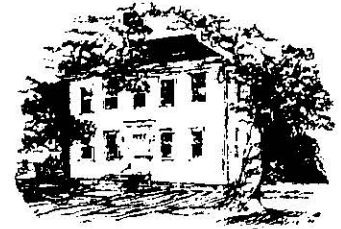


IMAGES

... then and now



Buckingham Lodge
1861

Steve Marvin and Diego Garcia – An Indian Hill Native and the Indian Ocean

Diego Garcia, a small, secluded atoll in the Indian Ocean, has become a vitally important US Naval Support Facility and is known by some as “the best kept secret in the Navy.” Local resident Steve Marvin played a pivotal role in its development



Discovered by Portuguese explorers in the 1500s, it is the largest of 52 islands forming the Chagos Archipelago. According to legend, it was named for the captain who first found it. Claimed by France until the 1800s, it was acquired by Great Britain after the Napoleonic Wars. In 1965 it became part of the British Indian Ocean Territory, which the UK and the US agreed to make available to both countries for defense purposes. A footprint shaped island, Diego Garcia has earned the nickname “Footprint of Freedom”. Formerly a volcano, it is 15 by 35 miles, and has a large interior lagoon surrounded by coconut palms and ironwood trees.

During the Cold War and Vietnam era military strategists were preparing for the future. Steve Marvin, a career Navy officer, led a study called Fuel in the Southern Hemisphere, to investigate possible fuel depots below the equator. Since there were no existing bases in the Indian Ocean, this led to another study that examined potential base locations in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean. Cognizant that a third of the world's population lived within 50 miles of the Indian Ocean coastline, and that the area was a likely hotspot – a place of inevitable future conflict, Marvin and his staff considered several island locations, but settled on Diego Garcia. An agreement with the British allowed the US to lease real estate on the atoll for a military base.

With the approval of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marvin and a representative from the Department of Defense asked Congress to approve funds for the construction of a Naval Communications Station; it was meant to be capable of much more. To make Diego Garcia a state of the art military installation involved negotiations. Marvin encouraged the dredging of the channel of the island's lagoon to 50 feet, permitting the Navy's largest ships safe entry to the anchorage. Senators were also persuaded to approve removal of coral pinnacles from the lagoon to give ships a significant turning basin, and to allow a pier for unloading supplies. And then there were adjurations about an airstrip. The Senators granted a 10,000-foot airstrip, but Captain Marvin urged 15,000 feet. Citing the dangers of wind velocity for aircraft, Marvin secured permission for two reinforced 2500 foot overruns, making the length of the runway actually 15,000 feet. The necessity for extensive fuel storage facilities was another vital point that was finally approved in the Navy's favor. Finally, with funding secured for the base, construction started in 1971 by Navy Construction Battalions - the Seabees.

In 1973 US Naval Communication Station Diego Garcia was commissioned. Initially sparse, communication activities have continued ever since, and the base has grown. World events led to expansion of facilities to allow pre-positioned ships to support rapid deployment. Originally a remote communication station, it became a major fleet and US Armed Forces support base by the 1980s. With its strategic location and range of facilities Diego Garcia is very important to the US and has been extremely significant in the Gulf Crisis (1987), the Gulf War of 1991, the Afghanistan War (2001), and the current Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Navy has a large contingent on Diego Garcia, but the Air Force and Army have a presence there also. Military personnel there call it “Gilligan's Island with Guns”.

Indian Hill native Steve Marvin “lived, ate, drank, and perspired copiously over Diego Garcia” for almost a decade of his Naval career. Prescient about the atoll's future as a vital link in the US defense structure, he persuaded Congressmen to approve a communications station with the capacity to support substantial military operations. Captain Marvin's professional dedication and determination were factors in the creation of Camp Justice on Diego Garcia, and he merits a salute from fellow residents.