

# SAN DIEGO, GUARDIAN OF THE AMERICAN PACIFIC

*By John S. Harrel*

**ABSTRACT:** San Diego did not easily become the home port of America's Pacific fleet. It was two decades after the US acquisition of the Philippines, Guam, and Hawai'i before a combination of imperialist naval strategy, Japanese expansionism, the Great White Fleet, unrest in Mexico and Central America, the completion of the Panama Canal, the Panama-California Exposition, a supportive congressman, and energetic civic leadership coalesced on the issue. Together, these factors led to the establishment of major naval facilities in this southern California city.

*Keywords:* San Diego navy facilities; Pacific naval strategy; American Pacific

**O**n the morning of May 1, 1898, the American Asiatic Squadron, led by the armored cruiser *USS Olympia*, bore down on the Spanish warships anchored off the city of Manila. Commodore George Dewey (1837–1917), on the bridge of the *USS Olympia*, gazed into the early morning nautical twilight as the outlines of the Spanish warships slowly materialized. Dewey calmly turned to Captain Vernon Gridley (1844–1898), commander of the *USS Olympia*, and stated: “You may fire when ready, Gridley.”<sup>1</sup> These simple words launched America's “Hail Mary play” for empire. When Dewey signaled cease-fire the Spanish Asiatic Squadron was destroyed and America was a world imperial power. Despite

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1. George Dewey, *Autobiography of George Dewey, Admiral of the Navy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), 191.

historian Gray Brechin's generalizations, the extension of the United States as a major military power in the Pacific Ocean was not a foregone conclusion.<sup>2</sup> It would be at least twenty years before the United States started to develop Pacific ports and naval bases that could support a Pacific fleet for the purpose of protecting America's colonial ventures in the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> How San Diego was chosen to serve as the guardian of America's Pacific is the subject of this article.

In 1900, the port cities of the American Pacific Coast were underdeveloped compared to East Coast ports. Civic leaders, envisioning the economic boost that a bustling harbor could provide to their city, were actively seeking economic support to develop their port, in competition with other West Coast cities. National strategic factors have tremendous potential to influence the process of port, and thus urban, development. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, California's civic leaders recognized the new strategic position of the United States as Dewey's victory catapulted the United States from a regional to a world power. As the US Navy expanded its presence in the Pacific, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego competed to become the home port for a new Pacific fleet. Although San Diego was a smaller city and its harbor entrance too shallow, civic leaders engaged in political maneuvers and offered enticements that convinced the Navy to establish the Pacific Fleet's home port in San Diego. Events around the Pacific added weight to San Diego's claim.

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2. Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 130–134.

3. "Fortification of Our Coast," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1904; Joseph Wilson, "The Rise of Japan; Defend the Coast! Some Lessons for the Far East War Which America Should Take to Heart—Imperative Need of Pacific Coast Fortifications," *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1904; Captain A.P. Niblack, USN, "Naval Stations and Bases Needed by Our Fleet: It Means Spending Millions . . .," *New York Times*, February 4, 1917; "Apparent Scare over Jap Controversy: Strong Fleet for Pacific Is a Port," *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1909.

Although Mare Island was founded around 1853 in northern San Francisco Bay, it was for a navy only beginning to transition from sail to steam warships. For the second half of the 19th century, it supported the small Pacific Squadron of Civil War-era, shallow-draft, sail and steam, wooden warships and modern (1880–1890) shallow-draft, steel, coastal defense battleships and monitors. Mare Island could not be adapted for the new steel, ocean-going navy being launched in the 1890s. The silt from the Sacramento River keeps the region shallow and would require constant dredging. The navy should have built facilities farther south in the bay proper. Based upon strictly military consideration, that is where the naval shore facilities for the new Pacific Fleet should have been constructed. After the period of this paper, the fleet expanded beyond the expectations of the naval planners of the early 20th century: Naval Air Station Alameda Island and Navy Base Treasure Island were both built on fill in the bay and other naval facilities followed. They are almost all gone now, for lack of political will to keep a navy presence.

An abundance of primary and secondary sources is available to trace the development of San Diego as the home port for the Pacific Fleet. The civic leadership of California during this time (1900–1920) was well informed regarding the political and economic opportunities that Admiral Dewey dropped into their lap. It is interesting to ponder how America’s emerging national military strategy supplemented local civic leaders’ efforts, resulting in the urban development of San Diego. We might ask: What military factors influenced the development of Pacific naval ports in general and San Diego in particular? How did the Great White Fleet’s visit to San Diego influence support for a Navy base there? And, finally, what role did San Diego’s Chamber of Commerce play in San Diego’s rise as a military metropolis?

#### KEY PLAYERS

Any discussion of American military strategy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries must begin with Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) of the United States Navy. Mahan was one of the most influential strategists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though a lackluster sailor, he was a prolific writer, publishing numerous books and articles on naval strategy and American imperialism. In 1890 he published *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660–1783*.<sup>4</sup> This best-selling work so impressed Kaiser Wilhelm II that he had it translated into German and invited then-Captain Mahan to meet with him in 1899 at The Hague.<sup>5</sup> For nations involved in imperialist expansion, Mahan’s books provided a kind of gospel for the development of naval policy; they were diligently studied not only by the German Navy but also the fledgling Japanese Navy.<sup>6</sup> He was a friend of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge and his works influenced the men who would catapult the United States from a second-rate regional power in the 1890s to a world power with a colonial empire in 1898, starting the United States on course to control the world’s oceans.<sup>7</sup>

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4. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (New York: Dover Publications, 1987, reprint of original 5th edition, 1894).

5. “Kaiser Wants to See Mahan,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1899.

6. Allan Westcott, ed., *On Naval Warfare, Selections from the Writings of Rear Admiral Alfred T. Mahan* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942), xiv–xvii.

7. For a summary of Mahan’s life, see Kevin Baker, “The Prophet of Sea Power,” *Military History* (March 2012): 58–65.

Admiral of the Navy George Dewey (1837-1917) was a fighting sailor with political and diplomatic skills. Ten days after the sinking of the *Maine* in Havana harbor and eight weeks before the president declared war, Dewey received secret orders from Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt:

WASHINGTON, February 25, 1898

DEWEY, Hongkong:

Secret and confidential. Order the squadron, except *Monocacy*, to Hongkong. Keep full of coal. In event of declaration of war [with] Spain, your duty will be to see that the Spanish squadron does not leave the Asiatic coast, and then [conduct] offensive operations in Philippine Islands . . .

ROOSEVELT.<sup>8</sup>

Roosevelt's order and Dewey's professionalism, aggressive combat style, and luck propelled the United States to the status of a world imperial power twenty years before it had developed the ability to defend its new Pacific colonies from military threats.<sup>9</sup> As Admiral of the Navy, Dewey fought the political battles to build a fleet and naval infrastructure at home and abroad for the defense and extension of America's colonial and economic worldwide empire. His autobiography provides insight into the man who laid the foundations for the modern Navy and whose victory led to the creation of the military-industrial complex in San Diego.<sup>10</sup>

San Diego Congressman William Kettner (1864-1930) deserves much of the credit for diverting the Navy from San Francisco and Los Angeles to San Diego. He describes his actions in his book, *Why It Was Done and How*.<sup>11</sup> Elected to Congress in 1912, he served four terms and left office in 1921. Kettner worked closely with the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce to entice the Navy, Army, and Marine Corps to expand their presence in San Diego.<sup>12</sup> By the time

8. 55th Congress, 3rd Session, *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the year 1898*. Appendix to the Report of the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898), 66-67.

9. "Fortification of Our Coast," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1904; Wilson, "The Rise of Japan"; Niblack, "Naval Stations and Bases Needed by Our Fleet"; "Apparent Scare over Jap Controversy: Strong Fleet for Pacific Is a Port," 1.

10. Dewey, *Autobiography*, 244-254, 273-275.

11. William Kettner, *Why It Was Done and How* (San Diego: Frye & Smith, 1923).

12. The San Diego Chamber of Commerce recognized the potential benefit of courting the Navy in their development plan as early as 1900. Today, the San Diego Region Chamber of Commerce maintains its archives for the 1900-1925 period in a private collection in their corporate headquarters. The archive contains minutes of board meetings, committee reports, and official

Kettner retired from Congress, he had secured Navy, Marine, and Army bases in San Diego and had laid the foundation to make San Diego America's "Guardian of the Pacific."<sup>13</sup>

#### STRATEGIC CONCERNS IN THE PACIFIC

With the annexation of Hawai'i and the defeat of Spain in the Philippines in 1898, America extended its interests to the far side of the Pacific. Captain (later Admiral) Alfred Thayer Mahan propounded America's need for empire at the close of the nineteenth century. Mahan argued that a nation's economy and security depended upon the unhindered flow of maritime commerce upon the world's oceans. The protection of commerce is a primary strategic interest of a nation-state, he declared. Therefore "command of the sea" and control of the world's oceans ought to transcend what Mahan referred to as the "petty political bickering" between legislative and executive branches.<sup>14</sup>

Achieving "command of the sea" or command of a specific geographic body of water, according to Mahan, required the concentration of a battleship fleet superior to that of any prospective rival. The American and Spanish application of this principle explains why Dewey and Spanish Admiral Montojo were unsupported in the western Pacific during the Spanish-American War. Both the main Spanish and American fleets were fighting each other in the Atlantic. Neither navy was strong enough to dispatch battleships or armored cruisers to the Pacific and still maintain a reasonable chance of success in the main theater of the war. In point of fact the battleship USS *Oregon* had to make a 14,000-mile cruise from San Francisco to Key West to reinforce the American battle fleet operating in the Caribbean under Rear Admiral William Sampson's command, leaving Dewey, days after his triumph over the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay, to face

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correspondence from prominent civil and military leaders of the time. These records verify the events recorded in Kettner's book.

