



ISLAND HISTORY

Diego Garcia is part of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) formed in 1965. The island is one of 56 in the Chagos Archipelago, which extends over an area of 22,000 square miles. The archipelago is located in the heart of the Indian Ocean, south of India and between Africa and Indonesia.

The tropical island is a narrow coral atoll with a land area of about eleven square miles nearly enclosing a lagoon. Its configuration is that of a "V" drawn by a shaky hand. The island stretches 34 miles from tip to tip, with an opening to the north-northwest. The small islands dot the mouth of the lagoon, which is approximately 13 miles long and 6 miles wide. The lagoon is from sixty to one hundred feet deep with numerous coral heads in most areas. Shallow reefs surround the island on the ocean side, as well as the lagoon. The island's mean height above sea level is 4 feet.

The climate is typically tropical, with warm temperatures and high humidity throughout the year. The average yearly precipitation is 102 inches. Island flora is lush, consisting of a large measure of coconut trees, which were the staple of the island for 200 years. Additionally, there are a variety of other tropical plants and trees including large hard trees such as takamaka, porcupine, guayule, and casahuate. Care is taken during construction operations to preserve the ecology of Diego Garcia. Wildlife on the island is sparse, but interesting and varied. No dangerous wildlife exists on the island. The worst of the lot is the small scorpion with a sting comparable to that of a bee. Land crabs, coconut crabs and hermit crabs abound and you may see a coconut rat scurry about. The largest creatures are the approximately 300 donkeys whose ancestors worked the now-abandoned plantation in the days before mechanization.

HISTORY

In December 1966, the United Kingdom and the United States signed a bilateral agreement making the islands of the British Indian Ocean Territory available for defense purposes to both governments. Both British and American flags fly over the island.

On 23 January 1971, a nine-man advance party from NMCB-40 landed on Diego Garcia to confirm planning information and to initiate preliminary survey for beach landing area. Subsequently, about 50 Seabees landed on Diego Garcia. They marked underwater obstructions, installed temporary navigational aids and cleared beach areas for landing additional personnel. Then, on 20 March 1971, an additional party of 160 men arrived.

On 24 March 1971, construction began on a U.S. Naval Communication Facility on Diego Garcia. Construction was accomplished by units of the U.S. Naval Construction Force (Seabees).

During December 1972, personnel of the Naval Communication Station Precommissioning Detachment arrived to prepare for commissioning. On 20 March 1973, U.S. Naval Communication Station, Diego Garcia was commissioned. The Communications Facility consisted of an austere communication station and necessary supporting facilities including an airstrip.

A major change to the island organization occurred with the establishment of the Naval Support Facility (NAVSUPFAC) on October 1, 1977. Commanding Officer, NAVSUPFAC assumed all duties and responsibilities previously assigned the Island Commander. The nucleus for the NAVSUPFAC came from the original Communication Station's enlisted officer allowances. All billets, other than those dedicated to communications support,

officer allowances. All billets, other than those dedicated to communications support, transferred to the Commanding Officer, NAVSUPFAC, who is responsible for maintaining and operating facilities and providing services and materials in support of several tena shore activities and units of the operating forces.

Recent world developments have highlighted Diego Garcia's importance to the defense posture of U.S. and Allied Forces. Commencing with the Yemen crisis in the spring of 1979, the Iranian crisis of 1979-81, and continuing with Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1990-91, Diego Garcia has played a primary role in the support of Naval units operating in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf areas. In the spring of 1980, a large monetary appropriations bill was passed by Congress to expand island facilities to meet future operational requirements. These overall island improvements will ensure that Diego G will remain a vital link in our defense structure in the years ahead.

