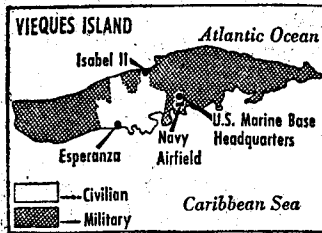


Services Near

By Nicolas de la Pena
Chicago Daily News Service



SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico,
May 4—Vieques, a small island off the east coast of Puerto Rico, has been waging a courageous but futile "war" against the United States Navy and, particularly, the United States Marines, for the last 20-odd years.

The Marines landed a year before Pearl Harbor and their initial beachhead has grown, through expropriations, to encompass 26,000 acres of the 33,000 that make up the island.

Now the word is out that the United States Navy has decided to expropriate 1434 more acres. Vieques's 6000 inhabitants will thus be left with only 5566 acres on which to live and work.

Vieques is lily-shaped, with a hilly spine, flat coastal plains and wide, white

Complete Vieques Takeover

sanded beaches and has been described by naval and Marine officials as one of the best places in the world in which to practice amphibious landings.

Major Naval Complex

The island lies about four miles opposite Roosevelt Roads, the great United States Navy base whose importance has been upgraded since Premier Fidel Castro's Communist regime first raised doubts as to the invulnerability of Guantanamo.

Roosevelt Roads, Vieques and Culebra, a 400-acre island off the east coast, form a triangle that might become one of the world's principal naval complexes—of prime importance to the defense system in the Atlantic and the Caribbean.

Just after the end of World War II, the people of Vieques

started their campaign to get some of their land back. They charged that many of the work force were leaving the island since the best sugar cane lands, Vieques's main cash crop, were within the naval preserve.

The Navy went so far as to ease some of this land as pasture for cattle. But all attempts to buy the land back were met with either silence or rebuffs on the part of the naval authorities.

Refused to Sell Island

Plans to build up Vieques as a tourist attraction came to nothing because the Navy refused the San Juan government permission to build an airstrip on Navy land. Since the seas between the port of Fajardo and Vieques are choppy the year round, the airstrip was a basic necessity if tourists were to visit the island.

The Navy also refused to sell the Commonwealth land for a much needed housing project.

The result is that, although most of Puerto Rico has been booming for 15 years, Vieques gets dingier and dingier, the young people emigrate either to Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands and those who remain feel that all hope is lost. From 10,000 in 1940, the population has decreased to about 6000.

Through all these years, Antonio Rivera Rodriguez, long-time Mayor of Vieques, has been battling the Navy there, here in San Juan and, through the mails, in Washington—al to no avail.

The Mayor headed a delegation of 30 citizens of Vieques who visited Gov. Luis Munoz Marin recently to protest reports of the new expropriation.

Munoz Marin, who has heard all this before, promised that he would take up the matter with President Johnson and with Congress, if need be. The people of Vieques have already heard all that before: In the 1960 electoral campaign, Gov. Munoz told the people of Vieques that he would talk to the Federal Government about their land problem. The record shows that he did talk to President Kennedy about it. But there has been no change in the Navy's policy.