13. Some of the records for the development of the United States Navy between 1901 and 1925 in the San Diego area are found within the 11th Naval District records deposited in the United States National Archives in Riverside County, California. With the exception of the Navy's San Diego Coaling Station between 1904 and 1911, these records are incomplete. The operational records of the Navy's ships on the Pacific coast between 1900 and 1920 are held at the Naval Yard in Washington D.C. and to a limited extent online at the Naval History and Heritage homepage. Pictures and general histories of most of the ships mentioned in this article can found on this homepage.

14. Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, 25-89.

a German challenge which was fully supported by the superior Imperial German Asiatic Armored Cruiser Squadron. The arrival of French, British, and Japanese warships defused the German threat but highlighted the fact that a number of ambitious imperialist powers were trolling the Pacific looking for opportunities.<sup>15</sup>

America's fleet in 1899 could not simultaneously protect its interest in the Pacific and its interests 10,000 miles away in the Atlantic and Caribbean. The voyage of the USS *Oregon* underscored the importance of securing an isthmus canal. In this period prior to the 1914 completion of the Panama Canal, American battleships would have to steam almost 21,000 miles to reach Manila Bay from the Atlantic Coast. This was a significant strategic problem of time and distance, especially in the face of the rapid naval build-ups by Japan and Germany in this period.

In the early 1900s, America had a problem similar to that of Imperial Russia. Both nations had underdeveloped Pacific coastal cities and ports; however, deployment of their fleets differed considerably. Russia divided its new steel navy between its Baltic and Asiatic fleets, while the United States massed the majority of its battleships and armored cruisers in the Atlantic, maintaining only small cruiser squadrons in the eastern and western Pacific.

In 1904, Japan conducted a surprise torpedo-boat attack that damaged and trapped the Russian Asian fleet in its harbor at Port Arthur, Russia's Manchurian naval base. (See Map 1.) Russian reinforcements from the Baltic sailed 20,000 miles but were destroyed at the Battle of Tsushima Strait before they could reach their Asian destination. For lack of a naval base south of besieged Port Arthur, the Russian Baltic fleet was defeated and scattered, and its ships were

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15. The battle of Manila, in which Dewey vanquished the Spanish Pacific fleet, took place on May 1, 1898. Dewey sent a dispatch ship to Hong Kong with the news of his victory. On May 2, the British warship *Linnet*, arrived in Manila Bay. On May 5, the French warship *Brioux* arrived. On May 6, the German warship *Irene* arrived and ignored signals to anchor near the American warships. On May 9, the German warship *Cormorant* arrived and would not comply with signals until the Americans fired a shot over her bow. On June 12, the commander of the German Asiatic Squadron arrived on the armored cruiser *Kaiser*, followed by three other armored cruisers, two other light cruisers, and 1200 naval infantry troops. A Japanese ship arrived in June. The American squadron, consisting of four cruisers, two gunboats, one revenue cutter, and two supply ships, was out-classed and out-gunned by the Germans. Dewey's diplomatic skills and the support of the neutral British and Japanese warships prevented conflict. Dewey, *Autobiography*, 266–267; Nathan Sargent, Cmdr. USN, *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign* (Washington, DC: National Historical Foundation, 1947 [Manuscript written in 1904]), 73–74; Terrell D. Gottschall, *By Order of the Kaiser* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 134–180.

hunted down and destroyed. Only three of the forty-one ships of Russia's Baltic fleet reached the safety of their port at Vladivostok. This Japanese victory demonstrated the importance of advance naval bases in support of naval operations. In 1904, California's port cities, like Port Arthur, could not be quickly reinforced by the American fleet stationed in the Atlantic.

The defense of the Pacific Coast in general, and California in particular, and the protection of American interests in the Pacific and Asia depended upon three factors. First, America had to deploy a battleship fleet in the Pacific capable of defeating the Japanese Navy. Second, America had to develop naval bases with coal supplies, machine shops, and drydocks to support the steam-powered fleet on the Pacific coast of the Americas and in strategically located Pacific colonies. Third, the United States assumed control of the Panama Canal's construction in 1904. While the canal would facilitate naval deployment as well as trade between the Atlantic and the Pacific, the protection of this important through-way would be an extra charge to military forces stationed in the vicinity. Mahan recognized that America's military and economic policies during this period were shaped by "the Monroe Doctrine, the Panama Canal, the Hawaiian Islands, markets in China and the exposure of the Pacific Coast, with its meager population, insufficiently developed resources, and somewhat turbulent attitude toward Asiatic [immigrants]." <sup>16</sup> The question was simply where to put the Pacific naval bases.

Mahan realized that America's Pacific colonies and its Pacific Coast had a limited number of commercial ports suitable for a fleet when compared to the Atlantic Coast. Assuming the American battle fleet was concentrated in the Atlantic, but the war was in the Pacific, the loss of a single naval station on the Pacific Coast or in the Pacific colonies before the fleet arrived would have been catastrophic. <sup>17</sup> One of the first national discussions was whether to place an advance naval base in the western Pacific at Subic Bay, Philippines, or in the central Pacific at Hawai'i. The outcome of the Russo-Japanese War

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16. Alfred T. Mahan (II), *Naval Strategy*, 1910. A series of lectures published by Admiral Mahan in 1910 and republished in 1991 of the United States Marine Corps, Quantico, VA., 437.

17. Mahan (II), *Naval Strategy*, 1910, 437. In a war with Japan that did not include European powers on the American side, neutrality treaties would close the British and German ports to the American Navy. In that case, the loss of Manila would make it impossible for the American fleet to operate in the western Pacific; the loss or destruction of a naval base on the Pacific Coast would prevent the American fleet from operating in the eastern Pacific.



(1904–1905) convinced the United States, for strategic and budgetary reasons, to place the advance base in Hawai‘i.<sup>18</sup> America’s Pacific Coast in 1910, like Russia’s in 1904, had only two naval bases: San Francisco and Puget Sound.<sup>19</sup> Like the Russian Baltic fleet, the American Atlantic fleet, until the completion of the isthmian canal, was outside supporting range of the Philippines or the American Pacific Coast. The advantages America had in the central and western Pacific were that she controlled Hawai‘i, Guam, American Samoa, the Philippines, and other islands where coaling stations could be established, and two of them, Hawai‘i and the Philippines, had the potential to be developed into full-scale naval bases.

By the early 1900s, Mahan had adjusted his earlier general conclusion that “concentration of the battle fleet” was essential and started advocating that the United States needed effective naval forces in both the Atlantic and Pacific. Most likely, this change in Mahan’s “theory of concentration” was due to America’s geopolitical situation after the Spanish-American War. Unlike armies that sit on the locations to be protected, the fleets Mahan envisioned would protect the American coast and Pacific colonies by controlling the sea approaches to these locations. The projected isthmian canal changed the geopolitical formula for the defense of the United States and her possessions. These proposed fleets were not so much for the defense of the American coast as for the protection of the projected isthmian canal and the resulting increased commerce with the Far East. Mahan anticipated that an enemy force would be able to easily interdict this artificial route, preventing transfer of naval units from one ocean to the other.<sup>20</sup> A foreign power’s commercial base on the Pacific coast of the Americas, such as at Magdalena Bay, Baja California, Mexico, would pose a significant threat to the canal.

The naval bases Mahan envisioned would perform three traditional functions: supply, repair, and defense of the fleet. To be effective, the naval bases would have to be close to the theater of operation, secured from land and sea threats, close to the sources

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18. William R. Braisted, “The Philippine Naval Base Problem, 1898–1909,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 41, no. 1 (June 1954): 21–40; See also Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897–1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991).

19. Mahan (II), *Naval Strategy*, 320.

20. Alfred T. Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and Its Effect upon International Policies* (Boston: Little Brown, and Company, 1900), 181–182.

of supply, near population centers, and located in a navigable harbor.<sup>21</sup> Mahan recommended that each coast should have primary and alternate naval bases.<sup>22</sup> Both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts required adequate fortification, including gun batteries, torpedo boats, and a garrison to prevent an enemy from establishing control.<sup>23</sup> In California, there were only three locations suitable for naval bases: San Francisco, San Pedro, and San Diego.

THE RISING SUN, THE CANAL, AND WEST COAST HARBORS  
The vulnerability of the Pacific Coast was well articulated by journalist Joseph Wilson in an article in the *Los Angeles Times* on October 9, 1904, entitled “The Rise of Japan; Defend the Coast!”<sup>24</sup> Wilson reviewed Japan’s successful wars with China and Russia.<sup>25</sup> He argued that with Russia’s defeat the balance of power in the Pacific had been disturbed. Due to America’s unfortified Pacific coast and limited naval forces in the Pacific, the Japanese fleet, especially its torpedo boats, posed a threat to America’s West Coast. Wilson argued that, based on their success against Russia, Japan would likely take advantage of American unpreparedness and develop plans to seize the Hawaiian Islands in order to paralyze America’s West Coast commerce. His warning included a prophecy that, unless America took the Japanese threat seriously, “our rivalry with Japan for the shipping business of the Pacific is bound to be one sided, and Japan will inevitably beat us.”<sup>26</sup>

Wilson then provided a survey of America’s current military situation on the Pacific Coast and his opinions and recommendations for its defense. He identified the need for a naval base and analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of each location. San Francisco, California, and Puget Sound, Washington, suffered from the same disadvantage: weather. (See Map 1.) Both locations suffer from severe winter storms and fog. Both have wet and cold winters, and their

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21. Mahan (II), *Naval Strategy*, 433–434.

