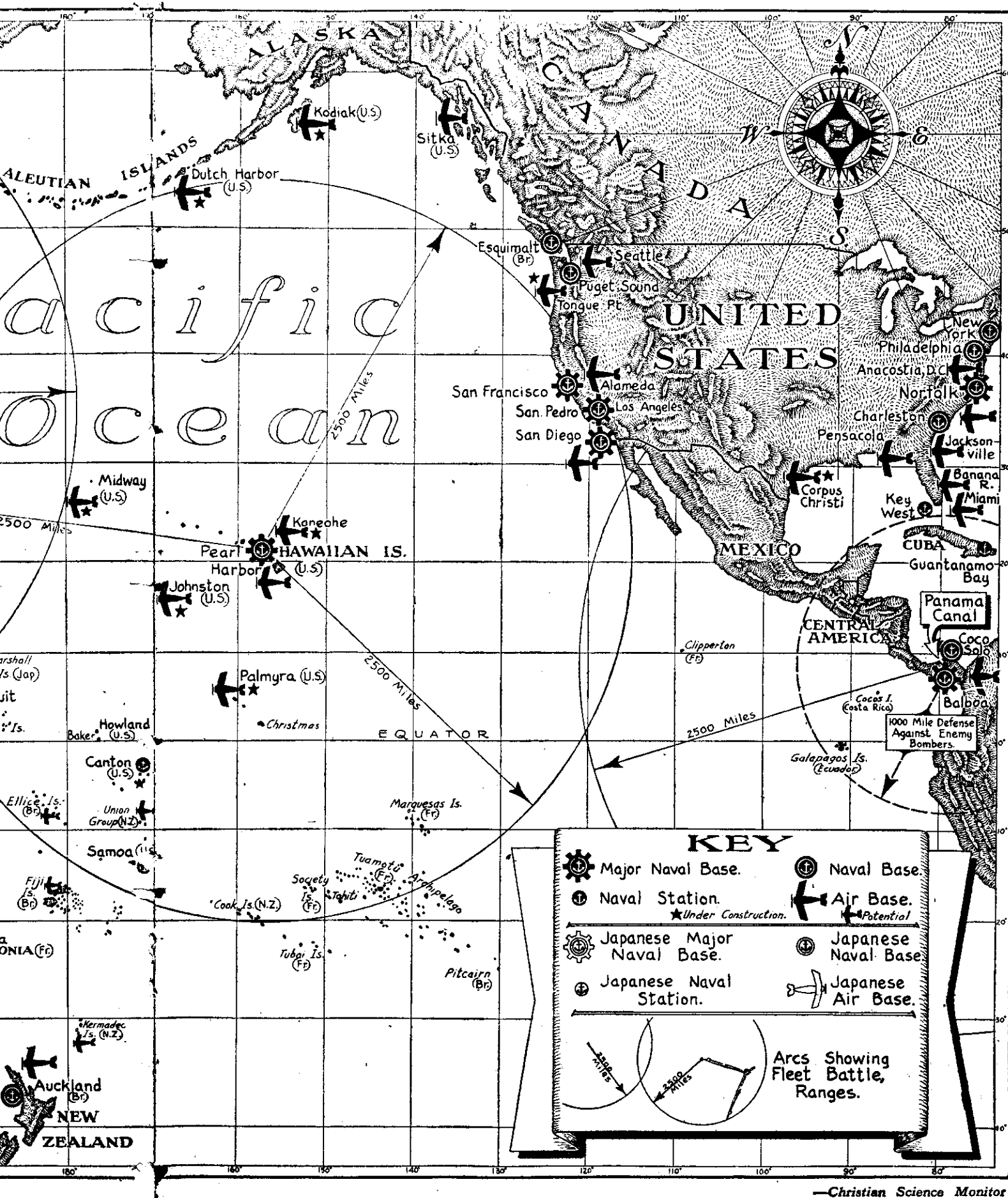


WORLD WAR BATTLE ZONE



ALASKA was purchased by the United States in 1867 for 7,200,000 dollars; last year, to protect this strategic possession, the U.S. was spending more than six times its purchase price, but this was not very much out of 2,000,000,000 dollars, which is the value of Alaska's gold, fish, and fur exports since 1867. Alaska's most populous area is the strip of islets and fjords which forms the northern continuation of the U.S.—Canada's west coast. This strip would be prized by an invader. Once established, he would be hard to eject, and the warm climate would be to his advantage. But both air bases and naval ports have been under preparation in the last year—naval bases are at Dutch Harbour (Unalaska), Kodiak Island, and, 1242 miles west of Kodiak, at Kiska (near the end of the Aleutian Island chain). Army bases are established at Anchorage (on the south coast of the mainland) and Fairbanks (well inland) and airports have been laid out beside them.

FROM Midway Island's dredged out central lagoon, where Pan-American Clippers land, the largest navy sea-plane tenders can mother a fleet of patrol bombers ranging as far north as Alaska's Aleutian chain, south to Pago Pago and west to Japan itself" said *Time* in a recent issue. "Submarines and light vessels can enter the lagoon for refuelling. Midway's commissioning was a reminder to the U.S. public that the Navy has worked fast and furious since it got the wherewithal from a grudging Congress," added *Time*. "But Navy men keep their most anxious eye on the water bridge east through Midway. Beyond Wake, the bridge passes through the Japanese Mandated Islands. Since the 1930's, Japan has worked hard building up air bases in this cluster of hundred of islands and her other pinpoints of land in the Pacific."

WHEN "French" Indo-China became "Japanese" Indo-China at the end of September, Japan gained another stronghold in the South China Sea. Japan and Vichy agreed to "co-operate in the defence of Indo-China" and Japan acquired air bases within practicable bombing range of Singapore, Manila, and the Dutch East Indies. More important than that, Japan is now better equipped to cut the British sea route from Singapore to Hong Kong. With this move, Manila became encircled by Japanese outposts, but the Japanese also entered a region which is surrounded by hostile possessions.

NAVAL experts have long faced the fact that it is unsafe for a fleet to fight too far from its base, for unless ships can get back to their docks in case of damage, they are at the mercy of submarines and aeroplanes. The naval rule of thumb for a safe operating radius is 2,500 miles. The only fleet operating base of the U.S. navy is at Pearl Harbour. There are only facilities for small vessels at other islands. For this reason it has long been doubted whether the U.S. Navy could ever force a decisive battle with the Japanese except in places where it would be at a serious disadvantage itself.

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