

## Notes of a Tourist

—5—

At Sea, Nearing Callao, Peru, Feb. 21, 1939.

While sailing the Caribbean sea we were reminded that the United States had a total of 140 vessels there at the time, ranging from heavy battleships to small supply ships. These ships bore a total of 41,000 officers and men, and yet out of the whole group we saw but two small destroyers at Balboa, with another tiny gray boat that looked like an officers' armored launch.

In round figures the canal cost a half billion dollars, and if from its annual income, interest were set aside at the rate of 3 per cent, the deficit would be only thirty millions. At the low rate at which Uncle Sam is now borrowing money, the dam is a good investment.

There are some 7,000 employees, which, together with members of their families, or dependents, make a total of around 29,000. In many ways these employees have a good job. The temperature varies only about 30 to 35 degrees, there is usually a cool breeze from the ocean, housing and sanitation are good, rents reasonable to employees, wages are fair, vacations liberal, and they are permitted to buy from the non-profit, non-taxed government commissary, which does a business of \$8,000,000 a year.

The Canal Zone, which includes the canal and five miles on each side, is efficiently governed by a man employed for \$10,000 a year, and the mechanical engineer, whose genius keeps everything running in apple pie order, receives \$9,250 per year. Either one could undoubtedly secure far more pay if employed in private industry, but they take a pride in their work, which is outstanding.

In the early days the manual labor was performed entirely by negroes. The white employees were paid in gold, while the negroes were paid in silver, so the whites soon became known as "Golds" and the others as "Silvers." That designation still prevails. Instead of whites and colored, which latter name might be misleading, the division, whatever it may be, is between Golds and Silvers.

Our information is to the effect that tolls are charged on the basis of tonnage, and that the tolls paid for the passage of the Nieuw Amsterdam was approximately \$17,000.

Everything about the canal is massive, and yet everything being on such large proportions, one soon gets used to it. Our ship which has a breadth of 88 feet, had a clearance on each side of 11 feet. By the simple process of putting the ship into the dock, closing the tremendous gates, which move quickly and easily, and opening the half dozen big pipes leading to Gatun lake, the ship, like a cork, is lifted by the waters until after having passed thru three locks it has gained the top of the canal, 85 feet above sea level. It took the Nieuw Amsterdam eight hours, to enter the canal, pass thru its length of approximately 40 miles and regain sea level after passing the locks at Pedro Miguel, and at Mira Flores.

For those who are hunting for it, parts of the old De Lesseps ditch together with its rusting machinery, may be seen, but to us on the boat little of that nature was visible.

From a military standpoint the Panama canal is one of the most important fortifications in the world. It guards the peace of the world to a greater extent than any other work of man, yet the traveler thru the canal sees military barracks, neat gardens, and wild jungle, but nowhere the evidence of military strength. The guns are so well concealed that they cannot be located either from a ship on the sea, or one in the air.

In an earlier period our coast fortifications were in plain sight. Everyone going to San Diego, Calif., could see the big guns, but the use of the airplane has made a great change. A few years ago representatives of foreign governments were not only permitted to see these things, but were shown just what we had and how we intended to use them. Even after the photographing of armament was prohibited and cameras were taken away from foreigners, the slant eyed vandals of Japan were caught using binoculars, with camera equipment, in order to spy upon our protective devices.

The Canal Zone is an armed camp with fortified hills, islands and subterranean fastnesses, in

which huge supplies are stored. One of its great features of safety lies in the fact that both the Atlantic and Pacific locks lie some six miles or more inland, well protected by shore batteries, so battleships intent on attack will have to undergo the disadvantage of six miles in range.

Still further protection, however is deemed necessary, and all America will unite in the importance of making the canal impregnable. Perhaps another canal will be built thru Nicaragua, but more likely greater efforts will be made to increase the military strength of the canal we now have.

There has been a great deal of improvement in the Isthmus in the past nine years, since our last visit. Beautiful homes in Panama and its suburbs, wider streets, modernistic business houses, a start toward improved highways. Old Panama, sacked by Henry Morgan in 1671 and long left to decay, has been cleaned up a bit. The jungle has been kept in abeyance, walls threatened with falling have been restored in part to preserve them, and scores of ruins are now to be seen which were buried under the jungle growth of nearly three centuries. Even the old stone bridge, built by the Spaniards, has been given new side walls for protection, but its old arches and foundations support modern traffic.

We saw Old Panama nine years ago in daylight, and this time in the late evening. Its haunting shadows are more impressive now, due to the light of a nearby roadhouse, yet one can wish that the tawdry, flimsy construction of the present, could have been kept away from one of the most interesting historical spots in the western hemisphere. One who really enjoys visiting a place of so great interest is not looking for a drink, and one looking for a drink finds little enjoyment in other things.

W. C. S.