22. *Ibid.*, 195–196.

23. *Ibid.*, 54.

24. Wilson, “The Rise of Japan.”

25. First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905).

26. As with the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 and World War II, Japan opened the war with Russia without warning when her torpedo-boat flotilla attacked the Russian Far East fleet at anchor in Port Arthur, Manchuria, China, without issuing a formal declaration of war.

coasts are lashed by violent storms. Puget Sound has the additional disadvantage of being 1400 sailing miles north of San Diego, too far to protect the projected isthmian canal.<sup>27</sup> Wilson contended that Mare Island (San Francisco) Naval Yard could never economically be fitted to receive a modern fleet.

The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce had struggled to develop San Pedro into a protected commercial harbor. Starting in 1898, the Army Corps of Engineers dredged the harbor and constructed a breakwater to create the largest man-made harbor in the world. It would become “a great commercial port” when it was completed, Wilson believed.<sup>28</sup>

He concluded, however, that San Diego was the ideal location for a naval base “second to none.”<sup>29</sup> It was the only major Pacific port free from storm and fog and the climate was neither too hot nor too cold. The harbor was excellent and when dredged would be able to accommodate the new large battleships. The cost of living was low, and there were less acute labor problems than were then plaguing San Francisco. When the isthmian canal was completed, San Diego would be the closest American port of call on the Pacific Coast. Wilson provided a game plan for a naval base at San Diego and encouraged Southern Californians to support his plan. First, the San Diego harbor needed to be dredged. Second, a naval yard with docks large enough for modern battleships should be built in San Diego. Additionally, San Francisco needed a naval dock where disabled battleships could be repaired, and Los Angeles and San Diego needed to obtain more satisfactory rail connections with the East.<sup>30</sup> Finally, each of the Pacific ports required modern fortifications.<sup>31</sup>

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27. To understand Wilson’s arguments, it needs to be understood that coal-powered warships had a maximum operating range of 4,000 miles. Since battle speeds greatly reduced that range, navy captains felt it unwise to drop below 50 per cent of bunker capacity.

28. Wilson, “The Rise of Japan.” As it happened, when the battleship fleet was shifted to the Pacific in 1922, San Pedro was the only port large enough for twenty battleships to anchor. As a result, the battleships’ home port was San Pedro and Long Beach between the 1920s and 1941.

29. Ibid.

30. San Diego did not have transcontinental rail connections until after 1907. Prior to that time, San Diego had only limited rail service via a side track connected through San Bernardino. James N. Price, “The Railroad Stations of San Diego County,” *San Diego Historical Society Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (Spring 1988), accessed July 23, 2012, <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/88spring/railroad.htm>.

31. Ibid.

Despite Wilson's warning (and acknowledgement of Japan's exemplary strategic preparation), America's sympathies were with Japan against Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). In 1898, in the aftermath of the Battle of Manila Bay, a Japanese warship had arrayed itself alongside British warships in support of Dewey when it appeared that the German Asiatic Squadron might side with Spain.<sup>32</sup> Yet, an outbreak of anti-Japanese activism in San Francisco in 1905 led to an international incident which, along with the extensive damage to San Francisco's infrastructure from the 1906 earthquake and fire, served as wake-up calls for US Navy planners who may have been considering San Francisco the leading candidate for a Pacific fleet's home port. San Diego's civic leaders were already working on the solution.<sup>33</sup>

#### SAN DIEGO ACTIVISM

Years before US acquisition of the Panama Canal route and before Wilson wrote his article, the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce (hereafter Chamber) reached the same conclusion as Wilson: San Diego should become a naval base.<sup>34</sup> San Diego's civic leaders faced the challenging task of developing their agricultural town and secondary port into a modern, commercial, maritime city. They recognized the potential economic benefit to their city of a canal across Central America. These civic leaders also recognized that, if their port

32. Foster Haily and Milton Lancelot, *Clear for Action* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1964), 72–73. One of the German warships protected a Spanish Army outpost from Filipino forces and evacuated the Spanish soldiers and their families in what, today, would be regarded as a humanitarian rescue by a German officer exceeding his orders. At the time, the German action was construed as possibly siding with Spain or as a means of advancing German claims at the later peace negotiations.

33. William R. Braisted, "The Philippine Naval Base Problem, 1898–1909," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (June 1954), 21–40; See also Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan 1897–1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991).

In February 1905, the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran a series of anti-Japanese articles that sparked two years of violence against Japanese immigrants. The San Francisco school board passed a resolution announcing its intent to order Japanese students to attend the segregated Chinese school. On April 18, 1906, in the midst of this domestic crisis, an earthquake and fire destroyed much of San Francisco's infrastructure, delaying the school board's implementation of its resolution until October 1906. This treatment of the Japanese minority violated the 1894 treaty between Japan and the United States and was viewed by Japan as an insult to its national pride and honor. President Theodore Roosevelt quieted the international crisis with his Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907. David Brudnoys, "Race and the San Francisco School Board Incident: Contemporary Evaluation," *California History Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (September 1971), 302–304.

34. John Martin, "The San Diego Chamber of Commerce Established the U.S. Coaling Station, 1900–1912, San Diego's First Permanent Naval Facility," *The Journal of San Diego History* 56, no. 2 (Fall 2010), 217–221.

were to attract the largest commercial ships, their harbor would have to be dredged. Being situated a few miles north of the unguarded Mexican border, with no natural defenses, they also realized that San Diego's fortifications needed to be modernized.

In January 1900, the Chamber passed a number of resolutions and submitted petitions to Congress to help achieve these goals. First, the Chamber's board on January 12, 1900, passed a resolution in favor of a Nicaraguan Canal. Second, on January 19, 1900, the board drafted an act for the authorization of \$219,000 to dredge a suitable channel across the sand bar to admit deep draft vessels into the harbor of San Diego. Then on January 15 and 19, 1900, the board discussed and endorsed a plan of the New York Chamber of Commerce to increase the Army's Coast Defense Artillery Corps from 9,702 to 19,404. This increase would have provided San Diego with 141 men and increased San Francisco's garrison to 1,998 and Puget Sound's garrison to 1,414.<sup>35</sup> Also in 1900, the Chamber established a plan to develop their city in concert with the Army and Navy. The establishment of a naval base and improved coast defense would be primary goals for the growth of the city from 1900 to 1924. From 1900, the Chamber utilized sophisticated lobbying tactics, working directly with congressional representatives and military officers while rallying public support to achieve these goals.

During the period of 1900–1912, the Chamber's lobbying efforts to attract military facilities were hampered by the need to dredge and deepen San Diego Bay's harbor mouth. Shortly after discussing the draft act for dredging the harbor, the Chamber received a telegram on February 9, 1900, from Admiral Albert Kautz inquiring whether it was safe to bring the USS *Iowa* into harbor.<sup>36</sup> There is no record of the USS *Iowa*, a deep-draft armored cruiser, entering the harbor, but smaller American and German warships entered the harbor, and their officers interacted with Chamber board members. Despite the limitation caused by the shallow harbor mouth, the Navy supported the establishment of a coaling station at San Diego because warships of modest size could use the port.<sup>37</sup> In February 1901, Chamber board

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35. San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce (hereafter SDRCOC) Minutes and attachments of the Board Meetings for the month of January 1900, vol. 1900.

36. SDRCOC, Telegram, date February 9, 1900, vol. 1900.

37. SDRCOC, Letter from Mr. Bradford, dated April 26, 1900, vol. 1900, 127.

members traveled to Washington, DC, and convinced Admiral R. B. Bradford to support the establishment of a coaling station and also to establish a torpedo-boat flotilla on the Pacific Coast and station it in San Diego. Key to their sales pitch was San Diego's climate and ocean conditions.<sup>38</sup>

In 1902, the Chamber focused on obtaining the naval coaling station and a defense post, along with the dredging of the harbor.<sup>39</sup> In February 1902, the USS *Philadelphia* touched bottom entering the harbor, and in April the USS *Iowa* visited the city but anchored outside the harbor.<sup>40</sup> In September 1902, Fort Rosecrans was approved for a two-company post, but the Chamber continued lobbying for a larger coast defense establishment.<sup>41</sup>

By 1904, the naval coaling station was completed, and the Chamber supported a bill in Congress to convert Point Loma Quarantine Station into a naval base. (See Map 2.)

