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PANAMA CANAL DESCRIBED VIVIDLY BY FORMER LA GRANDER

(By L. F. Ivanhoe)

Written for Neighborhood Club. When the Isthmus of Panama was discovered, the natives told the Spanish explorers there was a strait connecting the two oceans and many a fruitless search was made along the Atlantic side for the mythical strip of water. When it had been proven that such a strait did not exist the Spaniards conceived the idea of building a canal. It is said the proposition was favorably looked upon by the Spanish King, but his priests prevailed upon him not to attempt to divide what God had joined, so the matter was dropped.

During the early history of the United States, when the Pacific coast was just starting to command some attention, the matter was brought to congress, but nothing was done other than an investigation made as to the feasibility of the construction of a canal somewhere along the Isthmus of Panama, or at Nicaragua or Tehuantepec. In the early eighties a French corporation secured a concession from the Colombian government for the construction of a canal between Panama and Colon, and commenced work. The company soon ran out of funds and was succeeded by a second French company, which latter company was eventually bought by the United States.

I will dwell a short time on the

history of Panama, in order that you may know of the part played by the United States regarding the independence of the little southern republic.

Panama, prior to November 3, 1903, was a province of the Republic of Colombia. The seat of government was at Bogota, and those in power had little regard for the welfare of the people in the northern province. The people in Panama and Colon wanted a canal. It is possible those at Bogota and throughout other parts of Colombia wanted it also, but they contented themselves with trying to hold up for many millions the people who would build it, before granting a concession. During the fifty years prior to the American occupation of the Isthmus there were some fifty-four of fifty-five revolutions in that section, but Panama could never gain her freedom.

In 1898 came the Spanish-American war, and the memorable trip of the now famous battleship Oregon from the Pacific shores of the United States around the Horn to the fight at Santiago de Cuba, emphatically pointed out to the United States government the desirability of the canal from a naval and military standpoint.

The last French company was bankrupt, and could never have completed the ditch in one hundred years with the machinery and methods it followed by it. The United States government was willing to pay the French company a good figure for what little it had accomplished, but did not care to pay Colombia the high figure it asked for the canal strip.

The Panamanians organized another revolution in November, 1903. On the 3rd of November, the U. S. cruiser in the harbor of Colon landed a force of marines to "preserve order," Panama declared herself a free nation, and the United States immediately recognized her independence.

It is not on record that a single person was killed or wounded during Panama's last struggle, but this "comic opera revolution" marked an epoch in the history of the entire world, and caused the dreams of the old Spanish conquistadores to at last come true. On the 18th of November, 1903, just fifteen days after the revolution, a treaty was signed between the United States and Panama, granting the Americans a strip of land ten miles wide for the purpose of constructing a canal, and the United States guaranteed the independence of Panama against the entire world. Since that time, needless to say, there have been no revolutions and Panama has remained a free country. Colombia has not yet recognized the independence of Panama, but up to the present time she has never attempted to make the United States fulfill its guarantee.

In all probability Panama will remain a republic until such time as the United States sees fit to take her over. Under the treaty of November 18, 1903, the United States is ceded in perpetuity a strip of land extending for five miles on each side of the center line of the canal, and any additional land, water, or land under water necessary for the "maintenance, operation, sanitation, or protection of the canal, etc.," so should the United States decide that the entire Republic of Panama were necessary for any one of these purposes the little country might be entirely taken over under the treaty.

The canal is now almost completed. 'Tis a feather in the nation's cap of which we are deeply proud. The conquest of the difficulties encountered at Panama is a victory for these United States far greater than we yet can comprehend. We hold with it the key to the commerce of the western world; and, as the most highly civilized people, it is fitting that we should.

The canal, when finished, will have cost in the neighborhood of four hundred million dollars, but this sum will seem rather an insignificant price when we figure how quickly we can throw our navy from one ocean to the other in case we should have war with some naval power. No more

trips of the Oregon around the South American continent for ours! Once is enough.

The canal will be adequately fortified to protect it from any national enemy. It is to be the "Gibraltar of America," and will be practically impregnable.

The excavation of the canal has been principally accomplished by steam shovels and dredges.

Regarding the canal itself, I believe ninety-one in every hundred people are of the erroneous impression that the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific will be actually joined at the Isthmus with the completion of the Panama canal. This, however, is not the case, as the canal will be eighty-five feet above mean sea level between the locks. From the Pacific entrance to Miraflores, a distance of about three miles, and from the Atlantic entrance to Gatun about seven miles, the canal is at sea level, but for the intervening forty miles between these points a vessel, in passing from one ocean to the other, will be raised by the locks to the surface of Gatun Lake, which will always be between eighty-five and eighty-seven feet above the sea.

The massive locks are the greatest things in the line of concrete construction ever attempted, and are sufficiently strong to withstand any strain they may be called upon to bear. The gates are controlled by electricity, the power for operating them being generated by hydroelectric power plants which utilize the power of the water passing through the spillways. In case of emergency every part of the apparatus can be operated by hand. A liner, in passing through the locks will not do so under her own steam, but will be towed by electric towing locomotives which will keep her from fouling the walls, gates, etc. The locks are constructed in pairs, and vessels going in opposite directions can be passed without delay or hindrance.

At the upper end of each set of locks there is built an emergency dam which is simply a great swinging draw of structural steel upon the lock walls, so placed that should the gates give way and the water begin rushing through the opening, the emergency dam can be immediately swung out over the lock chamber, with which long steel girders drop down through the water to the floor of the lock, and steel plates are dropped down in front of the girders, thus making a very effective dam to hold the waters until the gates could be repaired. There is hardly a possibility of the emergency dams even being needed, but if their services are at any time required they will prove a highly valuable asset. Without them it would be impossible to hold the waters of the lake in case of an accident.

The rainfall throughout the Gatun watershed and along the zone is very high, ranging from sixty inches at Ancon to one hundred and twenty inches at Porto Bello per year, and it is not prophesied that any drought will cause the level of the lake to fall to such an extent as to interfere with traffic through the canal. At the same time it is understood the Isthmian Canal commission does not desire to take any chances on a continued dry spell, and it is the intention to build what lumbermen would call a "splash-dam" on the upper Chagres river, at Alajuela, where water may be held for an unforeseen emergency which might arise.

The Panamanians of the jungle are a very primitive race, with few wants and these abundantly supplied by nature. They have their own ideas about many things, and their beliefs are not easily shaken.

In the early part of 1912, the spillway at Gatun was closed and the railroad between Gatun and Gorgona was taken up. A relocated line of the railroad was built further south, above the high water level of the completed canal. Prior to the rebuilding or relocating of the railroad, it followed the Chagres river from Gorgona to Gatun, and was far below the Gatun Lake level in the Chagres river valley. During 1912 the water was allowed to rise to about sixty feet above sea level in the Gatun Lake region. Most of the towns between Gorgona and Gatun were very low in the lake basin, and with the spillway gates closed it remained only a question of time until the natives living in this area would be flooded out. Before the gates were closed, the

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