oriental indirectness said: "Under the circumstances nobody can guarantee that an undesirable conflict will never occur between France and Japan."

Distracted by the growing tension in Europe, the French withdrew from the Paracels in late 1938 or early 1939. On 20 February 1939 the Japanese produced Mr. Hirata, "discoverer" of the Paracels, and when they took Hainan from the Chinese they also occupied the Paracels.

During World War II, the Japanese used the Woody and Pattle Islands as radio and weather stations to provide typhoon warnings for their fleets and convoys. In January 1945 United States fliers passing the area sighted a French tricolor flying from the white tower of the administration building on Woody Island. This prompted CTG 71.1 to order the submarine PARGO, LCDR C. D. Bell commanding, to conduct a reconnaissance of Woody Island. On 4-5 February the PARGO verified the presence of the French flag, sketched the profile of the island, and sighted about 20 men on the beach. On the 6th PARGO sent two Australian commandos (Major Jenkins



Trees are rare in the Paracels except on Woody Island. This cluster of palms is on Lincoln Island, but the brush and grass in this view are much more typical of the local flora.



Drummond Island of the Crescent Group. Duncan and Money Islands are similar in appearance.

and WO/1 Chew) ashore in a rubber boat. A little over 3 hours later through the periscope the shore party was observed at close range, smiling and making a hand signal indicating gunfire. The submarine surfaced and picked up the two commandos who reported that the occupants of the island were clearly Japanese, the flag being a ruse. The PARGO then fired upon the island with 71 rounds of 4-inch and 18 pans of 20mm and claimed substantial damage including destruction of the weather/radio station.

En route to Woody, the PARGO had a look at Pattle Island and noted that the buildings and houses were well kept and that there were two 110-foot radio masts.

On 8 March 1945 three planes of VPD-117 from Mindoro hit Pattle and Woody with twenty-seven 250-pound and nine 100-pound GP. bombs. The strike was set up on information provided by the PARGO's scouting mission and was motivated by the suspicion that "the target radio stations...were 'Roger' for messages, creating circuit interference, and otherwise disrupting communications in addition to acting as lookout stations."

Sometime in 1945 the Japanese left the islands. In 1946 the French and Vietnamese returned to Pattle and the Chinese Nationalist Navy established a weather and radio station. In 1948 they had 156 personnel on the island including a 29-

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man hydrographic unit. When Hainan Island fell to the Communists in the spring of 1950, the Nationalists abandoned Woody Island, and it remained without permanent inhabitants until about August 1955. At this time personnel were seen playing volleyball in a corner of the cleared area. This promptly caught the attention of people who know the area, because group athletics are not normal to native fishermen, who find that a day at the nets provides ample exercise.

From that time on the island has been under increasingly frequent surveillance. This early party was apparently a small, advance group assigned to survey the area for future activity. In December 1955 and in the first 3 months of this year there was an upsurge of activity on the island. Some new buildings were erected and some of the better-preserved, cement-walled ruins were given new roofs. By April there were 11 new or newly rehabilitated buildings. The Chinese Communists appear to have approximately 200 persons there, possibly including some women and children.

There are no signs of weapons, radar, or other military equipment on the island, so it is probable that the immediate motives of the occupation are economic (to collect fertilizer) and political (to give

substance to the claim of sovereignty). The guano on Woody Island is of an inferior grade having many impurities, but the Japanese found it worth exploiting and the Chinese who are short on fertilizer will find it at least equally worthwhile. In 1922 the average depth of guano there was about 1.3 feet, and in 1933, after some years of Japanese exploitation, it was estimated at 10 inches.

The estimate for the whole Paracel group in 1922 was that 34 percent of the total area was covered to an average depth of 1.5 feet. In 1938 the Japanese were still working on Woody and were preparing to begin operations on Lincoln Island. The deposits on Robert Island are reported to have been exhausted, but other islands as yet untouched have considerable deposits.

Vietnamese marines have replaced the French and Senegalese troopers on Pattle Island. Woody and Pattle are about 50 nautical miles apart, and the two occupying groups have apparently had no contacts to date.

At present active claims to possession of the whole Paracel group are actively maintained by France, Communist China, Nationalist China, Vietnam, and Vietminh. The Japanese abandoned their claims in 1951 in the Treaty of Peace.

Hong Kong, 7 March: After months of heartbreaking effort the 2,315-ton Danish freighter BINTANG was towed into Hong Kong Harbor today, the first vessel in 50 years refloated from the treacherous north reef of the Paracel Islands.

BINTANG ran aground in January and was salvaged on a "no success, no pay" basis by tug skipper Leslie George Moore Warner, of Sydney, and a Danish salvage expert.

Among the welcoming crowd at BINTANG's triumphant berthing today were members of the police narcotics squad. They boarded her and seized 438 pounds of opium and 5 pounds of morphine, worth £28,000, and detained several men.

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# Spanish Naval Officer Training

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Spain did not take part in the Second World War and therefore did not have the opportunity to advance in proficiency and technical knowledge as did the participants. Naval training has been carried out in accordance with Spanish naval experience of the Civil War period of 1936-39, supplemented by secondhand information obtained largely from naval professional periodicals. The organization and training methods of the navy are outmoded and incapable of providing trained personnel to man modern warships. The senior officers are inexperienced in modern naval tactics, especially in antisubmarine warfare, escort of convoys, harbor defense, and in combined operations and coordination with other services. The junior officers have had little training in the operation and maintenance of equipment used by a modern navy. In September 1953 the Defense and Mutual Defense Assistance agreements between Spain and the United States were signed and subsequently a modernization program for Spain's obsolete warships was begun. It was soon discovered that modernization of the ships had to be accompanied by a modernization of the training of naval personnel. During the summer of 1955 a joint Spanish-United States committee made a study of Spanish naval schools and methods and of applicable United States methods. This study resulted in recommendations that have been approved by the Spanish Minister of Marine, who in November 1955 directed the Chief of Training to proceed immediately to implement the report within the limitations of the current budget. With current aid from the

U.S. Navy, including training of personnel in the United States and the provision of technical training aids and guidance in Spanish schools, the present outmoded training program should soon show signs of improvement and within several years begin to provide officers and men capable of operating the newly modernized Spanish Fleet.

The procurement of officer candidates for the various naval corps is by means of annual competitive examinations which take place at Madrid. Each year the following approximate numbers are chosen: General Line, 30; Engineering, 15; Supply, 8; Marine Corps, 8; and other corps in various numbers to the maximum of 5. The instruction of the first four branches is carried out at the Naval Academy over a period of 5 years, one of which is spent on board the schoolship J.S. ELCANO. During the final quarter of the last year instruction is carried out in ships of the fleet. All other officers take 1 year of military training at the Naval Academy and aboard ship.

Line officers can specialize in the following categories: electricity, gunnery, undersea warfare, hydrography, and naval warfare. There are also special courses for the submarine and aviation services.

Those qualified in aviation serve as observers in the air force when its planes are operating with the navy. They may also qualify as pilots of navy helicopters.

The officers of the Marine Corps specialize either in close-range antiaircraft defense or chemical warfare. Marine Corps officers can take courses at the