On November 6, 1906, Chairman Ackerman reported to the Chamber that Senator George C. Perkins of California, Chairman of the Senate Fortifications Committee, had toured Point Loma and agreed to support San Diego's request for a battery of four twelve-inch guns. During 1906, the Chamber followed up this success by passing resolutions, forwarded to their congressional representatives, for dredging the harbor and establishing a naval base in San Diego.<sup>42</sup>

San Diego was not alone in courting the military to establish local bases. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce was actively attempting to convince Congress to fortify its port of San Pedro. In an article published on October 12, 1904, the *Los Angeles Times* reviewed the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce's efforts and then discussed the strength and weakness of the fortifications along the Pacific Coast. The *Times* considered only San Francisco adequately defended with coastal fortifications; it judged San Diego's defenses inadequate to resist a determined attack. The unidentified author described a hypothetical attack by Japan to prove his point. San Diego's weak fortifications but good harbor could be quickly captured and used as a base

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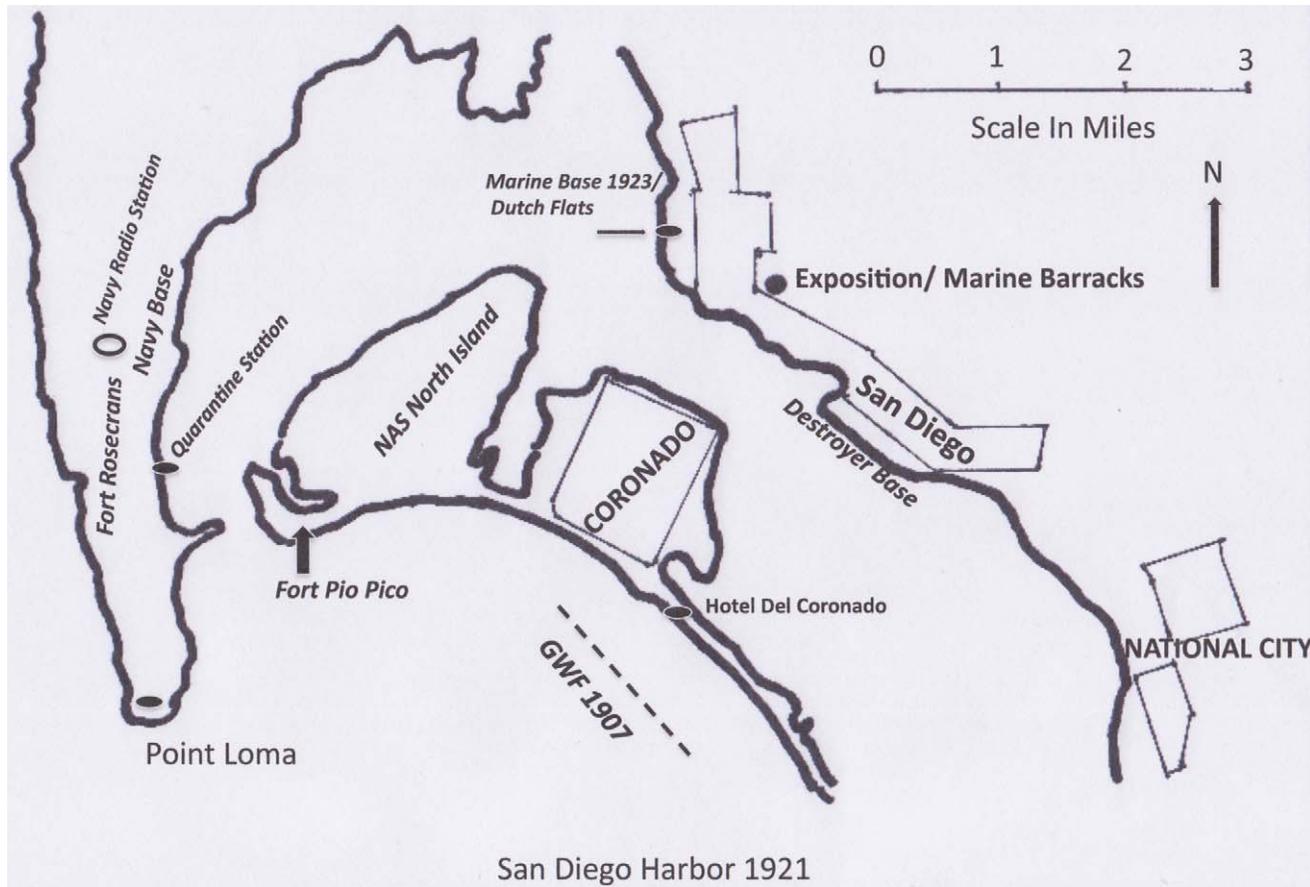
38. SDRCOC, Minutes of Board meeting, February 8, 1901, vol. 1901, 281-282.

39. Martin, "San Diego Chamber of Commerce," 218-224.

40. SDRCOC, Minutes of Board Meetings and Correspondence, February-April 1902, vol. 1902.

41. SDRCOC, Minutes of Board Meetings, September 26, 1902, vol. 1902.

42. SDRCOC, Minutes of Board Meetings and Correspondence, 1906, vol. 1906, 475, 517.



Map 2. San Diego's military facilities, 1921. Based on the US Army Corps of Engineers map of San Diego Harbor California, dated June 29, 1921, Coast Defense Study Group, U.S. Pacific Coast, <http://www.cdsg.org/pacific.htm>.

of operations by Japan. The author's primary argument was in support of defense appropriations for San Pedro, but he also chided the War Department for its failure to appreciate the value of San Diego or to improve its defenses.<sup>43</sup>

#### THE GREAT WHITE FLEET

In the spring of 1906, during the international crisis over the exclusion of Japanese students from San Francisco's schools, there were indications that Japan was strengthening her fleet and that Japanese military leaders believed they could successfully defeat American interests in the Pacific. The Office of Naval Intelligence reported evidence of Japanese fleet modernization and orders to European shipyards for dreadnought-class battleships and other armored warships.<sup>44</sup> Admiral Dewey calculated that it would take ninety days to conduct an emergency redeployment from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast, and in that time Japan could have captured the Philippines and Honolulu. While the school crisis was defused, it prompted Dewey to recommend to President Roosevelt that he dispatch the battleship fleet to Asia. Such a move would have many international and political objectives and send a clear message to the world that America was a modern naval power. On December 16, 1907, America's Great White Fleet of sixteen battleships, accompanied by support ships, steamed out of Chesapeake Bay and turned south toward the Straits of Magellan and the Pacific Ocean.<sup>45</sup>

On November 15, 1907, the Navy replied to the Chamber's invitation for the Great White Fleet to visit San Diego. The Navy informed the Chamber that the Pathfinder Fleet would conduct a port of call at San Diego.<sup>46</sup> This was a squadron of three modern cruisers (the USS *Tennessee*, *Washington*, and *California*) that preceded the Great White Fleet.<sup>47</sup> In December 1907, the Chamber received a letter pledging congressional support for the formation of a commission to

43. "Fortification of Our Coast," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1904, 6.

44. Britain's HMS *Dreadnought*, launched in 1906, was the first modern battleship with a primary battery of ten big 12-inch naval rifles. She outclassed all American battleships until the USS *Delaware* was launched in 1909.

45. Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 492–503. It took the Great White Fleet from December 16, 1907 to February 22, 1909 to complete the cruise.

46. The "Pathfinder Fleet" was a group of cruisers that preceded the Great White Fleet.

47. "Cruisers' Trip to the Pacific," *Washington Post*, October 2, 1907; "Open All Three for Visitors," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1908.

study the advantages of San Diego as a naval base.<sup>48</sup> After all their efforts to court the Navy, civic leaders were dismayed to learn in the spring of 1908 that America's Great White Fleet would not make a port call in San Diego. The three pathfinder cruisers reached San Diego by March 16, 1908, anchoring off Coronado Beach near the historic Del Coronado Hotel.<sup>49</sup> (See Map 2.)

A determined civic delegation led by Mayor John Forward and Colonel D.C. Collier sailed from San Diego on the steamer SS *St. Denis* to meet with the commander of the Great White Fleet, Rear Admiral R.D. Evans, at Magdalena Bay, Baja California, Mexico. The *San Diego Union's* reporter with the fleet observed that the natural features of Magdalena Bay made it an ideal location for a naval base.<sup>50</sup> The United States government had leased the bay from Mexico for naval gunnery training. While Magdalena Bay was an ideal anchorage for the entire Great White Fleet and had the potential to be developed into a naval base, its isolated location and the instability of the Mexican government made such improvements a questionable investment for the United States. On March 16, 1908, Mayor Forward telegraphed San Diego that their mission was successful and the fleet would make a San Diego port of call between April 12 and 15, 1908.<sup>51</sup>

On March 17, 1908, the *San Diego Union* reported that, on the contrary, the fleet would not enter San Diego Bay. An unnamed admiral had informed the reporter that the only port where sixteen battleships could anchor was Puget Sound. The mayor's delegation unsuccessfully tried to convince Admiral Evans to steam all or part of the fleet into San Diego Bay. But the battleships drew twenty-seven to twenty-nine feet and could not chance the sand bar at the mouth of the bay. However, the admirals told the reporter they were impressed with the potential of San Diego as a naval station, and Admiral Thomas spoke about establishing a naval training station in San Diego.<sup>52</sup>

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48. SDRCO, Reply to Invitation to the Pathfinder Fleet, dated November 15, 1907, and Reply to Letter, dated December 12, 1907, vol. 1908.

49. "Fleet Here Apr. 12 to 15, Says Mayor," *San Diego Union*, March 16, 1908.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.



Night view of the Great White Fleet anchored off Coronado Beach, 1908.  
*San Diego History Center (#919).*

On or about April 13, 1908, the battleships anchored outside the harbor off Coronado Beach. The sailors and marines received their month's pay before "liberty call" was sounded, releasing them and \$250,000 onto the economy of San Diego.<sup>53</sup> The churches of San Diego made an unsuccessful bid to close the saloons, which the mayor and city council addressed but wisely did not act upon.<sup>54</sup> Admiral Evans was rushed to Paso Robles Hot Springs for treatment of his inflammatory rheumatism. The festivities included a parade of sailors and marines followed by ceremonies, dinner parties, and other events.<sup>55</sup> While the newspapers did not record how much of the \$250,000 the fleet spent on "liberty," it would have been considerable. The fleet also stopped at San Pedro, Santa Barbara, and San Francisco.<sup>56</sup> At San Pedro-Long Beach and at Santa Barbara, the ships had to anchor off-shore as they had at Coronado.

After the departure of the fleet, the Chamber and city of San Diego were reinvigorated in their efforts to establish San Diego as a naval base. They passed a number of resolutions for harbor

53. The official US Navy itinerary does not list San Diego as a port of call. See US Navy History homepage, <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq42-1.htm#websitesgwf>.

54. The old proverb about "spending money like a drunken sailor" may have been behind this inaction by the city council.

55. "San Diego Is En Fete for Fleet," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1908; "Program of Events," *San Diego Union*, April 13, 1908.

56. "Battleships Will Arrive Here," *San Diego Union*, March 15, 1908.

improvements, expansion of the coaling station, construction of naval repair facilities, and the permanent stationing of a torpedo-boat flotilla at San Diego. The Chamber sought commercial contacts with Hawai'i and supported Hawai'i's funding request to fortify Pearl Harbor.<sup>57</sup>

In 1908, Chamber records include a request from the California Promotion Committee:

It is important that immediate steps be taken to ascertain what is necessary to be done at Mare Island Naval Yard, California, in order to make San Francisco the great naval base of the Pacific . . .<sup>58</sup>

This request reminded the Chamber that San Diego had serious competition from California's "first city" for limited naval funds.

#### PACIFIC INSTABILITIES AND SAN DIEGO-BASED RESPONSE

Local, national, and international events continued to draw America's attention to the Pacific Coast and Asia. California's anti-Japanese legislation further soured relations with Japan. In February 6, 1909, President Roosevelt met with Senators Flint of California and Nixon of Nevada and urged them to bring their strongest influence on their state legislatures to prevent further insults to Japan. In theory, the revival of the Japanese question had nothing to do with the movement of the Great White Fleet. As reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, the "cockiness" of the Japanese during the first crisis (1906–1907) was not dampened by the visit of America's battleship fleet. The author argued that Japan was taking an exasperating course with regard to California's legislative racism. The journalist concluded that American diplomats would be more comfortable addressing these issues when the battleship fleet had a stronger presence in the Pacific.<sup>59</sup> Instead of battleships, California received torpedo boats. In February 1910, San Diego was selected as the headquarters of the Pacific torpedo-boat flotilla.<sup>60</sup>

In 1910, civil disorder in Mexico and recurring problems with President Porfirio Díaz in 1911 threatened American economic

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57. SDRCO, vol. 2, 1908.

58. SDRCO, Letter from J.O. Harron, dated October 2, 1908, vol. 2.

59. "Apparent Scare over Jap Controversy: Strong Fleet for Pacific," *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1909.

60. "North Island Place Chosen [for] Torpedo Boats' Headquarters at San Diego," *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1910.

interests in Mexico and security along the common border. As unrest in Mexico and Central America mounted, San Diego became the *de facto* advance naval base for American cruisers operating off the Pacific coast of Mexico and Central and South America. The Navy's war plans for Latin America during the period 1911–1918 counted on a concentration of the Pacific squadron's cruisers at San Diego in order to effectively project American military presence along the coasts of Mexico or Central America.<sup>61</sup>

The first of these peace enforcement operations occurred in March 1911. A provisional regiment of Marines, consisting of twelve officers and 503 enlisted men, was assembled in San Diego from the Marine barracks at Mare Island and Puget Sound Naval Yards. On March 20, 1911, the regiment arrived at San Diego and established a camp on North Island. Tensions eased between the United States and Mexico before the Marines could cross the international border. The provisional regiment was disbanded, and the Marines returned to their home stations in June and July 1911.<sup>62</sup>

The first serious challenge to American military and political policy in the Pacific was not from Mexican or Central American revolutionaries but from Japan. If America held the Hawaiian Islands and prevented a foreign imperial power from establishing control of any port in Latin America, then the California coast, the Panama Canal, and the maritime trade in the eastern Pacific would be safe from interdiction by rampaging, coal-burning cruiser squadrons. (See Map 1.) It is therefore not surprising that some leaders in Washington took a Japanese attempt to establish a lease of Magdalena Bay in Baja California, Mexico, as a hostile act.

In 1910, President José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz of Mexico, worried about Mexican discontent with his pro-American policies, attempted to improve Mexican-Japanese relations. In December 1910, a Japanese Navy training squadron was entertained at the port of Santa Cruz. Shortly after the Japanese squadron's visit, Díaz's son visited Japan. A Japanese newspaper reported that a defensive alliance between

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61. "Pacific Fleet Is Ready," *New York Times*, March 14, 1916.

62. Chief Warrant Officer 2 Mark J. Denger, "A Brief History of the U.S. Marine Corps in San Diego," California State Military Department, The California State Military Museum. <http://www.militarymuseum.org/SDMarines.html>; Elmore A. Champie, *Brief History Of Marine Corps Base And Recruit Depot San Diego, California* (Washington DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division Headquarters Marine Corps, 1962), 1–3.

Japan and Mexico aimed at the United States and granting Japan permission to establish a naval base at Magdalena Bay was being negotiated.<sup>63</sup> In early 1911, the Díaz government cancelled the US Navy's lease of Magdalena Bay. It was suggested at the time by the local American consuls of Manzanillo and Salina Cruz that Mexico intended to lease the bay to Japan. After the overthrow of the Díaz government in May 1911, the Madero administration seemed ready to pursue the matter with Japan, if the United States would permit it.<sup>64</sup>

While these international events were unfolding, John Blackman, a Los Angeles businessman, was attempting to sell his company's interest in the bay. He was approached by a group of Japanese from San Francisco offering to buy 2,000 acres, provided they could get fishing concessions from a third party. Knowing that dealing with the Japanese for Magdalena Bay would result in a public outcry, Blackman devised a complicated stock deal and had his attorney, Frederick H. Allen, explain it to the State Department. The American government sat on the deal until the end of 1911. Due to the government's delay, Blackman decided to go forward with the transaction.<sup>65</sup>

In January 1912, Blackman took a group of interested investors on a tour of Magdalena Bay. This group included Japanese engineers.<sup>66</sup> As Blackman continued to pursue the deal, William Randolph Hearst got wind of the transaction. He informed the State Department of Blackman's activities, and in late January 1912, the State Department ordered Blackman to stop all transactions.<sup>67</sup> On February 29, 1912, Senator Lodge used the incident in a speech against treaties President Taft was attempting to get ratified.<sup>68</sup>

Hearst had come into possession of some incriminating documents and published a series of articles in April 1912 which revealed

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63. In April 1911, US Ambassador to Mexico Henry Lane was reported to have had a photograph of the Treaty, but President Taft insisted the treaty was a myth and the photograph never materialized. Eugene Keith Chamberlin, "The Japanese Scare at Magdalena Bay," *Pacific Historical Review* 24, no. 4 (November 1955), 345-359, 349. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3635319>, accessed March 1, 2012, 18-59.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., 350.

66. It is not clear whether these were Japanese Americans or Japanese Nationals. Chamberlin, 350-351.

67. Chamberlin, 351.

68. Ibid., 354.

plans for establishing a Japanese colony at Magdalena Bay accompanied by thousands of troops.<sup>69</sup> Suspicious of Hearst's "yellow peril" articles, the *New York Times* cabled the Japanese government, which categorically denied any interest in a settlement at Magdalena Bay.<sup>70</sup>

In late March or early April 1912, the American government informed Japan that the proposed commercial venture was unacceptable. Japan already had a coaling station at Punta Arenas near the Straits of Magellan, but her commercial need was recognized. Ships rounding the Cape often exhausted their supply of coal, and the military value of that location was nil. At the Magdalena site, there was no commercial value as the land was unproductive, and Mazatlán, 200 miles away, was an established coaling site. However, from the military point of view, Magdalena had many advantages. Its location would have permitted the Japanese government, through the steamship company negotiating for the lease, to establish wharves and fortifications without attracting attention. The commercial port could easily be converted to a naval base in time of war.<sup>71</sup>

The Japanese government started denying these allegations as soon as Hearst began publishing his articles. As an example, T. Miyaoka, a Japanese capitalist, publicly denied the Japanese were attempting to establish a naval coaling station at Magdalena Bay. He declared that Japan deplored sensational press and propaganda. He asserted that the Japanese were merely negotiating fishing rights and that the Toyo Kisen Kaisha Company needed to acquire property to store coal for civilian steam ships.<sup>72</sup> Historian Eugene Keith Chamberlin considered the 1912 incident at Magdalena Bay another William Randolph Hearst invention and exaggeration to keep the "yellow peril" issue alive.<sup>73</sup>

In all probability Chamberlin is correct, yet at the time the Magdalena Bay controversy reinforced the pro-Navy argument for a stronger naval presence on the Pacific Coast on the basis of a Japanese threat to Pacific shipping and the soon-to-be-operational Panama Canal. Journalists at the time saw it as a legitimate threat. In his

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69. *Ibid.*, 354-355.

70. *Ibid.*, 355.

71. "Warning to Japan on Magdalena Bay," *New York Times*, April 5, 1912.

72. "Denies Japan Seeks Mexican Naval Base," *New York Times*, May 5, 1912.

73. Chamberlin, 355-357.



In this 1912 political cartoon by T. E. Powers, Uncle Sam discovers Japanese fishing interests in Magdalena Bay, Mexico, to be a cloak for military motives, and orders them out, citing the “Munroe” Doctrine. *Caroline and Erwin Swann collection of caricatures and cartoons, Library of Congress (LC-USZ62-85448).*

1912 article “The Orient and World Peace,” author Basanta Koomar Roy wrote that “the Yellow Peril is a stern reality.” Roy warned that “the Mexican concession of 2,000,000 acres on Magdalena Bay threatened to be a Japanese Philippines . . . .”<sup>74</sup> The *Los Angeles Times*

74. Basanta Koomar Roy, “The Orient and World Peace,” *The Open Court* (1912), 620–635.

summarized the train of events: "The site could only be valuable for military purposes, and that would make its acquisition a hostile move by Japan."<sup>75</sup>

Mexico's instability and Japan's imperialism were not the only problems challenging American economic and military policy in Central America. Unrest in western Nicaragua posed problems for American military planners in 1912 and Washington decided upon military intervention. The majority of American warships and marines were based on the East Coast of the United States. To insert a marine landing force into western Nicaragua prior to the completion of the Panama Canal, the Navy had three options. The first option was to sail warships around South America to the west coast of Nicaragua. The second option was to sail the landing force to the east coast of Panama, have the Marines cross the Isthmus by rail and then board a Pacific warship for the final leg to western Nicaragua. Third, the Marines could have traveled via transcontinental rail to San Francisco and then boarded a warship and sailed to the west coast of Nicaragua. The naval planners selected option two. It was the simplest and quickest course of action despite its apparent complexity. A naval base at San Diego was key to supporting this strategy. On August 24, 1912, a provisional regiment of Marines, consisting of twenty-nine officers and 752 men, under command of Colonel Joseph H. Pendleton (1860-1942), sailed from Philadelphia for service in western Nicaragua. Four days later on August 28, 1912, the USS *California*, operating from San Diego, formed an expeditionary force from its crew and sent it ashore on the Pacific coast of Nicaragua to protect American lives and property.<sup>76</sup> Pendleton's Marines landed in the Canal Zone and made their way to the city of Balboa on the Pacific Coast. There they embarked on the USS *California*. On September 1, 1912, the USS *California* sailed back to Nicaragua and landed the marines on September 4, 1912. With Pendleton's Marines on shore, the peacekeeping mission was transferred to them, and the USS *California's* landing party returned to ship.<sup>77</sup>

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75. "Magdalena Bay's Importance," *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 1912.

76. The landing party consisted of 350 sailors and Marines under the command of Lieutenant-Commander Steele.

77. Report dated September 4, 1929, Location: Balboa, Canal Zone, From: Commander Special Service Squadron, To: Director of Naval Intelligence, Subject: Expeditions formed and landings effected by

Meanwhile, the revolutionary situation in Mexico remained unstable and endangered American lives and property. On September 4, 1913, Admiral Cowles, commander of the Pacific Squadron, ordered the USS *Buffalo* to proceed to Ciaris Estero, Mexico, with the objective of evacuating all Americans and foreigners from the Yaqui Valley. A landing party of Marines and sailors accompanied American Consul R. W. Vail to escort twelve Americans and eighty-three others from the Richardson Construction Company back to the USS *Buffalo*. The ship reached San Diego on September 14, 1913.<sup>78</sup>

#### CONGRESSMAN WILLIAM KETTNER

The Magdalena Bay incident, unrest in Central America, and the ongoing revolution in Mexico—and the fact that San Diego was the logistic hub for Navy and Marine expeditionary operations for these theaters—provide the context of the election of Congressman William Kettner. Kettner, a Democrat, had been an insurance executive before his election to Congress.<sup>79</sup> He was one of the few Democrats ever elected to represent San Diego at the national level. As a businessman he had an intimate relationship with the Chamber and understood what was required to achieve the Chamber's objectives. During his service as San Diego's congressman, he was in constant communication with the Chamber and provided a continuous stream of progress reports.<sup>80</sup>

Before assuming his congressional seat, Kettner traveled to Washington, DC, to pursue harbor appropriations for dredging San Diego Bay. He was aware that in order to secure the Secretary of the Navy's support, he had to first obtain the support of Admiral Dewey. His first two visits to Dewey failed to result in a letter of support. Kettner spent an evening at the Army and Navy Club where he interacted with a number of senior naval officers who encouraged him to visit Dewey a third time. The third meeting with Dewey won Kettner a letter of support:

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U.S. Naval Forces in Central America, Mexico, and West Indies from 1901 to May 1, 1929. [http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/haiti\\_list\\_exp.htm#1911](http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/haiti_list_exp.htm#1911).

78. Captain Harry Allanson Ellsworth, USMC, *One Hundred Eighty Landings of United States Marines, 1800-1934* (Marine Corps Historical Division, 1934, Reprinted by U.S. Marine Corps: Washington DC, 1974), 115.

79. Letter dated November 11, 1912, from William Kettner to J.D. Phelan. William Kettner Papers, MS29 File 4/1, San Diego History Center.

80. SDRCO, vols. 1912-1920.



Congressman William Kettner, 1915. *San Diego History Center* (8173).

The geographical situation of San Diego, 450 miles south of San Francisco, close to the Mexican border, and the nearest United States port to Panama on the Pacific coast points to its being a frequent port of call... The General Board believes it probable that naval use of the port will increase... There is room in the inner harbor for at least 16 capital ships... [and] it is desirable that a depth of 35 feet over the middle ground and 40 feet over the bar be provided...<sup>81</sup>

The letter did not furnish unqualified support of San Diego as a naval base, but it was sufficient to convince the Secretary of the Navy and other congressmen to sponsor a House bill adding an appropriation of \$249,000 for dredging the mouth of San Diego's harbor.<sup>82</sup> After twelve years of lobbying, the Chamber and San Diego had a representative who could implement their vision. By the end of his first term Kettner was able to procure for San Diego \$249,000 to dredge the harbor, \$95,000 to expand the naval coaling and fuel oil station, \$335,000 to upgrade the coast defenses (adding two twelve-inch mortar batteries) and \$300,000 to establish a naval radio station in San Diego.<sup>83</sup>

81. Ibid.

82. Kettner, *Why It Was Done and How*, 12–15.

83. Ibid., 40–45.

MEXICO, THE MILITARY, AND THE  
PANAMA-CALIFORNIA EXPOSITION

In 1914 the situation in Mexico deteriorated, and Washington decided again on military intervention. The Pacific Squadron was massed at San Diego under the command of Admiral Thomas B. Howard in order to initiate operations off Mexico's Pacific coast. Two hundred sixty Marines from Puget Sound Naval Yard and 600 Marines from Mare Island Naval Yard were transported to San Diego and formed into the 4th Provisional Marine Regiment under Colonel Pendleton.<sup>84</sup> Eighteen cruisers, destroyers, auxiliaries, and transports were involved in the operations.<sup>85</sup> This event was the largest military activity in San Diego since the visit of the Great White Fleet in 1908, but it was a minor sideshow of the full operation. The main theaters were the Texas border and the Caribbean.<sup>86</sup> As part of this operation, the 4th Provisional Marine Regiment sailed aboard the USS *South Dakota*, USS *West Virginia*, and transport USS *Jupiter* as a show of force to the Gulf of California. When stability returned, this naval task force returned to San Diego harbor on July 6, 1914, and the 4th Provisional Marine Regiment established an encampment at Camp Howard on North Island.<sup>87</sup>

With the completion of the Panama Canal in August 1914, San Diego and San Francisco both planned expositions. San Francisco opened the Panama-Pacific International Exposition and San Diego the Panama-California Exposition. The 1915–1916 Panama-California Exposition was an important event for the development of San Diego as it resulted in national recognition. When Kettner took office in 1912, San Diego was so little-known it was listed as “Santiago” in the Congressional Directory. Kettner believed this exposition would put San Diego on the map. He was involved in securing federal funding for the event and the attendance of congressmen, senators, cabinet members, and foreign dignitaries.<sup>88</sup>

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84. After his previous action in Nicaragua, Pendleton had returned to Portsmouth. On September 13, 1913, he had been given command of the Marine Barracks at Naval Base Puget Sound, Washington.

85. “Pacific Warships Order to Mexico,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1914.

86. “20,000 Troops and Two Naval Divisions Massed to Mobilize near Mexican Border,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1911.

87. Denger, “A Brief History of the U.S. Marine Corps in San Diego.”

88. Kettner, 36–39.

To support the California expositions, Major General George Barnett (1859–1930), Commandant of the Marine Corps, ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4th Marines to support the San Francisco event and the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines to support the San Diego event. Both battalions established model barracks and other Marine exhibits. In San Diego, Pendleton established a Marine barracks in Balboa Park, which is today the Science and Education Building in Balboa Park. The Marines would remain in Balboa Park until the Marine base at Dutch Flats was constructed in 1921.<sup>89</sup> (See Map 2.)

On September 16, 1914, at a banquet at the Grand Hotel in San Diego celebrating the rechristening of the USS *California* to USS *San Diego*, Pendleton gave a speech entitled “San Diego as a Marine Advance Base.”<sup>90</sup> At the time of the speech, the presence of the Marines in San Diego was temporary and dependent upon the Mexican situation.<sup>91</sup> Pendleton urged Headquarters Marine Corps to establish an Advance Marine Base at San Diego.<sup>92</sup> Twelve miles north of the Mexican border, San Diego was the southernmost harbor on the American Pacific coast. San Diego was the logical location from which to protect the Pacific shipping lanes and the Panama Canal’s western approach (see Map 1) and could serve as a port of embarkation for other military operations in South and Central America and Asia.

In February 1915, Pendleton approached Kettner and, over dinner, broached the subject of a Marine Advance Base.<sup>93</sup> Kettner guided the Colonel from his original proposal for a base at North Island to one at Dutch Flats. When General Barnett visited the exposition, he toured the site and added his support to the project.<sup>94</sup> Initially, Barnett had opposed establishing a Marine base in San Diego. During his congressional testimony on December 17, 1914,

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89. Denger, “A Brief History of the U.S. Marine Corps in San Diego.”

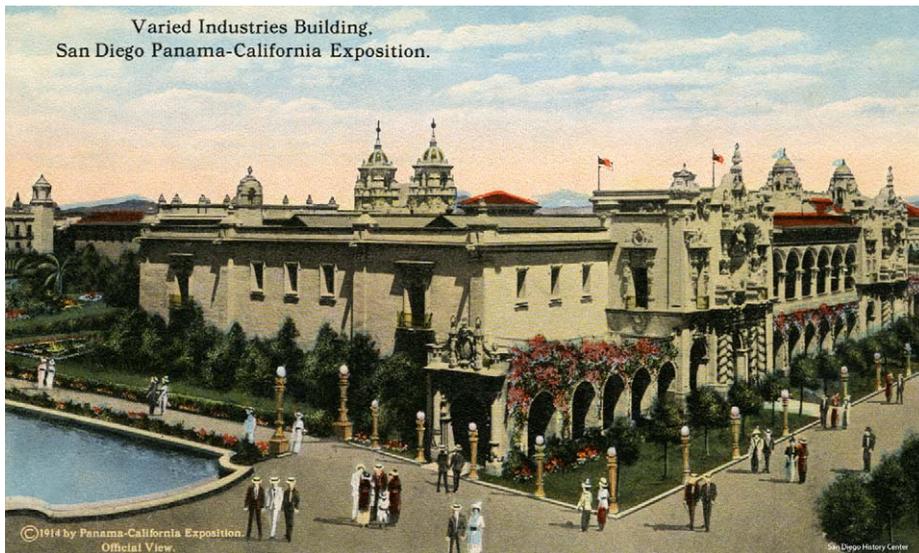
90. Martin K. Gordon, ed., *Joseph Henry Pendleton 1860–1942, Register of His Personal Papers* (Washington, DC: History And Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1975), “San Diego as a Marine Advance Base,” speech delivered by Colonel Pendleton on 16 September 1914 at a banquet at the U.S. Grant Hotel, San Diego, 46 (hereafter Pendleton Papers).

91. Pendleton Papers, 51, Memorandum dated 29 September 1914 from Maj. Gen. Cmdt. George Barnett to Col. Joseph H. Pendleton, 47.

92. Pendleton Papers, Memorandums and Letters from 16 September 1914 to 8 September 1915, 46–53.

93. The exact date of this conversation is not clear. Based upon the Pendleton’s Papers, it was in February or March 1915.

94. Kettner, 52–54.



In 1915–1916, San Diego hosted the lavish Panama-California Exposition to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal and to draw attention to San Diego’s expected boom in trans-isthmian trade. The fair’s elaborate exhibit buildings, such as the Varied Industries Building here, remain today as the core of Balboa Park. Tinted postcard, “San Diego Panama-California Exposition, Official View.” Published by the Panama-California Exposition, 1915. Courtesy of the San Diego History Center (GM460).

Barnett had called for locating the Pacific Coast Marine base in San Francisco because it was a major population center for recruiting and supplies. After his visit to the exposition, Barnett again testified before Congress on August 14, 1915. Based upon his trip to San Diego his recommendation had changed. Barnett concluded that San Diego had better climatic conditions than San Francisco and more civic support.<sup>95</sup> On December 6, 1915, Kettner sent a letter to Pendleton indicating support for the proposal.<sup>96</sup>

During the exposition, two events very publicly demonstrated the value of establishing a permanent Marine Expeditionary Base in San Diego. In June 1915, indigenous Mexicans raided American property, threatening American citizens in the Yaqui Valley (located inland from the coastal city of Guaymas), Mexico. On June 17, 1915, Pendleton led three companies of the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines from

95. Ibid., 55.

96. Pendleton Papers, letter dated 6 December 1915 from Congressman William Kettner to Colonel Pendleton, Folder 12, 54.

Balboa Park and embarked on the USS *Colorado* sailing for Guaymas. When Mexican authorities stabilized the situation at the end of July 1915, the USS *Colorado* and Colonel Pendleton's Marines returned to San Diego.<sup>97</sup> Winning even more publicity, in August 1915 Colonel Pendleton's Marines defended the Coronado Country Club's beach from a mock attack by sailors from the USS *Colorado*.<sup>98</sup>

Another visitor to San Diego's Panama-California Exposition was then-Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Delano Roosevelt (hereafter FDR). While there he toured Dutch Flats. FDR was favorably impressed and supported the proposal for the Marine base.<sup>99</sup> Kettner submitted a bill in 1916 authorizing the purchase of 232 acres for \$250,000. The City of San Diego donated an additional 500 acres of tidal flats, which were accepted by the Navy in 1917.<sup>100</sup> Due to dredging and fill requirements, construction of permanent buildings was not commenced until 1919. The Marines moved from Balboa Park into their new Dutch Flats installation on December 21, 1921, and dubbed it Marine Advanced Expeditionary Base, San Diego.<sup>101</sup> In August 1923, the Marine Recruit Depot relocated from Mare Island Naval Shipyard to the new San Diego Marine Base.<sup>102</sup>

Thereafter, FDR and Kettner discussed the objective of relocating the Naval Training Station from San Francisco to San Diego. FDR had visited Goat Island Naval training facility in Oakland and had found it to be an unhealthy environment. FDR informed Kettner that he would support the relocation of the facility to San Diego. In response, the Chamber raised \$290,000 to buy a site on Point Loma for the naval training facility. Key to this transaction was the Chamber's ability to rally support from the city's leading citizens. Kettner was thus able to offer the Navy \$300,000 in land and other incentives

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97. Report dated 4 September 1929, Location: Balboa, Canal Zone, From: Commander Special Service Squadron, To: Director of Naval Intelligence, Subject: Expeditions formed and landings effected by U.S. Naval Forces in Central America, Mexico, and West Indies from 1901 to 1 May 1929. [http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/haiti\\_list\\_exp.htm#1911](http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/haiti_list_exp.htm#1911).

98. "Battle Lines at San Diego," *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 1915.

99. Denger.

100. Kettner, 52-59.

101. Denger.

102. National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives at Riverside (here after NARANAR), Record Grp. 181, 11th Naval Dist., Box 32, Folders 1500-1, 1500-5 Memorandum Dated August 1, 1923, from Commanding General Hq. 5th Brigade to Commanding General Pacific, Subj: Transfer of Recruit Depot.

to relocate the naval training facility to San Diego. Construction at the Point Loma site started in 1921, and in 1923 the U.S. Navy Training Station, San Diego, was commissioned.<sup>103</sup>

### SAN DIEGO, NAVAL PORT

The increased naval activities due to the unrest in Latin America and World War I underscored the need for augmenting naval shore support facilities in San Diego. Between 1900 and 1912, the Chamber had waged an aggressive campaign to establish the coaling station as a fully functioning facility. The Navy's efforts to improve the station between 1912 and 1918 were assisted by the Chamber's lobbying efforts with federal representatives and officials. By the end of World War I the depot had evolved into a fully functioning fuel facility.<sup>104</sup> During World War I, the Chamber and San Diego's civic leaders accommodated the Navy's need for training facilities by turning over all of Balboa Park to the Navy once the exposition closed down in March 1917. All the park buildings were converted into a wartime training center for new sailors, marines, and naval aviators. Within a year the Chamber of Commerce proposed offering the Navy Department tracts of bay-front property at no cost with the proviso that the property be used to build naval installations in the future. San Diego's voters overwhelmingly approved a ballot proposition to this effect. San Diego's civic culture, as well as the Chamber's primary focus, was forging strong ties with the Navy. These installations would be constructed in the 1920s.<sup>105</sup> This partnership between San Diego and the Navy was a matter of civic pride and became a prominent theme in the Chamber's advertisements aimed at attracting tourists and residents.<sup>106</sup>

In 1923, the city of Oakland realized that it had been undercut and sent the federal government a letter of protest. The response from California Senator Samuel M. Shortridge admonished the northern city:

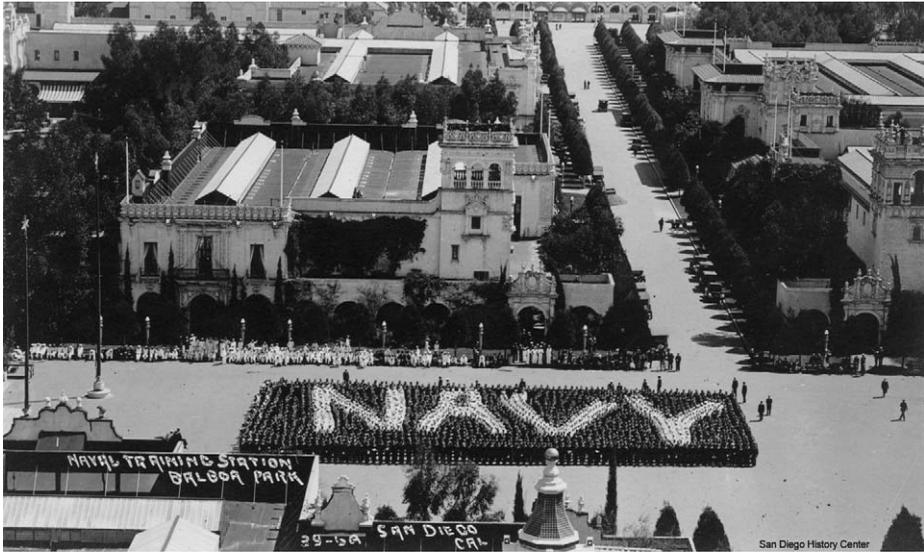
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103. Molly McClain, "'Liberty Station' and the Naval Training Center in San Diego," *The Journal of San Diego History* 54, no. 2 (Spring 2008), 74.

104. Martin, "San Diego Chamber of Commerce," 229.

105. Abraham J. Shragge, "I like the Cut of Your Jib," *The Journal of San Diego History* 48, no. 3 (Summer 2002), 51-119.

106. *Ibid.*



After the Panama-California Exposition closed in March 1917, Balboa Park, with all of its exposition buildings, was turned over to the Navy as a wartime training center for sailors, marines, and naval aviators. Here, World War I recruits line up in “NAVY” formation at Balboa Park Training Center, 1917. *San Diego History Center* (PCH 84-107).

It was in 1919 . . . that Congress first made the appropriation providing for the removal of the training station [from the San Francisco Bay area] to San Diego. Since that time \$2,000,000 has been appropriated and spent at San Diego for the training station alone . . . [I]f some of the protest had been made more timely, it is reasonable to assume that some of this activity might have been saved for Northern California.<sup>107</sup>

The success of the Chamber and Kettner was summarized in the Chamber Board President’s Annual Report for the fiscal year ending October 31, 1919. The report indicates that naval activities operating in San Diego in 1919 or budgeted for 1920–1924 included North Island Naval Air Station, Marine Base San Diego, Marine Railroad, Coaling Station, Fuel Oil Storage, Naval Base San Diego, Naval Training School, Concrete Ship Plant, Naval Radio Station Point Loma, Balboa Naval Hospital, and the Naval Repair Station. It was the home port of Squadron 4 and 5 of the Pacific Fleet, the 108th Torpedo Boat Destroyer Flotilla, naval support ships, and Naval Aircraft detachments. The Army was represented by improved gun batteries at Fort Rosecrans, the Air Service Flying School at Rockwell

107. Kettner, 62–63.

Field (North Island), and Camp Kearny, where the 40th Infantry Division (California Army National Guard) trained before being shipped to France in World War I.<sup>108</sup> The Marine Corps Recruit Depot would be transferred to San Diego in 1923.<sup>109</sup>

The increased permanent naval presence in San Diego and the unrest in Mexico and Central America required a reorganization of the Pacific Coast naval command structure. On October 26, 1917, the 12th Naval District created a southern headquarters in San Diego.<sup>110</sup> In 1920, half of the nation's battleships were transferred from the Atlantic and stationed permanently in the Pacific. San Diego is six hundred miles south of San Francisco, and the time required for routine communication between the headquarters, although immediate correspondence could be transmitted by telegraph, was one of the considerations that led to the relocation of the 11th Naval District (a regional headquarters) to San Diego, which was assigned the administrative responsibility for all of southern California in 1920.<sup>111</sup> With the transfer of the 11th Naval District to San Diego, the foundation of America's Guardian of the Pacific was complete.

### CONCLUSION

In the early 1900s, while Washington and Admiral Dewey were focused on the German threat, other civilian and military political editorialists and visionaries foresaw that the United States and Japan would sooner or later become primary antagonists for domination of the Pacific.<sup>112</sup> During the "Great Game" of imperialism, neutral nations would send warships to observe incidents in order to look

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108. SDRCO, Annual Report dated October 31, 1919, Vol. 1919.

109. NARANAR, Records Group 181, 11th Naval District, Box 32, Folder 1500-1 and 1500-5, memorandum dated August 1, 1923, Commanding General Headquarters 5th Marine Brigade to Commanding General Department of the Pacific, Subject: Transfer of the Recruit Depot.

110. *Ibid.*

111. NARANAR, Records Group 181, 11th Naval District Folder 400-16 and 400-16A, Memorandum For Secretary of the Navy, July 19, 1920; Fifty Years of Naval District Development 1903-1953, Department of the Navy, Naval History Center, [http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/navy\\_dist.htm#cn42](http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/navy_dist.htm#cn42). The memo read, in part, "At present all matters involving questions of policy must be referred for decision to the Commandant of the 12th Naval District at San Francisco, some 600 miles away. It usually takes six to eight days for a letter to be written and a reply therefrom. Questions, which require prompt decision, must be transmitted by telegraph at considerable expense to the Government."

112. Ronald Spector, *Admiral of the New Empire; Life and Career of George Dewey* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 137-153, 161.

after the rights of their citizens and their commercial interests. Their presence would gain them a voice in the negotiated peace, with the possibility of acquiring additional colonial possessions or interests. What charged this equation with extra meaning in the Manila Bay episode was the fact that, of those with ships on the scene, only Japan and America were Pacific powers. To maintain its new imperial status in the Pacific, the United States would have to develop its supporting Pacific possessions in Japan's backyard. Local officials in California did not understand that anti-Japanese-immigration legislation would antagonize Imperial Japan. Japan had established a track record of attacking powers that interfered with its imperial ambitions; it had already defeated the only other powers located on the Pacific Rim, China and Russia. Washington, in the wake of the Japanese government's reaction to an anti-Japanese resolution by the San Francisco school board in 1906, finally understood the threat. Japan's reaction made it clear that the real threat to the United States was Japanese imperialism, not Japanese immigration. Despite defeating China and Russia, Japan felt she was not accepted as an equal to America and the European powers. The San Francisco school board's action was an insult to Japan's national pride and a very dangerous course of action for the United States.<sup>113</sup> In the spirit of Mahan, Japan, along with Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, was in a naval arms race for dominance of the Pacific.<sup>114</sup> These political events were the impetus for President Theodore Roosevelt's decision to send the Great White Fleet on its world cruise. The "show the flag" cruise, while successful as a public relations stunt, was a failure militarily. In 1907 America had twenty-four battleships, and Japan had twelve. By 1914 the United States had increased to thirty-one with five more under construction. Japan had sixteen with four under construction.<sup>115</sup> This military superiority was irrelevant without naval support facilities. The lack of a Pacific fleet with naval bases on the Pacific Coast and in Asia demonstrated to the world generally and to Japan in particular that America could not realistically project its naval power into the western Pacific in a timely manner.

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113. Paul S. Dull, *A Battle History of The Imperial Japanese Navy (1941-1945)* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1978), 3-4.

114. *Ibid.*

115. During World War II, aircraft carriers would replace battleships as the dominant warship for control of the world's oceans.

Since 1900, the San Diego Chamber of Commerce's vision of urban development coincided with America's rise from a regional power focused upon the Atlantic and Caribbean to a world power focused on the Pacific. The Chamber realized that development of an American world-class navy required the nation to support the development of ports with naval bases on the sparsely settled Pacific Coast. Despite the Chamber's focused lobbying efforts between 1900 and 1912, it met with only limited success until the election of Congressman Kettner. He brought business networking skills to the Chamber's lobbying efforts. Together they developed a campaign plan that included incentives that reduced the cost of developing Navy and Marine facilities in San Diego. The utility of San Diego as a provisional base for naval peace enforcement operations in response to unrest in Mexico and Central America between 1911 and 1920, evidence of Japanese interest in Mexico, and the publicity provided by the Panama California Exposition of 1915–1916 convinced Washington's political and military leadership of the advantages of San Diego as a primary Navy and Marine base. Finally, the willingness of San Diego's civic leaders to donate land to the Navy, before and after 1920, was a significant incentive to establish naval shore installations in San Diego.<sup>116</sup> Together, San Diego's natural advantages, civic leaders and voters, Congressman Kettner, and strategic considerations spurred by events in Mexico, Central America, and Asia led to the development of San Diego as the home port of the Pacific Fleet.

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116. NARANAR, Records Group 181, 11th Naval District, Box 36, Folder 3900–20, petition dated 27 July 1922; Memorandum from Judge Advocate General to Commandant, 11th Naval District, dated 16 May 1922; Memorandum from Cmdt. 11th Naval District to Secretary of the Navy, dated 13 April 1922, and letters dated 21 January 1920 and 10 September 1921.